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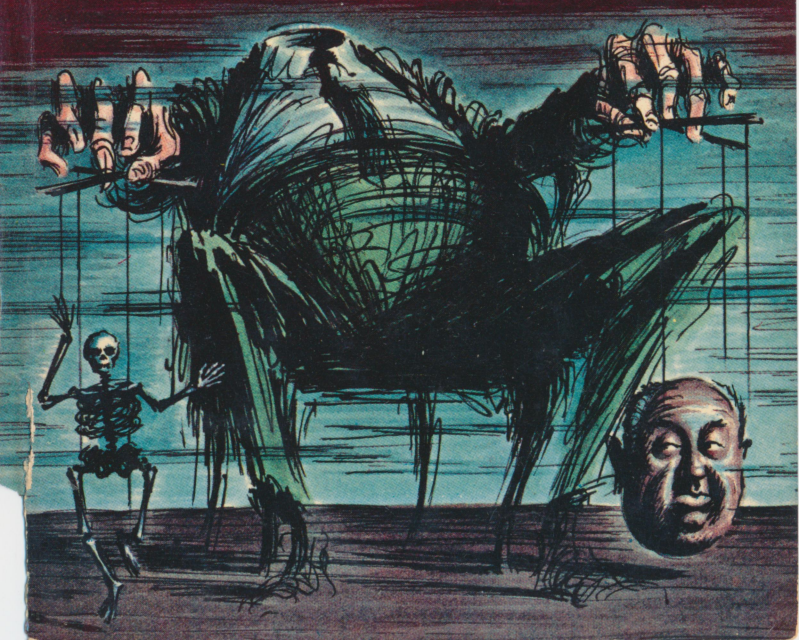
ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S FEAR AND TREMBLING

13 satanic stories by such peerless writers as Ray Bradbury, John Buchan, John Collier, and H. G. Wells



"The blunt instrument, the gang murder, the paid assassin have always seemed to me positively indelicate. Murder is a fine art and needs the embellishment of a sophisticated imagination. The true afficionado prefers to have his nerves ruffled by the implied threat—the Borgias rather than the Syndicate. What is more delightful than a domestic crime, when it is executed with subtlety and imagination? I leave to other more pedestrian talents materials based on newspaper accounts. True crimes, ugh! Alas, most of them are dull and give no evidence of the careful planning and loving thought that should go into any human activity as rewarding as murder."

Alfred Hitchcock

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS: FEAR AND TREMBLING

A DELL MYSTERY

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK

THE FORMS OF FEAR

THEY TELL ME—I have never had occasion to experiment—that "there is more than one way to skin a cat." I know, by reason of many delightfully quaking hours while equipped with slippers and easy chair, that there are a good many ways to induce shivery sensations in a reader.

It doesn't take a ghost story, necessarily; fear has many forms, and the spectral tale has lost the monopoly it once enjoyed. That type was, perhaps, written most effectively by M. R. James, and I have included here his wonderfully titled, "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad," as well as "Ghost Hunt," which H. R. Wakefield gives a distinctively modern twist.

The eleven other stories, however, produce shivers of other, widely varying kinds. The malignant creature which attacks the terrified servant night after night in Henry S. Whitehead's "Cassius" high-lights a fine example of the strange-beast theme. Ambrose Bierce's little shocker, "One Summer Night," is typical of this writer's bold delineation of brutality and callousness; its grave-robbing scene, with the ghoulish enterprise illumined by fitful lightning flashes, is appropriately eerie.

Our fear of the unknown, of elemental nature, gives us some terrifying moments in John Buchan's "Skule Skerry" when the venturesome scientist, alone on the tiny islet, realizes he is close to "the world which has only death in it" and, shuddering, stands "next door to the Abyss—that blanched wall of the North which is the negation of life." John Metcalfe takes us to "The Bad Lands," where ordinary things become charged with "sinister suggestion" and the scenery develops "an unpleasant tendency to the macabre"

—small wonder that it evokes a dream in which, with Brent Ormerod, we walk "up and up into a strange dim country full of signs and whisperings and somber trees, where hollow breezes blow fitfully and a queer house set with lofty pines shines out white against a lurid sky." *Br-rrr!* And, accompanying H. G. Wells's foolhardy young hero into "The Red Room," we discover, with him, that it contains not "haunts," but simply Fear—black Fear.

Along with Hugh Walpole's evildoer, we cringe under the terrible whips of conscience in "The Tarn." In contrast, Elizabeth Bowen presents in "Telling" a killer whose mind is incapable of knowing remorse for his bloody deed, but only a dim comprehension that at last he has found Something he can do—Something that others cannot. The havoc wrought by a twisted mind holds us enthralled in "The Night Reveals," William Irish's account of a man who finds he does not really know his wife; and John Collier, in "Little Memento," affords us a brief but memorable peek into the machinations of a devious and morbid old man.

Lastly, two tales which are far, far different from each other, but in their own ways equally effective. When you read Lord Dunsany's "The Sack of Emeralds," forget the real world and surrender yourself to his magic as he tells us of "one bad October night in the high wolds, with a north wind chaunting of winter," when an old man, his face hopeless, totters along under the weight of a heavy sack; listen to the *click, clack, clop* coming nearer in the darkness, first faintly, then louder and louder, at last to reveal the rider: a figure wearing a sword in a huge scabbard, looking blacker than the darkness—Ray Bradbury, whose unique talent for horror-writing is beginning to receive just recognition, makes us share with his simple swamp folk their awe at the silent thing sloshing in "The Jar"; like them we ask, "Wonder what it is? Wonder if it's a he or a she or just a plain old *it?*"

Whether you like your shivers old-fashioned or new-fangled, or both, you should get plenty of them from these pages!

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

CASSIUS

MY HOUSEMAN, Stephen Penn, who presided over the staff of my residence in St. Thomas, was not, strictly speaking, a native of that city. Penn came from the neighboring island of St. Jan. It is one of the ancient West Indian names, although there remain in the islands nowadays no Caucasians to bear that honorable cognomen.

Stephen's travels, however, had not been limited to the crossing from St. Jan—which, incidentally, is the authentic scene of R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*—which lies little more than a rowboat's journey away from the capital of the Virgin Islands. Stephen had been "down the Islands," which means that he had been actually as far from home as Trinidad, or perhaps, British Guiana, down through the great sweep of former mountaintops, submerged by some vast, cataclysmic, prehistoric inundation and named the Bow of Ulysses by some fanciful, antique geographer. That odyssey of humble Stephen Penn had taken place because of his love for ships. He had had various jobs afloat and his exact knowledge of the houseman's art had been learned under various man-driving ship's stewards.

During this preliminary training for his life's work, Stephen had made many acquaintances. One of these, an upstanding, slim, parchment-colored Negro of 30 or so, was Brutus Hellman. Brutus, like Stephen, had settled down in St. Thomas as a houseman. It was, in fact, Stephen who had talked him into leaving his native British Antigua, to try his luck in our American Virgin Islands. Stephen had secured for him his first job in St. Thomas, in the household of a naval officer.

For this friend of his youthful days, Stephen continued to feel a certain sense of responsibility; because, when Brutus happened to be abruptly thrown out of employment by the sudden illness and removal by the Naval Department of his employer in the middle of the winter season in St. Thomas, Stephen came to me and requested that his friend Brutus be allowed to come to me "on board-wages" until he was able to secure another place.

I acquiesced. I knew Brutus as a first-rate houseman. I was glad to give him a hand, to oblige the always agreeable and highly efficient Stephen, and, indeed, to have so skillful a servant added to my little staff in my bachelor quarters. I arranged for something more substantial than the remuneration asked for, and Brutus Hellman added his skilled services to those of the admirable Stephen. I was very well served that season and never had any occasion to regret what both men alluded to as my "very great kindness!"

It was not long after Brutus Hellman had moved his simple belongings into one of the servants'-quarters cabins in my stone-paved yard that I had another opportunity to do something for him. It was Stephen once more who presented his friend's case to me. Brutus, it appeared, had need of a minor operation, and, Negro-like, the two of them, talking the matter over between themselves, had decided to ask me, their present patron, to arrange it.

I did so, with my friend, Doctor Pelletier, chief surgeon, in charge of our Naval Station Hospital and regarded in Naval circles as the best man in the Medical Corps. I had not inquired about the nature of Brutus's affliction. Stephen had stressed the minor aspect of the required surgery, and that was all I mentioned to Doctor Pelletier.

It is quite possible that if Doctor Pelletier had not been going to Puerto Rico on Thursday of that week, this narrative, the record of one of the most curious experiences I have ever had, would never have been set down. If Pelletier, his mind set on sailing at 11:00, had not merely walked out of his operating-room as soon as he had finished with Brutus a little after 8:00 that Thursday morning,

left the dressing of the slight wound upon Brutus's groin to be performed by his assistants, then that incredible affair which I can only describe as the persecution of the unfortunate Brutus Hellman would never have taken place.

It was on Wednesday, about 2 p.m., that I telephoned to Doctor Pelletier to ask him to perform an operation on Brutus.

"Send him over to the hospital this afternoon," Pelletier had answered, "and I'll look him over about five and operate the first thing in the morning—if there is any need for an operation! I'm leaving for San Juan at eleven, for a week."

I thanked him and went upstairs to my siesta, after giving Stephen the message to Brutus, who started off for the hospital about an hour later. He remained in the hospital until the following Sunday afternoon. He was entirely recovered from the operation, he reported. It had been a very slight affair, really, merely the removal of some kind of growth. He thanked me for my part in it when he came to announce dinner while I was reading on the gallery.

It was on the Saturday morning, the day before Brutus got back, that I discovered something very curious in an obscure corner of my house-yard, just around the corner of the wall of the three small cabins which occupy its north side. These cabins were tenantless except for the one at the east end of the row. That one was Brutus Hellman's. Stephen Penn, like my cook, washer, and scullery maid, lived somewhere in the town.

I had been looking over the yard which was paved with old-fashioned flagging. I found it in excellent condition, weeded, freshly swept, and clean. The three stone servants' cubicles had been recently whitewashed and glistened like cake icing in the morning sun. I looked over this portion of my domain with approval, for I like things shipshape. I glanced into the two narrow air spaces between the little, two-room houses. There were no cobwebs visible. Then I took a look around the east corner of Brutus Hellman's little house where there was a narrow passageway be-

tween the house and the high wall of antique Dutch brick, and there, well in toward the north wall, I saw on the ground what I first took to be a discarded toy which some child had thrown there, probably, it occurred to me, over the wall at the back of the stone cabins.

It looked like a doll's house, which, if it had been thrown there, had happened to land right side up. It looked more or less like one of the quaint old-fashioned beehives one still sees occasionally in the conservative Lesser Antilles. But it could hardly be a beehive. It was far too small.

My curiosity mildly aroused, I stepped into the alley way and looked down at the odd little thing. Seen from where I stopped it rewarded scrutiny. For it was, although made in a somewhat bungling way, a reproduction of an African village hut, thatched, circular, conical. The thatching, I suspected, had formerly been most of the business end of a small house-broom of tine twigs tied together around the end of a stick. The little house's upright "logs" were a heterogeneous medley of little round sticks among which I recognized three dilapidated lead pencils and the broken-off handle of a toothbrush. These details will serve to indicate its size and to justify my original conclusion that the thing was a rather cleverly made child's toy. How such a thing had got into my yard unless over the wall, was an unimportant little mystery. The little hut, from the ground up to its thatched peak, stood about seven inches in height. Its diameter was, perhaps, eight or nine inches.

My first reaction was to pick it up, look at it more closely, and then throw it into the wire cage in another corner of the yard where Stephen burned up wastepaper and scraps at frequent intervals. The thing was plainly a discarded toy, and had no business cluttering up my spotless yard. Then I suddenly remembered the washer's pick'ny, a small, silent, very black child of six or seven, who sometimes played quietly in the yard while his stout mother toiled over the washtub set up on a backless chair near the kitchen door where she could keep up a continuous stream of chatter with my cook.

I stayed my hand accordingly. Quite likely this little

thatched hut was a valued item of that pick'ny's possessions. Thinking pleasantly to surprise little Aesculapius, or whatever the child's name might be, I took from my pocket a fifty-bit piece—value ten cents—intending to place the coin inside the little house, through its rounded, low entranceway.

Stooping down, I shoved the coin through the doorway, and, as I did so, something suddenly scuttered about inside the hut, and pinched viciously at the ends of my thumb and forefinger.

I was, naturally, startled. I snatched my fingers away, and stood hastily erect. A mouse, perhaps even a rat, inside there! I glanced at my fingers. There was no mark on them. The skin was not broken. The rodent's vicious little sharp teeth had fortunately missed their grip as he snapped at me, intruding on his sacred privacy. Wondering a little, I stepped out of the alleyway and into the sunny, open yard, somewhat upset at this Lilliputian *contretemps,* and resolved upon telling Stephen to see to it that there was no ugly rodent there when next little Aesculapius should retrieve his plaything.

But when I arrived at the gallery steps my friend Colonel Lorriquer's car was just drawing up before the house, and, in hastening to greet welcome early-morning callers and later in accepting Mrs. Lorriquers invitation to dinner and contract at their house that evening, the little hut and its unpleasant inhabitant were driven wholly out of my mind.

I did not think of it again until several days later, on the night when my premises had become the theater for one of the most inexplicable, terrifying, and uncanny happenings I have ever experienced.

My gallery is a very pleasant place to sit evenings, except in that spring period during which the West Indian candlemoths hatch in their myriads and, for several successive days, make it impossible to sit outdoors in any lighted, unscreened place.

It was much too early for the candlemoths, however, at

the time I am speaking of, and on the evening of that Sunday upon which Brutus Hellman returned from the hospital, a party of four persons, including myself, occupied the gallery.

The other man was Arthur Carswell, over from Haiti on a short visit. The two ladies were Mrs. Spencer, Colonel Lorriquer's widowed daughter, and her friend, Mrs. Squire. We had dined an hour previously at the Grand Hotel as guests of Carswell, and, having taken our coffee at my house, were remaining outdoors on the gallery for a breath of air on a rather warm and sultry February evening. We were sitting quietly talking in a rather desultory manner, all of us unspokenly reluctant to move inside the house for a projected evening at contract.

It was, as I recall the hour, about nine o'clock, the night warm, as I have said, and very still. Above, in a cloudless sky of luminous indigo, the tropical stars glowed enormous. The intoxicating sweet odors of white jasmine and tuberoses made the still air redolent. No sound, except an occasional rather languid remark from one of ourselves, broke the exquisite, balmy stillness.

Then, all at once, without any warning and with an abruptness which caused Carswell and me to stand up, the exquisite perfection of the night was rudely shattered by an appalling, sustained scream of sheer mortal terror.

That scream inaugurated what seems to me as I look back upon the next few days, to be one of the most unnerving, devastating, and generally horrible periods I can recall in a lifetime not devoid of adventure. I formulated at that time, and still retain, mentally, a phrase descriptive of it. It was "the Reign of Terror."

Carswell and I, following the direction of the scream, rushed down the outer gallery steps and back through the yard toward the Negro cabins. As I have mentioned, only one of these was occupied, Brutus Hellman's. As we rounded the corner of the house a faint light—it was Brutus's oil lamp—appeared in the form of a wide vertical strip at the entrance of the occupied cabin. To that we ran as to a beacon, and pushed into the room.

The lamp, newly lighted, and smoking, its glass chimney set on askew as though in great haste, dimly illuminated a strange scene. Doubled up and sitting on the side of his bed, the bedclothes lumped together near the bed's foot where he had flung them, cowered Brutus. His face was a dull, ashen gray in the smoky light, his back was bent, his hands clasped tightly about his shin. And, from between those clenched hands, a steady stream of blood stained the white sheet which hung over the bed's edge and spread below into a small pool on the cabin room's stone-paved floor.

Brutus, groaning dismally, rocked back and forth, clutching his leg. The lamp smoked steadily, defiling the close air, while, incongruously, through the now open doorway poured streams and great pulsing breaths of night-blooming tropical flowers, mingling strangely with the hot, acrid odor of the smoking lampwick.

Carswell went directly to the lamp, straightened the chimney, turned down the flame. The lamp ceased its ugly reek and the air of the cabin cleared as Carswell, turning away from the lamp, threw wide the shutters of the large window which, like most West Indian Negroes, Brutus had closed against the "night air" when he retired.

I gave my attention directly to the man, and by the time the air had cleared somewhat I had him over on his back in a reclining position, and with a great strip torn from one of his bedsheets, was binding up the ugly deep little wound in the lower muscle of his leg just at the outside of the shinbone. I pulled the improvised bandage tight, and the flow of blood ceased, and Brutus, his mind probably somewhat relieved by this timely aid, put an end to his moaning, and turned his ashy face up to mine.

"Did you see it, sar?" he inquired, biting back the trembling of his mouth.

I paid practically no attention to this remark. Indeed, I barely heard it. I was, you see, very busily engaged in stanching the flow of blood. Brutus had already lost a considerable quantity, and my rough bandaging was directed entirely to the end of stopping this. Instead of replying to

Brutus's question I turned to Carswell, who had finished with the lamp and the window, and now stood by, ready to lend a hand in his efficient way.

"Run up to the bathroom, will you, Carswell, and bring me a couple of rolls of bandage, from the medicine closet, and a bottle of mercurochrome." Carswell disappeared on this errand and I sat, holding my hands tightly around Brutus's leg, just above the bandage. Then he repeated his question, and this time I paid attention to what he was saying.

"See what, Brutus?" I inquired, and looked at him, almost for the first time—into his eyes, I mean. Hitherto I had been looking at my bandaging.

I saw a stark terror in those eyes.

"It," said Brutus, "de T'ing, sar."

I sat on the side of the bed and looked at him. I was, naturally, puzzled. "What thing, Brutus?" I asked very quietly, almost soothingly. Such terror possessed my second houseman that, I considered, he must, for the time being, be treated like a frightened child.

"De T'ing what attack me, sar," explained Brutus.

"What was it like?" I countered. "Do you mean it is still here—in your room?"

At that Brutus very nearly collapsed. His eyes rolled up and their irises nearly disappeared; he shuddered as though with a violent chill, from head to foot. I let go his leg. The blood would be no longer flowing, I felt sure, under that tight bandaging of mine. I turned back the bedclothes, rolled poor Brutus under them, tucked him in. I took his limp hands and rubbed them smartly. At this instant Carswell came in through the still-open doorway, his hands full of first-aid material. This he laid without a word on the bed beside me, and stood, looking at Brutus, slightly shaking his head. I turned to him.

"And would you mind bringing some brandy, old man? He's rather down and out, I'm afraid—trembling from head to foot."

"It's the reaction, of course," remarked Carswell quietly.

"I have the brandy here." The efficient fellow drew a small flask from his jacket pocket, uncorked it, and poured out a dose in the small silver cup which covered the patent stopper.

I raised Brutus's head from the pillow, his teeth audibly chattering as I did so, and just as I was getting the brandy between his lips, there came a slight scuttering sound from under the bed, and something, a small, dark, sinister-looking animal of about the size of a mongoose, dashed on all fours across the open space between the bed's corner and the still-open doorway and disappeared into the night outside. Without a word Carswell ran after it, turning sharply to the left and running past the open window. I dropped the empty brandy cup, lowered Brutus's head hastily to its pillow, and dashed out of the cabin. Carswell was at the end of the cabins, his flashlight stabbing the narrow alleyway where I had found the miniature African hut. I ran up to him.

"It went up here," said Carswell laconically.

I stood beside him in silence, my hand on his shoulder. He brightened every nook and cranny of the narrow alleyway with his light. There was nothing, nothing alive, to be seen. The Thing had had, of course, ample time to turn some hidden corner behind the cabins, to bury itself out of sight in some accustomed hiding-place, even to climb over the high, rough-surfaced back wall. Carswell brought his flashlight to rest finally on the little hutlike thing which still stood in the alleyway.

"What's that?" he inquired. "Looks like some child's toy."

"That's what I supposed when I discovered it," I answered. "I imagine it belongs to the washer's pickaninny." We stepped into the alleyway. It was not quite wide enough for us to walk abreast. Carswell followed me in. I turned over the little hut with my foot. There was nothing under it. I daresay the possibility of this as a cache for the Thing had occurred to Carswell and me simultaneously. The Thing, mongoose, or whatever it was, had got clean away.

We returned to the cabin and found Brutus recovering

from his aguelike trembling fit. His eyes were calmer now. The reassurance of our presence, the bandaging, had had their effect. Brutus proceeded to thank us for what we had done for him.

Helped by Carswell, I gingerly removed my rough bandage. The blood about that ugly bite—for a bite it certainly was, with unmistakable tooth marks around its badly torn edges—was clotted now. The flow had ceased. We poured mercurochrome over and through the wound, disinfecting it, and then I placed two entire rolls of three-inch bandage about Brutus's wounded ankle. Then, with various encouragements and reassurances, we left him, the lamp still burning at his request, and went back to the ladies.

Our contract game was, somehow, a jumpy one, the ladies having been considerably upset by the scare down there in the yard, and we concluded it early, Carswell driving Mrs. Spencer home and I walking down the hill with Mrs. Squire to the Grand Hotel where she was spending that winter.

It was still several minutes short of midnight when I returned, after a slow walk up the hill, to my house. I had been thinking of the incident all the way up the hill. I determined to look in upon Brutus Hellman before retiring, but first I went up to my bedroom and loaded a small automatic pistol, and this I carried with me when I went down to the cabins in the yard. Brutus's light was still going, and he was awake, for he responded instantly to my tap on his door.

I went in and talked with the man for a few minutes. I left him the gun, which he placed carefully under his pillow. At the door I turned and addressed him.

"How do you suppose the thing—whatever it was that attacked you, Brutus—could have got in, with everything closed up tight?"

Brutus replied that he had been thinking of this himself and had come to the conclusion that "de T'ing" had concealed itself in the cabin before he had retired and closed the window and door. He expressed himself as uneasy with the window open, as Carswell and I had left it.

"But, man, you should have the fresh air while you sleep. You don't want your place closed up like a field laborer's, do you?" said I rallyingly.

Brutus grinned. "No, sar," said he slowly, "ain't dat I be afeared of de Jumbee! I daresay it born in de blood, sar. I is close up everyt'ing by instinct! Besides, sar, now dat de T'ing attackin' me, p'raps bes' to have the window close up tightly. Den de T'ing cyant possibly mek an entrance 'pon me!"

I assured Brutus that the most agile mongoose could hardly clamber up that smooth, whitewashed wall outside and come in that window. Brutus smiled, but shook his head nevertheless.

" 'Tain't a mongoose, nor a rat, neither, sar," he remarked, as he settled himself for rest under the bedclothes.

"What do you think it is, then?" I inquired.

"Only de good Gawd know, sar," replied Brutus cryptically.

I was perhaps halfway across the house-yard on my way to turn in when my ears were assailed by precisely one of those suppressed combinations of squeals and grunts which John Masefield describes as presaging an animal tragedy under the hedge of an English countryside on a moonlit summer night. Something—a brief, ruthless combat for food or blood, between two small ground animals—was going on somewhere in the vicinity. I paused, listened, my senses the more readily attuned to this bitter duel because of what had happened in Brutus's cabin. As I paused, the squeals of the fighting animals abruptly ceased. One combatant, apparently, had given up the ghost! A grunting noise persisted for a few instants, however, and it made me shudder involuntarily. These sounds were low, essentially bestial, commonplace. Yet there was in them something so savage, albeit on the small scale of our everyday West Indian fauna, as to give me pause. I could feel the beginning of a cold shudder run down my spine under my white drill jacket!

I turned about, almost reluctantly, drawn somehow, in spite of myself, to the scene of combat. The grunts had

ceased now, and to my ears, in the quiet of that perfect night of soft airs and moonlight, there came the even more horrible little sound of the tearing of flesh! It was gruesome, quite horrible, well-nigh unbearable. I paused again, a little shaken, it must be confessed, my nerves a trifle unstrung. I was facing in the direction of the ripping sounds now. Then there was silence—complete, tranquil, absolute!

Then I stepped toward the scene of this small conflict, my flashlight sweeping that corner of the yard nearest the small alleyway.

It picked up the victim almost at once, and I thought—I could not be quite sure—that I saw at the very edge of the circle of illumination, the scrambling flight of the victor. The victim was commonplace. It was the body, still slightly palpitating, of a large, well-nourished rat. The dead rat lay well out in the yard, its freshly drawn vital fluid staining a wide smear on the flagstone which supported it—a ghastly-looking affair. I looked down at it curiously. It had, indeed, been a ruthless attack to which this lowly creature had succumbed. Its throat was torn out, it was disemboweled, rived terrifically. I stepped back to Brutus's cabin, went in, and picked up from a pile of them on his bureau a copy of one of our small-sheet local newspapers. With this, nodding smilingly at Brutus I proceeded once more to the scene of carnage. I had an idea. I laid the paper down, kicked the body of the rat upon it with my foot, and, picking up the paper, carried the dead rat into Brutus's cabin. I turned up his lamp and carried it over to the bedside.

"Do you suppose this was your animal, Brutus?" I asked. "If so, you seem to be pretty well avenged!"

Brutus grinned and looked closely at the riven animal. Then, "No, sar," he said slowly, " 'Twas no rat whut attacked me, sar. See de t'roat, please, sar. Him ahl tore out, mos' effectively! No, sar. But—I surmise—from de appearance of dis t'roat, de mouf which maim me on de laig was de same mouf whut completely ruin dis rat!"

And, indeed, judging from the appearance of the rat Brutus's judgment might well be sound.

I wrapped the paper about it, said good night once more

to Hellman, carried it out with me, threw it into the metal wastebasket in which the house trash is burned every mornning, and went to bed.

At three minutes past four the next morning I was snatched out of my comfortable bed and a deep sleep by the rattle of successive shots from the wicked little automatic I had left with Brutus. I jumped into my bathrobe, thrust my feet into my slippers, and was downstairs on the run, almost before the remnants of sleep were out of my eyes and brain. I ran out through the kitchen, as the nearest way, and was inside Brutus's cabin before the empty pistol, still clutched in his hand and pointed toward the open window, had ceased smoking. My first words were:

"Did you get It, Brutus?" I was thinking of the thing in terms of "It."

"Yes, sar," returned Brutus, lowering his pistol. "I t'ink I scotch him, sar. Be please to look on de window sill. P'raps some blood in evidence, sar."

I did so, and found that Brutus's marksmanship was better than I had anticipated when I entrusted him with the gun. To be sure, he had fired off all seven bullets, and, apparently, scored only one hit. A small, single drop of fresh blood lay on the white-painted wooden window sill. No other trace of the attacker was in evidence. My flashlight revealed no marks, and the smooth, freshly whitewashed wall outside was unscathed. Unless the Thing had wings—something suddenly touched me on the forehead, something light and delicate. I reached up, grasping. My hand closed around something like a string. I turned the flashlight up and there hung a thin strand of liana stem. I pulled it. It was firmly fastened somewhere up above there. I stepped outside, with one of Brutus's chairs, placed this against the outer wall under the window, and standing on it, raked the eaves with the flashlight. The upper end of the liana stem was looped about a small projection in the gutter, just above the window.

The Thing, apparently, knew enough to resort to this mechanical method for its second attack that night.

Inside, Brutus, somewhat excited over his exploit, found

a certain difficulty in describing just what it was that had drawn his aim.

"It hav de appearance of a frog, sar," he vouchsafed. "I is wide awake when de T'ing land himse'f 'pon de sill, an' I have opportunity for takin' an excellent aim, sar." That was the best I could get out of Brutus. I tried to visualize a "Thing" which looked like a frog, being able to master one of our big, ferocious rats and tear out its inner parts and go off with them, not to mention liana stems with loop-knots in them to swing from a roof to an open window, and which could make a wound like the one above Brutus Hellman's ankle. It was rather too much for me. But—the Reign of Terror had begun, and no mistake!

I went back to the house, broached my medicine closet, and returned to the cabin with a pair of glass microscopic slides. Between these I made a smear of the still fresh and fluid blood on the window sill, and went back to my room, intending to send the smear later in the morning to Doctor Pelletier's laboratory man at the Municipal Hospital.

I left the slides there myself, requesting Doctor Brownell to make me an analysis of the specimen with a view to determining its place in the gamut of West Indian fauna, and that afternoon, shortly after the siesta hour, I received a telephone call from the young physician. Doctor Brownell had a certain whimsical cast apparent in his voice which was new to me. He spoke, I thought, rather banteringly.

"Where did you get your specimen, Mr. Canevin?" he inquired. "I understood you to say it was the blood of some kind of lower animal."

"Yes," said I, "that was what *I* understood, Doctor Brownell. Is there something peculiar about it?"

"Well—" said Doctor Brownell slowly and somewhat banteringly, "yes—and no. The only queer thing about it is that it's—human blood, probably a Negro's."

I managed to thank him, even to say that I did not want the specimen returned, in answer to his query, and we rang off.

The plot, it seemed to me, was, in the language of the

tradition of strange occurrences, thickening! This, then, must be Brutus's blood. Brutus's statement, that he had shot at and struck the marauder at his open window, must be imagination—Negro talk! But, even allowing that it was Brutus's blood—there was, certainly, no one else about to supply that drop of fresh fluid which I had so carefully scraped up on my two glass slides—how had he got blood, from his wounded lower leg, presumably, on that high window sill? To what end would the man lie to me on such a subject? Besides, certainly he had shot at something—the pistol was smoking when I got to his room. And then—the liana stem? How was that to be accounted for?

Doctor Brownell's report made the whole thing more complicated than it had been before. Science, which I had so cheerfully invoked, had only served to make this mystery deeper and more inexplicable.

Handicapped by nothing more than a slight limp Brutus Hellman was up and attending to his duties about the house the next day. In response to my careful questioning, he had repeated the story of his shooting in all particulars just as he had recounted that incident to me in the gray hours of the early morning. He had even added a particular which fitted in with the liana stem as the means of ingress. The Thing, he said, had appeared to *swing down* onto the window sill from above, as he, awake for the time being between cat naps, had first seen it and reached for the pistol underneath his pillow and then opened fire.

Nothing happened throughout the day; nor, indeed, during the Reign of Terror, as I have called it, did anything untoward occur throughout, except at night. That evening, shortly after eight o'clock, Brutus retired, and Stephen Penn, who had accompanied him to his cabin, reported to me that, in accordance with my suggestion, the two of them had made an exhaustive search for any concealed "Thing" which might have secreted itself about Brutus's premises. They had found nothing, and Brutus, his window open, but provided with a tight-fitting screen which had been installed

during the day, had fallen asleep before Stephen left. Penn had carefully closed the cabin door behind him, making sure that it was properly latched.

The attack that night—I had been sleeping "with one eye open"—did not come until two o'clock in the morning. This time Brutus had no opportunity to use the gun, and so I was not awakened until it was all over. It was, indeed, Brutus calling me softly from the yard at a quarter past two that brought me to my feet and to the window.

"Yes," said I, "what is it, Brutus?"

"You axed me to inform you, sar, of anything," explained Brutus from the yard.

"Right! What happened? Wait, Brutus, I'll come down," and I hurriedly stepped into bathrobe and slippers.

Brutus was waiting for me at the kitchen door, a hand to his left cheek, holding a handkerchief rolled into a ball. Even in the moonlight I could see that this make-shift dressing was bright red. Brutus, it appeared, had suffered another attack of some kind. I took him into the house and upstairs, and dressed the three wounds in his left cheek in my bathroom. He had been awakened without warning, fifteen minutes before, with a sudden hurt, had straightened up in bed, but not before two more stabs, directly through the cheek, had been delivered. He had only just seen the Thing scrambling down over the foot of the bed, as he came awake under the impetus of these stabs, and, after a hasty search for the attacker had wisely devoted himself to stanching his bleeding face. Then, trembling in every limb, he had stepped out into the yard and come under my window to call me.

The three holes through the man's cheek were of equal size and similar appearance, obviously inflicted by some stabbing implement of about the diameter of a quarter-inch. The first stab, Brutus thought, had been the one highest up, and this one had not only penetrated into the mouth like the others, but had severely scratched the gum of the upper jaw just above his eyetooth. I talked to him as I dressed these three wounds. "So the Thing must have been concealed inside your room, you think, Brutus?"

"Undoubtedly, sar," returned Brutus. "There was no possible way for it to crawl in 'pon me—de door shut tight, de window screen undisturb', sar."

The poor fellow was trembling from head to foot with shock and fear, and I accompanied him back to his cabin. He had not lighted his lamp. It was only by the light of the moon that he had seen his assailant disappear over the foot of the bed. He had seized the handkerchief and run out into the yard in his pajamas.

I lighted the lamp, determining to have electricity put into the cabin the next day, and, with Brutus's assistance, looked carefully over the room. Nothing, apparently, was hidden anywhere. There was only a little space to search through, Brutus had few belongings, the cabin furniture was adequate but scanty. There were no superfluities, no place, in other words, in which the Thing could hide itself.

Whatever had attacked Brutus was indeed going about its work with vicious cunning and determination.

Brutus turned in, and after sitting beside him for a while, I left the lamp turned down, closed the door, and took my departure.

Brutus did not turn up in the morning, and Stephen Penn, returning from an investigatory visit to the cabin came to me on the gallery about nine o'clock with a face as gray as ashes. He had found Brutus unconscious, the bed soaked in blood, and, along the great pectoral muscle where the right arm joins the body, a long and deep gash from which the unfortunate fellow had, apparently, lost literally quarts of blood. I telephoned for a doctor and hurried to the cabin.

Brutus was conscious upon my arrival, but so weakened from loss of blood as to be quite unable to speak. On the floor, beside the bed, apparently where it had fallen, lay a medium-sized pocketknife, its largest blade open, soaked in blood. Apparently this had been the instrument with which he had been wounded.

The doctor, soon after his arrival, declared a blood transfusion to be necessary, and this operation was performed at eleven o'clock in the cabin, Stephen contributing

a portion of the blood, a young Negro from the town, paid for his service, the rest. After that, and the administration of a nourishing hot drink, Brutus was able to tell us what had happened.

Against his own expectations, he had fallen alseep immediately after my departure, and curiously, had been awakened not by any attack upon him, but by the booming of a *rata* drum from somewhere up in the hills back of the town where some of the Negroes were, doubtless, "making magic," a common enough occurrence in any of the voodoo-ridden West Indian islands. But this, according to Brutus, was no ordinary awakening.

No—for, on the floor, beside his bed, *dancing to the distant drumbeats,* he had seen—It!

That Brutus had possessed some idea of the identity or character of his assailant, I had, previous to this occurrence of his most serious wound, strongly suspected. I had gathered this impression from half a dozen little things, such as his fervid denial that the creature which had bitten him was either a rat or a mongoose; his "Gawd know" when I had asked him what the Thing was like.

Now I understood clearly, of course, that Brutus knew what kind of creature had concealed itself in his room. I even elicited the fact, discovered by him, just how I am quite unaware, that the Thing had hidden under a loose floor board beneath his bed and so escaped detection on the several previous searches.

But to find out from Brutus—the only person who knew —that, indeed, was quite another affair. There can be, I surmise, no human being as consistently and completely shut-mouthed as a West Indian Negro, once such a person has definitely made up his mind to silence on a given subject! And on this subject, Brutus had, it appeared, quite definitely made up his mind. No questions, no cajolery, no urging—even with tears, on the part of his lifelong friend Stephen Penn—could elicit from him the slightest remark bearing on the description or identity of the Thing. I myself used every argument which logic and common sense presented to my Caucasian mind. I urged his subsequent safety

upon Brutus, my earnest desire to protect him, the logical necessity of cooperating, in the stubborn fellow's own obvious interest, with us who had his welfare at heart. Stephen, as I have said, even wept! But all these efforts on our parts, were of no avail. Brutus Hellman resolutely refused to add a single word to what he had already said. He had awakened to the muted booming of the distant drum. He had seen the Thing dancing beside his bed. He had, it appeared, fainted from this shock, whatever the precise nature of that shock may have been, and knew nothing more until he came slowly to a vastly weakened consciousness between Stephen Penn's visit to him late in the morning, and mine which followed it almost at once.

There was one fortunate circumstance. The deep and wide cut which had, apparently, been inflicted upon him with his pocketknife—which had been lying, open, by mere chance, on a small taboret beside his bed—had been delivered lengthwise of the pectoral muscle, not across the muscle. Otherwise the fellow's right arm would have been seriously crippled for life. The major damage he had suffered in this last and most serious attack had been the loss of blood, and this, through my employment of one donor of blood and Stephen Penn's devotion in giving him the remainder, had been virtually repaired.

However, whether he spoke or kept silent, it was plain to me that I had a very definite duty toward Brutus Hellman. I could not, if anything were to be done to prevent it, have him attacked in this way while in my service and living on my premises.

The electricity went in that afternoon, with a pull-switch placed near the hand of whoever slept in the bed, and, later in the day, Stephen Penn brought up on a donkey cart from his town lodging-place, his own bedstead, which he set up in Brutus's room, and his bureau containing the major portion of his belongings, which he placed in the newly swept and garnished cabin next door. If the Thing repeated its attack that night, it would have Stephen, as well as Brutus, to deal with.

One contribution to our knowledge Stephen made, even

before he had actually moved into my yard. This was the instrument with which Brutus had been stabbed through the cheek. He found it cached in the floor space underneath that loose board where the Thing had hidden itself. He brought it to me, covered with dried blood. It was a rough, small-scale reproduction of an African *assegai,* or stabbing-spear. It was made out of an ordinary butcher's hardwood meat skewer, its head a splinter of pointed glass such as might be picked up anywhere about the town. The head—and this was what caused the resemblance to an *assegai*—was very exactly and neatly bound on to the cleft end of the skewer, with fishline. On the whole, and considered as a piece of work, the *assegai* was a highly creditable job.

It was on the morning of this last-recorded attack on Brutus Hellman during the period between my visit to him and the arrival of the doctor with the man for the blood transfusion, that I sat down, at my desk, in an attempt to figure out some conclusion from the facts already known. I had progressed somewhat with my theoretical investigation at that time. When later, after Brutus could talk, he mentioned the circumstance of the Thing's dancing there on his cabin floor, to the notes of a drum, in the pouring moonlight which came through his screened window and gave its illumination to the little room, I came to some sort of indeterminate decision. I will recount the steps—they are very brief—which led up to this.

The facts, as I noted them down on paper that day, pointed to a pair of alternatives. Either Brutus Hellman was demented, and had invented his "attacks," having inflicted them upon himself for some inscrutable reason; or —the Thing was possessed of qualities not common among the lower animals! I set the two groups of facts side by side, and compared them.

Carswell and I had actually seen the Thing as it ran out of the cabin that first night. Something, presumably the same Thing, had torn a large rat to pieces. The same Thing had bitten savagely Brutus's lower leg. Brutus's description of it was that it looked "like a frog." Those four facts

seemed to indicate one of the lower animals, though its genus and the motive for its attacks were unknown!

On the other hand, there was a divergent set of facts. The Thing had used mechanical means, a liana stem with a looped knot in it, to get into Brutus's cabin through the window. It had used some stabbing instrument, later found, and proving to be a manufactured affair. Again, later, it had used Brutus's knife in its final attack. All these facts pointed to some such animal as a small monkey. This theory was strengthened by the shape of the bites on Brutus's leg and on the rat's throat.

That it was *not* a monkey, however, there was excellent evidence. The Thing looked like a frog. A frog is a very different-looking creature from any known kind of monkey. There were, so far as I knew, no monkeys at the time on the island of St. Thomas.

I added to these sets of facts two other matters. The blood alleged to be drawn from the Thing had, on analysis, turned out to be human blood. The single circumstance pointed very strongly to the insanity theory. On the other hand, Brutus could hardly have placed the fresh blood which I had myself scraped up on my slides, on the window sill where I found it. Still, he might have done so, if his insanity were such as to allow for an elaborately planted hoax or something of the kind. He could have placed the drop of blood there, drawn from his own body by means of a pinprick, before he fired the seven cartridges that night. It was possible. But, knowing Brutus, it was so improbable as to be quite absurd.

The final circumstance was the little "African" hut. That, somehow, seemed to fit in with the *assegai*. The two naturally went together.

It was a jumble, a puzzle. The more I contrasted and compared these clues, the more impossible the situation became.

Well, there was one door open, at least. I decided to go through that door and see where it led me. I sent for Stephen. It was several hours after the blood transfusion. I had to get some of Brutus's blood for my experiment, but

it must be blood drawn previous to the transfusion. Stephen came to see what I wanted.

"Stephen," said I, "I want you to secure from Hellman's soiled things one of those very bloody sheets which you changed on his bed today, and bring it here."

Stephen goggled at me, but went at once on this extraordinary errand. He brought me the sheet. On one of its corners, there was an especially heavy mass of clotted blood. From the underside of this I managed to secure a fresh enough smear on a pair of glass slides, and with these I stepped into my car and ran down to the hospital and asked for Doctor Brownell.

I gave him the slides and asked him to make for me an analysis for the purpose of comparing this blood with the specimen I had given him two days before. My only worry was whether or not they had kept a record of the former analysis, it being a private job and not part of the hospital routine. They had recorded it, however, and Doctor Brownell obligingly made the test for me then and there. Half an hour after he had stepped into the laboratory he came back to me.

"Here are the records," he said. "The two specimens are unquestionably from the same person, presumably a Negro. They are virtually identical."

The blood alleged to be the Thing's, then, was merely Brutus's blood. The strong presumption was, therefore, that Brutus had lost his mind.

Into this necessary conclusion, I attempted to fit the remaining facts. Unfortunately for the sake of any solution, they did not fit! Brutus might, for some insane reason, have inflicted the three sets of wounds upon himself. But Brutus had not made the "African" hut, which had turned up before he was back from the hospital. He had not, presumably, fastened that liana stem outside his window. He had not, certainly, slain that rat, nor could he have "invented" the creature which both Carswell and I had seen, however vaguely, running out of his cabin that night of the first attack.

At the end of all my cogitations, I knew absolutely noth-

ing, except what my own senses had conveyed to me; and these discordant facts I have already set down in their order and sequence, precisely and accurately, as they occurred.

To these I now add the additional fact that upon the night following the last recorded attack on Brutus Hellman nothing whatever happened. Neither he nor Stephen Penn, sleeping side by side in their two beds in the cabin room, was in any way disturbed.

I wished, fervently, that Doctor Pelletier were at hand. I needed someone like him to talk to. Carswell would not answer, somehow. No one would answer. I needed Pelletier, with his incisive mind, his scientific training, his vast knowledge of the West Indies, his open-mindedness to facts wherever these and their contemplation might lead the investigator. I needed Pelletier very badly indeed! And Pelletier was still over in Puerto Rico.

Only one further circumstance, and that, apparently, an irrelevant one, can be added to the facts already narrated —those incongruous facts which did not appear to have any reasonable connection with one another and seemed to be mystifyingly contradictory. The circumstance was related to me by Stephen Penn, and it was nothing more or less than the record of a word, a proper name. This, Stephen alleged, Brutus had repeated, over and over, as, under the effects of the two degrees of temperature which he was carrying as the result of his shock and of the blood transfusion, he had tossed about restlessly during a portion of the night. That name was, in a sense, a singularly appropriate one for Brutus to utter, even though one would hardly suspect the fellow of having any acquaintance with Roman history, or, indeed, with the works of William Shakespeare!

The name was—Cassius!

I figured that anyone bearing the Christian name, Brutus, must, in the course of a lifetime, have got wind of the original Brutus's side partner. The two names naturally go together, of course, like Damon and Pythias, David and Jonathan! However, I said nothing about this to Brutus.

I was on the concrete wharf beside the Naval Administration Building long before the *Grebe* arrived from San Juan on the Thursday morning a week after Brutus Hellman's operation.

I wanted to get Pelletier's ear at the earliest possible moment. Nearby, in the waiting line against the wall of the Navy building, Stephen Penn at the wheel, stood my car. I had telephoned Pelletier's man that he need not meet the doctor. I was going to do that myself, to get what facts, whatever explanation Pelletier might have to offer as I drove him through the town and up the precipitous roadways of Denmark Hill to his house at its summit.

My bulky, hard-boiled, genial naval-surgeon friend, of the keen, analytical brain and the skillful hands which so often skirted the very edges of death in his operating-room, was unable, however, to accompany me at once upon his arrival. I had to wait more than 20 minutes for him, while others, who had prior claims upon him, interviewed him. At last he broke away from the important ones and heaved his unwieldy bulk into the back seat of my car beside me. Among those who had waylaid him, I recognized Doctors Roots and Maguire, both Naval surgeons.

I had not finished my account of the persecution to which Brutus Hellman had been subjected by the time we arrived at the doctor's hilltop abode. I told Stephen to wait for me and finished the story inside the house while Pelletier's houseman was unpacking his traveling-valises. Pelletier heard me through in virtual silence, only occasionally interrupting with a pertinent question. When I had finished he lay back in his chair, his eyes closed.

He said nothing for several minutes. Then, his eyes still shut, he raised and slightly waved his big, awkward-looking hand, that hand of such uncanny skill when it held a knife, and began to speak, very slowly and reflectively. "Doctor Roots mentioned a peculiar circumstance on the wharf."

"Yes?" said I.

"Yes," said Doctor Pelletier. He shifted his ungainly bulk in his big chair, opened his eyes and looked at me. Then, very deliberately, "Roots reported the disappearance of

the thing—it was a parasitic growth—that I removed from your houseman's side a week ago. When they had dressed the fellow and sent him back to the ward Roots intended to look the thing over in the laboratory. It was quite unusual. I'll come to that in a minute. But when he turned to pick it up, it was gone; had quite disappeared. The nurse, Miss Charles, and he looked all over for it, made a very thorough search. That was one of the things he came down for this morning—to report that to me." Once again Pelletier paused, looked at me searchingly, as though studying me carefully. Then he said, "I understand you to say that the Thing, as you call it, is still at large?"

The incredible possible implication of this statement of the disappearance of the growth removed from Hellman's body and the doctor's question, stunned me for an instant. Could he possibly mean to imply—? I stared at him blankly for an instant.

"Yes," said I, "it is still at large, and poor Hellman is barricaded in his cabin. As I have told you, I have dressed those bites and gashes myself. He absolutely refuses to go to the hospital again. He lies there, muttering to himself, ash-gray with fear."

"Hm," vouchsafed Doctor Pelletier. "How big would you say the Thing is, Canevin, judging from your glimpse of it and the marks it leaves?"

"About the size, say, of a rat," I answered, "and black. We had that one sight of it, that first night. Carswell and I both saw it scuttering out of Hellman's cabin right under our feet when this horrible business first started."

Doctor Pelletier nodded, slowly. Then he made another remark, apparently irrelevant. "I had breakfast this morning on board the *Grebe*. Could you give me lunch?" He looked at his watch.

"Of course," I returned. "Are you thinking of—"

"Let's get going," said Doctor Pelletier, heaving himself to his feet.

We started at once, the doctor calling out to his servants that he would not be back for one-o'clock "breakfast," and Stephen Penn, who had driven us up the hill, drove us down

again. Arrived at my house, we proceeded straight to Hellman's cabin. Doctor Pelletier talked soothingly to the poor fellow while examining those ugly wounds. On several he placed fresh dressings from his professional black bag. When he had finished he drew me outside.

"You did well, Canevin," he remarked reflectively, "in not calling in anybody, dressing those wounds yourself! What people don't know, er—won't hurt 'em!" He paused after a few steps away from the cabin. "Show me," he commanded, "which way the Thing ran, that first night."

I indicated the direction, and we walked along the line of it, Pelletier forging ahead, his black bag in his big hand. We reached the corner of the cabin in a few steps, and Pelletier glanced up the alleyway between the cabin's side and the high yard wall. The little toy house, looking somewhat dilapidated now, still stood where it had been, since I first discovered it. Pelletier did not enter the alleyway. He looked in at the queer little miniature hut.

"Hm," he remarked, his forehead puckered into a thick frowning wrinkle. Then, turning abruptly to me, "I suppose it must have occurred to you that the Thing lived in that," said he challengingly.

"Yes—naturally; after it went for my fingers—whatever *that* creature may have been. Three or four times I've gone in there with a flashlight after one of the attacks on Brutus Hellman; picked it up, even, and looked inside—"

"And the Thing is never there," finished Doctor Pelletier, nodding sagaciously.

"Never," I corroborated.

"Come on up to the gallery," said the doctor, "and I'll tell you what I think."

We proceeded to the gallery at once and Doctor Pelletier, laying down his black bag, caused a lounge chair to groan and creak beneath his recumbent weight while I went into the house to command the usual West Indian preliminary to a meal.

A few minutes later Doctor Pelletier told me what he thought, according to his promise. His opening remark was

in the form of a question; about the very last question anyone in his senses would have regarded as pertinent to the subject in hand.

"Do you know anything about twins, Canevin?" he inquired.

"Twins?" said I. "Twins!" I was greatly puzzled. I had not been expecting any remarks about twins. "Well," said I, as Doctor Pelletier stared at me gravely, "only what everybody knows about them, I imagine. What about them?"

"There are two types of twins, Canevin—and I don't mean the difference arising out of being separate or attached-at-birth, the 'Siamese' or ordinary types. I mean something far more basic than that accidental division into categories; more fundamental—deeper than that kind of distinction. The two kinds of twins I have reference to are called, in biological terminology, monozygotic and dizygotic respectively; those which originate, that is, from one cell, or from two."

"The distinction," I threw in, "which Johannes Lange makes in his study of criminal determinism, his book, *Crime and Destiny*. The one-cell-originated twins, he contends, have identical motives and personalities. If one is a thief, the other has to be! He sets out to prove—and that pompous ass, Haldane, who wrote the foreword, believes it, too—that there is no free will; that man's moral course is predetermined, inescapable—a kind of scientific Calvinism."

"Precisely, just that," said Doctor Pelletier. "Anyhow, you understand that distinction."

I looked at him, still somewhat puzzled. "Yes," said I, "but still, I don't see its application to this nasty business of Brutus Hellman."

"I was leading up to telling you," said Doctor Pelletier, in his matter-of-fact, forthright fashion of speech, "to telling you, Canevin, that the Thing is undoubtedly the parasitic, 'Siamese twin' that I cut away from Brutus Hellman last Thursday morning, and which disappeared out of the operating-room. Also, from the evidence, I'd be inclined to

think it is of the 'dizygotic' type. That would not occur, in the case of 'attached' twins, more than once in ten million times!"

He paused at this and looked at me. For my part, after that amazing, that utterly incredible statement, so calmly made, so dispassionately uttered, I could do nothing but sit limply in my chair and gaze woodenly at my guest. I was so astounded that I was incapable of uttering a word. But I did not have to say anything. Doctor Pelletier was speaking again, developing his thesis.

"Put together the known facts, Canevin. It is the scientific method, the only satisfactory method, when you are confronted with a situation like this one. You can do so quite easily, almost at random, here. To begin with, you never found the Thing in that little thatched hut after one of its attacks—did you?"

"No," I managed to murmur, out of a strangely dry mouth. Pelletier's theory held me stultified by its unexpectedness, its utter, weird strangeness. The name "Cassius" smote my brain. That identical blood—

"If the Thing had been, say, a rat," he continued, "as you supposed when it went for your fingers, it would have gone straight from its attacks on Brutus Hellman to its diggings—the refuge instinct; 'holing-up.' But it didn't. You investigated several times and it wasn't inside the little house, although it ran toward it, as you believed, after seeing it start that way the first night; although the creature that went for your hand was there, inside, *before it suspected pursuit*. You see? That gives us a lead, a clue. The Thing possesses a much higher level of intelligence than that of a mere rodent. Do you grasp that significant point, Canevin? The Thing, anticipating pursuit, avoided capture by instinctively outguessing the pursuer. It went toward its diggings but deferred entrance until the pursuer had investigated and gone away. Do you get it?"

I nodded, not desiring to interrupt. I was following Pelletier's thesis eagerly now.

He resumed, "Next—consider those wounds, those bites, on Brutus Hellman. They were never made by any small,

ground-dwelling animal, a rodent, like a rat or a mongoose. No; those teeth marks are those of—well, say, a marmoset or any very small monkey; or, Canevin, *of an unbelievably small human being!*"

Pelletier and I sat and looked at each other. I think that, after an appreciable interval, I was able to nod my head in his direction. Pelletier continued, "The next point we come to—before going on to something a great deal deeper, Canevin—is the *color* of the Thing. You saw it. It was only a momentary glimpse, as you say, but you secured enough of an impression to seem pretty positive on that question of its color. Didn't you?"

"Yes," said I slowly. "It was as black as a derby hat, Pelletier."

"There you have one point definitely settled, then." The doctor was speaking with a judicial note in his voice, the scientist in full stride now. "The well-established ethnic rule, the biological certainty in cases of miscegenation between Caucasians or quasi-Caucasians and the Negro or Negroid types is that the offspring is never darker than the darker of the two parents. The 'black-baby' tradition, as a 'throwback' being produced by mulatto or nearly Caucasian parents is a bugaboo, Canevin, sheer bosh! It doesn't happen that way. It *cannot* happen. It is a biological impossibility, my dear man. Although widely believed, that idea falls into the same category as the ostrich burying its head in the sand and thinking it is concealed! It falls in with the Amazon myth! The 'Amazons' were merely long-haired Scythians, those 'women-warriors' of antiquity. Why, damn it, Canevin, it's like believing in the Centaur to swallow a thing like that."

The doctor had become quite excited over his expression of biological orthodoxy. He glared at me, or appeared to, and lighted a fresh cigarette. Then, considering for a moment, while he inhaled a few preliminary puffs, he resumed. "You see what that proves, don't you, Canevin?" he inquired, somewhat more calmly now.

"It seems to show," I answered, "since Brutus is very 'clear-colored,' as the Negroes would say, that one of his

parents was a black; the other very considerably lighter, perhaps even a pure Caucasian."

"Right, so far," acquiesced the doctor. "And the other inference, in the case of twins—what?"

"That the twins were dizygotic, even though attached," said I slowly, as the conclusion came clear in my mind after Pelletier's preparatory speech. "Otherwise, of course, if they were the other kind, the monocellular or monozygotic, they would have the same coloration, derived from either the dark or the light-skinned parent."

"Precisely," exclaimed Doctor Pelletier. "Now—"

"You mentioned certain other facts," I interrupted, " 'more deep-seated,' I think you said. What—"

"I was just coming to those, Canevin. There are, actually, two such considerations which occur to me. First—why did the Thing degenerate, undoubtedly after birth, of course, if there were no prenatal process of degeneration? They would have been nearly of a size, anyway, when born, I'd suppose. Why did It shrink up into a withered, apparently lifeless little homunculus, while its fellow twin, Brutus Hellman, attained to a normal manhood? There are some pretty deep matters involved in those queries, Canevin. It was comatose, shrunken, virtually dead while attached."

"Let's see if we can't make a guess at them," I threw in.

"What would *you* say?" countered Doctor Pelletier.

I nodded, and sat silently for several minutes trying to put what was in my mind together in some coherent form so as to express it adequately. Then:

"A couple of possibilities occur to me," I began. "One or both of them might account for the divergence. First, the failure of one or more of the ductless glands, very early in the Thing's life after birth. It's the pituitary gland, isn't it, that regulates the physical growth of an infant—that makes him grow normally. If that fails before it has done its full work, about the end of the child's second year, you get a midget. If, on the other hand, it keeps on too long—does not dry up as it should, and cease functioning, its normal task finished—the result is a giant; the child simply

goes on growing, bigger and bigger! Am I right, so far? And, I suppose, the cutting process released it from its coma."

"Score one!" said Doctor Pelletier, wagging his head at me. "Go on—what else? There are many cases, of course, of blood-letting ending a coma."

"The second guess is that Brutus had the stronger constitution, and outstripped the other one. It doesn't sound especially scientific, but that sort of thing does happen as I understand it. Beyond those two possible explanations I shouldn't care to risk any more guesses."

"I think both those causes have been operative in this case," said Doctor Pelletier reflectively. "And, having performed that operation, you see, I think I might add a third, Canevin. It is purely conjectural. I'll admit that frankly, but one outstanding circumstance supports it. I'll come back to that shortly. In short, Canevin, I imagine—my instinct tells me—that almost from the beginning, quite unconsciously, of course, and in the automatic processes of outstripping his twin in physical growth, *Brutus absorbed the other's share* of nutriments.

"I can figure that out, in fact, from several possible angles. The early nursing, for instance! The mother—she was, undoubtedly, the black parent—proud of her 'clear' child, would favor it, nurse it first. There is, besides, always some more or less obscure interplay, some balanced adjustment, between physically attached twins. In this case, God knows how, that invariable 'balance' became disadjusted—the adjustment became unbalanced, if you prefer it that way. The mother, too, from whose side the dark twin probably derived its constitution, may very well have been a small, weakly woman. The fair-skinned other parent was probably robust, physically. But, whatever the underlying causes, we know that Brutus grew up to be normal and fully mature, and I know, from that operation, that the Thing I cut away from him was his twin brother, degenerated into an apparently lifeless homunculus, a mere appendage of Brutus, something which, *apparently, had quite lost nearly*

everything of its basic humanity; even most of its appearance, Canevin—a Thing to be removed surgically, like a wen."

"It is a terrible idea," said I slowly, and after an interval. "But, it seems to be the only way to explain, er—the facts! Now tell me, if you please, what is that 'outstanding circumstance' you mentioned which corroborates this, er—theory of yours."

"It is the Thing's *motive,* Canevin," said Doctor Pelletier, very gravely, "allowing, of course, that we are right—that I am right—in assuming for lack of a better hypothesis that what I cut away from Hellman had life in it; that it escaped; that it is now—well, trying to get at a thing like that, under the circumstances, I'd be inclined to say, we touch bottom!"

"Good God—the *motive!*" I almost whispered. "Why, it's horrible, Pelletier; it's positively uncanny. The Thing becomes, quite definitely, a horror. The motive—in that Thing! You're right, old man. Psychologically speaking, it 'touches bottom,' as you say."

"And humanly speaking," added Doctor Pelletier in a very quiet voice.

Stephen came out and announced "breakfast." It was one o'clock. We went in and ate rather silently. As Stephen was serving the dessert Doctor Pelletier spoke to him. "Was Hellman's father a white man, do you happen to know, Stephen?"

"De man was an engineer on board an English trading-vessel, sar."

"What about his mother?" probed the doctor.

"Her a resident of Antigua, sar," replied Stephen promptly, "and is yet alive. I am acquainted with her. Hellman ahlways send her some portion of his earnings, sar, very regularly. At de time Hellman born, her a 'ooman which do washing for ships' crews, an' make an excellent living. Nowadays, de poor soul liddle more than a piteous invalid, sar. Her ahlways a small liddle 'ooman, not too strong."

"I take it she is a dark woman?" remarked the doctor, smiling at Stephen.

Stephen, who is a medium-brown young man, a "zambo," as they say in the English Islands like St. Kitts and Montserrat and Antigua, grinned broadly at this, displaying a set of magnificent, glistening teeth.

"Sar," he replied, "Hellman's mother de precisely identical hue of dis fella," and Stephen touched with his index finger the neat black bow tie which set off the snowy whiteness of his immaculate drill houseman's jacket. Pelletier and I exchanged glances as we smiled at Stephen's little joke.

On the gallery immediately after lunch, over coffee, we came back to that bizarre topic which Doctor Pelletier had called the "motive." Considered quite apart from the weird aspect of attributing a motive to a quasi-human creature of the size of a rat, the matter was clear enough. The Thing had relentlessly attacked Brutus Hellman again and again, with an implacable fiendishness; its brutal, single-minded efforts being limited in their disastrous effects only by its diminutive size and relative deficiency of strength. Even so, it had succeeded in driving a full-grown man, its victim, into a condition not very far removed from imbecility.

What obscure processes had gone on piling up cumulatively to a fixed purpose of pure destruction in that primitive, degenerated organ that served the Thing for a brain! What dreadful weeks and months and years of semiconscious brooding, of existence endured parasitically as an appendage upon the instinctively loathed body of the normal brother! What savage hatred had burned itself into that minute, distorted personality! What incalculable instincts, deep buried in the backgrounds of the black heredity through the mother, had come into play—as evidenced by the Thing's construction of the typical African hut as its habitation—once it had come, after the separation, into active consciousness, the newborn, freshly realized freedom to exercise and release all that acrid, seething hatred upon him who had usurped its powers of self-expression, its very life itself! What manifold thwarted instincts had, by the processes of substitution, crystallized themselves into one overwhelming, driving desire—the consuming instinct for revenge!

I shuddered as all this clarified itself in my mind, as I formed, vaguely, some kind of mental image of that personality. Doctor Pelletier was speaking again. I forced my engrossed mind to listen to him. He seemed very grave and determined, I noticed.

"We must put an end to all this, Canevin," he was saying. "Yes, we must put an end to it."

Ever since that first Sunday evening when the attacks began, as I look back over that hectic period, it seems to me that I had had in mind primarily the idea of capture and destruction of what had crystallized in my mind as "The Thing." Now a new and totally bizarre idea came in to cause some mental conflict with the destruction element in that vague plan. This was the almost inescapable conviction that the Thing had been originally—whatever it might be properly named now—a human being. As such, knowing well, as I did, the habits of the blacks of our Lesser Antilles, it had, unquestionably, been received into the church by the initial process of baptism. That indescribable creature which had been an appendage on Brutus Hellman's body, had been, *was now,* according to the teaching of the church, a Christian. The idea popped into my mind along with various other sidelights on the situation, stimulated into being by the discussion with Doctor Pelletier which I have just recorded.

The idea itself was distressing enough, to one who, like myself, has always kept up the teachings of my own childhood, who has never found it necessary, in these days of mental unrest, to doubt, still less to abandon, his religion. One of the concomitants of this idea was that the destruction of the Thing after its problematical capture, would be an awkward affair upon my conscience, for, however far departed the Thing had got from its original status as "A child of God—an Inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven," it must retain, in some obscure fashion, its human, indeed its Christian, standing. There are those, doubtless, who might well, as I did, the habits of the blacks of our Lesser Antilles, who would lay all the stress on the plain necessity of stopping the Thing's destructive malignancy without reference

to any such apparently farfetched and artificial consideration. Nevertheless this aspect of our immediate problem, Pelletier's gravely enunciated dictum: "We must put an end to all this," weighed heavily on my burdened mind. It must be remembered that I had put in a dreadful week over the affair.

I mention this scruple of mine because it throws up into relief, in a sense, those events which followed very shortly after Doctor Pelletier had summed up what necessarily lay before us, in that phrase of his.

We sat on the gallery and cogitated ways and means, and it was in the midst of this discussion that the scruple alluded to occurred to me. I did not mention it to Pelletier. I mentally conceded, of course, the necessity of capture. The subsequent disposal of the Thing could wait on that.

We had pretty well decided, on the evidence, that the Thing had been lying low during the day in the little hut-like arrangement which it appeared to have built for itself. Its attacks so far had occurred only at night. If we were correct, the capture would be a comparatively simple affair. There was, as part of the equipment in my house, a small bait net, of the circular closing-in-from-the-bottom kind, used occasionally when I took guests on a deep-sea fishing-excursion out to Congo or Levango Bays. This I unearthed, and looked over. It was intact, recently mended, without any holes in the tightly meshed netting designed to capture and retain small fish to be used later as live bait.

Armed with this, our simple plan readily in mind, we proceeded together to the alleyway about half-past two that afternoon, or, to be more precise, we were just at that moment starting down the gallery steps leading into my yard, when our ears were assailed by a succession of piercing, childish screams from the vicinity of the house's rear.

I rushed down the steps, four at a time, the more unwieldy Pelletier following me as closely as his propulsive apparatus would allow. I was in time to see, when I reached the corner of the house, nearly everything that was happening, almost from its beginning. It was a scene which, reproduced in a drawing accurately limned, would appear

wholly comic. Little Aesculapius, the washer's small, black child, his eyes popping nearly from his head, his diminutive black legs twinkling under his single flying garment, his voice uttering blood-curdling yowls of pure terror, raced diagonally across the yard in the direction of his mother's washtub near the kitchen door, the very embodiment of crude, ungovernable fright, a veritable caricature, a figure of fun.

And behind him, coming on implacably, for all the world like a misshapen black frog, bounded the Thing, in hot pursuit, Its red tongue out of Its gash of a mouth, Its diminutive blubbery lips drawn back in a wide snarl through which a murderous row of teeth flashed viciously in the pouring afternoon sunlight. Little Aesculapius was making good the promise of his relatively long, thin legs—panic driving him. He outdistanced the Thing hopelessly, yet It forged ahead in a rolling, leaping series of bounds, using hands and arms, froglike, as well as Its strange, withered, yet strangely powerful bandied legs.

The sight, grotesque as it would have been to anyone unfamiliar with the Thing's history and identity, positively sickened me. My impulse was to cover my face with my hands, in the realization of its underlying horror. I could feel a faint nausea creeping over me, beginning to dim my senses. My washerwoman's screams had added to the confusion within a second or two after those of the child had begun, and now, as I hesitated in my course toward the scene of confusion, those of the cook and scullery maid were added to the cacophonous din in my back yard. Little Aesculapius, his garment stiff against the breeze of his own progress, disappeared around the rearmost corner of the house to comparative safety through the open kitchen door. He had, as I learned sometime afterward, been playing about the yard and had happened upon the little hut in its obscure and seldom-visited alleyway. He had stooped, and picked it up. "The Thing"—the child used that precise term to describe It—lay, curled up, asleep within. It had leaped to Its splayed feet with a snarl of rage, and gone straight for the little Negro's foot.

Thereafter the primitive instinct for self-preservation and Aesculapius's excellent footwork had solved his problem. He reached the kitchen door, around the corner and out of our sight, plunged within, and took immediate refuge atop the shelf of a kitchen cabinet well out of reach of that malignant, unheard-of demon like a big black frog which was pursuing him and which, doubtless, would haunt his dreams for the rest of his existence. So much for little Aesculapius, who thus happily passes out of the affair.

My halting was, of course, only momentary. I paused, as I have mentioned, but for so brief a period as not to allow Doctor Pelletier to catch up with me. I ran, then, with the net open in my hands, diagonally across the straight course being pursued by the Thing. My mind was made up to intercept It, entangle It in the meshes. This should not be difficult considering its smallness and the comparative shortness of Its arms and legs; and, having rendered It helpless, to face the ultimate problem of Its later disposal.

But this plan of mine was abruptly interfered with. Precisely as the flying body of the pursued pick'ny disappeared around the corner of the house, my cook's cat, a ratter with a neighborhood reputation and now, although for the moment I failed to realize it, quite clearly an instrument of that Providence responsible for my scruple, came upon the scene with violence, precision, and that uncanny accuracy which actuates the feline in all its physical manifestations.

This avatar, which, according to a long-established custom, had been sunning itself demurely on the edge of the rain-water piping which ran along the low eaves of the three yard cabins, aroused by the discordant yells of the child and the three women in four distinct keys, had arisen, taken a brief, preliminary stretch, and condescended to turn its head toward the scene below—

The momentum of the cat's leap arrested instantaneously the Thing's course of pursuit, bore it, sprawled out and flattened, to the ground, and twenty sharp powerful retractile claws sank simultaneously into the prone little body.

The Thing never moved again. A more merciful snuffing out would be difficult to imagine.

It was a matter of no difficulty to drive Junius, the cat, away from his kill. I am on terms of pleasant intimacy with Junius. He allowed me to take the now limp and flaccid little body away from him quite without protest, and sat down where he was, licking his paws and readjusting his rumpled fur.

And thus, unexpectedly, without intervention on our part, Pelletier and I saw brought to its sudden end, the tragical denouement of what seems to me to be one of the most outlandish and most distressing affairs which could ever have been evolved out of the mad mentality of Satan, who dwells in his own place to distress the children of men.

And that night, under a flagstone in the alleyway, quite near where the Thing's strange habitation had been taken up, I buried the mangled leathery little body of that unspeakably grotesque homunculus which had once been the twin brother of my houseman, Brutus Hellman. In consideration of my own scruple which I have mentioned, and because, in all probability, this handful of strange material which I lowered gently into its last resting place had once been a Christian, I repeated the Prayer of Committal from the Book of Common Prayer. It may have been —doubtless was, in one sense—a grotesque act on my part. But I cherish the conviction that I did what was right.

HUGH WALPOLE

THE TARN

FOSTER moved unconsciously across the room, bent, toward the bookcase, and stood leaning forward a little, choosing now one book, now another, with his eyes. His host, seeing the muscles of the back of his thin, scraggy neck stand out above his low flannel collar, thought of the ease with which he could squeeze that throat, and the pleasure, the triumphant, lustful pleasure that such an action would give him.

The low, white-walled, white-ceilinged room was flooded with the mellow, kindly Lakeland sun. October is a wonderful month in the English Lakes—golden, rich, and perfumed, slow suns moving through apricot-tinted skies to ruby evening glories; the shadows lie then thick about that beautiful country, in dark purple patches, in long weblike patterns of silver gauze, in thick splotches of amber and gray. The clouds pass in galleons across the mountains, now veiling, now revealing, now descending with ghostlike armies to the very breast of the plains, suddenly rising to the softest of blue skies and lying thin in lazy languorous color.

Fenwick's cottage looked across to Low Fells; on his right, seen through side windows, sprawled the hills above Ullswater.

Fenwick looked at Foster's back and felt suddenly sick, so that he sat down, veiling his eyes for a moment with his hand. Foster had come up there, come all the way from London, to explain. It was so like Foster to want to explain, to want to put things right. For how many years had he known Foster? Why, for twenty at least, and during all those years Foster had been forever determined to put things right with everybody. He could never bear to be dis-

liked; he hated that anyone should think ill of him; he wanted everyone to be his friend. That was one reason, perhaps, why Foster had got on so well, had prospered so in his career; one reason, too, why Fenwick had not.

For Fenwick was the opposite of Foster in this. He did not want friends, he certainly did not care that people should like him—that is, people for whom, for one reason or another, he had contempt—and he had contempt for quite a number of people.

Fenwick looked at that long, thin, bending back and felt his knees tremble. Soon Foster would turn round and that high, reedy voice would pipe out something about the books. *What jolly books you have, Fenwick!* How many, many times in the long watches of the night, when Fenwick could not sleep, had he heard that pipe sounding close there—yes, in the very shadows of his bed! And how many times had Fenwick replied to it, *I hate you! You are the cause of my failure in life! You have been in my way always. Always, always, always! Patronizing and pretending, and in truth showing others what a poor thing you thought me, how great a failure, how conceited a fool! I know. You can hide nothing from me! I can hear you!*

For twenty years now Foster had been persistently in Fenwick's way. There had been that affair, so long ago now, when Robins had wanted a sub-editor for his wonderful review the *Parthenon,* and Fenwick had gone to see him and they had had a splendid talk. How magnificently Fenwick had talked that day; with what enthusiasm he had shown Robins (who was blinded by his own conceit, anyway) the kind of paper the *Parthenon* might be; how Robins had caught his own enthusiasm, how he had pushed his fat body about the room, crying, "Yes, yes, Fenwick—that's fine! That's fine indeed!"—and then how, after all, Foster had got that job.

The paper had only lived for a year or so, it is true, but the connection with it had brought Foster into prominence just as it might have brought Fenwick!

Then, five years later, there was Fenwick's novel, *The Bitter Aloe*—the novel upon which he had spent three years

of blood-and-tears endeavor—and then, in the very same week of publication, Foster brought out *The Circus,* the novel that made his name; although, heaven knows, the thing was poor-enough sentimental trash. You may say that one novel cannot kill another—but can it not? Had not *The Circus* appeared would not that group of London know-alls—that conceited, limited, ignorant, self-satisfied crowd, who nevertheless can do, by their talk, so much to affect a book's good or evil fortunes—have talked about *The Bitter Aloe* and so forced it into prominence? As it was, the book was stillborn and *The Circus* went on its prancing, triumphant way.

After that there had been many occasions—some small, some big—and always in one way or another that thin scraggy body of Foster's was interfering with Fenwick's happiness.

The thing had become, of course, an obsession with Fenwick. Hiding up there in the heart of the Lakes, with no friends, almost no company, and very little money, he was given too much to brooding over his failure. He *was* a failure and it was not his own fault. How could it be his own fault with his talents and his brilliance? It was the fault of modern life and its lack of culture, the fault of the stupid material mess that made up the intelligence of human beings—and the fault of Foster.

Always Fenwick hoped that Foster would keep away from him. He did not know what he would not do did he see the man. And then one day, to his amazement, he received a telegram:

Passing through this way. May I stop with you Monday and Tuesday?—Giles Foster.

Fenwick could scarcely believe his eyes, and then—from curiosity, from cynical contempt, from some deeper, more mysterious motive that he dared not analyze—he had telegraphed—*Come.*

And here the man was. And he had come—would you believe it?—to "put things right." He had heard from Hamlin Eddis that Fenwick was hurt with him, had some kind of grievance.

"I didn't like to feel that, old man, and so I thought I'd just stop by and have it out with you, see what the matter was, and put it right."

Last night after supper Foster had tried to put it right. Eagerly, his eyes like a good dog's who is asking for a bone that he knows he thoroughly deserves, he had held out his hand and asked Fenwick to "say what was up."

Fenwick had simply said that nothing was up; Hamlin Eddis was a damned fool.

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that!" Foster had cried, springing up out of his chair and putting his hand on Fenwick's shoulder. "I'm glad of that, old man. I couldn't bear for us not to be friends. We've been friends so long."

Lord! How Fenwick hated him at that moment.

"What a jolly lot of books you have!" Foster turned round and looked at Fenwick with eager, gratified eyes. "Every book here is interesting! I like your arrangement of them, too, and those open bookshelves—it always seems to me a shame to shut up books behind glass!"

Foster came forward and sat down quite close to his host. He even reached forward and laid his hand on his host's knee. "Look here! I'm mentioning it for the last time —positively! But I do want to make quite certain. There *is* nothing wrong between us, is there, old man? I know you assured me last night, but I just want—"

Fenwick looked at him and, surveying him, felt suddenly an exquisite pleasure of hatred. He liked the touch of the man's hand on his knee; he himself bent forward a little and, thinking how agreeable it would be to push Foster's eyes in, deep, deep into his head, crunching them, smashing them to purple, leaving the empty, staring, bloody sockets, said, "Why, no. Of course not. I told you last night. What could there be?"

The hand gripped the knee a little more tightly.

"I *am* so glad! That's splendid! Splendid! I hope you won't think me ridiculous, but I've always had an affection for you ever since I can remember. I've always wanted to know you better. I've admired your talent so greatly. That novel of yours—the—the—the one about the aloe—"

"The Bitter Aloe?"

"Ah, yes, that was it. That was a splendid book. Pessimistic, of course, but still fine. It ought to have done better. I remember thinking so at the time."

"Yes, it ought to have done better."

"Your time will come, though. What I say is that good work always tells in the end."

"Yes, my time will come."

The thin, piping voice went on. "Now, I've had more success than I deserved. Oh, yes, I have. You can't deny it. I'm not falsely modest. I mean it. I've got some talent, of course, but not as much as people say. And you! Why, you've got so *much* more than they acknowledge. You have, old man. You have indeed. Only—I do hope you'll forgive my saying this—perhaps you haven't advanced quite as you might have done. Living up here, shut away here, closed in by all these mountains, in this wet climate—always raining—why, you're out of things! You don't see people, don't talk and discover what's really going on. Why, look at me!"

Fenwick turned round and looked at him.

"Now, I have half the year in London, where one gets the best of everything, best talk, best music, best plays; and then I'm three months abroad, Italy or Greece or somewhere, and then three months in the country. Now, that's an ideal arrangement. You have everything that way."

Italy or Greece or somewhere!

Something turned in Fenwick's breast, grinding, grinding, grinding. How he had longed, oh, how passionately, for just one week in Greece, two days in Sicily! Sometimes he had thought that he might run to it, but when it had come to the actual counting of the pennies— And how this fool, this fathead, this self-satisfied, conceited, patronizing—

He got up, looking out at the golden sun.

"What do you say to a walk?" he suggested. "The sun will last for a good hour yet."

As soon as the words were out of his lips he felt as though someone else had said them for him. He even turned half round to see whether anyone else were there.

Ever since Foster's arrival on the evening before he had been conscious of this sensation. A walk? Why should he take Foster for a walk, show him his beloved country, point out those curves and lines and hollows, the broad silver shield of Ullswater, the cloudy purple hills hunched like blankets about the knees of some recumbent giant? Why? It was as though he had turned round to someone behind him and had said, "You have some further design in this."

They started out. The road sank abruptly to the lake, then the path ran between trees at the water's edge. Across the lake tones of bright-yellow light, crocus-hued, rode upon the blue. The hills were dark.

The very way that Foster walked bespoke the man. He was always a little ahead of you, pushing his long, thin body along with little eager jerks, as though, did he not hurry, he would miss something that would be immensely to his advantage. He talked, throwing words over his shoulder to Fenwick as you throw crumbs of bread to a robin.

"Of course I was pleased. Who would not be? After all, it's a new prize. They've only been awarding it for a year or two, but it's gratifying—really gratifying—to secure it. When I opened the envelope and found the check there—well, you could have knocked me down with a feather. You could, indeed. Of course, a hundred pounds isn't much. But it's the honor—"

Whither were they going? Their destiny was as certain as though they had no free will. *Free will? There is no free will. All is fate.* Fenwick suddenly laughed aloud.

Foster stopped. "Why, what is it?"

"What's what?"

"You laughed."

"Something amused me."

Foster slipped his arm through Fenwick's. "It *is* jolly to be walking along together like this, arm in arm, friends. I'm a sentimental man. I won't deny it. What I say is that life is short and one must love one's fellow-beings, or where is one? You live too much alone, old man." He squeezed Fenwick's arm. "That's the truth of it."

It was torture, exquisite, heavenly torture. It was wonderful to feel that thin, bony arm pressing against his. Almost you could hear the beating of that other heart. Wonderful to feel that arm and the temptation to take it in your hands and to bend it and twist it and then to hear the bones crack —crack—crack— Wonderful to feel that temptation rise through one's body like boiling water and yet not to yield to it. For a moment Fenwick's hand touched Foster's. Then he drew himself apart.

"We're at the village. This is the hotel where they all come in the summer. We turn off at the right here. I'll show you my tarn."

"Your tarn?" asked Foster. "Forgive my ignorance, but what *is* a tarn exactly?"

"A tarn is a miniature lake, a pool of water lying in the lap of the hill. Very quiet, lovely, silent. Some of them are immensely deep."

"I should like to see that."

"It is some little distance—up a rough road. Do you mind?"

"Not a bit. I have long legs."

"Some of them are immensely deep—unfathomable—nobody touched the bottom—but quiet, like glass, with shadows only—"

"Do you know, Fenwick, I have always been afraid of water— I've never learned to swim. I'm afraid to go out of my depth. Isn't that ridiculous? But it is all because at my private school, years ago, when I was a small boy, some big fellows took me and held me with my head under the water and nearly drowned me. They did indeed. They went farther than they meant to. I can see their faces."

Fenwick considered this. The picture leaped to his mind. He could see the boys—large, strong fellows, probably—and this skinny thing like a frog, their thick hands about this throat, his legs like gray sticks kicking out of the water, their laughter, their sudden sense that something was wrong, the skinny body all flaccid and still—

He drew a deep breath.

Foster was walking beside him now, not ahead of him,

as though he were a little afraid and needed reassurance. Indeed, the scene had changed. Before and behind them stretched the uphill path, loose with shale and stones. On their right, on a ridge at the foot of the hill, were some quarries, almost deserted, but the more melancholy in the fading afternoon because a little work still continued there; faint sounds came from the gaunt listening chimneys, a stream of water ran and tumbled angrily into a pool below, once and again a black silhouette, like a question mark, appeared against the darkening hill.

It was a little steep here, and Foster puffed and blew. Fenwick hated him the more for that. So thin and spare, and still he could not keep in condition! They stumbled, keeping below the quarry, on the edge of the running water, now green, now a dirty white-gray, pushing their way along the side of the hill.

Their faces were set now toward Helvellyn. It rounded the cup of the hills, closing in the base and then sprawling to the right.

"There's the tarn!" Fenwick exclaimed, and then added, "The sun's not lasting as long as I had expected. It's growing dark already."

Foster stumbled and caught Fenwick's arm. "This twilight makes the hills look strange—like living men. I can scarcely see my way."

"We're alone here," Fenwick answered. "Don't you feel the stillness? The men will have left the quarry now and gone home. There is no one in all this place but ourselves. If you watch you will see a strange green light steal down over the hills. It lasts for but a moment and then it is dark.

"Ah, here is my tarn. Do you know how I love this place, Foster? It seems to belong especially to me, just as much as all your work and your glory and fame and success seem to belong to you. I have this and you have that. Perhaps in the end we are even, after all. Yes—

"But I feel as though that piece of water belonged to me and I to it, and as though we should never be separated—yes. Isn't it black?

"It is one of the deep ones. No one has ever sounded it.

Only Helvellyn knows, and one day I fancy that it will take me too into its confidence, will whisper its secrets—"

Foster sneezed. "Very nice. Very beautiful, Fenwick. I like your tarn. Charming. And now let's turn back. That is a difficult walk beneath the quarry. It's chilly, too."

"Do you see that little jetty there?" Fenwick led Foster by the arm. "Someone built that out into the water. He had a boat there, I suppose. Come and look down. From the end of the little jetty it looks so deep and the mountains seem to close round."

Fenwick took Foster's arm and led him to the end of the jetty. Indeed, that water looked deep here. Deep and very black. Foster peered down, then he looked up at the hills that did indeed seem to have gathered close around him. He sneezed again.

"I've caught a cold, I'm afraid. Let's turn homeward, Fenwick, or we shall never find our way."

"Home, then," said Fenwick, and his hands closed about the thin, scraggy neck. For the instant the head half turned, and two startled, strangely childish eyes stared; then, with a push that was ludicrously simple, the body was impelled forward, there was a sharp cry, a splash, a stir of something white against the swiftly gathering dusk, again and then again, then far-spreading ripples, then silence.

The silence extended. Having enwrapped the tarn, it spread as though with finger on lip to the already quiescent hills. Fenwick shared in the silence. He luxuriated in it. He did not move at all. He stood there looking upon the inky water of the tarn, his arms folded, a man lost in intensest thought. But he was not thinking. He was only conscious of a warm, luxurious relief, a sensuous feeling that was not thought at all.

Foster was gone—that tiresome, prating, conceited, self-satisfied fool! Gone, never to return. The tarn assured him of that. It stared back into Fenwick's face approvingly as though it said, *You have done well—a clean and necessary job. We have done it together, you and I. I am proud of you.*

He was proud of himself. At last he had done something

definite with his life. Thought, eager, active thought, was beginning now to flood his brain. For all these years he had hung around in this place doing nothing but cherish grievances, weak, backboneless—now at last there was action. He drew himself up and looked at the hills. He was proud—and he was cold. He was shivering. He turned up the collar of his coat. Yes, there was that faint green light that always lingered in the shadows of the hills for a brief moment before darkness came. It was growing late. He had better return.

Shivering now so that his teeth chattered, he started off down the path, and then was aware that he did not wish to leave the tarn. The tarn was friendly—the only friend he had in all the world. As he stumbled along in the dark this sense of loneliness grew. He was going home to an empty house. There had been a guest in it last night. Who was it? Why, Foster, of course—Foster with his silly laugh and amiable, mediocre eyes. Well, Foster would not be there now. No, he never would be there again.

And suddenly Fenwick started to run. He did not know why, except that now that he had left the tarn he was lonely. He wished that he could have stayed there all night, but because it was cold he could not, and so now he was running so that he might be at home with the lights and the familiar furniture—and all the things that he knew to reassure him.

As he ran the shale and stones scattered beneath his feet. They made a tit-tattering noise under him, and someone else seemed to be running too. He stopped, and the other runner also stopped. He breathed in the silence. He was hot now. The perspiration was trickling down his cheeks. He could feel a dribble of it down his back inside his shirt. His knees were pounding. His heart was thumping. And all around him the hills were so amazingly silent, now like india-rubber clouds that you could push in or pull out as you do those india-rubber faces, gray against the night sky of a crystal purple, upon whose surface, like the twinkling eyes of ships at sea, stars were now appearing.

His knees steadied, his heart beat less fiercely, and he

began to run again. Suddenly he had turned the corner and was out at the hotel. Its lamps were kindly and reassuring. He walked then quietly along the lakeside path, and had it not been for the certainty that someone was treading behind him he would have been comfortable and at his ease. He stopped once or twice and looked back, and once he stopped and called out, "Who's there?"

Only the rustling trees answered.

He had the strangest fancy, but his brain was throbbing so fiercely that he could not think, that it was the tarn that was following him, the tarn slipping, sliding along the road, being with him so that he should not be lonely. He could almost hear the tarn whisper in his ear, *We did that together, and so I do not wish you to bear all the responsibility yourself. I will stay with you, so that you are not lonely.*

He climbed down the road toward home, and there were the lights of his house. He heard the gate click behind him as though it were shutting him in. He went into the sitting-room, lighted and ready. There were the books that Foster had admired.

The old woman who looked after him appeared. "Will you be having some tea, sir?"

"No, thank you, Annie."

"Will the other gentleman be wanting any?"

"No; the other gentleman is away for the night."

"Then there will be only one for supper?"

"Yes, only one for supper."

He sat in the corner of the sofa and fell instantly into a deep slumber.

He woke when the old woman tapped him on the shoulder and told him that supper was served. The room was dark save for the jumping light of two uncertain candles. Those two red candlesticks—how he hated them up there on the mantelpiece! He had always hated them, and now they seemed to him to have something of the quality of Foster's voice—that thin, reedy, piping tone.

He was expecting at every moment that Foster would enter, and yet he knew that he would not. He continued to turn his head toward the door, but it was so dark there

that you could not see. The whole room was dark except just there by the fireplace, where the two candlesticks went whining with their miserable twinkling plaint.

He went into the dining-room and sat down to his meal. But he could not eat anything. It was odd—that place by the table where Foster's chair should be. Odd, naked, and made a man feel lonely.

He got up once from the table and went to the window, opened it and looked out. He listened for something. A trickle as of running water, a stir, through the silence, as though some deep pool were filling to the brim. A rustle in the trees, perhaps. An owl hooted. Sharply, as though someone had spoken to him unexpectedly behind his shoulder, he closed the window and looked back, peering under his dark eyebrows into the room.

Later on he went up to bed.

Had he been sleeping, or had he been lying lazily as one does, half dozing, half luxuriously not thinking? He was awake now, utterly awake, and his heart was beating with apprehension. It was as though someone had called him by name. He slept always with his window a little open and the blind up. Tonight the moonlight shadowed in sickly fashion the objects in his room. It was not a flood of light nor yet a sharp splash, silvering a square, a circle, throwing the rest into ebony darkness. The light was dim, a little green, perhaps, like the shadow that comes over the hills just before dark.

He stared at the window, and it seemed to him that something moved there. Within, or, rather, against the green-gray light, something silver-tinted glistened. Fenwick stared. It had the look, exactly, of slipping water.

Slipping water! He listened, his head up, and it seemed to him that from beyond the window he caught the stir of water, not running, but rather welling up and up, gurgling with satisfaction as it filled and filled.

He sat up higher in bed, and then saw that down the wallpaper beneath the window water was undoubtedly trickling. He could see it lurch to the projecting wood of the

sill, pause, and then slip, slither down the incline. The odd thing was that it fell so silently.

Beyond the window there was that odd gurgle, but in the room itself absolute silence. Whence could it come? He saw the line of silver rise and fall as the stream on the window-ledge ebbed and flowed.

He must get up and close the window. He drew his legs above the sheets and blankets and looked down.

He shrieked. The floor was covered with a shining film of water. It was rising. As he looked it had covered half the short, stumpy legs of the bed. It rose without a wink, a bubble, a break! Over the sill it poured now in a steady flow, but soundless. Fenwick sat up in the bed, the clothes gathered up to his chin, his eyes blinking, the Adam's apple throbbing like a throttle in his throat.

But he must do something, he must stop this! The water was now level with the seats of the chairs, but still was soundless. Could he but reach the door!

He put down his naked foot, then cried again. The water was icy cold. Suddenly, leaning, staring at its dark, unbroken sheen, something seemed to push him forward. He fell. His head, his face was under the icy liquid; it seemed adhesive and, in the heart of its ice, hot like melting wax. He struggled to his feet. The water was breast-high. He screamed again and again. He could see the looking-glass, the row of books, the picture of Durer's "Horse," aloof, impervious. He beat at the water, and flakes of it seemed to cling to him like scales of fish, clammy to his touch. He struggled, plowing his way toward the door.

The water now was at his neck. Then something had caught him by the ankle. Something held him. He struggled, crying, "Let me go! Let me go! I tell you to let me go! I hate you! I hate you! I will not come down to you! I will not—"

The water covered his mouth. He felt that someone pushed in his eyeballs with bare knuckles. A cold hand reached up and caught his naked thigh.

In the morning the little maid knocked and, receiving no answer, came in, as was her wont, with his shaving-water.

What she saw made her scream. She ran for the gardener.

They took the body with its staring, protruding eyes, its tongue sticking out between the clenched teeth, and laid it on the bed.

The only sign of disorder was an overturned water jug. A small pool of water stained the carpet.

It was a lovely morning. A twig of ivy idly, in the little breeze, tapped the pane.

JOHN COLLIER

LITTLE MEMENTO

A YOUNG MAN who was walking fast came out of a deep lane onto a wide hilltop space, where there was a hamlet clustered about a green. The setting encompassed a pond, ducks, the Waggoner Inn, with white paint and swinging sign; in fact, all the fresh, clean, quiet, ordinary appurtenances of an upland Somerset hamlet.

The road went on, and so did the young man, over to the very brink of the upland, where a white gate gave upon a long garden well furnished with fruit trees, and at the end of it a snug little house sheltered by a coppice and enjoying a view over the vast vale below. An old man of astonishingly benevolent appearance was pottering about in the garden. He looked up as the hiker, Eric Gaskell, approached his gate.

"Good morning," said he. "A fine morning!"

"Good morning," said Eric Gaskell.

"I have had my telescope out this morning," said the old man. "I don't often get down the hill these days. The way back is a little too steep for me. Still, I have my view and my telescope. I think I know all that goes on."

"Well, that's very nice," said Eric.

"It is," said the old man. "You are Mr. Gaskell?"

"Yes," said Eric. "I know. We met at the vicarage."

"We did," said the old man. "You often take your walk this way. I see you go by. Today I thought, *Now this is the day for a chat with young Mr. Gaskell!* Come in."

"Thanks," said Eric. "I will, for a spell."

"And how," said the old man, opening his gate, "do you and Mrs. Gaskell like Somerset?"

"Enormously," said Eric.

"My housekeeper tells me," said the old man, "that you come from the East Coast. Her niece is your little maid. You don't find it too dull here? Too old-fashioned?"

"We like that part of it best," said Eric.

"In these days," said the old man, "young people like old-fashioned things. That's a change from my day. Now most of us who live about here are old codgers, you know. There's Captain Felton, of course, but the Vicar, the Admiral, Mr. Coperus, and the rest—all old codgers. You don't mind that?"

"I like it," said Eric.

"We have our hobbies," said the old man. "Coperus is an antiquarian; the Admiral has his roses."

"And you have your telescope," said Eric.

"Ah, my telescope," said the old man. "Yes, yes, I have my telescope. But my principal pastime—what I really plume myself on—is my museum."

"You have a museum?" said Eric.

"Yes, a museum," said the old man. "I should like you to have a look at it and tell me what you think."

"I shall be delighted," said Eric.

"Then come right in," said the old man, leading him toward the house. "I seldom have the chance of showing my collection to a newcomer. You must bring Mrs. Gaskell one of these days. Does she find enough entertainment in this quiet part, do you think?"

"She loves it," said Eric. "She can't see too much of the country here. She drives every day in her red roadster."

"All by herself," said the old man. "Does she like the house?"

"Well, I don't know," said Eric. "She did when we chose it last spring. She liked it very much."

"It is a very nice house," said the old man.

"She finds it a little oppressive lately, I'm afraid," said Eric. "She says she has to get out to breathe."

"It is the difference in the air," said the old man. "After living on the East Coast."

"Probably it's that," said Eric.

By this time they had reached the front door. The old man ushered Eric in. They entered a very snug, trim little room, the furniture all well polished and everything meticulously arranged. "This is my little sitting-room," the old man said. "My dining-room, too, these days. The drawing-room and the little study beyond I have given over entirely to my museum. Here we are."

He threw open a door. Eric stepped in, looked around, and stared in amazement. He had been expecting the usual sort of thing: a neat cabinet or two with Roman coins, flint implements, a snake in alcohol, perhaps a stuffed bird or some eggs. But this room and the study, seen through the connecting doorway, were piled high with the most broken, battered, frowzy, gimcrack collection of junk he had ever seen in his life. What was oddest of all was that no item in this muddle of rubbish had even the excuse of a decent antiquity. It was as if several cartloads of miscellaneous material had been collected from the village dump and spilled over the tables, sideboards, chairs, and floors of these two rooms.

The old man observed Eric's astonishment with the greatest good humor. "You are thinking," said he, "that this collection is not the sort of thing one usually finds in a museum. You are right. But let me tell you, Mr. Gaskell, that every object here has a history. These pieces are pebbles rolled and broken by the stream of time as it flows over the villages in our quiet little district. Taken together, they are a—a record. Here is a souvenir from the War: a telegram to the Bristows in Upper Medlum, saying their boy was killed. It was years before I could get it from poor Mrs. Bristow. I gave her a pound for it."

"Very interesting," said Eric.

"That wheelbarrow," said the old man, pointing out a splintered wreck, "was the cause of two deaths. It rolled down a bank into the lane here just as a car was coming along. It was in all the papers. 'Local Tragedy.' "

"Extraordinary!" said Eric.

"It all makes up life," said the old man. "Here is a belt dropped by one of the Irish haymakers when they fought the gypsies. This hat belonged to the man who had Church Farm, near you. He won a prize in the Irish Sweep and drank himself to death, poor fellow! These are bricks from my gardener's cottage. It burned down, you know, and nobody knows how the fire started. This is a snake which somehow got into the church during service last year. Captain Felton killed it. He's a very handsome man, don't you think?"

"Yes. I suppose so. I hardly know him."

"That's funny. I thought you and Mrs. Gaskell were very great friends of Captain Felton."

"What gave you that idea?"

"Perhaps it was just my fancy. Here is a rather sad exhibit. These horns came from a bull that Farmer Lawson put into my meadow. Somebody left the gate open; it got out and gored a man on the road."

"We scarcely know Captain Felton," said Eric. "We met him when first we came here, but—"

"Quite, quite," said the old man. "Here is an anonymous letter. We have them now and then in this district, as in most places. Mr. Coperus gave me this."

"Are they usually well founded, the hints in your local brand of anonymous letters?" asked Eric.

"I believe they are," said the old man. "Someone seems to know what goes on. Here's something that I fear won't last very long—a giant puffball from the graveyard. They grow larger there than elsewhere. Feel how light it is."

He thrust it toward Eric. Eric had been fumbling with his pipe and tobacco pouch and now put them down to take the puffball. "Very light," said he. "Wonderful."

"Come through here," cried the old man eagerly. "I was forgetting my boots." Eric followed him, still carrying the giant fungus. "These boots," said the old man, "came off a tramp found drowned in a pond. That little pond near Captain Felton's house."

"What does Felton do?" asked Eric.

"He has an income. He amuses himself."

"What is his amusement?" said Eric very casually.

"I'm afraid," said the old man, with a twinkle, "that Captain Felton is rather one for the ladies."

"Indeed?" said Eric.

"There are stories," said the old man. "The captain is very discreet, but—you know how it is. That big crystal up there—that was found in the quarry half a mile down our little road here. Well now, that quarry had been out of use for many years. You can drive into it from the road, and I'm told the captain finds it a very secluded rendezvous. Dear me, I ought not to gossip. But the fact is the shepherd boys have been known to look over the top, and of course stories get round. People love to chuckle over such matters. I'm afraid that someday one of the worthy gentlemen whose domestic relations the captain has, so to speak, trespassed upon will look over the top and—well, there are some very large stones lying about. Here is a cat I had stuffed. Now there is a very extraordinary story connected with this cat."

"Tell me," said Eric, "is Felton here now?"

"He's here," said the old man. "I saw his car go by only an hour ago. It's a red car. One doesn't often see a red car, though as a matter of fact another red one came by just after his."

"I—I think I must be off," said Eric.

"Must you go?" said the old man. "I was just going to tell you about this unhappy cat."

"Another time," said Eric.

"Another time, then. Let me see you to the gate."

Eric hurried through the gate.

"You are not going back the way you came?" said the old man. "It's quicker."

"No. No. I have to go round this way," said Eric.

"That will lead you past the captain's quarry," said the old man. "Well, good-by. Come again soon."

He watched Eric stride rapidly down the road and even climbed a bank to watch him farther. When he saw him

leave the road and strike over the face of the down, toward the upper lip of the quarry, he went placidly back to his museum.

There he took up Eric's pipe and tobacco pouch and fondled them with infinite affection. It was quite a long time before he could bring himself to place them carefully on a shelf and return to his pottering in the garden.

M. R. JAMES

OH, WHISTLE, AND I'LL COME TO YOU, MY LAD

"I SUPPOSE you will be getting away pretty soon, now Full term is over, Professor," said a person not in the story to the Professor of Ontography, soon after they had sat down next to each other at a feast in the hospital hall of St. James's College.

The professor was young, neat, and precise in speech. "Yes," he said, "my friends have been making me take up golf this term, and I mean to go to the East Coast—in point of fact to Burnstow (I dare say you know it)—for a week or ten days to improve my game. I hope to get off tomorrow."

"Oh, Parkins," said his neighbor on the other side, "if you are going to Burnstow, I wish you would look at the site of the Templars' preceptory, and let me know if you think it would be any good to have a dig there in the summer."

It was, as you might suppose, a person of antiquarian pursuits who said this, but, since he merely appears in this prologue, there is no need to give his entitlements.

"Certainly," said Parkins the professor, "if you will describe to me whereabouts the site is, I will do my best to give you an idea of the lay of the land when I get back; or I could write to you about it, if you would tell me where you are likely to be."

"Don't trouble to do that, thanks. It's only that I'm thinking of taking my family in that direction in the Long, and it occurred to me that, as very few of the English preceptories have ever been properly planned, I might have an opportunity of doing something useful on off-days."

The professor rather sniffed at the idea that planning out a preceptory could be described as useful. His neighbor

continued, "The site—I doubt if there is anything showing above ground—must be down quite close to the beach now. The sea has encroached tremendously, as you know, all along that bit of coast. I should think, from the map, that it must be about three quarters of a mile from the Globe Inn, at the north end of the town. Where are you going to stay?"

"Well, *at* the Globe Inn, as a matter of fact," said Parkins. "I have engaged a room there. I couldn't get in anywhere else; most of the lodging-houses are shut up in winter, it seems; and, as it is, they tell me that the only room of any size I can have is really a double-bedded one, and that they haven't a corner in which to store the other bed, and so on. But I must have a fairly large room, for I am taking some books down, and mean to do a bit of work; and though I don't quite fancy having an empty bed—not to speak of two—in what I may call for the time being my study, I suppose I can manage to rough it for the short time I shall be there."

"Do you call having an extra bed in your room roughing it, Parkins?" said a bluff person opposite. "Look here, I shall come down and occupy it for a bit; it'll be company for you."

The professor quivered, but managed to laugh in a courteous manner. "By all means, Rogers; there's nothing I should like better. But I'm afraid you would find it rather dull; you don't play golf, do you?"

"No, thank heaven!" said rude Mr. Rogers.

"Well, you see, when I'm not writing I shall most likely be out on the links, and that, as I say, would be rather dull for you, I'm afraid."

"Oh, I don't know! There's certain to be somebody I know in the place; but, of course, if you don't want me, speak the word, Parkins; I shan't be offended. Truth, as you always tell us, is never offensive."

Parkins was, indeed, scrupulously polite and strictly truthful. It is to be feared that Mr. Rogers sometimes practiced upon his knowledge of these characteristics. In Parkins's breast there was a conflict now raging, which for a

moment or two did not allow him to answer. That interval being over, he said, "Well, if you want the exact truth, Rogers, I was considering whether the room I speak of would really be large enough to accommodate us both comfortably; and also whether (mind, I shouldn't have said this if you hadn't pressed me) you would not constitute something in the nature of a hindrance to my work."

Rogers laughed loudly. "Well done, Parkins!" he said. "It's all right. I promise not to interrupt your work; don't you disturb yourself about that. No, I won't come if you don't want me; but I thought I should do so nicely to keep the ghosts off." Here he might have been seen to wink and to nudge his next neighbor. Parkins might also have been seen to become pink. "I beg pardon, Parkins," Rogers continued, "I oughtn't to have said that. I forgot you didn't like levity on these topics."

"Well," Parkins said, "as you have mentioned the matter, I freely own that I do *not* like careless talk about what you call ghosts. A man in my position," he went on, raising his voice a little, "cannot, I find, be too careful about appearing to sanction the current belief on such subjects. As you know, Rogers, or as you ought to know; for I think I have never concealed my views—"

"No, you certainly have not, old man," put in Rogers *sotto voce.*

"—I hold that any semblance, any appearance of concession to the view that such things might exist is equivalent to a renunciation of all that I hold most sacred. But I'm afraid I have not succeeded in securing your attention."

"Your *undivided* attention, was what Dr. Blimber actually *said,*" Rogers interrupted, with every appearance of an earnest desire for accuracy. "But I beg your pardon, Parkins, I'm stopping you."

"No, not at all," said Parkins. "I don't remember Blimber; perhaps he was before my time. But I needn't go on. I'm sure you know what I mean."

"Yes, yes," said Rogers, rather hastily, "just so. We'll go into it fully at Burnstow, or somewhere."

In repeating the above dialogue I have tried to give the

impression which it made on me, that Parkins was something of an old woman—rather henlike, perhaps, in his little ways; totally destitute, alas! of the sense of humor, but at the same time dauntless and sincere in his convictions, and a man deserving of the greatest respect. Whether or not the reader has gathered so much, that was the character which Parkins had.

On the following day Parkins did, as he had hoped, succeed in getting away from his college, and in arriving at Burnstow. He was made welcome at the Globe Inn, was safely installed in the large double-bedded room of which we have heard, and was able before retiring to rest to arrange his materials for work in apple-pie order upon a commodious table which occupied the outer end of the room, and was surrounded on three sides by windows looking out seaward; that is to say, the central window looked straight out to sea, and those on the left and right commanded prospects along the shore to the north and south respectively. On the south you saw the village of Burnstow. On the north no houses were to be seen, but only the beach and the low cliff backing it. Immediately in front was a strip —not considerable—of rough grass, dotted with old anchors, capstans, and so forth; then a broad path; then the beach. Whatever may have been the original distance between the Globe Inn and the sea, not more than 60 yards now separated them.

The rest of the population of the inn was, of course, a golfing one, and included a few elements that call for a special description. The most conspicuous figure was, perhaps, that of an *ancien militaire,* secretary of a London club, and possessed of a voice of incredible strength, and of views of a pronouncedly Protestant type. These were apt to find utterance after his attendance upon the ministrations of the vicar, an estimable man with inclinations toward a picturesque ritual, which he gallantly kept down as far as he could out of deference to East Anglian tradition.

Professor Parkins, one of whose principal characteristics was pluck, spent the greater part of the day following his arrival at Burnstow in what he had called improving his

game, in company with this Colonel Wilson, and during the afternoon—whether the process of improvement were to blame or not, I am not sure—the colonel's demeanor assumed a coloring so lurid that even Parkins jibbed at the thought of walking home with him from the links. He determined, after a short and furtive look at that bristling mustache and those incarnadined features, that it would be wiser to allow the influences of tea and tobacco to do what they could with the colonel before the dinner hour should render a meeting inevitable.

"I might walk home tonight along the beach," he reflected—"yes, and take a look—there will be light enough for that—at the ruins of which Disney was talking. I don't exactly know where they are, by the way; but I expect I can hardly help stumbling on them."

This he accomplished, I may say, in the most literal sense, for in picking his way from the links to the shingle beach his foot caught, partly in a gorse root and partly in a biggish stone, and over he went. When he got up and surveyed his surroundings, he found himself in a patch of somewhat broken ground covered with small depressions and mounds. These latter, when he came to examine them, proved to be simply masses of flints embedded in mortar and grown over with turf. He must, he quite rightly concluded, be on the site of the preceptory he had promised to look at. It seemed not unlikely to reward the spade of the explorer; enough of the foundations was probably left at no great depth to throw a good deal of light on the general plan. He remembered vaguely that the Templars, to whom this site had belonged, were in the habit of building round churches, and he thought a particular series of the humps or mounds near him did appear to be arranged in something of a circular form.

Few people can resist the temptation to try a little amateur research in a department quite outside their own, if only for the satisfaction of showing how successful they would have been had they only taken it up seriously. Our professor, however, if he felt something of this mean desire, was also truly anxious to oblige Mr. Disney. So he paced

with care the circular area he had noticed, and wrote down its rough dimensions in his notebook. Then he proceeded to examine an oblong eminence which lay east of the center of the circle and seemed to his thinking likely to be the base of a platform or altar. At one end of it, the northern, a patch of the turf was gone—removed by some boy or other creature *feræ naturæ*. It might, he thought, be as well to probe the soil here for evidences of masonry, and he took out his knife and began scraping away the earth. And now followed another little discovery; a portion of soil fell inward as he scraped, and disclosed a small cavity. He lighted one match after another to help him to see of what nature the hole was, but the wind was too strong for them all. By tapping and scratching the sides with his knife, however, he was able to make out that it must be an artificial hole in masonry. It was rectangular, and the sides, top, and bottom, if not actually plastered, were smooth and regular. Of course it was empty. No! As he withdrew the knife he heard a metallic clink, and when he introduced his hand it met with a cylindrical object lying on the floor of the hole. Naturally enough, he picked it up, and when he brought it into the light, now fast fading, he could see that it, too, was of man's making—a metal tube about four inches long and evidently of some considerable age.

By the time Parkins had made sure that there was nothing else in this odd receptacle, it was too late and too dark for him to think of undertaking any further search. What he had done had proved so unexpectedly interesting that he determined to sacrifice a little more of the daylight on the morrow to archeology. The object which he now had safe in his pocket was bound to be of some slight value at least, he felt sure.

Bleak and solemn was the view on which he took a last look before starting homeward. A faint yellow light in the west showed the links, on which a few figures moving toward the clubhouse were still visible, the squat martello tower, the lights of Aldsey village, the pale ribbon of sands intersected at intervals by black wooden groynes, the dim and murmuring sea. The wind was bitter from the north, but was at his back when he set out for the Globe. He quick-

ly rattled and clashed through the shingle and gained the sand, upon which, but for the groynes which had to be got over every few yards, the going was both good and quiet.

One last look behind, to measure the distance he had made since leaving the ruined Templars' church, showed him a prospect of company on his walk, in the shape of a rather indistinct personage, who seemed to be making great efforts to catch up with him, but made little, if any, progress. I mean that there was an appearance of running about his movements, but that the distance between him and Parkins did not seem materially to lessen. So, at least, Parkins thought, and decided that he almost certainly did not know him, and that it would be absurd to wait until he came up. For all that, company, he began to think, would really be very welcome on that lonely shore, if only you could choose your companion. In his unenlightened days he had read of meetings in such places which even now would hardly bear thinking of. He went on thinking of them, however, until he reached home, and particularly of one which catches most people's fancy at some time of their childhood: "Now I saw in my dream that Christian had gone but a very little way when he saw a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him."

What should I do now, he thought, *if I looked back and caught sight of a black figure sharply defined against the yellow sky, and saw that it had horns and wings? I wonder whether I should stand or run for it. Luckily, the gentleman behind is not of that kind, and he seems to be about as far off now as when I saw him first. Well, at this rate he won't get his dinner as soon as I shall; and, dear me! it's within a quarter of an hour of the time now. I must run!*

Parkins had, in fact, very little time for dressing. When he met the colonel at dinner, Peace—or as much of her as that gentleman could manage—reigned once more in the military bosom; nor was she put to flight in the hours of bridge that followed dinner, for Parkins was a more than respectable player. When, therefore, he retired toward twelve o'clock, he felt that he had spent his evening in quite a satisfactory way, and that, even for so long as a fortnight or three weeks, life at the Globe would be sup-

portable under similar conditions—*especially,* thought he, *if I go on improving my game.*

As he went along the passages he met the boots of the Globe, who stopped and said, "Beg your pardon, sir, but as I was a-brushing your coat just now there was something fell out of the pocket. I put it on your chest of drawers, sir, in your room, sir—a piece of a pipe or something of that, sir. Thank you, sir. You'll find it on your chest of drawers, sir—yes, sir. Good night, sir."

The speech served to remind Parkins of his little discovery of that afternoon. It was with some considerable curiosity that he turned it over by the light of his candles. It was of bronze, he now saw, and was shaped very much after the manner of the modern dog whistle; in fact it was—yes, certainly it was—actually no more nor less than a whistle. He put it to his lips, but it was quite full of a fine, caked-up sand or earth, which would not yield to knocking, but must be loosened with a knife. Tidy as ever in his habits, Parkins cleared out the earth onto a piece of paper, and took the latter to the window to empty it out. The night was clear and bright, as he saw when he had opened the casement, and he stopped for an instant to look at the sea and note a belated wanderer stationed on the shore in front of the inn. Then he shut the window, a little surprised at the late hours people kept at Burnstow, and took his whistle to the light again. Why, surely there were marks on it, and not merely marks, but letters! A very little rubbing rendered the deeply cut inscription quite legible, but the professor had to confess, after some earnest thought, that the meaning of it was as obscure to him as the writing on the wall to Belshazzar. There were legends both on the front and on the back of the whistle. The one read thus:

FLA
FUR BIS
FLE

The other:

卐 QUIS EST ISTE QUI VENIT 卐

I ought to be able to make it out, he thought, *but I sup-*

pose I am a little rusty in my Latin. When I come to think of it, I don't believe I even know the word for a whistle. The long one does seem simple enough. It ought to mean, "Who is this who is coming?" Well, the best way to find out is evidently to whistle for him.

He blew tentatively and stopped suddenly, startled and yet pleased at the note he had elicited. It had a quality of infinite distance in it, and, soft as it was, he somehow felt it must be audible for miles round. It was a sound, too, that seemed to have the power (which many scents possess) of forming pictures in the brain. He saw quite clearly for a moment a vision of a wide, dark expanse at night, with a fresh wind blowing, and in the midst a lonely figure—how employed, he could not tell. Perhaps he would have seen more had not the picture been broken by the sudden surge of a gust of wind against his casement, so sudden that it made him look up, just in time to see the white glint of a sea bird's wing somewhere outside the dark panes.

The sound of the whistle had so fascinated him that he could not help trying it once more, this time more boldly. The note was little, if at all, louder than before, and repetition broke the illusion—no picture followed, as he had half hoped it might. *But what is this? Goodness! what force the wind can get up in a few minutes! What a tremendous gust! There! I knew that window fastening was no use! Ah! I thought so—both candles out. It's enough to tear the room to pieces.*

The first thing was to get the window shut. While you might count twenty Parkins was struggling with the small casement, and felt almost as if he were pushing back a sturdy burglar, so strong was the pressure. It slackened all at once, and the window banged to and latched itself. Now to relight the candles and see what damage, if any, had been done. No, nothing seemed amiss; no glass even was broken in the casement. But the noise had evidently roused at least one member of the household; the colonel was to be heard stumping in his stockinged feet on the floor above, and growling.

Quickly as it had risen, the wind did not fall at once. On

it went, moaning and rushing past the house, at times rising to a cry so desolate that, as Parkins disinterestedly said, it might have made fanciful people feel quite uncomfortable; even the most unimaginative, he thought after a quarter of an hour, might be happier without it.

Whether it was the wind, or the excitement of golf, or of the researches in the preceptory that kept Parkins awake, he was not sure. Awake he remained, in any case, long enough to fancy (as I am afraid I often do myself under such conditions) that he was the victim of all manner of fatal disorders. He would lie counting the beats of his heart, convinced that it was going to stop work every moment, and would entertain grave suspicions of his lungs, brain, liver, etc.—suspicions which he was sure would be dispelled by the return of daylight, but which until then refused to be put aside. He found a little vicarious comfort in the idea that someone else was in the same boat. A near neighbor (in the darkness it was not easy to tell his direction) was tossing and rustling in his bed, too.

The next stage was that Parkins shut his eyes and determined to give sleep every chance. Here again over-excitement asserted itself in another form—that of making pictures. *Experto crede,* pictures do come to the closed eyes of one trying to sleep, and are often so little to his taste that he must open his eyes and disperse them.

Parkins's experience on this occasion was a very distressing one. He found that the picture which presented itself to him was continuous. When he opened his eyes, of course, it went; but when he shut them once more it framed itself afresh, and acted itself out again, neither quicker nor slower than before. What he saw was this:

A long stretch of shore—shingle edged by sand, and intersected at short intervals with black groynes running down to the water—a scene, in fact, so like that of his afternoon's walk that, in the absence of any landmark, it could not be distinguished therefrom. The light was obscure, conveying an impression of gathering storm, late winter evening, and slight cold rain. On this bleak stage at first no

actor was visible. Then, in the distance, a bobbing black object appeared; a moment more, and it was a man running, jumping, clambering over the groynes, and every few seconds looking eagerly back. The nearer he came the more obvious it was that he was not only anxious, but even terribly frightened, though his face was not to be distinguished. He was, moreover, almost at the end of his strength. On he came; each successive obstacle seemed to cause him more difficulty than the last. *Will he get over this next one?* thought Parkins; *it seems a little higher than the others.* Yes; half climbing, half throwing himself, he did get over, and fell all in a heap on the other side (the side nearest to the spectator). There, as if really unable to get up again, he remained crouching under the groyne, looking up in an attitude of painful anxiety.

So far no cause whatever for the fear of the runner had been shown; but now there began to be seen, far up the shore, a little flicker of something light-colored moving to and fro with great swiftness and irregularity. Rapidly growing larger, it, too, declared itself as a figure in pale, fluttering draperies, ill-defined. There was something about its motion which made Parkins very unwilling to see it at close quarters. It would stop, raise arms, bow itself toward the sand, then run stooping across the beach to the water edge and back again; and then, rising upright, once more continue its course forward at a speed that was startling and terrifying. The moment came when the pursuer was hovering about from left to right only a few yards beyond the groyne where the runner lay in hiding. After two or three ineffectual castings hither and thither it came to a stop, stood upright, with arms raised high, and then darted straight forward toward the groyne.

It was at this point that Parkins always failed in his resolution to keep his eyes shut. With many misgivings as to incipient failure of eyesight, overworked brain, excessive smoking, and so on, he finally resigned himself to light his candle, get out a book, and pass the night waking, rather than be tormented by this persistent panorama, which he

saw clearly enough could only be a morbid reflection of his walk and his thoughts on that very day.

The scraping of match on box and the glare of light must have startled some creatures of the night—rats or what not—which he heard scurry across the floor from the side of his bed with much rustling. *Dear, dear! the match is out! Fool that it is!* But the second one burned better, and a candle and book were duly procured, over which Parkins pored till sleep of a wholesome kind came upon him, and that in no long space. For about the first time in his orderly and prudent life he forgot to blow out the candle, and when he was called next morning at eight there was still a flicker in the socket and a sad mess of guttered grease on the top of the little table.

After breakfast he was in his room, putting the finishing touches to his golfing costume—fortune had again allotted the colonel to him for a partner—when one of the maids came in.

"Oh, if you please," she said, "would you like any extra blankets on your bed, sir?"

"Ah! thank you," said Parkins. "Yes, I think I should like one. It seems likely to turn rather colder."

In a very short time the maid was back with the blanket. "Which bed should I put it on sir?" she asked.

"What? Why, that one—the one I slept in last night," he said, pointing to it.

"Oh yes! I beg your pardon, sir, but you seemed to have tried both of 'em; leastways, we had to make 'em both up this morning."

"Really? How very absurd!" said Parkins. "I certainly never touched the other, except to lay some things on it. Did it actually seem to have been slept in?"

"Oh yes, sir!" said the maid. "Why, all the things was crumpled and throwed about all ways, if you'll excuse me, sir—quite as if anyone 'adn't passed but a very poor night, sir."

"Dear me," said Parkins. "Well, I may have disordered it more than I thought when I unpacked my things. I'm very

sorry to have given you the extra trouble, I'm sure. I expect a friend of mine soon, by the way—a gentleman from Cambridge—to come and occupy it for a night or two. That will be all right, I suppose, won't it?"

"Oh yes, to be sure, sir. Thank you, sir. It's no trouble, I'm sure," said the maid, and departed to giggle with her colleagues.

Parkins set forth, with a stern determination to improve his game. I am glad to be able to report that he succeeded so far in this enterprise that the colonel, who had been rather repining at the prospect of a second day's play in his company, became quite chatty as the morning advanced; and his voice boomed out over the flats, as certain also of our own minor poets have said, "like some great bourdon in a minster tower."

"Extraordinary wind, that, we had last night," he said. "In my old home we should have said someone had been whistling for it."

"Should you, indeed!" said Parkins. "Is there a superstition of that kind still current in your part of the country?"

"I don't know about superstition," said the colonel.

"They believe in it all over Denmark and Norway, as well as on the Yorkshire coast; and my experience is, mind you, that there's generally something at the bottom of what these countryfolks hold to, and have held to for generations. But it's your drive." (Or whatever it might have been: the golfing reader will have to imagine appropriate digressions at the proper intervals.)

When conversation was resumed, Parkins said, with a slight hesitancy, "Apropos of what you were saying just now, Colonel, I think I ought to tell you that my own views on such subjects are very strong. I am, in fact, a convinced disbeliever in what is called the 'supernatural.' "

"What!" said the colonel, "do you mean to tell me you don't believe in second sight, or ghosts, or anything of that kind?"

"In nothing whatever of that kind," returned Parkins firmly.

"Well," said the colonel, "but it appears to me at that

rate, sir, that you must be little better than a Sadducee."

Parkins was on the point of answering that, in his opinion, the Sadducees were the most sensible persons he had ever read of in the Old Testament; but, feeling some doubt as to whether much mention of them was to be found in that work, he preferred to laugh the accusation off.

"Perhaps I am," he said; "but— Here, give me my cleek, boy!— Excuse me one moment, Colonel." A short interval. "Now, as to whistling for the wind, let me give you my theory about it. The laws which govern winds are really not at all perfectly known—to fisherfolk and such, of course, not known at all. A man or woman of eccentric habits, perhaps, or a stranger, is seen repeatedly on the beach at some unusual hour, and is heard whistling. Soon afterward a violent wind rises; a man who could read the sky perfectly or who possessed a barometer could have foretold that it would. The simple people of a fishing-village have no barometers, and only a few rough rules for prophesying weather. What more natural than that the eccentric personage I postulated should be regarded as having raised the wind, or that he or she should clutch eagerly at the reputation of being able to do so? Now, take last night's wind; as it happens, I myself was whistling. I blew a whistle twice, and the wind seemed to come absolutely in answer to my call. If anyone had seen me—"

The audience had been a little restive under this harangue, and Parkins had, I fear, fallen somewhat into the tone of a lecturer; but at the last sentence the colonel stopped him.

"Whistling, were you?" he said. "And what sort of whistle did you use? Play this stroke first." Interval.

"About that whistle you were asking, Colonel. It's rather a curious one. I have it in my— No; I see I've left it in my room. As a matter of fact, I found it yesterday."

And then Parkins narrated the manner of his discovery of the whistle, upon hearing which the colonel grunted, and opined that, in Parkins's place, he should himself be careful about using a thing that had belonged to a set of papists, of whom, speaking generally, it might be affirmed

that you never knew what they might not have been up to. From this topic he diverged to the enormities of the vicar, who had given notice on the previous Sunday that Friday would be the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, and that there would be service at eleven o'clock in the church. This and other similar proceedings constituted in the colonel's view a strong presumption that the vicar was a concealed papist, if not a Jesuit; and Parkins, who could not very readily follow the colonel in this region, did not disagree with him. In fact, they got on so well together in the morning that there was no talk on either side of their separating after lunch.

Both continued to play well during the afternoon, or, at least well enough to make them forget everything else until the light began to fail them. Not until then did Parkins remember that he had meant to do some more investigating at the preceptory; but it was of no great importance, he reflected. One day was as good as another; he might as well go home with the colonel.

As they turned the corner of the house, the colonel was almost knocked down by a boy who rushed into him at the very top of his speed, and then, instead of running away, remained hanging on to him and panting. The first words of the warrior were naturally those of reproof and objurgation, but he very quickly discerned that the boy was almost speechless with fright. Inquiries were useless at first. When the boy got his breath he began to howl, and still clung to the colonel's legs. He was at last detached, but continued to howl.

"What in the world *is* the matter with you? What have you been up to? What have you seen?" said the two men.

"Ow, I seen it wive at me out of the winder," wailed the boy, "and I don't like it."

"What window?" said the irritated colonel. "Come, pull yourself together, my boy."

"The front winder it was, at the 'otel," said the boy.

At this point Parkins was in favor of sending the boy home, but the colonel refused; he wanted to get to the bottom of it, he said. It was most dangerous to give a boy such

a fright as this one had had, and if it turned out that people had been playing jokes, they should suffer for it in some way. And by a series of questions he made out this story: The boy had been playing about on the grass in front of the Globe with some others; then they had gone home to their teas, and he was just going, when he happened to look up at the front winder and see it a-wiving at him. *It* seemed to be a figure of some sort, in white as far as he knew—couldn't see its face; but it wived at him, and it warn't a right thing—not to say not a right person. Was there a light in the room? No, he didn't think to look if there was a light. Which was the window? Was it the top one or the second one? The seckind one it was—the big winder what got two little uns at the sides.

"Very well, my boy," said the colonel, after a few more questions. "You run away home now. I expect it was some person trying to give you a start. Another time, like a brave English boy, you just throw a stone—well, no, not that exactly, but you go and speak to the waiter, or to Mr. Simpson, the landlord, and—yes—and say that I advised you to do so."

The boy's face expressed some of the doubt he felt as to the likelihood of Mr. Simpson's lending a favorable ear to his complaint, but the colonel did not appear to perceive this, and went on, "And here's a sixpence—no, I see it's a shilling—and you be off home, and don't think any more about it."

The youth hurried off with agitated thanks, and the colonel and Parkins went round to the front of the Globe and reconnoitered. There was only one window answering to the description they had been hearing.

"Well, that's curious," said Parkins; "it's evidently my window the lad was talking about. Will you come up for a moment, Colonel Wilson? We ought to be able to see if anyone has been taking liberties in my room."

They were soon in the passage, and Parkins made as if to open the door. Then he stopped and felt in his pockets.

"This is more serious than I thought," was his next remark. "I remember now that before I started this morning I locked the door. It is locked now, and, what is more, here is the

key." And he held it up. "Now," he went on, "if the servants are in the habit of going into one's room during the day when one is away, I can only say that—well, that I don't approve of it at all." Conscious of a somewhat weak climax, he busied himself in opening the door (which was indeed locked) and in lighting candles. "No," he said, "nothing seems disturbed."

"Except your bed," put in the colonel.

"Excuse me, that isn't my bed," said Parkins. "I don't use that one. But it does look as if someone had been playing tricks with it."

It certainly did. The clothes were bundled up and twisted together in a most tortuous confusion. Parkins pondered.

"That must be it," he said at last. "I disordered the clothes last night in unpacking, and they haven't made it since. Perhaps they came in to make it, and that boy saw them through the window; and then they were called away and locked the door after them. Yes, I think that must be it."

"Well, ring and ask," said the colonel, and this appealed to Parkins as practical.

The maid appeared, and, to make a long story short, deposed that she had made the bed in the morning when the gentleman was in the room, and hadn't been there since. No, she hadn't no other key. Mr. Simpson he kep' the keys; he'd be able to tell the gentleman if anyone had been up.

This was a puzzle. Investigation showed that nothing of value had been taken, and Parkins remembered the disposition of the small objects on tables and so forth well enough to be pretty sure that no pranks had been played with them. Mr. and Mrs. Simpson furthermore agreed that neither of them had given the duplicate key of the room to any person whatever during the day. Nor could Parkins, fair-minded man as he was, detect anything in the demeanor of master, mistress, or maid that indicated guilt. He was much more inclined to think that the boy had been imposing on the colonel.

The latter was unwontedly silent and pensive at dinner and throughout the evening. When he bade good night to

Parkins, he murmured in a gruff undertone, "You know where I am if you want me during the night."

"Why, yes, thank you, Colonel Wilson, I think I do; but there isn't much prospect of my disturbing you, I hope. By the way," he added, "did I show you that old whistle I spoke of? I think not. Well, here it is."

The colonel turned it over gingerly in the light of the candle.

"Can you make anything of the inscription?" asked Parkins, as he took it back.

"No, not in this light. What do you mean to do with it?"

"Oh, well, when I get back to Cambridge I shall submit it to some of the archeologists there, and see what they think of it; and very likely, if they consider it worth having, I may present it to one of the museums."

" 'M!" said the colonel. "Well, you may be right. All I know is that, if it were mine, I should chuck it straight into the sea. It's no use talking, I'm well aware, but I expect that with you it's a case of live and learn. I hope so, I'm sure, and I wish you a good night."

He turned away, leaving Parkins in act to speak at the bottom of the stair, and soon each was in his own bedroom.

By some unfortunate accident, there were neither blinds nor curtains to the windows of the professor's room. The previous night he had thought little of this, but tonight there seemed every prospect of a bright moon rising to shine directly on his bed, and probably wake him later on. When he noticed this he was a good deal annoyed, but, with an ingenuity which I can only envy, he succeeded in rigging up, with the help of a railway rug, some safety pins, and a stick and umbrella, a screen which, if it only held together, would completely keep the moonlight off his bed. And shortly afterward he was comfortable in that bed. When he had read a somewhat solid work long enough to produce a decided wish for sleep, he cast a drowsy glance round the room, blew out the candle, and fell back upon the pillow.

He must have slept soundly for an hour or more, when a sudden clatter shook him up in a most unwelcome manner.

In a moment he realized what had happened. His carefully constructed screen had given way, and a very bright frosty moon was shining directly on his face. This was highly annoying. Could he possibly get up and reconstruct the screen? Or could he manage to sleep if he did not?

For some minutes he lay and pondered over the possibilities; then he turned over sharply, and with all his eyes open lay breathlessly listening. There had been a movement, he was sure, in the empty bed on the opposite side of the room. Tomorrow he would have it moved, for there must be rats or something playing about in it. It was quiet now. No! the commotion began again. There was a rustling and shaking; surely more than any rat could cause.

I can figure to myself something of the professor's bewilderment and horror, for I have in a dream 30 years back seen the same thing happen; but the reader will hardly, perhaps, imagine how dreadful it was to him to see a figure suddenly sit up in what he had known was an empty bed. He was out of his own bed in one bound, and made a dash toward the window, where lay his only weapon, the stick with which he had propped his screen. This was, as it turned out, the worst thing he could have done, because the personage in the empty bed, with a sudden smooth motion, slipped from the bed and took up a position, with outspread arms, between the two beds, and in front of the door. Parkins watched it in a horrid perplexity. Somehow, the idea of getting past it and escaping through the door was intolerable to him; he could not have borne—he didn't know why—to touch it; and as for its touching him, he would sooner dash himself through the window than have that happen. It stood for the moment in a band of dark shadow, and he had not seen what its face was like. Now it began to move, in a stooping posture, and all at once the spectator realized, with some horror and some relief, that it must be blind, for it seemed to feel about it with its muffled arms in a groping and random fashion. Turning half away from him, it became suddenly conscious of the bed he had just left, and darted toward it, and bent over and felt the pillows in a way which made Parkins shudder as he had never in his life

thought it possible. In a very few moments it seemed to know that the bed was empty, and then, moving forward into the area of light and facing the window, it showed for the first time what manner of thing it was.

Parkins, who very much dislikes being questioned about it, did once describe something of it in my hearing, and I gathered that what he chiefly remembers about it is a horrible, an intensely horrible, face of *crumpled linen.* What expression he read upon it he could not or would not tell, but that the fear of it went nigh to maddening him is certain.

But he was not at leisure to watch it for long. With formidable quickness it moved into the middle of the room, and, as it groped and waved, one corner of its draperies swept across Parkins's face. He could not—though he knew how perilous a sound was—he could not keep back a cry of disgust, and this gave the searcher an instant clue. It leaped toward him upon the instant, and the next moment he was halfway through the window backward, uttering cry upon cry at the utmost pitch of his voice, and the linen face was thrust close into his own. At this, almost the last possible second, deliverance came, as you will have guessed. The colonel burst the door open and was just in time to see the dreadful group at the window. When he reached the figures only one was left. Parkins sank forward into the room in a faint, and before him on the floor lay a tumbled heap of bedclothes.

Colonel Wilson asked no questions, but busied himself in keeping everyone else out of the room and in getting Parkins back to his bed; and himself, wrapped in a rug, occupied the other bed for the rest of the night. Early on the next day Rogers arrived, more welcome than he would have been a day before, and the three of them held a very long consultation in the professor's room. At the end of it the colonel left the hotel door carrying a small object between his finger and thumb, which he cast as far into the sea as a very brawny arm could send it. Later on the smoke of a burning ascended from the back premises of the Globe.

Exactly what explanation was patched up for the staff

and visitors at the hotel I must confess I do not recollect. The professor was somehow cleared of the ready suspicion of delirium tremens, and the hotel of the reputation of a troubled house.

There is not much question as to what would have happened to Parkins if the colonel had not intervened when he did. He would either have fallen out of the window or else lost his wits. But it is not so evident what more the creature that came in answer to the whistle could have done than frighten. There seemed to be absolutely nothing material about it save the bedclothes of which it had made itself a body. The colonel, who remembered a not very dissimilar occurrence in India, was of opinion that if Parkins had closed with it it could really have done very little, and that its one power was that of frightening. The whole thing, he said, served to confirm his opinion of the Church of Rome.

There is really nothing more to tell, but, as you may imagine, the professor's views on certain points are less clear-cut then they used to be. His nerves, too, have suffered. He cannot even now see a surplice hanging on a door quite unmoved, and the spectacle of a scarecrow in a field late on a winter afternoon has cost him more than one sleepless night.

AMBROSE BIERCE

ONE SUMMER NIGHT

THE FACT that Henry Armstrong was buried did not seem to him to prove that he was dead: he had always been a hard man to convince. That he really was buried, the testimony of his senses compelled him to admit. His posture—flat upon his back, with his hands crossed upon his stomach and tied with something that he easily broke without profitably altering the situation—the strict confinement of his entire person, the black darkness and profound silence, made a body of evidence impossible to controvert and he accepted it without cavil.

But dead—no; he was only very, very ill. He had, withal, the invalid's apathy and did not greatly concern himself about the uncommon fate that had been allotted to him. No philosopher was he—just a plain, commonplace person gifted, for the time being, with a pathological indifference; the organ that he feared consequences with was torpid. So, with no particular apprehension for his immediate future, he fell asleep, and all was peace with Henry Armstrong.

But something was going on overhead. It was a dark summer night, shot through with infrequent shimmers of lightning silently firing a cloud lying low in the west and portending a storm. These brief, stammering illuminations brought out with ghastly distinctness the monuments and headstones of the cemetery and seemed to set them dancing. It was not a night in which any credible witness was likely to be straying about a cemetery, so the three men who were there, digging into the grave of Henry Armstrong, felt reasonably secure.

Two of them were young students from a medical college a few miles away; the third was a gigantic Negro known as Jess. For many years Jess had been employed about the cemetery as a man-of-all-work and it was his favorite pleasantry that he "knew every soul in the place." From the nature of what he was now doing it was inferable that the place was not so populous as its register may have shown it to be.

Outside the wall, at the part of the grounds farthest from the public road, were a horse and a light wagon, waiting.

The work of excavation was not difficult; the earth with which the grave had been loosely filled a few hours before offered little resistance and was soon thrown out. Removal of the casket from its box was less easy, but it was taken out, for it was a perquisite of Jess, who carefully unscrewed the cover and laid it aside, exposing the body in black trousers and white shirt.

At that instant the air sprang to flame, a cracking shot of thunder shook the stunned world, and Henry Armstrong tranquilly sat up. With inarticulate cries the men fled in terror, each in a different direction. For nothing on earth could two of them have been persuaded to return. But Jess was of another breed.

In the gray of the morning the two students, pallid and haggard from anxiety and with the terror of their adventure still beating tumultuously in their blood, met at the medical college.

"You saw it?" cried one.

"God! yes—what are we to do?"

They went around to the rear of the building, where they saw a horse, attached to a light wagon, hitched to a gatepost near the door of the dissecting-room. Mechanically they entered the room. On a bench in the obscurity sat the Negro Jess. He rose, grinning, all eyes and teeth.

"I'm waiting for my pay," he said.

Stretched naked on a long table lay the body of Henry Armstrong, the head defiled with blood and clay from the blow of a spade.

ELIZABETH BOWEN

TELLING

I

TERRY looked up; Josephine lay still. He felt shy, embarrassed all at once at the idea of anyone coming here. His brain was ticking like a watch; he looked up warily.

But there was nobody. Outside the high, cold walls, beyond the ragged arch of the chapel, delphiniums crowded in sunshine—straining with brightness, burning each other up—bars of color that, while one watched them, seemed to turn round slowly. But there was nobody there.

The chapel was a ruin, roofed by daylight, floored with lawn. In a corner the gardener had tipped out a heap of cut grass from the lawnmower. The daisy-heads wilted, the cut grass smelled stuffy and sweet. Everywhere cigarette ends, scattered last night by the couples who'd come here to kiss. *First the dance,* thought Terry, *then this. The servants will never get straight.* The cigarette ends would lie here for days, till after the rain, and go brown and rotten.

Then he noticed a charred cigarette stump in Josephine's hair. The short wavy ends of her hair fell back—still in lines of perfection—from temples and ears; by her left ear the charred stump showed through. For that, he thought, she would never forgive him; fastidiousness was her sensibility, always tormented. ("If you must know," she had said, "well, you've got dirty nails, haven't you? Look.") He bent down and picked the cigarette end out of her hair; the fine ends fluttered under his breath. As he threw it away, he noticed his nails were still dirty. His hands were stained now —naturally—but his nails must have been dirty before. Had she noticed again?

But had she, perhaps, for a moment been proud of him?

Had she had just a glimpse of the something he'd told her about? He wanted to ask her, "What do you feel now? Do you believe in me?" He felt sure of himself, certain, justified. For nobody else would have done this to Josephine.

Himself they had all—always—deprecated. He felt a shrug in this attitude, a thinly disguised kind of hopelessness. "Oh, *Terry*—" they'd say, and break off. He was no good; he couldn't even put up a tennis net. He never could see properly (whisky helped that at first, then it didn't), his hands wouldn't serve him, things he wanted them to hold slipped away from them. He was no good; the younger ones laughed at him till they, like their brothers and sisters, grew up and were schooled into bitter kindliness. Again and again he'd been sent back to them all (and repetition never blunted the bleak edge of these homecomings) from school, from Cambridge, now—a month ago—from Ceylon. "The bad penny!" he would remark, very jocular. "If I could just think things out," he had tried to explain to his father, "I know I could do *something*." And once he had said to Josephine, "I know there is Something I could do."

"And they will know now," he said, looking round (for the strange new pleasure of clearly and sharply seeing) from Josephine's face to her stained breast (her heavy blue beads slipped sideways over her shoulder and soiled on the grass—touched, surrounded now by the unhesitant trickle); from her breast up the walls to their top, the top crumbling, the tufts of valerian trembling against the sky. It was as though the dark-paned window through which he had so long looked out had swung open suddenly. He saw (clear as the walls and the sky) Right and Wrong, the old childish fixities. *I have done right,* he thought (but his brain was still ticking). *She ought not to live with this flaw in her. Josephine ought not to live, had to die.*

All night he had thought this out, walking alone in the shrubberies, helped by the dance music, dodging the others. His mind had been kindled, like a dull coal suddenly blazing. He was not angry; he kept saying, "I must not be angry, I must be just." He was in a blaze (it seemed to himself) of justice. The couples who came face to face with him

down the paths started away. Someone spoke of a minor prophet, someone breathed, "Caliban."— He kept saying, "That flaw right through her. She damages truth. She kills souls; she's killed mine." So he had come to see, before morning, his purpose as God's purpose.

She had laughed, you see. She had been pretending. There was a tender and lovely thing he kept hidden, a spark in him; she had touched it and made it the whole of him, made him a man. She had said, "Yes, *I* believe, Terry. I understand." That had been everything. He had thrown off the old dull armor— Then she had laughed.

Then he had understood what other men meant when they spoke of her. He had seen at once what he was meant to do. "This is for me," he said. "No one but I can do it."

All night he walked alone in the garden. Then he watched the French windows, and when they were open again stepped in quickly and took down the African knife from the dining-room wall. He had always wanted that African knife. Then he had gone upstairs (remembering, on the way, all those meetings with Josephine, shaving, tying of ties), shaved, changed into flannels, put the knife into his blazer pocket (it was too long, more than an inch of the blade came out through the inside lining) and sat on his window sill, watching sunlight brighten and broaden from a yellow agitation behind the trees into swathes of color across the lawn. He did not think; his mind was like somebody singing, somebody able to sing.

And, later, it had all been arranged for him. He fell into, had his part in, some kind of design. Josephine had come down in her pleated white dress (when she turned the pleats whirled). He had said, "Come out!" and she gave that light, distant look, still with a laugh at the back of it, and said, "Oh—right-o, little Terry." And she had walked down the garden ahead of him, past the delphiniums into the chapel. Here, to make justice perfect, he had asked once more, "*Do* you believe in me?" She had laughed again.

She lay now with her feet and body in sunshine (the sun was just high enough), her arms flung out wide at him— desperately, generously—her head rolling sideways in

shadow on the enclosed, silky grass. On her face was a dazzled look (eyes half closed, lips drawn back), and expression almost of diffidence. Her blood quietly soaked through the grass, sinking through to the roots of it.

He crouched a moment and, touching her eyelids—still warm—tried to shut her eyes. But he didn't know how. Then he got up and wiped the blade of the African knife with a handful of grass, then scattered the handful away. All the time he was listening; he felt shy, embarrassed at the thought of anyone finding him here. And his brain, like a watch, was still ticking.

On his way to the house he stooped down and dipped his hands in the garden tank. Someone might scream; he felt embarrassed at the thought of somebody screaming. The red curled away through the water and melted.

He stepped in at the morning-room window. The blinds were half down—he stooped his head to avoid them—and the room was in dark-yellow shadow. (He had waited here for them all to come in, that afternoon he arrived back from Ceylon.) The smell of pinks came in, and two or three bluebottles bumbled and bounced on the ceiling. His sister Catherine sat with her back to him, playing the piano. (He had heard her as he came up the path.) He looked at her pink, pointed elbows—she was playing a waltz, and the music ran through them in jerky ripples.

"Hullo, Catherine!" he said, and listened in admiration. So his new voice sounded like this!

"Hullo, Terry!" She went on playing, worrying at the waltz. She had an anxious, methodical mind, but loved gossip. He thought, *Here is a bit of gossip for you—Josephine's down in the chapel, covered with blood. Her dress is spoiled, but I think her blue beads are all right. I should go and see.*

"I say, Catherine—"

"Oh, Terry, they're putting the furniture back in the drawing-room. I wish you'd go and help. It's getting those big sofas through the door—and the cabinets." She laughed, "I'm just putting the music away," and went on playing.

He thought, *I don't suppose she'll be able to marry now. No one will marry her.* He said, "Do you know where Josephine is?"

"No, I haven't"—rum-tum-tum, rum-tum-*tum*—"the slightest idea. Go on, Terry."

He thought, *She never liked Josephine.* He went away.

He stood in the door of the drawing-room. His brothers and Beatrice were punting the big armchairs, chintz-skirted, over the waxy floor. They all felt him there, for as long as possible didn't notice him. Charles—fifteen, with his pink, scrubbed ears—considered a moment, shoving against the cabinet, thought it was rather a shame, turned with an honest, kindly look of distaste, said, "Come on, Terry." *He can't go back to school now,* thought Terry, *can't go anywhere, really. Wonder what they'll do with him—send him out to the Colonies?* Charles had perfect manners: square, bluff, perfect. He never thought about anybody, never felt anybody—just classified them. Josephine was "a girl staying in the house," "a friend of my sister's." He would think at once (in a moment when Terry had told him), *A girl staying in the house—it's—well, I mean, if it hadn't been a girl staying in the house—*

Terry went over to him; they pushed the cabinet. But Terry pushed too hard, crooked; the farther corner grated against the wall. "Oh, I say, we've scratched the paint," said Charles. And indeed they had; on the wall was a gray scar. Charles went scarlet; he hated things to be done badly. It was nice of him to say, *"We've* scratched the paint." Would he say later, "We've killed Josephine?"

"I think perhaps you'd better help with the sofas," said Charles civilly.

"You should have seen the blood on my hands just now," said Terry.

"Bad luck!" Charles said quickly, and went away.

Beatrice, Josephine's friend, stood with her elbows on the mantelpiece looking at herself in the glass above. Last night a man had kissed her down in the chapel (Terry had watched them). This must seem to Beatrice to be written all over her face—what else could she be looking at? Her eyes

in the looking-glass were dark, beseeching. As she saw Terry come up behind her she frowned angrily and turned away.

"I say, Beatrice, do you know what happened down in the chapel?"

"Does it interest you?" She stooped quickly and pulled down the sofa loose-cover where it had "runkled" up, as though the sofa legs were indecent.

"Beatrice, what would you do if I'd killed somebody?"

"Laugh," said she wearily.

"If I'd killed a woman?"

"Laugh harder. Do you know any women?"

She was a lovely thing, really; he'd ruined her, he supposed. He was all in a panic. "Beatrice, swear you won't go down to the chapel." Because she might, well—of course she'd go down. As soon as she was alone and they didn't notice, she'd go creeping down to the chapel. It had been *that* kind of kiss.

"Oh, be quiet about that old chapel!" Already he'd spoiled last night for her. How she hated him! He looked round for John. John had gone away.

On the hall table were two letters, come by the second post, waiting for Josephine. *No one,* he thought, *ought to read them*—he must protect Josephine; he took them up and slipped them into his pocket.

"I say," called John from the stairs, "what are you doing with those letters?" John didn't mean to be sharp, but they had taken each other unawares. They none of them wanted Terry to *feel* how his movements were sneaking movements; when they met him creeping about by himself they would either ignore him or say, "Where are *you* off to?" jocosely and loudly, to hide the fact of their knowing he didn't know. John was Terry's elder brother, but hated to sound like one. But he couldn't help knowing those letters were for Josephine, and Josephine was "staying in the house."

"I'm taking them for Josephine."

"Know where she is?"

"Yes, in the chapel—I killed her there."

But John—hating this business with Terry—had turned

away. Terry followed him upstairs, repeating, "I killed her there, John—John, I've killed Josephine in the chapel." John hurried ahead, not listening, not turning round. "Oh yes," he called over his shoulder. "Right you are, take them along." He disappeared into the smoking room, banging the door. It had been John's idea that, from the day after Terry's return from Ceylon, the sideboard cupboard in the dining-room should be kept locked up. But he'd never said anything; oh no. What interest could the sideboard cupboard have for a brother of his? he pretended to think.

Oh yes, thought Terry, *you're a fine man, with a muscular back, but you couldn't have done what I've done.* There had, after all, been Something in Terry. He *was* abler than John (they'd soon know). John had never kissed Josephine.

Terry sat down on the stairs, saying, "Josephine, Josephine!" He sat there gripping a baluster, shaking with exaltation.

The study door panels had always looked solemn; they bulged with solemnity. Terry had to get past to his father; he chose the top left-hand panel to tap on. The patient voice said, "Come in!"

Here and now, thought Terry. He had a great audience; he looked at the books round the dark walls and thought of all those thinkers. His father jerked up a contracted, strained look at him. Terry felt that hacking with his news into this silence was like hacking into a great, grave chest. The desk was a havoc of papers.

"What exactly do you want?" said his father, rubbing the edge of the desk.

Terry stood there silently; everything ebbed. "I want," he said at last, "to talk about my future."

His father sighed and slid a hand forward, rumpling the papers. "I suppose, Terry," he said as gently as possible, "you really *have* got a future?" Then he reproached himself. "Well, sit down a minute—I'll just—"

Terry sat down. The clock on the mantelpiece echoed the ticking in his brain. He waited.

"Yes?" said his father.

"Well, there must be some kind of future for me, mustn't there?"

"Oh, certainly—"

"Look here, Father, I have something to show you. That African knife—"

"What about it?"

"That African knife. It's here. I've got it to show you."

"What about it?"

"Wait just a minute." He put a hand into either pocket; his father waited.

"It *was* here—I did have it. I brought it to show you. I must have it somewhere—that African knife."

But it wasn't there, he hadn't got it; he had lost it; left it, dropped it—on the grass, by the tank, anywhere. He remembered wiping it— Then?

Now his support was all gone; he was terrified now; he wept.

"I've lost it," he quavered, "I've lost it."

"What do you mean?" said his father, sitting blankly there like a tombstone, with his white, square face. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"Nothing," said Terry, weeping and shaking. "Nothing, nothing, nothing."

RAY BRADBURY

THE JAR

IT WAS one of those things they keep in a jar in the tent of a sideshow on the outskirts of a little, drowsy town. One of those pale things drifting in alcohol plasma, forever dreaming and circling, with its peeled dead eyes staring out at you and never seeing you. It went with the noiselessness of late night, and only the crickets chirping, the frogs sobbing off in the moist swampland. One of those things in a big jar that makes your stomach jump like it does when you see an amputated arm in a laboratory vat.

Charlie stared back at it for a long time.

A long time, his big raw hands, hairy on the roofs of them, clenching the rope that kept back curious people. He had paid his dime and now he stared.

It was getting late. The merry-go-round drowsed down to a lazy mechanical tinkle. Tent peggers back of a canvas smoked and cursed over a poker game. Lights switched out, putting a summer gloom over the carnival. People streamed homeward in cliques and queues. Somewhere, a radio flared up, then cut, leaving Louisiana sky wide and silent with stars peppering it.

There was nothing in the world for Charlie but that pale thing sealed in its universe of serum. Charlie's loose mouth hung open in a pink weal, teeth showing, eyes puzzled, admiring, wondering.

Someone trotted in the shadows behind him, small beside Charlie's giant tallness. "Oh," said the shadow, coming into the light-bulb glare. "You still here, bud?"

"Yeah," said Charlie, irritated; his thoughts were touched.

The carny-boss appreciated Charlie's curiosity. He nodded at his old acquaintance in the jar. "Everybody likes it; in a peculiar kinda way, I mean."

Charlie rubbed his long jawbone. "You—uh—ever consider selling it?"

The carny-boss's eyes dilated, then closed. He snorted. "Naw. It brings customers. They like seeing stuff like that. Sure."

Charlie made a disappointed, "Oh."

"Well," consider the carny-boss, "if a guy had money, maybe—"

"How much money?"

"If a guy had—" the carny-boss estimated, squinting eyes, counting on fingers, watching Charlie as he tacked it out one finger after another. "If a guy had three, four, say, maybe seven or eight—"

Charlie nodded with each motion, expectantly. Seeing this, the carny-boss raised his total, "—maybe ten dollars, or maybe fifteen—"

Charlie scowled, worried. The carny-boss retreated, "Say a guy has *twelve* dollars—" Charlie grinned. "Why, he could buy that thing in that jar," concluded the carny-boss.

"Funny thing," said Charlie, "I got just twelve bucks in my denims. And I been reckoning how looked up to I'd be back down at Wilder's Hollow if I brung home something like this to set on my shelf over the table. The guys would sure look up to me than, I bet."

"*Well,* now, listen here—" said the carny-boss.

The sale was completed with the jar put on the back seat of Charlie's wagon. The horse skittered its hoofs when it saw it, and whinnied.

The carny-boss glanced up with an expression of, almost, relief. "I was tired of seeing the thing around. Don't thank me. Lately I been thinking things about it, funny things—don't mind me, I'm just a big-mouth. S'long, farmer!"

Charlie drove off. The naked blue light bulbs withdrew like dying stars, the open dark country night of Louisiana swept in around the wagon and horse. The brass merry-go-

round clanking faded. There was just Charlie, the horse timing its gray hoofs, and the crickets.

And the jar behind the high seat.

It sloshed back and forth, back and forth. Sloshed wet. And the cold gray thing drowsily slumped against the glass, looking out, looking out, but seeing nothing, nothing, nothing.

Charlie leaned back to pet the lid. Smelling of strange liquor, his hand returned, changed and cold and trembling, excited. He was bright-scarlet happy about this. *Yes, sir!*

Slosh, slosh, slosh—

In the Hollow numerous grass-green and blood-red lanterns tossed dusty light over men huddled, changing, spitting, sitting on General Store property.

They knew the creak-bumble of Charlie's vehicle and did not shift their raw, drab-haired skulls as he rocked to a halt. Their cigars were nicotine glowworms crawling from political lips to knee-perches and return-trip. Their voices were frog mutterings in summer night.

Charlie leaned at an eager angle. "Hi, Clem. Hi, Milt."

"Lo, Charlie. Lo, Charlie," they murmured. The political conflict continued. Charlie cut it down the seam.

"I got somethin' here. I got somethin' you might wanna see!"

Tom Carmody's eyes glinted, green in the lamplight, from the General Store porch. It seemed to Charlie that Tom Carmody was forever installed under porches in shadow, or under trees in shadow, or if in a room in the farthest niche, showing his eyes out at you from his dark. You never knew what his face was doing, and his eyes were always funning you. And every time they looked at you they laughed a different way.

"You ain't got nothin' we wants ta see, you dumb sheebaw!"

Charlie made a fist with a blunt-knuckle fringe. "Somethin' in a jar," he went on. "Looks kine a like a brain, kine a like a pickled wolf, kine a like—well come look yourself!"

Somebody snicked his cigar into a fall of pink ash and

ambled over to look. Charlie grandly elevated the jar lid, and in the uncertain lantern light the man's face changed. "Hey, now, what in hell *is* this—"

It was the first thaw of the night. Others shifted lazily upright, leaned forward; gravity pulled them into walking. They made no effort, except to keep one shoe before the other, to keep from collapsing upon their unusual faces. They circled the jar and contents. And Charlie, first time in his life, seized upon some strategy and clapped the lid down with a glass clatter.

"You want to see more, drop around to my house. It'll be there," he declared generously.

Tom Carmody spat from out his porch eyrie. "Ha!"

"Lemme see thet again," cried Gramps Medknowe. "Is it a brain?"

Charlie flapped the reins and the horse stumbled into action.

"Come on around! You're welcome!"

"What'll your wife say?"

"She'll kick the tar off our heels!"

But Charlie and the wagon were gone over the hill. They stood around, all of them, chewing tongues, squinting after. Tom Carmody swore softly from the porch—

As Charlie climbed the steps of his shack, carrying the jar to its throne in the living-room, he thought that from now on the place would be a palace. The incumbent king swam without moving in his private pool, raised, elevated upon his shelf over the table. This jar was the one thing that dispelled the gray sameness that hung over the place on the swamp rim.

"What've you got there?"

Thedy's thin soprano turned him from his admiration. She stood in the bedroom door glaring out, her thin body clothed in faded blue gingham, her hair drawn to a drab knot behind red ears. Her eyes were faded like the gingham.

"Well," she repeated. "What is it?"

"What does it look like to you, Thedy?"

She took a thin step forward, making a slow indolent pendulum of hips. Her eyes were intent upon the jar, her lips drawing back to show feline milk teeth.

The dead pale thing hung in its serum.

Thedy snapped a dull-blue glance at Charlie, then back to the jar, and swept around quickly to clutch the wall. "It —it looks just like—*you*—Charlie!" she shouted hoarsely.

The door slammed behind her.

The reverberation did not disturb the jar's contents. But Charlie stood there, longing after her, neck muscles long, taut, heart pounding frantically, and then after his heart slowed a bit, he talked to the thing in the jar.

"I work the bottom land to the buttbone ever' year, and she takes the money and rushes off down home visitin' her folks, nine weeks at a stretch. I can't keep holt of her. She and the men from the store make fun of me. I can't help it if I'm not whip-smart."

Philosophically, the contents of the jar gave no advice.

"Charlie?" Someone stood in the door.

Charlie turned, startled, then broke out a grin. It was some of the men from the General Store.

"Uh—Charlie—we—that is—we thought—well—we came up to have a look at that—stuff—you got in that there jar—"

July passed warm, and it was August.

For the first time in years, Charlie was happy as tall corn growing after a drought. It was gratifying of an evening to hear boots slushing through the tall grass, the sound of men spitting into the ditch prior to setting foot on the porch, the sound of heavy bodies creaking across it, and the groan of the house as yet another shoulder leaned against its frame door and another voice said. as a hairy arm wiped clean the questioning mouth, "Kin I come in?"

With elaborate casualness, Charlie'd invite the arrivals in. There'd be chairs, soapboxes for all, or at least carpets to squat on. And by the time crickets were itching their legs into a summertime humming, and frogs were throat-swollen like ladies with goiters belching in the great night, the

room would be full to bursting with people from all the bottom lands.

At first nobody would say anything. The first half-hour of such an evening, while people came in and got settled, was spent in carefully rolling cigarettes. Putting tobacco neatly into the rut of brown paper, loading it, tamping it, as they loaded and tamped and rolled their thoughts and fears and amazement for the evening. It gave them time to think. You could see their brains working behind their eyes as they fingered the cigarettes into smoking order.

It was kind of a rude church gathering. They sat, squatted, leaned on plaster walls, and one by one, with reverent awe, they stared at the jar upon its shelf.

They wouldn't stare sudden-like. That would've been irreverent. No, they kind of did it slow, casual, as if they were glancing around the room—letting eyes fumble over just *any* old object that happened into their consciousness.

And—just by accident, of course—the focus of their wandering eyes would occur always at the same place. After a while all eyes in the room would be fastened to it, like pins stuck in some incredible pincushion. And the only sound would be someone sucking a corncob. Or the children's barefooted scurry on the porch planks outside. Maybe some woman's voice would come. "You kids git away, now! Git!" And with a giggle like soft, quick water, the bare feet would rush off to scare the bullfrogs.

Charlie would be up front, naturally, on his rocking chair, a plaid quilt under his lean rump, rocking slow, enjoying the fame and looked-up-toedness that came with keeping the jar.

Thedy, she'd be seen way back of the room with the women folks in a bunch like gray grapes, abiding their menfolk. Thedy looked like she was ripe for jealous screaming. But she said nothing, just watched men tromp into her living-room and set at the feet of Charlie staring at this here Holy Grail-like thing, and her lips were set as seven-day concrete and she spoke not a civil word to anybody.

After a period of proper silence, someone, maybe old Gramps Medknowe from Creek Road, would clear the

phlegm from his old throat's cavern, lean forward, blinking, wet his lips, maybe, and there'd be a curious tremble in his calloused fingers.

This would cue everyone to get ready for the talking to come. Ears were primed. People settled much as sows in warm mud after the rain.

Gramps looked a long while, measured his lips with a lizard tongue, then settled back and said, like always, in a high thin old man's tenor, "Wonder what *it* is? Wonder if it's a he or a she or just a plain old *it?* Sometimes I wake up nights, twist on my cornmatting, think about that jar setting here in the long dark. Think about it hangin' in liquid, peaceful and pale like an animal oyster. Sometimes I wake Ma and we both think of it—"

While talking, Gramps moved his fingers in a quavering pantomime. Everybody watched his thick thumb weave, and the other heavy-nailed fingers undulate.

"—we both lay there, thinkin'. And we shivers. May be a hot night, trees sweatin', mosquitoes too hot to fly, but we shivers jest the same, and turn over, tryin' to sleep—"

Gramps lapsed back into silence, as if his speech was enough from him; let some other voice talk the wonder, awe, and strangeness.

Juke Marmer, from Willows Road, wiped sweat off his palms on the round of his knees and softly said, "I remember when I was a runnel-nosed gawk, we had a cat who was all the time makin' kittens. Lordamighty, she'd a litter ever' time she turned around and skipped a fence—" Juke spoke in a kind of holy softness, benevolent. "Well, we usually gave the kittens away, but when this one particular litter busted out, everybody within walkin' distance had one-two our cats by gift, already.

"So Ma busied on the back porch with a big gallon glass jar, filling it to the brim with water. It slopped in the sunlight. Ma said, 'Juke, you drown them kittens!' I 'member I stood there, the kittens mewed, running around, blind, small, helpless, and snugly. Just beginning to get their eyes open. I looked at Ma, I said, 'Not *me,* Ma! You do it!' But Ma

turned pale and said it had to be done and I was the only one handy. And she went off to stir gravy and fix chicken. I—I picked up one—kitten. I held it. It was warm, it made a mewing sound. I felt like running away, not ever coming back."

Juke nodded his head now, eyes bright, young, seeing into the past, making it stark, chiseling it out with hammer and knife of words, smoothing it into horrible bas-relief with his tongue.

"I dropped the kitten into the water. He closed his eyes, opened his mouth, gasping for air. I remember how the little white fangs showed, the pink tongue came out, and bubbles with it, in a line, to the top of the water!

"I remember to this day the way that kitten floated after it was all over, drifting around, around, slow and not worrying, looking out at me, not condemnin' me for what I had done. But not likin' me, either. Ahhhhh—"

Hearts beat fast. Eyes shifted quickly from Juke to the shelved jar, back to him, up again, a spectators' game, as one sees at a tennis tournament, interest changing from moment to moment, apprehensively.

A pause.

Jahdoo, the black man from Swamp Crick Road, tossed his ivory eyeballs like a dusky juggler in his head. His dark knuckles knotted and flexed—grasshoppers alive.

"You know what thet is? You know, you *know?* That am the center of Life, sure 'nuff! Lord believe me, it am so!"

Swaying in a treelike rhythm, Jahdoo was blown by some swamp wind nobody could see, hear, or feel, but himself. His eyeballs went around again, as if loosened from all mooring. His voice needled a dark thread pattern picking up each person by the lobes of their ears and sewing them into one unbreathing design.

"From that, lyin' back in the Middibamboo Sump, all sort o' thing crawl. It put out hand, it put out feet, it put out tongue an' horn an' it grow. Little bitty ameba, perhap. Then a frog with a bulge-throat fit ta bust! Yah!" He cracked knuckles. "It slobber on up to its gummy joints and

it—it *am a man!* That am the center of creation. That am Middibamboo Mamma, from which we all come ten thousand year ago. Believe it!"

"Ten thousand year ago!" reiterated Granny Carnation.

"It am old! Looky it! It don' worra no more. It know better. It hang like pork chop in fryin' fat. It got eye to see with, but it don' blink 'em, they don' look fretted, does they? No, man! It know betta. It know thet we done come from it, and we is going back *to* it!"

"What color eyes has it got?"

"Gray."

"Naw, green!"

"What color hair? Brown?"

"Black!"

"Red!"

"No, gray!"

Then Charlie would give his drawling opinion. Some nights he'd say the same thing, some nights not. It didn't matter. When you said the same thing night after night in the deep summer, it always sounded different. The crickets changed it. The frogs changed it. The thing in the jar changed it. Charlie said, "What if an old man went back into the swamp, or maybe a young child, and wandered around for years and years lost in the drippin' trails and gullies, the wet ravines, in the nights, skin a-turnin' pale, and makin' cold and shrivelin' up. Bein' away from the sun he'd keep witherin' away up and up and finally sink into a muck-hole and lay in a kind of—solution, like the maggot mosquito sleepin' in liquid. Why, why—for all we know, this might be someone we know. Someone we passed words with once on a time. For all we know—"

A hissing from among the womenfolks back in the shadows. One woman standing, eyes shining black, fumbling for words. Her name was Mrs. Tridden. She said, "Lots of little kids run stark naked into the swamp ever' year. They runs around and they never comes back. I almost got lost maself. I—I lost my little boy, Foley, that way. You—you *don't suppose!!*"

Breaths were taken in, snatched through nostrils, con-

stricted, tightened. Mouths turned down at corners, bent by grim facial muscles. Heads turned on celery-stalk necks, and eyes read her horror and hope. It was in Mrs. Tridden's body, wire-taut, holding onto the wall back of her with straight fingers stiff. "My baby," she whispered. She breathed it out. "My baby. My Foley! Foley! Foley, is that you? Foley! Foley, tell me, baby is that *you!*"

Everybody held his breath, turning to see the jar.

The thing in the jar said nothing. It just stared blind-white out upon the multitude. And deep in raw-boned bodies a secret fear juice ran like spring thaw, and the resolute ice of calm life and belief and easy humbleness was cracked down the middle by that juice and melted away in a gigantic torrent.

"It moved!" someone screamed.

"No, no, it didn't move. Just your eyes playin' tricks!"

"Hones' ta God," cried Juke. "I saw it shift slow like a dead kitten."

"Hush up, now! It's been dead a long, long time. Maybe since before you was born!"

"He made a sign!" screamed Mrs. Tridden, the mother woman. "That's my baby, my Foley! My baby you got there! Three year old, he was! My baby lost and white in the swamp!" The sobbing broke out of her, then.

"Now, now, there now, Mrs. Tridden. There now. Set down and stop shakin'. Ain't no more your child'n mine. There, there." One of the womenfolk held her and faded out the sobbing into jerked breathing and a fluttering of her lips in butterfly quickness as the breath stroked over them, afraid.

When all was quiet again, Granny Carnation, with a withered pink flower in her shoulder-length gray hair, sucked the pipe in her trap mouth and talked around it, shaking her head to make the hair dance in the light:

"All this talking and shoving around words. Hah. Like as not we'll never know what it is. Like as not if we could find out, we wouldn't want to know. It's like them magic tricks them magicians do at the show. Once you find the feke, it ain't no more fun 'n' the innards of a jackbob. We come col-

lecting around here every ten nights or so, talking, social-like, with something, always something, to talk about. Stands to reason if we found out what the damn thing is there'd be nothing to talk about, so there!"

"Well, damn it to hell!" rumbled a bull voice. "I don't think it's nothin'!"

Tom Carmody. Tom Carmody standing, as always, in shadow. Out on the porch, just his eyes staring in, his lips laughing at you dimly, mocking. His laughter got inside Charlie like a hornet sting. Thedy had put him up to it, Thedy was trying to undermine Charlie's social life, she was!

"Nothing," joked Carmody harshly, "in that jar but a bunch of old jellyfish from Sea Cove, a-rottin' and a-stinkin' fit to whelp!"

"You mightn't be jealous, Cousin Carmody?" asked Charlie.

"Haw!" snorted Carmody. "I jest come around ta watch you dumb nitwits jaw about nuthin'. I gits a kick out of it. You notice I never set foot inside or took part. I'm goin' home right now. Anybody wanna come along with me?"

He got no offer of company. He laughed again, as if this were a bigger joke, how so many people could be so dumb, and Thedy was raking her palms with angry nails back of the room. Charlie felt a twinge of unexpected fear at this.

Carmody, still laughing, rapped off the porch with his high-heeled boots and the sound of crickets took him away.

Granny Carnation gummed her pipe. "Like I was saying before the storm; that thing on the shelf, why couldn't it be sort of—all things? Lots of things. What they call a—gimmle—"

"Symbol?"

"That's it. Symbol. Symbol of all the nights and days in the dead canebrake. Why's it have to be one thing? Maybe it's lots."

And the talking went on for another hour, and Thedy slipped away into the night on the track of Tom Carmody, and Charlie began to sweat. They were up to something, those two. They were planning something. Charlie sweated warm all the rest of the evening—

The meeting broke up late, and Charlie bedded down with mixed emotions. The meeting had gone off well, but what about Thedy and Tom Carmody?

Very late, with certain star coveys shuttled down the sky marking the time as late, Charlie heard the shushing of the tall grass parted by her penduluming hips. Her heels tacked soft across the porch.

She lay soundlessly in bed, cat eyes staring at him. He couldn't see them, but he could *feel* them staring.

"Charlie?"

He waited.

Then he said, "I'm awake."

Then she waited.

"Charlie?"

"What?"

"Bet you don't know where I been, bet you don't know where I been." It was a faint, derisive singsong in the night.

He waited.

She waited again. She couldn't bear waiting long, though, and continued, "I been to the carnival over in Cape City. Tom Carmody drove me. We—we talked to the carny-boss, Charlie, we did, we did, we *sure* did." And she sort of giggled to herself, secretly.

Charlie stirred upright on an elbow.

She said, "We found out what it is in your jar, Charlie—" insinuatingly.

Charlie flumped over, hands to ears. "I don't wanna hear."

"Oh, but you gotta hear, Charlie. It's a good joke. Oh, it's rare, Charlie," she hissed.

"Go—away," he said in a low firm voice.

"Unh-unh. No. No, sir, Charlie, honey. Not until I tell. We talked to the carny-boss and he—he almost died laughin', he said he sold it to some—hick—for twelve bucks. And it ain't worth more than two dollars at most!"

Laughter bloomed in the dark, right out of her mouth, an awful kind of flower with her breath as its perfume. She finished it, snapping, quick:

"It's just junk, Charlie! Liquid rubber, papier-mâche, silk,

cotton, chemicals! That's all! Got a metal framework inside it! That's all! That's all it is, Charlie! That's all," she shrilled in triumph.

He sat up swiftly, ripping sheets apart in big fingers, roaring, tears coming bright on his cheeks. "I don't wanna hear! Don't wanna hear!" he bellowed over and over.

She teased. "Wait'll everyone hears how fake it is! Won't they laugh! Won't they flap their lungs!"

He caught her wrists. "You ain't—gonna tell them?"

"Ouch, you hurt me!"

"You *ain't* gonna tell them."

"Wouldn't want me known as a liar, would you, Charles?"

He flung her wrists like white sticks into a well. "Whyncha leave alone? You're dirty! Dirty jealous of everything I do. I took shine off your nose when I brung the jar home. You didn't sleep right until you ruined things!"

She laughed nastily. "Then I *won't* tell everybody," she said.

He caught on to her. "You spoiled *my* fun. That's all that counted. It don't matter if you tell the rest. *I* know. And I'll never have no more fun. You and that Tom Carmody. Him laughin'. I wish I could stop him from laughin'. He's been laughin' for years at me! Well, you just go tell the rest, the other people now—might as well have your fun—"

He strode angrily, grabbed the jar so it sloshed, and would have flung it on the floor, but he stopped, trembling, and let it down softly on the rickety table. He leaned over it, sobbing. If he lost this, the world was gone. And he was losing Thedy, too. Every month that passed she danced farther away, sneering at him, funning him. For too many years her hips had been the pendulum by which he reckoned the time of his living. But other men—Tom Carmody, for one—were reckoning time from the same source.

Thedy was standing, waiting for him to smash the jar. Instead, he petted it thoughtfully. He thought of the long, good evenings in the past month, those rich evenings of comradery, conversation woven into the fabric of the room. That, at least, was good, if nothing else.

He turned slowly to Thedy. "Thedy, you didn't go to the carnival."

"Yes, I did."

"You're lyin'!"

"No, I'm not."

"Thedy, this jar *has* to have somethin' in it. Somethin' besides the junk you say. Too many people believe there's somethin' in it, Thedy. You can't change that. The carnyman, if you talked to him, lied. Come here, Thedy."

"What you want?" she asked sullenly.

"Come over here."

"Keep away from me, Charlie."

"I just want to show you something, Thedy." His voice was soft, low and insisting. "Here, kittie, kittie—*here kittie!*"

It was another night, about a week later. Gramps Medknowe and Granny Carnation came, followed by young Juke and Mrs. Tridden and Jahdoo, the colored man. Followed by all the others, young and old, creaking into chairs, each with his or her symbol, though hope, fear, and wonder in mind. Each not looking at the shrine, but saying hello softly to Charlie.

They waited for the others to gather. From the shine of their eyes one could see that each saw something different in the jar, something of the life and the pale life after life, and the life in death and the death in life, each with his story, his cue, his lines, familar, old but new.

Charlie sat alone.

"Hello, Charlie." A glance around, into the empty bedroom. "Where's your wife? Gone off again to visit her folks?"

"Yeah, she run off again to Tennessee. Be back in a couple weeks. She's the darndest one for running off. You know Thedy."

"Great one for gantin' off, that woman."

Soft voices talking, getting settled, and then, quite suddenly, like a black leopard moving from the dark—Tom Carmody.

Tom Carmody standing outside the door, knees sagging and trembling, arms hanging and shaking at his side, staring into the room. Tom Carmody not daring to enter. Tom Carmody with his mouth open, but not smiling. His lips wet and slack, not smiling. His face pale as chalk, as if it had been kicked with a boot.

Gramps looked up at the jar, cleared his throat and said, "Why, I never noticed so definite before. It's got *blue* eyes."

"It always had blue eyes," said Jahdoo.

"No," whined Gramps. "No, it didn't. It was brown last time we was here." He blinked upward. "And another thing—it's got brown hair. Didn't have brown hair before."

"Yes, yes it did," sighed Mrs. Tridden.

"No, it didn't!"

"Yes, it did!"

Tom Carmody, shivering in the summer night, staring at the jar. Charlie, glancing up at it, rolling a cigarette, casually, at peace and calm, very certain of his life and world and thoughts. Tom Carmody, alone, seeing things about the jar he never saw before. *Everybody* seeing what they wanted to see; all thoughts running in a tide of quick rain.

My baby! My little baby! screamed the thought of Mrs. Tridden.

A grain! thought Gramps.

The colored man jigged his fingers. *Middibamboo Mamma!*

A fisherman pursed his lips. *Jellyfish!*

Kitten! Here kittie, kittie, kittie! the thoughts drowned clawing in Juke's skull. *Kitten!*

Everything and anything! shrilled Granny's weazened thought. *The night, the swamp, the death, the pallid moist things of the sea!*

Silence, and then Gramps said, "I wonder. I wonder. Wonder if it's a he—or a she—or just a plain old *it?*"

Charlie glanced up, satisfied, tamping his cigarette, shaping it to his mouth. Then he looked at Tom Carmody, who would never smile again, in the door. "I reckon we'll never know. Yeah, I reckon we won't." Charlie smiled.

It was just one of those things they keep in a jar in the tent of a sideshow on the outskirts of a little drowsy town. One of those pale things drifting in plasma, forever dreaming, circling, with its peeled, dead eyes staring out at you and never seeing you—

JOHN METCALFE

THE BAD LANDS

It is now perhaps fifteen years ago that Brent Ormerod, seeking the rest and change of scene that should help him to slay the demon neurosis, arrived in Todd toward the close of a mid-October day. A decrepit fly bore him to the one hotel, where his rooms were duly engaged, and it is this vision of himself sitting in the appalling vehicle that makes him think it was October or thereabouts, for he distinctly remembers the determined settling-down of the dusk that forced him to drive when he would have preferred to follow his luggage on foot.

He decided immediately that five o'clock was an unsuitable time to arrive in Todd. The atmosphere, as it were, was not receptive. There was a certain repellent quality about the frore autumn air, and something peculiarly shocking in the way in which desultory little winds would spring up in darkening streets to send the fallen leaves scurrying about in hateful, furtive whirlpools.

Dinner, too, at the hotel hardly brought the consolation he had counted on. The meal itself was unexceptionable, and the room cheerful and sufficiently well filled for that time of year, yet one trivial circumstance was enough to send him upstairs with his temper ruffled and his nerves on edge. They had put him at a table with a one-eyed man, and that night the blank eye haunted all his dreams.

But for the first eight or nine days at Todd things went fairly well with him. He took frequent cold baths and regular exercise and made a point of coming back to the hotel so physically tired that to get into bed was usually to drop immediately into sleep. He wrote back to his sister, Joan, at

Kensington that his nerves were already much improved and that only another fortnight seemed needed to complete the cure. *Altogether a highly satisfactory week.*

Those who have been to Todd remember it as a quiet, secretive watering place, couched watchfully in a fold of a long range of low hills along the Norfolk coast. It has been pronounced restful by those in high authority, for time there has a way of passing dreamily as if the days, too, were being blown past like the lazy clouds on the wings of wandering breezes. At the back, the look of the land is somehow strangely forbidding, and it is wiser to keep to the shore and the more neighboring villages. Salterton, for instance, has been found normal.

There are long stretches of sand dunes to the west, and by their side a nine-hole golf course. Here, at the time of Brent's visit, stood an old and crumbling tower, an enigmatic structure which he found interesting from its sheer futility. Behind it an inexplicable road seemed to lead with great decision most uncomfortably to nowhere— Todd, he thought, was in many ways a nice spot, but he detected in it a tendency to grow on one unpleasantly. He came to this conclusion at the end of the ninth day, for it was then that he became aware of a peculiar uneasiness, an indescribable malaise.

This feeling of disquiet he at first found himself quite unable to explain or analyze. His nerves he had thought greatly improved since he had left Kensington, and his general health was good. He decided, however, that perhaps yet more exercise was necessary, and so he walked along the links and the sand dunes to the queer tower three times a day instead of twice.

His discomfort rapidly increased. He would become conscious, as he set out for his walk, of a strange sinking at his heart and of a peculiar moral disturbance which was very difficult to describe. These sensations attained their maximum when he had reached his goal upon the dunes, and he suffered then what something seemed to tell him was very near the pangs of spiritual dissolution.

It was on the eleventh day that some faint hint of the

meaning of these peculiar symptoms crossed his mind. For the first time he asked himself why it was that of all the many rambles he had taken in Todd since his arrival each one seemed inevitably to bring him to the same place—the yellow sand dunes with the mysterious-looking tower in the background. Something in the bland foolishness of the structure seemed to have magnetized him, and in the unaccountable excitement which the sight of it invariably produced, he had found himself endowing it with almost human characteristics.

With its white-nightcap dome and its sides of pale yellow stucco it might seem at one moment to be something extravagantly ridiculous, a figure of fun at which one should laugh and point. Then, as likely as not, its character would change a little, and it would take on the abashed and crestfallen look of a jester whose best joke has fallen deadly flat, while finally, perhaps, it would develop with startling rapidity into a jovial old gentleman laughing madly at Ormerod from the middle distance out of infinite funds of merriment.

Now Brent was well aware of the dangers of an obsession such as this, and he immediately resolved to rob the tower of its unwholesome fascination by simply walking straight up to it, past it, and onward along the road.

It was on the morning of one of the last October days that he set out from the hotel with this intention in his mind. He reached the dunes at about ten, and plodded with some difficulty across them in the direction of the tower. As he neared it his accustomed sensations became painfully apparent, and presently increased to such a pitch that it was all he could do to continue on his way.

He remembered being struck again with the peculiar character of the winding road that stretched before him into a hazy distance where everything seemed to melt and swim in shadowy vagueness. On his left the gate stood open, to his right the grotesque tower threatened.

Now he had reached it, and its shadow fell straight across his path. He did not halt to examine it, but strode forward through the open gate and entered upon the winding

road. At the same moment he was astonished to notice that the painful clutch at his heart was immediately lifted, and that with it, too, all the indescribable uneasiness which he had characterized to himself as "moral" had utterly disappeared.

He had walked on for some little distance before another rather remarkable fact struck his attention. The country was no longer vague; rather, it was peculiarly distinct, and he was able to see for long distances over what seemed considerable stretches of parklike land, gray, indeed, in tone and somehow sad with a most poignant melancholy, yet superficially, at least, well cultivated and in some parts richly timbered. He looked behind him to catch a glimpse of Todd and of the sea, but was surprised to find that in that direction the whole landscape was become indistinct and shadowy.

It was not long before the mournful aspect of the country about him began so to depress him and work upon his nerves that he debated with himself the advisability of returning at once to the hotel. He found that the ordinary, insignificant things about him were becoming charged with sinister suggestion and that the scenery on all sides was rapidly developing an unpleasant tendency to the macabre. Moreover, his watch told him that it was now half-past eleven—and lunch was at one. Almost hastily he turned to descend the winding road.

It was an hour later that he again reached the tower and saw the familiar dunes stretching once more before him. For some reason or other he seemed to have found the way back much longer and more difficult than the outward journey, and it was with a feeling of distinct relief that he actually passed through the gate and set his face toward Todd.

He did not go out again that afternoon, but sat smoking and thinking, in the hotel. In the lounge he spoke to a man who sat in a chair beside him. "What a queer place that is, all at the back there behind the dunes!"

His companion's only comment was a drowsy grunt.

"Behind the tower," pursued Ormerod, "the funny tower

at the other end of the links. The most Godforsaken place you can imagine. And simply miles of it!"

The other, roused to coherence much against his will, turned slowly round. "Don't know it," he said. "There's a large farm where you say, and the other side of that is a river and then you come to Harkaby or somewhere."

He closed his eyes and Ormerod was left to ponder the many difficulties of his remarks.

At dinner he found a more sympathetic listener. Mr. Stanton-Boyle had been in Todd a week when Brent arrived, and his sensitive, young-old face with the eager eyes and the quick, nervous contraction of the brows had caught the newcomer's attention from the first. Up to now, indeed, they had only exchanged commonplaces, but tonight each seemed more disposed toward intimacy. Ormerod began.

"I suppose you've walked around the country at the back here a good deal?" he said.

"No," replied the other. "I never go there now. I went there once or twice and that was enough."

"Why?"

"Oh, it gets on my nerves. Do you get any golf here?"

The conversation passed to other subjects, and it was not until both were smoking together over liqueur brandies in the lounge that it returned to the same theme. And then they came to a remarkable conclusion.

"The country at the back of this place," said Brent's companion, "is somehow abominable. It ought to be blown up or something. I don't say it was always like that. Last year, for instance, I don't remember noticing it at all. I fancy it may have been depressing enough, but it was not—not abominable. It's gone abominable since then, particularly to the southwest!"

They said good night after agreeing to compare notes on Todd, S.W., and Ormerod had a most desolating dream wherein he walked up and up into a strange dim country, full of signs and whisperings and crowding, somber trees, where hollow breezes blew fitfully, and a queer house set with lofty pine shone out white against a lurid sky.

On the next day he walked again past the tower and through the gate and along the winding road. As he left Todd behind him and began the slow ascent among the hills he became conscious of some strange influence that hung over the country like a brooding spirit. The clearness of the preceding day was absent; instead all seemed nebulous and indistinct, and the sad landscape dropped behind him in the numb, unreal recession of a dream.

It was about four o'clock, and as he slowly ascended into the mournful tracts the grayness of the late autumn day was deepening into dusk. All the morning, clouds had been gathering in the west, and now the dull ache of the damp sky gave the uneasy sense of impending rain. Here a fitful wind blew the gold flame of a sear leaf athwart the November gloom, and out along the horizon great leaden masses were marching out to sea.

A terrible sense of loneliness fell upon the solitary walker trudging up into the sighing country, and even the sight of scattered habitations, visible here and there among the shadows, seemed only to intensify his feeling of dream and unreality. Everywhere the uplands strained in the moist wind, and the lines of gaunt firs that marched against the horizon gloom pointed ever out to sea. The wan crowding-on of the weeping heavens, the settled pack of those leaning firs, and the fitful scurry of the leaves in the chill blast down the lane smote upon his spirit as something unutterably sad and terrible. On his right a skinny blackthorn shot up hard and wiry toward the dull gray sky; there ahead trees in a wood fluttered ragged yellow flags against the dimness.

A human figure appeared before him, and presently he saw that it was a man, apparently a laborer. He carried tools upon his shoulders, and his head was bent so that it was only when Ormerod addressed him that he looked up and showed a withered countenance. "What is the name of all this place?" said Brent, with a wide sweep of his arm.

"This," said the laborer, in a voice so thin and tired that it seemed almost like the cold breath of the wind that drove beside them, "is Hayes-in-the-Up. Of course, though, it'll be

a mile farther on for you before you get to Fennington." He pointed in the direction from which he had just come, turned his sunken eyes again for a moment upon Ormerod, then faded down the path.

Brent looked after him wondering, but as he swept his gaze about him much of his wonder vanished. All around, the wan country seemed to rock giddily beneath those lowering skies, so heavy with the rain that never fell; all around, the sailing uplands seemed to heave and yearn under the sad tooting of the damp November wind. Oh, he could well imagine that the men of this weary, twilight region would be worn and old before their time, with its sinister stare in their eyes and its haggard gloom abroad in their pinched faces!

Thinking thus, he walked on steadily, and it was not long before certain words of the man he had met rose with uneasy suggestion to the surface of his mind. What, he asked himself, was Fennington? Somehow he did not think that the name stood for another village; rather, the word seemed to connect itself ominously with the dream he had had some little time ago. He shuddered, and had not walked many paces farther before he found that his instinct was correct.

Opposite him, across a shallow valley, stood that white house, dimly set in giant pine. Here the winds seemed almost visible as they strove in those lofty trees, and the constant rush by of the weeping sky behind made all the view seem to tear giddily through some unreal, watery medium. A striking resemblance of the pines to palm trees and a queer effect of light which brought the white façade shaking bright against the sailing cloud-banks gave the whole a strangely exotic look.

Gazing at it across the little valley, Ormerod felt somehow that this, indeed, was the center and hub of the wicked country, the very kernel and essence of this sad, unwholesome land that he saw flung wide in weariness about him. This abomination was it that magnetized him, that attracted him from afar with fatal fascination, and threatened him with untold disaster. Almost sobbing, he descended his side of the valley, and then rose again to meet the house.

Parklike land surrounded the building, and from the smooth turf arose the pines and some clusters of shrubs. Among these Ormerod walked carefully till he was suddenly so near that he could look into a small room through its open window while he sheltered in a large yew whose dusky skirts swept the ground.

The room seemed strangely bare and deserted. A small table was pushed to one side, and dust lay thick upon it. Nearer Ormerod a chair or two appeared, and, opposite, a great, black mantelpiece glowered in much gloom. In the center of the floor was set the object that seemed to dominate the whole.

This was a large and cumbrous spinning-wheel of forbidding mien. It glistened foully in the dim light, and its many molded points pricked the air in very awful fashion. Waiting there in the close stillness, the watcher fancied he could see the treadle stir. Quickly, with beating heart, beset by sudden dread, he turned away, retraced his steps among the sheltering shrubs, and descended to the valley bottom.

He climbed up the other side, and was glad to walk rapidly down the winding path till, on turning his head, it was no longer possible to see the house he had left.

It must have been near six o'clock when, on approaching the gate and tower, weary from his walk and anxious to reach the familiar and reassuring atmosphere of the hotel, he came suddenly upon a man walking through the darkness in the same direction as himself. It was Stanton-Boyle.

Ormerod quickly overtook him and spoke. "You have no idea," he said, "how glad I am to see you. We can walk back together now."

As they strolled to the hotel Brent described his walk, and he saw the other trembling. Presently Stanton-Boyle looked at him earnestly and spoke. "I've been here too," he said, "and I feel just as you do about it. I feel that that place Fennington is the center of the rottenness. I looked through the window, too, and saw the spinning-wheel and—" He stopped suddenly. "No," he went on a moment later, "I won't tell you what else I saw!"

"It ought to be destroyed!" shouted Ormerod. A curious excitement tingled in his blood. His voice was loud, so that people passing them in the street turned and gazed after them. His eyes were very bright. He went on, pulling Stanton-Boyle's arm impressively. "I shall destroy it!" he said. "I shall burn it and I shall most assuredly smash that old spinning-wheel and break off its horrid spiky points!" He had a vague sense of saying curious and unusual things, but this increased rather than moderated his unaccountable elation.

Stanton-Boyle seemed somewhat abnormal too. He seemed to be gliding along the pavement with altogether unexampled smoothness and nobility as he turned his glowing eyes on Brent. "Destroy it!" he said. "Burn it! Before it is too late and it destroys you. Do this and you will be an unutterably brave man!"

When they reached the hotel Ormerod found a telegram awaiting him from Joan. He had not written to her for some time and she had grown anxious and was coming down herself on the following day. He must act quickly, before she came, for her mind in this matter would be unsympathetic. That night as he parted from Stanton-Boyle his eyes blazed in a high resolve. "Tomorrow," he said, as he shook the other's hand, "I shall attempt it."

The following morning found the neurotic as good as his word. He carried matches and a tin of oil. His usually pale cheeks were flushed and his eyes sparkled strangely. Those who saw him leave the hotel remembered afterward how his limbs had trembled and his speech halted. Stanton-Boyle, who was to see him off at the tower, reflected these symptoms in a less degree. Both men were observed to set out engaged in earnest conversation.

At about noon Stanton-Boyle returned. He had walked with Ormerod to the sand dunes, and there left him to continue on his strange mission alone. He had seen him pass the tower, strike the fatal gate in the slanting morning sun, and then dwindle up the winding path till he was no more than an intense, pathetic dot along that way of mystery.

As he returned he was aware of companionship along the street. He looked round and noticed a policeman strolling in much abstraction some 50 yards behind him. Again at the hotel entrance he turned about. The same figure in blue uniform was visible, admiring the houses opposite from the shade of an adjacent lamppost. Stanton-Boyle frowned and withdrew to lunch.

At half-past two Joan arrived. She inquired nervously for Ormerod, and was at once addressed by Stanton-Boyle, who had waited for her in the entrance hall as desired by Brent. "Mr. Ormerod," he told her, "is out. He is very sorry. Will you allow me the impropriety of introducing myself? My name is Stanton-Boyle."

Joan tore open the note which had been left for her by Ormerod. She seemed to find the contents unsatisfactory, for she proceeded to catechize Stanton-Boyle upon her brother's health and general habit of life at Todd. Following this, she left the hotel hastily after ascertaining the direction from which Ormerod might be expected to return.

Stanton-Boyle waited. The moments passed, heavy, anxious, weighted with the sense of coming trouble. He sat and smoked. Discreet and muffled noises from within the hotel seemed full somehow of uneasy suggestion and foreboding. Outside, the street looked very gloomy in the darkness. Something would happen directly.

It came suddenly. A sound of tramping feet and excited cries that grew rapidly in volume and woke strange echoes in the reserved autumnal roads. Presently the tumult lessened abruptly, and only broken fitful shouts and staccato ejaculations stabbed the silence. Stanton-Boyle jumped up and hurried to the entrance hall.

Here there were cries and hustlings and presently strong odors and much suppressed excitement. He saw Joan talking very quickly to the manager of the hotel. She seemed to be developing a point of view, and it was evident that it was not the manager's. For some time the press of people prevented him from discovering the cause of the commotion, but here and there he could make out detached sen-

tences. "Tried to set old Hackney's farm on fire—" "But they'd seen him before and another man too, so—" "Asleep in the barn several times."

Before long all but the hotel residents had dispersed, and in the center of the considerable confusion which still remained, it was now possible to see Ormerod supported by two policemen. A third hovered in the background with a large notebook. As Stanton-Boyle gazed, Brent lifted his bowed head so that their eyes met. "I have done it," he said. "I smashed it up. I brought back one of its points in my pocket—overcoat, left hand—as a proof." Having pronounced words, Mr. Ormerod fainted.

For some time there was much disturbance. The necessary arrangements for the temporary pacification of the law and of the hotel had to be carried through, and after that Ormerod had to be got to bed. It was only after the initial excitement had in large measure abated that Stanton-Boyle ventured to discuss the matter over the after-dinner coffee. He had recognized one of the three policemen as the man whom he had noticed in the morning, and had found it well to retire from observation until he and his companions had left the hotel. Now, however, he felt at liberty to explain his theories of the situation to such as chose to listen.

He held forth with peculiar vehemence and with appropriate gestures. He spoke of a new kind of *terre mauvaise,* of strange regions, connected, indeed, with definite geographical limits upon the earth, yet somehow apart from them and beyond them. "The relation," he said, "is rather one of parallelism and correspondence than of actual connection. I honestly believe that these regions do exist, and are quite as real in their way as the ordinary world we know. We might say they consist in a special and separated set of stimuli to which only certain minds in certain conditions are able to respond. Such a district seems to be superimposed upon the country to the southwest of this place."

A laugh arose. "You won't get the magistrate to believe that," said someone. "Why, all where you speak of past

that gate by the dunes is just old Hackney's farm and nothing else."

"Of course," said another. "It was one of old Hackney's barns he was setting alight, I understand. I was speaking to one of the policemen about it. He said that fellow Ormerod had always been fossicking around there, and had gone to sleep in the barn twice. I expect it's all bad dreams."

A third spoke derisively. "Surely," he said, "you don't really expect us to believe in your Bad Lands. It's like Jack and the Beanstalk."

"All right!" said Stanton-Boyle. "Have it your own way! I know my use of the term 'Bad Lands' may be called incorrect, because it usually means that bit in the States, you know—but that's a detail. I tell you I've run up against things like this before. There was the case of Dolly Wishart, but no, I won't say anything about that—you wouldn't believe it."

The group around looked at him oddly. Suddenly there was a stir, and a man appeared in the doorway. He carried Ormerod's overcoat.

"This may settle the matter," he said. "I heard him say he'd put something in the pocket. He said—"

Stanton-Boyle interrupted him excitedly. "Why, yes," he said. "I'd forgotten that. What I was telling you about—the spinning-wheel. It will be interesting to see it—" He stopped and fumbled in the pockets. In another moment he brought out something for all to see.

It was part of the handle of a patent separator—an object familiar enough to any who held even meager acquaintance with the life of farms, and upon it could still be discerned the branded letters G.P.H.

"George Philip Hackney," interpreted the unbelievers with many smiles.

H. R. WAKEFIELD

GHOST HUNT

WELL, LISTENERS, this is Tony Weldon speaking. Here we are on the third of our series of Ghost Hunts. Let's hope it will be more successful than the other two. All our preparations have been made, and now it is up to the spooks. My colleague tonight is Professor Mignon of Paris. He is the most celebrated investigator of psychic phenomena in the world, and I am very proud to be his collaborator.

We are in a medium-size, three-story Georgian house not far from London. We have chosen it for this reason: it has a truly terrible history. Since it was built, there are records of no less than 30 suicides in or from it, and there may well have been more. There have been eight since 1893. Its builder and first occupant was a prosperous city merchant, and a very bad hat, it appears: glutton, wine bibber, and other undesirable things, including a very bad husband. His wife stood his cruelties and infidelities as long as she could and then hanged herself in the powder closet belonging to the biggest bedroom on the second floor, so initiating a horrible sequence.

I used the expression "suicides in and from it," because while some have shot themselves and some hanged themselves, no less than nine have done a very strange thing. They have risen from their beds during the night and flung themselves to death in the river which runs past the bottom of the garden some hundred yards away. The last one was actually seen to do so at dawn on an autumn morning. He was seen running headlong and heard to be shouting as though to companions running by his side. The owner tells me people simply will not live in the house and the agents will no longer keep it on their books. He will not live in it himself, for very good reasons, he declares. He will not tell us what those reasons are; he wishes us to have

an absolutely open mind on the subject, as it were. And he declares that if the professor's verdict is unfavorable, he will pull down the house and rebuild it. One can understand that, for it seems to merit the label, "Death Trap."

Well, that is sufficient introduction. I think I have convinced you it certainly merits investigation, but we cannot guarantee to deliver the goods or the ghosts, which have an awkward habit of taking a night off on these occasions.

And now to business—imagine me seated at a fine satinwood table, not quite in the middle of a big reception room on the ground floor. The rest of the furniture is shrouded in white protective covers. The walls are light oak panels. The electric light in the house has been switched off, so all the illumination I have is a not very powerful electric lamp. I shall remain here with a mike while the professor roams the house in search of what he may find. He will not have a mike, as it distracts him and he has a habit, so he says, of talking to himself while he conducts these investigations. He will return to me as soon as he has anything to report. Is that all clear? Well, then, here is the professor to say a few words to you before he sets forth on his tour of discovery. I may say he speaks English far better than I do. Professor Mignon—

Ladies and gentlemen, this is Professor Mignon. This house is without doubt, how shall I say, impregnated with evil. It affects one profoundly. It is bad, bad, bad! It is soaked in evil and reeking from its wicked past. It must be pulled down, I assure you. I do not think it affects my friend, Mr. Weldon, in the same way, but he is not psychic, not mediumistic, as I am. Now shall we see ghosts, spirits? Ah, that I cannot say! But they are here and they are evil; that is sure. I can feel their presence. There is, maybe, danger. I shall soon know. And now I shall start off with just one electric torch to show me the way. Presently I will come back and tell you what I have seen, or if not seen, felt and perhaps suffered. But remember, though we can summon spirits from the vasty deep, will they come when we call for them? We shall see.

Well, listeners, I'm sure if anyone can, it's the professor. You must have found those few words far more impressive than anything I said. That was an expert speaking on what he knows. Personally, alone here in this big, silent room, they didn't have a very reassuring effect on me. In fact, he wasn't quite correct when he said this place didn't affect me at all. I don't find it a very cheerful spot, by any means. You can be sure of that. I may not be psychic, but I've certainly got a sort of feeling it doesn't want us here, resents us, and would like to see the back of us. *Or else!* I felt that way as soon as I entered the front door. One sort of had to wade through the hostility. I'm not kidding or trying to raise your hopes.

It's very quiet here, listeners. I'm having a look around the room. This lamp casts some queer shadows. There is an odd one near the wall by the door, but I realize now it must be one cast by a big Adams bookcase. I know that's what it is because I peeped under the dust cover when I first came in. It's a very fine piece. It's queer to think of you all listening to me. I shouldn't really mind if I had some of you for company. The owner of the house told us we should probably hear rats and mice in the wainscoting. Well, I can certainly hear them now. Pretty hefty rats, from the sound of them—even you can almost hear them, I should think.

Well, what else is there to tell you about? Nothing very much, except that there's a bat in the room. I think it must be a bat and not a bird. I haven't actually seen it, only its shadow as it flew past the wall just now, and then it fanned past my face. I don't know much about bats, but I thought they went to bed in the winter. This one must suffer from insomnia. Ah, there it is again—it actually touched me as it passed.

Now I can hear the professor moving about in the room above. I don't suppose you can—have a try. Now listen carefully—

Hello! Did you hear that? He must have knocked over a chair or something—a heavy chair, from the sound of it. I wonder if he's having any luck. Ah, there's that bat again—

it seems to like me. Each time it just touches my face with its wings as it passes. They're smelly things, bats—I don't think they wash often enough. This one smells kind of rotten.

I wonder what the professor knocked over—I can see a small stain forming on the ceiling. Perhaps a flower bowl or something. Hello! Did you hear that sharp crack? I think you must have. The oak paneling stretching, I suppose, but it was almost ear-splitting in here. Something ran across my foot then—a rat, perhaps. I've always loathed rats. Most people do, of course.

That stain on the ceiling has grown quite a lot. I think I'll just go to the door and shout to the professor to make sure he's all right. You'll hear me shout and his answer, I expect—

Professor!— Professor!—

Well, he didn't answer. I believe he's a little bit deaf. But he's sure to be all right. I won't try again just yet, as I know he likes to be undisturbed on these occasions. I'll sit down again for a minute or two. I'm afraid this is rather dull for you, listeners. I'm not finding it so, but then of course— There, I heard him cough. Did you hear that cough, listeners—a sort of very throaty double cough? It seemed to come from— I wonder if he's crept down and is having a little fun with me, because I tell you, listeners, this place is beginning to get on my nerves just a wee little bit, just a bit. I wouldn't live in it for a pension, a very large pension— Get away, you brute! That bat—faugh! It stinks.

Now listen carefully—can you hear those rats? Having a game of Rugger, from the sound of them. I really shall be quite glad to get out of here. I can quite imagine people doing themselves in in this house. Saying to themselves, after all, it isn't much of a life when you think of it—figure it out, is it? Just work and worry and getting old and seeing your friends die. Let's end it all in the river!

I'm not being very cheerful, am I? It's this darned house. Those other two places we investigated didn't worry me a bit, but this— I wonder what the professor's doing, besides coughing. I can't quite make that cough out because—get

away, you brute! That bat'll be the death of me! Death of me! Death of me!

I'm glad I've got you to talk to, listeners, but I wish you could answer back. I'm beginning to dislike the sound of my own voice. After a time, if you've been talking in a room alone, you get fanciful. Have you ever noticed that? You sort of think you can hear someone talking back—

There!— No, of course you couldn't have heard it, because it wasn't there, of course. Just in my head. Just subjective, that's the word. That's the word. Very odd. That *was* me laughing, of course. I'm saying "of course" a lot. Of course I am. Well, listeners, I'm afraid this is awfully dull for you. Not for me, though, not for me! No ghosts so far, unless the professor is having better luck—

There! You must have heard that! What a crack that paneling makes! Well, you must have heard that, listeners —better than nothing! Ha, ha! Professor! Professor! Phew, what an echo!

Now, listeners, I'm going to stop talking for a moment. I don't suppose you'll mind. Let's see if we can hear anything—

Did you hear it? I'm not exactly sure what it was. Not sure. I wonder if you heard it? Not exactly, but the house shook a little and the windows rattled. I don't think we'll do that again. I'll go on talking. I wonder how long one could endure the atmosphere of this place. It certainly is inclined to get one down.

Gosh, that stain has grown—the one on the ceiling. It's actually started to drip. I mean form bubbles—they'll start dropping soon. Colored bubbles, apparently. I wonder if the professor is okay? I mean he might have shut himself up in a powder closet or something, and the powder closets in this house aren't particularly—well, you never know, do you?

Now I should have said that shadow had moved. No, I suppose I put the lamp down in a slightly different position. Shadows do make odd patterns, you must have noticed that. This one might be a body lying on its face with its arms

stretched out. Cheerful, aren't I? An aunt of mine gassed herself, as a matter of fact—well, I don't know why I told you that. Not quite in the script.

Professor! Professor! Where is that old fuzzy-whiskers? I shall certainly advise the owner to have this place pulled down. Emphatically. Then where'll *you* go! I must go upstairs in a minute or two and see what's happened to the professor. Well, I was telling you about auntie—

D'you know, listeners, I really believe I'd go completely crackers if I stayed here much longer—more or less, anyway, and quite soon, quite soon, quite soon. Absolutely stark, staring! It wears you down. That's exactly it, it wears you down. I can quite understand—well, I won't say all that again. I'm afraid this is all awfully dull for you, listeners. I should switch if off if I were you—

I *should!* What's on the other program? I mean it—switch off! There, what did I tell you—that stain's started to drip drops, drip drops, drip drops, drip drops! I'll go and catch one on my hand—

Good God!

Professor! Professor! Professor! Now up those stairs! Which room would it be? Left or right? Left, right, left, right —left has it. In we go—

Well, gentlemen, good evening! What have you done with the professor? I know he's dead—see his blood on my hand? What have you done with him? Make way, please, gentlemen. What have you done with him? D'you want me to sing it—tra-la-la—

Switch off, you fools!

Well, if this isn't too darned funny—ha, ha, ha, ha! Hear me laughing, listeners—

Switch off, you fools!

That can't be him lying there—he hadn't a *red* beard! Don't crowd round me, gentlemen. Don't crowd me, I tell you!

What do you want me to do? You want me to go to the river, don't you? Ha, ha! Now? Will you come with me? Come on, then! To the river! To the river!

JOHN BUCHAN

SKULE SKERRY

IT HAPPENED a good many years ago, when I was quite a young man. I wasn't the cold scientist then that I fancy I am today. I took up birds in the first instance chiefly because they fired what imagination I had got. They fascinated me, for they seemed of all created things the nearest to pure spirit—those little beings with a normal temperature of 125°. Think of it! The goldcrest, with a stomach no bigger than a bean, flies across the North Sea! The curlew sandpiper, that breeds so far north that only about three people have ever seen its nest, goes to Tasmania for its holidays.

So I always went bird hunting with a queer sense of expectation and a bit of a tremor, as if I were walking very near the boundaries of the things we are not allowed to know. I felt this especially in the migration season. The small atoms, coming God knows whence and going God knows whither, were sheer mystery. They belonged to a world built in different dimensions from ours. I don't know what I expected, but I was always waiting for something, as much in a flutter as a girl at her first ball. You must realize that mood of mind to understand what follows.

One year I went to the Norland Islands for the spring migration. Plenty of people do the same, but I had the notion to do something a little different. I had a theory that migrants go north and south on a fairly narrow road. They have their corridors in the air as clearly defined as a highway, and keep an inherited memory of these corridors, like the stout conservatives they are.

I didn't go to the Blue Banks or to Noop or to Hermaness or any of the obvious places where birds might be expected

to make their first landfall. At that time I was pretty well-read in the sagas, and had taught myself Icelandic for the purpose.

Now it is written in the Saga of Earl Skuli, which is part of the Jarla Saga or Saga of the Earls, that Skuli, when he was carving out his earldom in the Scots Islands, had much to do with a place called the Isle of the Birds. It is mentioned repeatedly, and the saga man has a lot to say about the amazing multitude of birds there. It couldn't have been an ordinary gullery, for the Northmen saw too many of these to think them worth mentioning.

I got it into my head that it must have been one of the alighting-places of the migrants, and was probably as busy a spot today as in the 11th century. The saga said it was near Halmarsness, and that was on the west side of the Island of Una, so to Una I decided to go. I fairly got that Isle of Birds on the brain. From the map it might be any one of a dozen skerries under the shadow of Halmarsness.

I remember that I spent a good many hours in the British Museum before I started, hunting up the scanty records of those parts. I found—I think it was in Adam of Bremen—that a succession of holy men had lived on the isle, and that a chapel had been built there and endowed by Earl Rognvald, which came to an end in the time of Malise of Strathearn. There was a bare mention of the place, but the chronicler had one curious note: *Insula Avium, quae est ultima insula et proxima abysso.*

I wondered what on earth he meant. The place was not ultimate in any geographical sense, neither the farthest north nor the farthest west of the Norlands. And what was the abyss? In monkish Latin the word generally means hell—Bunyan's Bottomless Pit—and sometimes the grave; but neither meaning seemed to have much to do with an ordinary sea skerry.

I arrived at Una about eight o'clock on a May evening, having been put across from Voss in a flitboat. It was a quiet evening; the sky without clouds but so pale as to be

almost gray, the sea gray also, but with a certain iridescence in it, and the low lines of the land a combination of hard grays and umbers, cut into by the harder white of the lighthouse.

I can never find words to describe that curious quality of light that you get up in the North. Sometimes it is like looking at the world out of deep water. Farquharson used to call it "milky," and one saw what he meant. Generally it is a sort of essence of light, cold and pure and rarefied, as if it were reflected from snow. There is no color in it, and it makes thin shadows.

Some people find it horribly depressing—Farquharson said it reminded him of a churchyard in the early morning where all his friends were buried—but personally I found it tonic and comforting. But it made me feel very near the edge of the world.

There was no inn, so I put up at the post office, which was on a causeway between a fresh-water loch and a sea voe, so that from the doorstep you could catch brown trout on one side and sea trout on the other. Next morning I set off for Halmarsness, which lay five miles to the west over a flat moorland all puddled with tiny lochans. There seemed to be nearly as much water as land. Presently I came to a bigger loch under the lift of ground which was Halmarsness.

There was a gap in the ridge through which I looked straight out to the Atlantic, and there in the middle distance was what I knew instinctively to be my island. It was perhaps a quarter of a mile long, low for the most part, but rising in the north to a grassy knoll beyond the reach of any tides. In parts it narrowed to a few yards width, and the lower levels must often have been awash. But it was an island, not a reef, and I thought I could make out the remains of the monkish cell. I climbed Halmarsness, and there, with nesting skuas swooping angrily about my head, I got a better view.

It was certainly my island, for the rest of the archipelago was inconsiderable skerries, and I realized that it might

well be a resting-place for migrants, for the mainland cliffs were too thronged with piratical skuas and other jealous fowl to be comfortable for weary travelers.

I sat for a long time on the headland looking down from the 300 feet of basalt to the island half a mile off—the last bit of solid earth between me and Greenland. The sea was calm for Norland waters but there was a snowy edging of surf to the skerries which told of a tide rip.

Two miles farther south I could see the entrance to the famous Roost of Una, where, when tide and wind collide, there is a wall like a house, so that a small steamer cannot pass it. The only signs of human habitation were about a small gray farm in the lowlands toward the Roost, but the place was full of the evidence of man—a herd of Norland ponies, each tagged with its owner's name, grazing sheep of the piebald Norland breed, a broken barbed-wire fence that dropped over the edge of the cliff.

I was only an hour's walk from a telegraph office and a village which got its newspapers not more than three days late. It was a fine spring noon, and in the empty bright land there was scarcely a shadow.

All the same, as I looked down at the island I did not wonder that it had been selected for attention by the saga man and had been reputed holy. For it had an air of concealing something, though it was as bare as a billiard table. It was an intruder, an irrelevance in the picture, planted there by some celestial caprice. I decided forthwith to make my camp on it, and the decision, inconsequently enough, seemed to me to be something of a venture.

That was the view taken by John Ronaldson, when I talked to him after dinner. John was the postmistress's son, more fisherman than crofter; like all Norlanders, a skillful sailor and an adept at the dipping lug, and noted for his knowledge of the western coast. He had difficulty in understanding my plan, and when he identified my island he protested.

"Not Skule Skerry!" he cried. "What would take ye there, man? Ye'll get a' the birds ye want on Halmarsness

and a far better bield. Ye'll be blawn away on the skerry, if the wind rises."

I explained to him my reasons as well as I could, and I answered his fears about a gale by pointing out that the island was sheltered by the cliffs from the prevailing winds, and could be scourged only from the south, southwest, or west, quarters from which the wind rarely blew in May.

"It'll be cauld," he said, "and wat."

I pointed out that I had a tent and was accustomed to camping.

"Ye'll starve."

I expounded my proposed methods of commissariat.

"It'll be an ill job getting ye on and off."

But after cross-examination he admitted that ordinarily the tides were not difficult, and that I could get a rowboat to a beach below the farm I had seen—its name was Sgurravoe. Yet when I had said all this he still raised objections till I asked him flatly what was the matter with Skule Skerry.

"Naebody gangs there," he said gruffly.

"Why should they?" I asked. "I'm only going to watch the birds."

But the fact that it was never visited seemed to stick in his throat and he grumbled out something that surprised me. "It has an ill name," he said.

But when I pressed him he admitted that there was no record of shipwreck or disaster to account for the ill name. He repeated the words "Skule Skerry" as if they displeased him.

"Folk dinna gang near it. It has aye had an ill name. My grandfather used to say that the place wasna canny."

Now your Norlander has nothing of a Celt in him, and is as different from the Hebridean as a Northumbrian from a Cornishman. They are a fine, upstanding, hardheaded race, almost pure Scandinavian in blood, but they have as little poetry in them as a Manchester radical. I should have put them down as utterly free from superstition and, in all my many visits to the islands, I have never yet come across a folk tale—hardly even a historical legend.

Yet here was John Ronaldson, with his weather-beaten face and stiff chin and shrewd blue eyes, declaring that an innocent-looking island "wasna canny," and showing the most remarkable disinclination to go near it.

Of course, all this only made me keener. Besides, it was called Skule Skerry, and the name could only come from Earl Skuli, so it was linked up authentically with the oddments of information I had collected in the British Museum —the Jarla Saga and Adam of Bremen and all the rest of it.

John finally agreed to take me over next morning in his boat, and I spent the rest of the day in collecting my kit. I had a small E.P. tent, and a Wolseley valise and half a dozen rugs, and since I had brought a big box of tinned stuffs from the stores, all I needed was flour and meal and some simple groceries. I learned that there was a well on the island, and that I could count on sufficient driftwood for my fire, but to make certain I took a sack of coals and another of peats.

So I set off next day in John's boat, ran with the wind through the Roost of Una when the tide was right, tacked up the coast, and came to the skerry early in the afternoon.

You could see that John hated the place. We ran into a cove on the east side and he splashed ashore as if he expected to have his landing opposed, looking all the time sharply about him. When he carried my stuff to a hollow under the knoll which gave a certain amount of shelter, his head was always twisting round.

To me the place seemed to be the last word in forgotten peace. The swell lipped gently on the reefs and the little pebbled beaches, and only the babble of gulls from Halmarsness broke the stillness.

John was clearly anxious to get away, but he did his duty by me. He helped me to get the tent up, found a convenient place for my boxes, pointed out the well and filled my water bucket, and made a zareba of stones to protect my camp on the Atlantic side. We had brought a small dinghy along with us, and this was to be left with me, so that

when I wanted I could row across to the beach at Sgurravoe. As his last service he fixed an old pail between two boulders on the summit of the knoll, and filled it with oily waste, so that it could be turned into a beacon.

"Ye'll maybe want to come off," he said, "and the boat will maybe no be there. Kindle your flare, and they'll see it at Sgurravoe and get the word to me, and I'll come for ye though the Muckle Black Silkie himsel' was hunkerin' wi' the skerry." Then he looked up and sniffed the air. "I dinna like the set of the sky," he declared. "It's a bad weatherhead. There'll be mair wund than I like in the next four and twenty hours."

So saying, he hoisted his sail and presently was a speck in the water toward the Roost. There was no need for him to hurry, for the tide was now wrong, and before he could pass the Roost he would have three hours to wait on this side of the Mull. But the man, usually so deliberate and imperturbable, had been in a fever to be gone.

His departure left me in a curious mood of happy loneliness and pleasurable expectation. I was left solitary with the seas and the birds. I laughed to think that I had found a streak of superstition in the granite John. He and his Muckle Black Silkie! I knew the old legend of the North which tells how the Finns, the ghouls that live in the deeps of the ocean, can on occasion don a seal's skin and come to land to play havoc with mortals.

But diablerie and this isle of mine were worlds apart. I looked at it as the sun dropped, drowsing in the opal-colored tides, under a sky in which pale clouds made streamers like a spectral aurora borealis and I thought that I had stumbled upon one of those places where Nature seems to invite one to her secrets. As the light died the sky was flecked as with the roots and branches of some great nebular tree. That would be the weatherhead of which John Ronaldson had spoken.

I got my fire going, cooked my supper, and made everything snug for the night. I had been right in my guess about the migrants. It must have been about ten o'clock when they began to arrive—after my fire had died out and I was

smoking my last pipe before getting into my sleeping-bag.

A host of fieldfares settled gently on the south part of the skerry. A faint light lingered till after midnight, but it was not easy to distinguish the little creatures, for they were aware of my presence and did not alight within a dozen yards of me. But I made out bramblings and buntings and what I thought was the Greenland wheatear; also jacksnipe and sanderling; and I believed from their cries that the curlew sandpiper and the whimbrel were there. I went to sleep in a state of high excitement, promising myself a fruitful time on the morrow.

I slept badly, as one often does one's first night in the open. Several times I woke with a start under the impression that I was in a boat rowing swiftly with the tide. And every time I woke I heard the flutter of myriad birds, as if a velvet curtain were being slowly switched along an oak floor. At last I fell into deeper sleep, and when I opened my eyes it was full day.

The first thing that struck me was that it had got suddenly colder. The sky was stormily red in the east, and masses of woolly clouds were banking in the north. I lighted my fire with numbed fingers and hastily made tea.

I could see the nimbus of seafowl over Halmarsness, but there was only one bird left on my skerry. I was certain from its forked tail that it was a Sabine's gull, but before I got my glass out it was disappearing into the haze toward the north. The sight cheered and excited me, and I cooked my breakfast in pretty good spirits.

That was literally the last bird that came near me, barring the ordinary shearwaters and gulls and cormorants that nested round about Halmarsness. (There was not one single nest of any sort on the island. I had heard of that happening before in places which were regular halting-grounds for migrants.) The travelers must have had an inkling of the coming weather and were waiting somewhere well to the south.

About nine o'clock it began to blow. Great God, how it blew! You must go to the Norlands if you want to know what wind can be. It is like being on a mountaintop, for

there is no high ground to act as a windbreak. There was no rain, but the surf broke in showers and every foot of the skerry was drenched with it. In a trice Halmarsness was hidden, and I seemed to be in the center of a maelstrom, choked with scud and buffeted on every side by swirling waters.

Down came my tent at once. I wrestled with the crazy canvas and got a black eye from the pole, but I managed to drag the ruins into the shelter of the zareba which John had built and tumble some of the bigger boulders on it. There it lay, flapping like a sick albatross. The water got into my food boxes and soaked my fuel, as well as every inch of my clothing.

I had looked forward to a peaceful day of watching and meditation, when I could write up my notes; and instead I spent a morning like a Rugger scrum. I might have enjoyed it, if I hadn't been so wet and cold, and could have got a better lunch than some clammy mouthfuls out of a tin.

One talks glibly about being "blown off" a place, generally an idle exaggeration—but that day I came very near the reality. There were times when I had to hang on for dear life to one of the bigger stones to avoid being trundled into the yeasty seas.

About two o'clock the volume of the storm began to decline, and then for the first time I thought about the boat. With a horrid sinking of the heart I scrambled to the cove where we had beached it. It had been drawn up high and dry, and its painter secured to a substantial boulder. But now there was not a sign of it except a ragged rope end round the stone. The tide had mounted to its level, and tide and wind had smashed the rotten painter. By this time what was left of it would be tossing in the Roost.

This was a pretty state of affairs. John was due to visit me next day, but I had a cold 24 hours ahead of me. There was of course the flare he had left me, but I was not inclined to use this. It looked like throwing up the sponge and confessing that my expedition had been a farce. I felt miserable, but obstinate, and, since the weather was clear-

ly mending, I determined to put the best face on the business, so I went back to the wreckage of my camp, and tried to tidy up.

There was still far too much wind to do anything with the tent, but the worst of the spindrift had ceased and I was able to put out my bedding and some of my provender to dry. I got a dry jersey out of my pack and as I was wearing fisherman's boots and oilskins I managed to get some slight return of comfort. Also at last I succeeded in lighting a pipe. I found a corner under the knoll which gave me a modicum of shelter, and I settled myself to pass the time with tobacco and my own thoughts.

About three o'clock the wind died away completely. That I did not like, for a dead lull in the Norlands is often the precursor of a new gale. Indeed, I never remembered a time when some wind did not blow, and I had heard that when such a thing happened people came out of their houses to ask what the matter was. But now we had the deadest sort of calm.

The sea was still wild and broken, the tides raced by like a millstream, and a brume was gathering which shut out Halmarsness—shut out every prospect except a narrow circuit of gray water. The cessation of the racket of the gale made the place seem uncannily quiet. The present tumult of the sea, in comparison with the noise of the morning, seemed no more than a mutter and an echo.

As I sat there I became conscious of an odd sensation. I seemed to be more alone, more cut off not only from my fellows but from the habitable earth than I had ever been before. It was like being in a small boat in mid-Atlantic—but worse, if you understand me, for that would have been loneliness in the midst of a waste which was nevertheless surrounded and traversed by the works of man, whereas now I felt that I was clean outside of man's ken. I had come somehow to the edge of that world where life is and was very close to the world which has only death in it.

At first I do not think there was much fear in the sensation; chiefly strangeness, but the kind of strangeness which awes without exciting. I tried to shake off the mood and got

up to stretch myself. There was not much room for exercise, and as I moved with stiff legs along the reefs I slipped into the water, so that I got my arms wet. It was cold beyond belief—the very quintessence of deathly Arctic ice, so cold that it seemed to sear and bleach the skin.

From that moment I date the most unpleasant experience of my life. I became suddenly the prey of a black depression, shot with the red lights of terror. But it was not a numb terror, for my brain was acutely alive—I had the sense to try to make tea, but my fuel was still too damp, and the best I could do was to pour half the contents of my brandy flask into a cup and swallow the stuff. That did not properly warm my chilled body, but—since I am a very temperate man—it speeded up my thoughts instead of calming them. I felt myself on the brink of a childish panic. One thing I thought I saw clearly—the meaning of Skule Skerry. By some alchemy of Nature, which I could not guess at, it was on the track by which the North exercised its spell, a cableway for the magnetism of that cruel frozen uttermost which man might penetrate but could never subdue or understand.

Though the latitude was not far north, there are folds and tucks in space as if this isle was the edge of the world. Birds knew it, and the old Northerns, who were primitive beings like the birds, knew it. That was why this inconsiderable skerry had been given the name of a conquering jarl. The old Church knew it and had planted a chapel to exorcise the demons of darkness. I wondered what sights the hermit, whose cell had been on the very spot where I was cowering, had seen in the winter dusks.

It may have been partly the brandy, acting on an empty stomach, and partly the extreme cold, but my brain, in spite of my efforts to think rationally, began to run like a dynamo. It is difficult to explain my mood, but I seemed to be two persons—one a reasonable modern man trying to keep sane and scornfully rejecting the fancies which the other, a cast-back to something elemental, was furiously spinning. But it was the second that had the upper hand—

I felt myself loosed from my moorings, a mere waif on

uncharted seas. What is the German phrase? *Urdummheit* —primal idiocy—that is what was the matter with me. I had fallen out of civilization into the outlands and was feeling their spell—

I could not think, but I could remember, and what I had read of the Norse voyagers came back to me with horrid persistence. They had known the outlaw terrors—the Sea Walls at the World's end, the Curdled Ocean with its strange beasts. These men did not sail north as we did, in steamers, with modern food and modern instruments, huddled into crews and expeditions. They had gone out almost alone, in brittle galleys, and they had known what we could never know.

And then I had a shattering revelation. I had been groping for a word and I suddenly got it. It was Adam of Bremen's *proxima abysso*. This island was next door to the Abyss, and the Abyss was that blanched wall of the North which was the negation of life.

That unfortunate recollection was the last straw. I remember that I forced myself to get up and try again to kindle a fire. But the wood was still too damp, and I realized with consternation that I had very few matches left, several boxes having been ruined that morning.

As I staggered about I saw the flare which John had left for me, and almost lighted it. But some dregs of manhood prevented me—I could not own defeat in that babyish way —I must wait till John Ronaldson came for me next morning. Instead, I had another mouthful of brandy and tried to eat some of my sodden biscuits. But I could scarcely swallow; this infernal cold, instead of rousing hunger, had given me only a raging thirst.

I forced myself to sit down again with my face to the land. You see, every moment I was becoming more childish. I had the notion—I cannot call it a thought—that down the avenue from the north something terrible and strange might come. My state of nerves must have been pretty bad, for though I was cold and empty and weary I was scarcely conscious of physical discomfort. My heart was fluttering like a scared boy's; and all the time the other part of me

was standing aside and telling me not to be a damned fool.

I think that if I had heard the rustle of a flock of migrants I might have pulled myself together, but not a blessed bird had come near me all day. I had fallen into a world that killed life, a sort of Valley of the Shadow of Death.

The brume spoiled the long northern twilight, and presently it was almost dark. At first I thought that this was going to help me, and I got hold of several of my half-dry rugs and made a sleeping-place.

But I could not sleep, even if my teeth had stopped chattering, for a new and perfectly idiotic idea possessed me. It came from a recollection of John Ronaldson's parting words. What had he said about the Black Silkie—the Finn who came out of the deep and hunkered on this skerry? Raving mania! But on that lost island in the darkening night with icy tides lapping about me was any horror beyond belief?

Still the sheer idiocy of the idea compelled a reaction. I took hold of my wits with both hands and cursed myself for a fool. I could even reason about my folly. I knew what was wrong with me. I was suffering from *panic*—a physical affection produced by natural causes explicable, though as yet not fully explained.

Two friends of mine had once been afflicted with it, one in a lonely glen in the Jotunheim so that he ran for ten miles over stony hills till he found a *saeter* and human companionship; the other in a Bavarian forest, where both he and his guide tore for hours through the thicket till they dropped like logs beside a highroad.

This reflection enabled me to take a pull on myself and to think a little ahead. If my troubles were physical, then there would be no shame in looking for the speediest cure. Without further delay I must leave this God-forgotten place.

The flare was all right, for it had been on the highest point of the island, and John had covered it with a peat. With one of my few remaining matches I lighted the oily waste, and a great smoky flame leaped to heaven.

If the half dark had been eerie, this sudden brightness was eerier. For a moment the glare gave me confidence,

but as I looked at the circle of moving water evilly lighted up, all my terrors returned. How long would it take for John to reach me? They would see it at once at Sgurravoe —they would be on the lookout for it. John would not waste time, for he had tried to dissuade me from coming. An hour, two hours at the most.

I found I could not take my eyes from the waters. They seemed to flow from the north in a strong stream, black as the heart of the elder ice, irresistible as fate, cruel as hell. There seemed to be uncouth shapes swimming in them, which were more than the flickering shadows from the flare. Something portentous might at any moment come down that river of death— And then my knees gave under me and my heart shrank like a pea, for I saw that the something had come.

It drew itself heavily out of the sea, wallowed for a second, and then raised its head and, from a distance of five yards, looked me blindly in the face. The flare was fast dying down, but even so at that short range it cast a strong light, and the eyes of the awful thing seemed to be dazed by it.

I saw a great dark head like a bull's—an old face wrinkled as if in pain—a gleam of enormous broken teeth —a dripping beard—all formed on other lines than God has made mortal creatures. And on the right of the throat was a huge scarlet gash. The thing seemed to be moaning, and then from it came a sound—whether of anguish or wrath I cannot tell—but it seemed to me the cry of a tortured fiend.

That was enough for me. I pitched forward in a swoon, hitting my head on a stone, and in that condition three hours later John Ronaldson found me.

They put me to bed at Sgurravoe with hot bottles, and the doctor from Voss next day patched up my head and gave me a sleeping-draught. He declared that there was little the matter with me, except shock from exposure, and promised to set me on my feet in a week.

For three days I was as miserable as a man could be, and did my best to work myself into a fever. I had said

not a word about my experience, and left my rescuers to believe that my only troubles were cold and hunger and that I had lighted the flare because I had lost the boat. But during these days I was in a critical state. I knew that there was nothing wrong with my body, but I was gravely concerned about my mind.

For this was my difficulty. If that awful thing was a mere figment of my brain, then I had better be certified at once as a lunatic. No sane man could get into such a state as to see such portents with the certainty with which I had seen that creature come out of the night. If, on the other hand, the thing was a real presence, then I had looked on something outside natural law, and my intellectual world was broken in pieces.

I was a scientist, and a scientist cannot admit the supernatural. If with my eyes I had beheld the monster in which Adam of Bremen believed, which holy men had exorcised, which even the shrewd Norlanders shuddered at as the Black Silkie, then I must burn my books and revise my creed. I might take to poetry or theosophy, but I would never be much good again at science.

On the third afternoon I was trying to doze, and with shut eyes fighting off the pictures which tormented my brain. John Ronaldson and the farmer of Sgurravoe were talking at the kitchen door. The latter asked some questions, and John replied, "Aye, it was a walrus and nae mistake. It came ashore at Gloop Ness and Sandy Fraser hae gotten the skin of it. It was deid when he found it, but no' long deid. The puir beast would drift south on some floe, and it was sair hurt, for Sandy said it had a hole in its throat ye could put your nieve in. There hasna been a walrus come to Una since my grandfather's day."

I turned my face to the wall and composed myself to sleep. For now I knew that I was sane and need not forswear science.

H. G. WELLS

THE RED ROOM

"I CAN assure you," said I, "that it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me." And I stood up before the fire with my glass in my hand.

"It is your own choosing," said the man with the withered arm, and glanced at me askance.

"Eight-and-twenty years," said I, "I have lived, and never a ghost have I seen as yet."

The old woman sat staring hard into the fire, her pale eyes wide open. "Aye," she broke in, "and eight-and-twenty years you have lived and never seen the likes of this house, I reckon. There's a many things to see, when one's still but eight-and-twenty." She swayed her head slowly from side to side. "A many things to see and sorrow for."

I half suspected the old people were trying to enhance the spiritual terrors of their house by their droning insistence. I put down my empty glass on the table and looked about the room, and caught a glimpse of myself, abbreviated and broadened to an impossible sturdiness, in the queer old mirror at the end of the room. "Well," I said, "if I see anything tonight, I shall be so much the wiser. For I come to the business with an open mind."

"It's your own choosing," said the man with the withered arm once more.

I heard the sound of a stick and a shambling step on the flags in the passage outside, and the door creaked on its hinges as a second old man entered, more bent, more wrinkled, more aged even than the first. He supported himself by a single crutch, his eyes were covered by a shade, and his lower lip, half-averted, hung pale and pink from

his decaying yellow teeth. He made straight for an armchair on the opposite side of the table, sat down clumsily, and began to cough. The man with the withered arm gave this newcomer a short glance of positive dislike; the old woman took no notice of his arrival, but remained with her eyes fixed steadily on the fire.

"I said—it's your own choosing," said the man with the withered arm, when the coughing had ceased for a while.

"It's my own choosing," I answered.

The man with the shade became aware of my presence for the first time, and threw his head back for a moment and sideways, to see me. I caught a momentary glimpse of his eyes, small and bright and inflamed. Then he began to cough and splutter again.

"Why don't you drink?" said the man with the withered arm, pushing the beer toward him. The man with the shade poured out a glassful with a shaky arm that splashed half as much again on the deal table. A monstrous shadow of him crouched upon the wall and mocked his action as he poured and drank. I must confess I had scarce expected these grotesque custodians. There is to my mind something inhuman in senility, something crouching and atavistic; the human qualities seem to drop from old people insensibly day by day. The three of them made me feel uncomfortable, with their gaunt silences, their bent carriage, their evident unfriendliness to me and to one another.

"If," said I, "you will show me to this haunted room of yours, I will make myself comfortable there."

The old man with the cough jerked his head back so suddenly that it startled me, and shot another glance of his red eyes at me from under the shade; but no one answered me. I waited a minute, glancing from one to the other.

"If," I said a little louder, "if you will show me to this haunted room of yours, I will relieve you from the task of entertaining me."

"There's a candle on the slab outside the door," said the man with the withered arm, looking at my feet as he addressed me. "But if you go to the Red Room to-night—"

("This night of all nights!" said the old woman.)

"You go alone."

"Very well," I answered. "And which way do I go?"

"You go along the passage for a bit," said he, "until you come to a door, and through that is a spiral staircase, and halfway up that is a landing and another door covered with baize. Go through that and down the long corridor to the end, and the Red Room is on your left up the steps."

"Have I got that right?" I said, and repeated his directions. He corrected me in one particular.

"And are you really going?" said the man with the shade, looking at me again for the third time, with that queer, unnatural tilting of the face.

("This night of all nights!" said the old woman.)

"It is what I came for," I said, and moved toward the door. As I did so, the old man with the shade rose and staggered round the table, so as to be closer to the others and to the fire. At the door I turned and looked at them, and saw they were all close together, dark against the firelight, staring at me over their shoulders, with an intent expression on their ancient faces.

"Good night," I said, setting the door open.

"It's your own choosing," said the man with the withered arm.

I left the door wide open until the candle was well alight, and then I shut them in and walked down the chilly, echoing passage.

I must confess that the oddness of these three old pensioners in whose charge her ladyship had left the castle, and the deep-toned, old-fashioned furniture of the housekeeper's room in which they foregathered, affected me in spite of my efforts to keep myself at a matter-of-fact phase.

They seemed to belong to another age, an older age, an age when things spiritual were different from this of ours, less certain; an age when omens and witches were credible, and ghosts beyond denying. Their very existence was spectral; the cut of their clothing, fashions born in dead brains. The ornaments and conveniences of the room about them were ghostly—the thoughts of vanished men, which still haunted rather than participated in the world of today.

But with an effort I sent such thoughts to the right-about. The long, drafty subterranean passage was chilly and dusty, and my candle flared and made the shadows cower and quiver. The echoes rang up and down the spiral staircase, and a shadow came sweeping up after me, and one fled before me into the darkness overhead. I came to the landing and stopped there for a moment, listening to a rustling that I fancied I heard; then, satisfied of the absolute silence, I pushed open the baize-covered door and stood in the corridor.

The effect was scarcely what I expected, for the moonlight, coming in by the great window on the grand staircase, picked out everything in vivid black shadow or silvery illumination. Everything was in its place: the house might have been deserted on the yesterday instead of eighteen months ago. There were candles in the sockets of the sconces, and whatever dust had gathered on the carpets or upon the polished flooring was distributed so evenly as to be invisible in the moonlight. I was about to advance, and stopped abruptly. A bronze group stood upon the landing, hidden from me by the corner of the wall, but its shadow fell with marvelous distinctness upon the white paneling, and gave me the impression of someone crouching to waylay me. I stood rigid for half a minute perhaps. Then, with my hand in the pocket that held my revolver I advanced, only to discover a Ganymede and Eagle glistening in the moonlight. That incident for a time restored my nerve, and a porcelain Chinaman on a buhl table, whose head rocked silently as I passed him, scarcely startled me.

The door to the Red Room and the steps up to it were in a shadowy corner. I moved my candle from side to side, in order to see clearly the nature of the recess in which I stood before opening the door. Here it was, thought I, that my predecessor was found, and the memory of that story gave me a sudden twinge of apprehension. I glanced over my shoulder at the Ganymede in the moonlight, and opened the door of the Red Room rather hastily, with my face half-turned to the pallid silence of the landing.

I entered, closed the door behind me at once, turned the

key I found in the lock within, and stood with the candle held aloft, surveying the scene of my vigil, the great Red Room of Lorraine Castle, in which the young duke had died. Or, rather, in which he had begun his dying, for he had opened the door and fallen headlong down the steps I had just ascended. That had been the end of his vigil, of his gallant attempt to conquer the ghostly tradition of the place; and never, I thought, had apoplexy better served the ends of superstition. And there were other and older stories that clung to the room, back to the half-credible beginning of it all, the tale of a timid wife and the tragic end that came to her husband's jest of frightening her. And looking around that large shadowy room, with its shadowy window bays, its recesses and alcoves, one could well understand the legends that had sprouted in its black corners, its germinating darkness. My candle was a little tongue of flame in its vastness, that failed to pierce the opposite end of the room, and left an ocean of mystery and suggestion beyond its island of light.

I resolved to make a systematic examination of the place at once and dispel the fanciful suggestions of its obscurity before they obtained a hold upon me. After satisfying myself of the fastening of the door, I began to walk about the room, peering round each article of furniture, tucking up the valances of the bed, and opening its curtains wide. I pulled up the blinds and examined the fastenings of the several windows before closing the shutters, leaned forward and looked up the blackness of the wide chimney, and tapped the dark oak paneling for any secret opening. There were two big mirrors in the room, each with a pair of sconces bearing candles, and on the mantelshelf, too, were more candles in china candlesticks. All these I lighted one after the other. The fire was laid—an unexpected consideration from the old housekeeper—and I lighted it, to keep down any disposition to shiver, and when it was burning well, I stood round with my back to it and regarded the room again. I had pulled up a chintz-covered armchair and a table to form a kind of barricade before me, and on this lay my revolver ready to hand. My precise examination

had done me good, but I still found the remoter darkness of the place, and its perfect stillness, too stimulating for the imagination. The echoing of the stir and crackling of the fire was no sort of comfort to me. The shadow in the alcove, at the end in particular, had that undefinable quality of a presence, that odd suggestion of a lurking living thing that comes so easily in silence and solitude. At last, to reassure myself, I walked with a candle into it, and satisfied myself that there was nothing tangible there. I stood that candle upon the floor of the alcove, and left it in that position.

By this time I was in a state of considerable nervous tension, although to my reason there was no adequate cause for the condition. My mind, however, was perfectly clear. I postulated quite unreservedly that nothing supernatural could happen, and to pass the time I began to string some rhymes together, Ingoldsby fashion, of the original legend of the place. A few I spoke aloud, but the echoes were not pleasant. For the same reason I also abandoned, after a time, a conversation with myself upon the impossibility of ghosts and haunting. My mind reverted to the three old and distorted people downstairs, and I tried to keep it upon that topic. The somber reds and blacks of the room troubled me; even with seven candles the place was merely dim. The one in the alcove flared in a draft, and the fire-flickering kept the shadows and penumbra perpetually shifting and stirring. Casting about for a remedy, I recalled the candles I had seen in the passage, and, with a slight effort, walked out into the moonlight, carrying a candle and leaving the door open, and presently returned with as many as ten. These I put in various knickknacks of china with which the room was sparsely adorned, lighted and placed where the shadows had lain deepest, some on the floor, some in the window recesses, until at last my seventeen candles were so arranged that not an inch of the room but had the direct light of at least one of them. It occurred to me that when the ghost came, I could warn him not to trip over them. The room was now quite brightly illuminated. There was something very cheery and reassuring in these little streaming flames, and snuffing them gave me

an occupation, and afforded a reassuring sense of the passage of time.

Even with that, however, the brooding expectation of the vigil weighed heavily upon me. It was after midnight that the candle in the alcove suddenly went out, and the black shadow sprang back to its place. I did not see the candle go out; I simply turned and saw that the darkness was there, as one might start and see the unexpected presence of a stranger.

"By Jove!" said I aloud; "that draft's a strong one!" and, taking the matches from the table, I walked across the room in a leisurely manner to relight the corner again. My first match would not strike, and as I succeeded with the second, something seemed to blink on the wall before me. I turned my head involuntarily, and saw that the two candles on the little table by the fireplace were extinguished. I rose at once to my feet.

"Odd!" I said. "Did I do that myself in a flash of absent-mindedness?"

I walked back, relighted one, and as I did so, I saw the candle in the right sconce of one of the mirrors wink and go right out, and almost immediately its companion followed it. There was no mistake about it. The flame vanished, as if the wicks had been suddenly nipped between a finger and a thumb, leaving the wick neither glowing nor smoking black. While I stood gaping, the candle at the foot of the bed went out, and the shadows seemed to take another step toward me.

"This won't do!" said I, and first one and then another candle on the mantelshelf followed.

"What's up?" I cried, with a queer high note getting into my voice somehow. At that the candle on the wardrobe went out, and the one I had relighted in the alcove followed.

"Steady on!" I said. "These candles are wanted," speaking with a half-hysterical facetiousness, and scratching away at a match the while for the mantel candlesticks. My hands trembled so much that twice I missed the rough paper of the matchbox. As the mantel emerged from dark-

ness again, two candles in the remoter end of the window were eclipsed. But with the same match I also relighted the larger mirror candles, and those on the floor near the doorway, so that for the moment I seemed to gain on the extinctions. But then in a volley there vanished four lights at once in different corners of the room, and I struck another match in quivering haste and stood hesitating whither to take it.

As I stood undecided, an invisible hand seemed to sweep out the two candles on the table. With a cry of terror, I dashed at the alcove, then into the corner, and then into the window, relighting three, as two more vanished by the fireplace; then, perceiving a better way, I dropped the matches on the iron-bound deedbox in the corner, and caught up the bedroom candlestick. With this I avoided the delay of striking matches; but for all that the steady process of extinction turned, and crept in upon me, first a step gained on this side of me and then on that. It was like a ragged storm cloud sweeping out the stars. Now and then one returned for a minute, and was lost again. I was now almost frantic with the horror of coming darkness, and my self-possession deserted me. I leaped panting and disheveled from candle to candle in a vain struggle against that remorseless advance.

I bruised myself on the thigh against the table, I sent a chair headlong, I stumbled and fell and whisked the cloth from the table in my fall. My candle rolled away from me, and I snatched another as I rose. Abruptly this was blown out, as I swung it off the table, by the wind of my sudden movement, and immediately the two remaining candles followed. But there was light still in the room, a red light that staved off the shadows from me. The fire! Of course, I could thrust my candle between the bars and relight it!

I turned to where the flames were dancing between the glowing coals, and splashing red reflections upon the furniture, made two steps toward the grate, and incontinently the flames dwindled and vanished, the glow vanished, the reflections rushed together and vanished, and as I thrust the candle between the bars darkness closed upon me like

the shutting of an eye, wrapped about me in a stifling embrace, sealed my vision, and crushed the last vestiges of reason from my brain. The candle fell from my hand. I flung out my arms in a vain effort to thrust that ponderous blackness away from me, and, lifting up my voice, screamed with all my might—once, twice, thrice. Then I think I must have staggered to my feet. I know I thought suddenly of the moonlit corridor, and, with my head bowed and my arms over my face, made a run for the door.

But I had forgot the exact position of the door, and struck myself heavily against the corner of the bed. I staggered back, turned, and was either struck or struck myself against some other bulky furniture. I have a vague memory of battering myself thus, to and fro in the darkness, of a cramped struggle, and of my own wild crying as I darted to and fro, of a heavy blow at last upon my forehead, a horrible sensation of falling that lasted an age, of my last frantic effort to keep my footing, and then I remember no more.

I opened my eyes in daylight. My head was roughly bandaged, and the man with the withered arm was watching my face. I looked about me, trying to remember what had happened, and for a space I could not recollect. I turned to the corner, and saw the old woman, no longer abstracted, pouring out some drops of medicine from a little blue phial into a glass. "Where am I?" I asked. "I seem to remember you, and yet I cannot remember who you are."

They told me then, and I heard of the haunted Red Room as one who hears a tale. "We found you at dawn," said he, "and there was blood on your forehead and lips."

It was very slowly I recovered my memory of my experience. "You believe now," said the old man, "that the room is haunted?" He spoke no longer as one who greets an intruder, but as one who grieves for a broken friend.

"Yes," said I, "the room is haunted."

"And you have seen it. And we, who have lived here all our lives, have never set eyes upon it. Because we have never dared— Tell us, is it truly the old earl who—"

"No," said I, "it is not."

"I told you so," said the old lady, with the glass in her hand. "It is his poor young countess who was frightened—"

"It is not," I said. "There is neither ghost of earl nor ghost of countess in that room, there is no ghost there at all; but worse, far worse—"

"Well?" they said.

"The worst of all the things that haunt poor mortal men," said I; "and that is, in all its nakedness—Fear! Fear that will not have light nor sound, that will not bear with reason, that deafens and darkens and overwhelms. It followed me through the corridor, it fought against me in the room—"

I stopped abruptly. There was an interval of silence. My hand went up to my bandages.

Then the man with the shade sighed and spoke. "That is it," said he. "I knew that was it. A Power of Darkness. To put such a curse upon a woman! It lurks there always. You can feel it even in the daytime, even of a bright summer's day, in the hangings, in the curtains, keeping behind you however you face about. In the dusk it creeps along the corridor and follows you, so that you dare not turn. There is Fear in that room of hers—black Fear, and there will be —so long as this house of sin endures."

LORD DUNSANY

THE SACK OF EMERALDS

ONE BAD OCTOBER NIGHT in the high wolds beyond Wiltshire, with a north wind chanting of winter, with the old leaves letting go their hold one by one from branches and dropping down to decay, with a mournful sound of owls, and in fearsome loneliness, there trudged in broken boots and in wet and windy rags an old man, stooping low under a sack of emeralds. It was easy to see, had you been traveling late on that inauspicious night, that the burden of the sack was far too great for the poor old man that bore it. And had you flashed a lantern in his face there was a look there of hopelessness and fatigue that would have told you it was no wish of his that kept him tottering on under that bloated sack.

When the menacing look of the night and its cheerless sounds, and the cold, and the weight of the sack, had all but brought him to the door of death, and he had dropped his sack onto the road and was dragging it on behind him, bumping it very slowly over the stones, just as he felt that his final hour was come, and come (which was worse) as he held the accursed sack, just then he saw the bulk and the black shape of the Sign of the Lost Shepherd loom up by the ragged way. He opened the door and staggered into the light and sank on a bench with his huge sack beside him.

All this you had seen had you been on that lonely road, so late on those bitter wolds, with their outlines vast and mournful in the dark, and their little clumps of trees sad with October. But neither you nor I were out that night. I

did not see the poor old man and his sack until he sank down all of a heap in the lighted inn.

And Yon the blacksmith was there; and the carpenter, Willie Losh; and Jackers, the postman's son. And they gave him a glass of beer. And the old man drank it up, still hugging his emeralds.

And at last they asked him what he had in his sack, the question he clearly dreaded; and he only clasped yet tighter the sodden sack and mumbled he had potatoes.

"Potatoes," said Yon the blacksmith.

"Potatoes," said Willie Losh.

And when he heard the doubt that was in their voices the old man shivered and moaned.

"Potatoes, did you say?" said the postman's son. And they all three rose and tried to peer at the sack that the rain-soaked wayfarer so zealously sheltered.

And from the old man's fierceness I had said that, had it not been for that foul night on the roads and the weight he had carried so far and the fearful winds of October, he had fought with the blacksmith, the carpenter, and the postman's son, all three, till he beat them away from his sack. And weary and wet as he was he fought them hard.

I should no doubt have interfered; and yet the three men meant no harm to the wayfarer, but resented the reticence that he displayed to them though they had given him beer; it was to them as though a master key had failed to open a cupboard. And, as for me, curiosity held me down to my chair and forbade me to interfere on behalf of the sack; for the old man's furtive ways, and the night out of which he came, and the hour of his coming, and the look of his sack, all made me long as much to know what he had as even the blacksmith, the carpenter, and the postman's son.

And then they found the emeralds. They were all bigger than hazelnuts, hundreds and hundreds of them. And the old man screamed.

"Come, come, we're not thieves," said the blacksmith.

"We're not thieves," said the carpenter.

"We're not thieves," said the postman's son.

And with awful fear on his face the wayfarer closed his

sack, whimpering over his emeralds and furtively glancing round as though the loss of his secret were an utterly deadly thing. And then they asked him to give them just one each, just one huge emerald each, because they had given him a glass of beer. Then to see the wayfarer shrink against his sack and guard it with clutching fingers one would have said that he was a selfish man, were it not for the terror that was freezing his face. I have seen men look at Death with far less fear.

And they took their emerald all three, one enormous emerald each, while the old man hopelessly struggled till he saw his three emeralds go, and fell to the floor and wept, a pitiable, sodden heap.

And about that time I began to hear far off down the windy road, by which that sack had come, faintly at first and slowly louder and louder, the click-clack-clop of a lame horse coming nearer. Click-clack-clop and a loose shoe rattling, the sound of a horse too weary to be out upon such a night, too lame to be out at all.

Click-clack-clop. And all of a sudden the old wayfarer heard it; heard it above the sound of his own sobbing, and at once went white to the lips. Such sudden fear as blanched him in a moment struck right to the hearts of all there. They muttered to him that it was only their play, they hastily whispered excuses, they asked him what was wrong, but seemed scarcely to hope for an answer. Nor did he speak, but sat with a frozen stare, all at once dry-eyes, a monument to terror.

Nearer and nearer came the click-clack-clop.

And when I saw the expression of that man's face and how its horror deepened as the ominous sound drew nearer, then I knew that something was wrong. And looking for the last time upon all four, I saw the wayfarer horror-struck by his sack and the other three crowding round it to put their huge emeralds back, then, even on such a night, I slipped away from the inn.

Outside the bitter wind roared in my ears, and close in the darkness the horse went click-clack-clop.

And as soon as my eyes could see at all in the night I saw

a man in a huge hat looped up in front, wearing a sword in a scabbard shabby and huge, and looking blacker than the darkness, riding on a lean horse slowly up to the inn. Whether his were the emeralds, or who he was, or why he rode a lame horse on such a night, I did not stop to discover, but went at once from the inn as he strode in his great black riding-coat up to the door.

And that was the last that was ever seen of the wayfarer, the blacksmith, the carpenter, or the postman's son.

WILLIAM IRISH

THE NIGHT REVEALS

HARRY JORDAN awoke with a start in complete darkness. The only thing he could make out, at first, was a ghostly greenish halo looming at him from across the room, bisected by a right angle: the radium dial of the clock on the dresser. He squinted his blurred eyes to get in focus, and the halo broke up into 12 numbers, with the hands at 3 and 6. Half past three in the morning—he'd only been asleep four hours and had four more to go.

Instead of turning over and trying again, he suddenly sat up, wide awake now. He'd had a strange feeling that he was alone in the room from the minute he first opened his eyes. He knew he wasn't, knew he must be wrong, still he couldn't get rid of it, any more than he could explain it. Probably one of those dim instincts still lurking just below the surface in most human beings, he thought with a shiver, harking back to the days when they were just hairy tree dwellers. Well, he'd knock it for a loop and then go back to pounding his ear, only way to get rid of it.

He pivoted on his elbow, reached out gingerly to touch the Missis's shoulder, convince himself she was right where she was every night. Blank pillow was all that met his touch, and the instinct that had warned him seemed to be laughing down the ages—it had been right after all. He threshed around the other way, flipped on the light on that side of him, turned back again to look. The pillow bore an imprint where her head had rested, that was all; the bedclothes were turned triangularly down on that side. Oh well, maybe she'd got up to get a glass of water—

He sat there awhile giving his head a massage. Then

when she didn't come back he got up and went out to see if there was anything the matter. Maybe the kid was sick, maybe she'd gone to his room. He opened the closed door as quietly as he could. The room was dark.

"Marie," he whispered urgently. "You in here?"

He snapped on the light, just to make sure. She wasn't. The kid was just a white mound, sleeping the way only a nine-year-old can: flashlight powder wouldn't have awakened him. He eased the door shut once more. There wasn't any other place she could be, she wouldn't be in the living-room at this hour of the morning. He gave that the lights too, then cut them again. So far he'd been just puzzled, now he was starting to get worked up.

He went back to the bedroom, put on his shoes and pants. The window in there was only open from the top, so there hadn't been any accident or anything like that, nothing along those lines. Her clothes were missing from the chair; she'd dressed while he was asleep. He went out to the door of the apartment and stood looking up and down the prim fireproof corridor. He knew she wouldn't be out there; if she'd come this far, then she would have gone the rest of the way—to wherever it was she was going. The empty milk bottle was still standing there with a curled-up note in it, as he'd seen it when he locked up at 11. There wasn't really anything to get scared about, it was just that it was so damned inexplicable! He'd given up all thought of trying to go back to sleep until this was solved. All the time he kept rubbing one hand down the back of his neck, where he needed a haircut.

He knew for a fact that she wasn't a sleepwalker, she'd never suffered from that as far as he could recall. She hadn't received an emergency call from some relatives in the dead of night, because neither of them had any. And she hadn't got sore at him suddenly and gone off and left him, because they got along hand-in-glove. Take tonight for instance, just before turning in, when he'd filled his pipe for one last smoke, the way she'd insisted on lighting it for him instead of letting him do it himself, the affectionate way she'd held the match until the bowl glowed red, and

that stunt she was so fond of doing, turning the match around in her fingers and holding the little stick by the head until the other end of it had burned down. When they got along so swell, how could she have anything against him? And the interest she showed in hearing him tell about his work each night, the way she drank in the dry details of his daily grind, asking him what premises if any he'd inspected that day and what report he was turning in to the office on them and all about it—that wasn't just pretended, it couldn't have been; she showed too much understanding, too much real eagerness. Instead of lessening, her interest in his job seemed to increase if anything as time went on. They'd never even had an angry word between them, not in five years now, not since that awful night riding in the cab when the door had opened suddenly and she fell out on her head and he thought for a minute he'd lost her.

He stepped across the corridor finally and punched the elevator button. If she'd been taken ill suddenly and needed medicine—but he'd been right in the room with her, and they had a telephone in the place. The elevator came up and the night operator shoved the slide out of the way. This was going to sound dumb as hell, but she wasn't in the flat with him, that much he was sure of. "Did, did—Mrs. Jordan didn't go down with you a little while ago, did she?" he asked.

"Yes sir, she did," the man said. "But that was quite a while ago. I took her down about happast two."

She'd been gone over an hour already! His face lengthened with anxiety, but it gave him a good excuse to say, "I think I'll go down with you, wait for her by the front door." On the way down he swallowed a few times, and finally came out with it more than he had wanted to. "She say where she was going?" He hung on the fellow's words, leaning toward him in the car.

"Said she couldn't sleep, just wanted to get a breath of fresh air."

Reassuring, matter-of-fact as the reason sounded, he couldn't get all the comfort out of it he needed. "She should be back by now," he murmured, looking down at the floor.

She might have been knocked down by a taxi, waylaid by a purse snatcher, a woman alone at that hour of the night! His face was a shade paler at the thought as he stepped from the elevator out to the front door and stood there scanning the desolate street, first up one way, then down the other. To notify the police still seemed a little drastic, like borrowing trouble, but if she wasn't back pretty soon —he turned around. "Which way'd she go?" he asked the porter.

"Down toward Third," the man said. Which was certainly the less safe of the two directions, the other one being Park. They were on Lexington. What could she want down there, under the shadow of the El, where drunks lying sprawled in doorways were not an uncommon sight? He began to walk slowly back and forth on the sidewalk in front of the lighted doorway. "I can't imagine—" he said a couple of times, for the benefit of the porter who had come out and joined him. He was a pipe smoker, but this was no time for a pipe. He took a package of cigarettes out of the pocket of his jacket, which he'd put on over his undershirt. He gave the man one as well as himself, and then he felt for the folder of matches he always carried in his side pocket. They were not there; he'd handed them to Marie when she'd asked him to let her light his pipe for him earlier in the evening, and she must have forgotten to give them back to him. He tapped himself all over; she'd kept them all right, absent-mindedly, or they would be on him now.

The porter went in, got some, and came out again. "I wouldn't worry if I was you, Mr. Jordan," he remarked sympathetically; Jordan's fears were beginning to be easily discernible on his face. "I don't think she went very far away, she'll prob'ly be back any minute now."

And just as the calming words were being spoken, Jordan made her out, coming alone up the street toward them, from the corner of Third Avenue. She was walking very quickly, but without showing any signs of being frightened. As she joined him in the radius of the lighted doorway there was nothing either furtive or guilty about her; it

might have been four in the afternoon instead of four in the morning.

"Tsk, tsk," she clucked comfortingly, "I just know you've been worried sick about me, haven't you?"

They rode upstairs together without either of them saying anything further in the presence of the houseman. Her seedy, shapeless black coat, five years old now, looked as dilapidated as ever; she'd gone out without a hat and her graying hair was even untidier than usual as a result; otherwise she looked just the way she always did. She was carrying a small package done up in vivid green drugstore paper.

When he'd closed the door on the two of them once more, Jordan turned to her. "What on earth made you do that? You gave me a good stiff fright, I can tell you that!" There was no melodrama in the way he said it and no melodrama in the way she answered, just a man and wife talking something over quietly.

"I felt I just had to get some fresh air into my lungs," she said simply. "I'd been lying there two solid hours without being able to close my eyes. You must have woke up right after I left," she said casually.

He stopped unlacing his shoes and looked up at her in surprise. "Why, he said you'd been gone nearly an hour!"

"Well I like that!" she said in mild indignation. "What ails him anyway? I wasn't out of the house fifteen minutes all told—just once around the block and then I stopped in at that all-night druggist on Third, Geety's, and bought a box of aspirin." She unwrapped it virtuously and showed it to him. "Are you going to take my word for it, Harry Jordan, or that no-account employee downstairs?" she demanded, but without heat. "My stars, I ought to know how long I was gone, I'm not that feeble-minded!" All this, in an easygoing drawl between the two of them, without any emphasis or recrimination.

"Forget it, Marie," he said good-naturedly, bending over his shoes once more. "He must have dozed off for a minute and lost track of the time." He yawned cavernously. The thin eerie wail of a fire truck came floating in on the still

night air, but from such a great distance that it sounded miles away; it must have been at least two or three blocks to the east, Second or Third Avenue. "All set?" droned Jordan sleepily, and without waiting for any answer he snapped the lights out. Almost before the current had left the filaments he was sleeping the sleep of the just, now that his good wife was back at his side.

He was a little dopey next day at the office from the unaccustomed break in his sleep the night before, but there wasn't much to do, just type out the report he'd made on that blaze the week before up in Washington Heights. The building had still been under construction, within an ace of completion, when it was mysteriously gutted and just the walls left standing. Neither his own investigation nor the report of the Fire Marshal's office had been able to unearth any evidence that the fire was incendiary; that is to say, deliberate instead of accidental. True, there had been some vague reports of labor trouble, but he had tracked them down and found them to be absolutely groundless; there had been no difficulties of any kind between the contractors and the labor union. Another thing, the blaze had taken place on a Sunday evening, a full day and a half after the workmen had knocked off.

It had been fairly easy to trace its point of origin. One apartment, on the ground floor, had been completed and opened for inspection to prospective tenants. Marie herself, for that matter, had been up there to look at it; she'd been heartbroken when he told her the next day what had happened. As he reconstructed it, some careless visitor had tossed a cigarette into a closet while being shown through the layout. The renting agent had locked up and gone home at six, taking the key with him, and the fire had smoldered away in there for the next two hours. The night watchman had no key to the place, so that absolved him of responsibility. He'd discovered it through the windows around eight.

All this was in the notes Jordan had prepared for his report. His reports were never questioned. If they said "Pay," the company paid; if they said "No Indemnity," the com-

pany told its legal talent to stand by for action. Harry Jordan was its best investigator. He slipped a sheet of stationery letterheaded *Hercules Mutual Fire Insurance Corporation* under the roller of the typewriter and began laboriously picking out letters on the keyboard with two fingers. He always hated this part of the job; it was with hopeful anticipation therefore that he looked up as the president's secretary halted beside him. "E. P. would like to see you in his office as soon as you're through."

"This can wait," he said gratefully, and went in through a frosted-glass door.

"Morning," Parmenter said. "Read about that awful thing on the upper East Side?"

"I got away late this morning, didn't get a look at my paper," Jordan admitted. Parmenter showed him his, folded back to the third page. "That's us, you know," he added, while Jordan moved his lips soundlessly down the column. The latter looked up, startled. "One of those old-law tenements; I didn't know we covered—"

"We did this time," Parmenter told him gloomily. "The bank had taken it over for an investment, tinkered with it a little, slapped on a little paint, replaced the vertical escapes with horizontals, so technically it was no longer strictly old-law. It didn't pan out as well as they'd expected, so they turned it over to a guy named Lapolla, and he had even more extensive remodeling scheduled for the latter part of this month, soon as they could dispossess the remaining tenants. Well, on the strength of that we sold him coverage. He just called me a little while ago, tearing out his hair by the handfuls. Place is a complete wreck and if it hadn't been for the new escapes, incidentally, everyone on the upper floors would have been cremated alive. As it is there's three or four of them in the hospital right now with second-degree burns." He motioned with the folded paper. "According to this it started behind the stairs on the ground floor. They have it listed as 'suspicious origin'."

"You think it smells sort of funny yourself, that it?" asked Jordan.

"Not from the angle of Lapolla, as beneficiary, trying to

pull a fast one on us—take out insurance and then commit arson on his own property; we've been handling him off and on since '31. He's straight. But there's always this thought: the type people living in a dump like that would be ignorant enough to resent being cleared out for the remodeling, and one of 'em might have tried to get even with the landlord. Anyway, Jordan, you know what to do, give the premises a look-see, get depositions from the janitor and whoever was in the building at the time—or as soon as they're in a condition to make any. Track down this 'suspicious origin' tag the paper has given it for all it's worth, and if you find any evidence—" But Jordan was already closing the frosted-glass door behind him, the paper wedged in his pocket.

Burned buildings were nothing new to him, but this one was a complete mess, and the teeming tenements all around it only gave its exploded blackened window spaces an added touch of grisliness. Not a pane of glass, not a splinter of frame, had been left in the whole façade; it was just a shell, and already they had the ropes up to bring down the front wall before nightfall.

"Investigator for the underwriters," he said, and they let him through the barrier as soon as he'd produced his credentials.

"Three-alarmer," said his departmental escort, flashing his torch down the nightmare hallway from just within the entrance. "I still don't know how we got 'em all out, even with the nets. I tell you, if it had happened a month sooner before the new escapes had been tacked on, it woulda made history. Mushroomed up the well, like most of 'em do. He turned his flash upward and the beam lost itself out of sight. There was no ceiling to stop it, just a weird network of charred beams through which the open sky peered from six stories above, where the roof had fallen through and disintegrated on its way down like something strained through a succession of sieves.

"Anything phony-looking about it?" asked Jordan. He edged forward along the fresh planking that had been laid between the doorway and the skeletonized staircase.

"Why would there have to be?" was the answer. "The way they leave their baby carriages parked behind the stairs—you can count the frames of four of 'em back there right now, and cripes knows what other junk was piled on 'em that's just ashes now! That's begging for it to happen!"

"That where it started, you think?"

"Must've. The basement under us wasn't touched, and fire eats up, not down—Hey, stay back here, those stairs would fold up if a cat tried to walk on 'em!"

"Lemme that a minute," said Jordan, reaching for the torch. "I'm not going up, I just want to take a look behind 'em. Nothing ever happened to me yet in one of these places."

He sidled forward to the end of the plank, then got off it onto the original flooring, which was ankle-deep in debris that had fallen from above but hadn't given way on this floor. Testing it each step of the way before he put his weight down on it, he advanced slowly to what had been the back of the hall. The torch revealed a number of tortured metal frames, upthrust under the stairs, that had once been the hoops enclosing baby carriages. The heat here must have been terrific at the height of the blaze; the door that had once led downward to the basement was completely burned away. An iron knob and two twisted hinges were all that remained to show there had been one. The steps going down were brick, however; they remained.

"C'mon back," the assistant marshal said irritably, "before you bring the whole works down on us!"

Jordan got down on his heels and began to paw about, using the rib of an umbrella for a poker. Fine ash, that had once been the pillows and blankets lining the carriages, billowed up, tickling his nostrils. He sneezed and blew a little round clear space on the charred floor boards.

It was when he had straightened up and turned to go, and had already shifted the torch away, that he first saw it. It sent up a dull gleam for an instant as the light flickered over it. He turned back to it with the flash, lost track of it at first, then finally found it again. It had fallen into one of the springs of the erstwhile perambulators and adhered

there, soldered on by the heat like a gob of yellow-brown chewing gum. He touched it, pried it loose with a snap, it came off hard as a rock. It was, as a matter of fact, very much like a pebble, but it was metal, he could see that. He was going to throw it away, but when he scratched the surface of it with his thumbnail, it showed up brighter underneath, almost like gold. He found his way back to the fire marshal and showed it to him.

"What do you make of this?"

The marshal didn't make very much of it. "One of the bolts or gadgets on one of them gocarts, melted down, that's all," he said.

But it obviously wasn't one of the "bolts or gadgets" or it wouldn't have fused with the heat like that, the rest of the springs and frames hadn't; and what metal was softer than iron and yellow—but gold? He slipped it into his pocket. A jeweler would be able to tell him in a minute—not that that would prove anything, either.

"What time was the alarm sent in?" he asked the marshal.

"The first one came in at the central station about 3:30, then two more right on top of it."

"Who turned the first one in, got any idea?"

"Some taxi driver—he's got an early morning stand down at the next corner."

Jordan traced the cab man to the garage where he bedded his car. He caught him just as he was leaving on a new shift.

"I heard glass bust," he said, "and first I thought it was a burglary, then when I look I see smoke steaming out."

"Had you seen anyone go in or leave before that happened?"

"Tell you the truth, I was reading by the dashlight, didn't look up oncet until I heard the smash."

At the emergency ward, where the three worst sufferers had been taken, Jordan found none in a condition to talk to him. Two were under morphine and the third, a top-floor tenant named Dillhoff, swathed in compresses steeped

in strong tea to form a protective covering replacing burned-away tissue, could only stare up at him with frightened eyes above the rim of the gauze that muffled even his face. His wife, however, was there at the bedside.

"Yah, insurance!" she broke out hotly when Jordan had introduced himself. "He gets his money—but vot do I get if my man diess?"

He let her get that out of her system first, then—"Some of those people that Lapolla forced to vacate were pretty sore, weren't they? Did you ever hear any of them make any threats, say they'd get even?"

Her eyes widened as she got the implication. "Ach, no, no!" she cried, wringing her hands, "we vas all friends togedder, they would not do that to those that shtayed behind! No, they vas goot people, poor maybe, but goot!"

"Was the street door left open at nights or locked?"

"Open, alvays open."

"Then anybody could have walked into the hallway that didn't belong there? Did you, at any time during the past few days, pass anyone, notice anyone, in the halls or on the stairs that didn't live in the house?"

Not a soul. But then she never went out much, she admitted.

He left on that note, got in touch with the rewrite man who had shaped the account sent in by the reporter who had covered it. "What'd he say that made you people label it 'suspicious' orgin?"

"I put that in myself for a space-filler," the writer admitted airily. "Anything with three alarms, it don't hurt to give it a little eerie atmosphere—"

Jordan hung up rather abruptly, his mouth a thin line. So he'd been on a wild-goose chase all day, had he, on account of the careless way some city rooms tossed around phrases! There wasn't a shred of evidence, as far as he'd been able to discover, that it was anything but accidental.

Parmenter, when he went back at five after seeing Lapolla and getting a statement from the Chief Fire Marshal himself, nodded in agreement after listening to him out-

line the results of his investigation. "Make out your report," he said briefly, "I'll see that a check's sent to Lapolla as soon as he files his claim."

Jordan wound up both reports, the one he'd been working on that morning and the new one, then went home, still heartily disgusted with the methods of city journalism. The kid scuffled to the door to let him in, gamboled about him. Marie planted an amiable kiss on his cheek. "Something you like dear—giblets," she beamed.

It was when she turned her head to reach for something behind her, near the end of the meal, that he looked twice at her neck. "Something missing on you toni—"

She touched her throat absently. "Oh, I know—my locket, isn't that what you mean?"

"What'd you do, lose it?"

"No," she said slowly, "it finally came off, after all these years. I left it at the jeweler's to be fixed."

"That reminds me—" he said, and touched his side pocket.

"Reminds you of what?" she asked calmly.

"Oh nothing, never mind," he answered. If it was worth anything, gold, maybe the jeweler'd give him some trinket in exchange he could surprise her with. He got up and went out again right after the meal, said he'd be right back. "My wife's locket ready yet?" he asked the little skullcapped man behind the counter.

"What locket?" was the tart response. "She left no locket with me. I haven't seen your wife in three months, Mr. Jordan."

Must've been some other shop then. He coughed to cover up the mistake. "Well, as long as I'm in here, take a look at this. Worth anything?" He spilled the shapeless calcinated blob of metal onto the glass counter. The old man screwed a glass into his eye, touched a drop of nitric acid to it, nodded.

"Yop, it's gold. Wait, I find out if it's solid or just plated."

He took a file, began to scrape it back and forth across the surface. There was a tiny click, as though he'd broken it. He turned back to Jordan, holding his palm out in

astonishment to show him. There were two blobs now instead of one, both identical in outline but thinner; two halves of what had been a locket before it fused together in the fire. A little powdered glass dribbled off one, like sugar, as the jeweler moved his hand.

"What's that, there?" said Jordan, pointing to a scorched oval of paper adhering to one side. "Lemme use that glass a minute!"

With the naked eye it was just a brown blank, like undeveloped film; under the glass a dim outline revealed itself.

"Haven't you got anything stronger? Get me a magnifying glass."

The jeweler came hurrying back with it, Jordan got the thing in focus under it, and suddenly found himself looking at a dimmed snapshot of his own kid, taken at the age of three or four. He didn't say a word, just gave a peculiar heaving snort down his nose, like a horse drinking water. There couldn't be any mistake, it was no optical illusion, the glass played up the engraved lettering on the inside of the other half-locket: *H. J. to M. J.* 1925.

He heard some other guy walk out of the shop saying to the jeweler he didn't want to sell it after all; it must have been himself, because here he was on his way back home with it again. He didn't say a word when he got in, just sat there reading the account of the fire in the morning's paper over and over, and shivering a little more each time. Finally he put the crusher on that by getting up and pouring himself a shot from the bottle in the closet.

"What jeweler'd you leave that locket with?" he asked her quietly.

She looked up from one of the kid's stockings she was darning. "Old man Elias," she answered unhesitatingly. "He's the only one I know of around here."

He'd just been there. He didn't say another word for the next hour. Then, very slowly, around 11 he took out his pipe for his usual last smoke. He had to keep his wrists from trembling as he reached for the tobacco tin, filled the bowl, pressed it in with his thumb. His lashes were low over his eyes the whole time, it was hard to tell where he was look-

ing. He took a folder of matches out of his pocket. She came right over to him with a housewifely smile. "No, no, that's my job," she said. She lit the pipe for him and then she turned the flickering match upside down, deftly pinched it at the head, and let it burn itself up to a finish. He kept looking down his nose at the bowl of his pipe, and beyond, to where her other hand was. You could only see a quarter of the match folder now; her hand covered the rest. You couldn't see it at all now, it had been tucked completely out of sight. She straightened up and moved around the room. She'd forgotten to give him his matches back, as she had the night before. His face was moist sitting there, as if the room were too warm. He got up and went to bed, leaving on his socks and trousers under the covers.

She stayed in the kitchen for awhile, and then came in carrying a cup and saucer with steam coming from it. "Harry," she said, "I want you to try some of this, just to make sure of getting a good night's sleep. The druggist I was speaking to last night recommended—"

"You seem to need it, not me," he said dryly.

"I just had mine out there," she assured him. "Now don't let it get cold—"

He took the cup from her, sat up, keeping the covers around his shoulders with one hand. "Well, bring me the box and let me see what it is, I like to know what I'm swallowing."

She turned and went out again docilely. He promptly thrust one leg far out, flipped up the lid of the radiator cover, and emptied the cup into the humidifying pan below.

"Tasted swell," he said, handing the cup back when she returned with a can marked *Ovaltine*. He gave her a wretched grimace that was the closest he could get to a grin. "Just like in the ads," he said, and flopped limply back on the pillow. The lights went out.

She came in again in about half an hour and bent over him, listening. "Harry," she said guardedly, "Harry," and even shook him a little by the shoulder. He didn't move. *It sure was supposed to be strong, all right!* he thought. He heard the front door close, and he reared up, shoved

his feet into his shoes, whipped on his coat, and made for the door. He heard the elevator slide open and close again outside just as he got there. He tore the flat door open, attempted to catch the elevator before it went down, then stopped short. Stop her? What good would it do to stop her? She'd only say she couldn't sleep again, like last night, and he'd end up by half believing her himself. He had to find out once and for all, make sure, and there was only one way to do that.

He waited till the red shaft light went out before he rang to bring the car back again. It flashed on again, white, and the porter gave him a surprised look when he saw who it was. There wasn't a joke in poor Jordan's whole system, but he managed to force one out nevertheless. "Insomnia seems to be catching." The porter smirked. He didn't believe him, and Jordan didn't blame him.

She was still in sight when he got to the door, hugging the building line as she walked. Third again, where the houses weren't fireproof and there were no doormen. He waited until she'd turned the corner before he started out from their own place, because if she should look back—the porter was right beside him the whole time, wondering what it was all about. Jordan covered the pause by pretending to scrape something off the sole of his shoe that wasn't there at all. When he finally got to the corner she was already two blocks up, avenue blocks being shorter than the lateral ones. He crossed to the other side, so he could get closer to her without being conspicuous, then crept up until he was just half a block behind her, she on the west side, he on the east. The El pillars kept coming between them like a sort of sparse picket fence, and then there were occasional barber poles and empty glass sidewalk display cases to screen him. But she never once looked around.

When she got to the corner where the scene of the fire was, ten blocks north of where they lived, she stopped, and he saw her stand there gazing down the street at the wrecked building. The front wall had been pulled down by now, but the side walls were still up, with an occasional floor beam to link them. It was almost as if she was gloating,

the way she stood there devouring the scene, and it was the deadest giveaway ever that she knew what it was, that she'd been there once before.

He put his hand to his windpipe, as if he couldn't get enough air in, and turned his head away. Any shred of hope he may have had until now, that she'd lost the locket and someone living in that house had picked it up and carried it there to lose it a second time in the fire, was swept remorselessly away—no room any more for benefit of doubt.

She started on again, so he did too. Why didn't she turn back—wasn't it bad enough, what she'd done already? Was she going to do it over again, the very night after? But hope springs eternal, and a minute after she'd damned herself irrevocably by standing there staring at her handiwork, he was again trying to find an out for her in his own mind. She had undoubtedly been there the night before—there was no denying that—but could she have come home so calm after she had *purposely* done a thing like that? Nobody could. It must have been accidental. She might have had to light a match to find her way downstairs, thrown it over the banisters, and gone away without realizing what she'd done. Or someone else had done it, right after she left. She might have been visiting some indigent relative or black sheep that she didn't want him to know about, given them the locket to turn into cash, and then fibbed about it to him; even the best of women kept certain things like that from their husbands at times. It was that alone that kept him from swiftly overtaking, stopping her. Only why didn't she go home, why in God's name didn't she go home now?

Instead she went two blocks farther, then abruptly, as if on the spur of the moment, she chose a side street to the right, leading down toward Second Avenue. Again, he took the opposite side of the street, but hung back a little, since it was much narrower than the north-south artery. It was a neighborhood of decrepit, unprotected tenements, all crammed from basement to roof with helpless sleepers, and his spine turned cold as ice as he darted in and out from

doorway to doorway after her. And at each moldy entrance that she herself passed, her head would turn a little and she'd glance in, he couldn't help noticing. Past Second she went, all the way to First, and then without warning she doubled back, began to retrace her steps. He shrank back into the nearest doorway and flattened himself there, to let her go by. At last, he breathed with relief, she was going home. And then the horrid thought occurred—had she just been reconnoitering, trying to pick the right spot for her ghastly act?

There was not even a taxi driver around this time; the street, the whole zone, was dead. She passed a building that was vacant, that had been foreclosed and doomed to demolition perhaps, whose five floors of curtainless windows stared blankly forth, most of the lower panes broken by ball-playing kids. She had passed it once before. Now suddenly, just as she came abreast of it, the blackness of its yawning entryway seemed to suck her in. One minute she was there in full view on the sidewalk, the next she had vanished; she was gone like a puff of smoke, and he shuddered at the implication.

He came out of his retreat and started crossing diagonally toward where she had gone in. As he neared it he quickened his steps, until he was nearly running. He looked in from the sidewalk; it was like trying to peer through black velvet. He stepped in, treading softly, one hand out before him. Something suddenly slashed across his waist and he nearly folded up like a jackknife. One hand pressed to the excruciating stomach pain that resulted, he explored the obstacle with the other. The front door had evidently been stolen off its hinges, carted away for firewood. In place of it the new owners or the police had nailed up a number of slats to keep out intruders, all but the middle one of these had also been yanked away, and you could either slip in under it or, rather foolishly, climb up over it. He ducked below it, went soft-shoeing down the musty hall, keeping the wall at his shoulder to guide him, stopping every other minute to listen, trying to find out where she had gone.

Suddenly the thin glow of a match showed ahead, far

down at the other end of the hall. Not the flame itself—that was hidden—just its dimmer reflection, little more than darkness with motes of orange in it. It was coming from behind the staircase; so too, before he could take even another step forward, was the rattling and scuffling of dry papers, then the ominous sound of a box being dragged across the floor. He plunged forward, still keeping his heels clear of the ground. The match glow went out once before he got there, then a second one immediately replaced it. He turned the corner of the staircase base and stopped dead—

He saw it with his own eyes; caught her in the very act, red-handed, killing all condonation, all doubt, once and for all. She had dragged a box filled with old newspapers into the angle formed by the two walls of the little alcove just under and behind the long tinder-dry wooden staircase that went up five stories, with a broken skylight above to give it a perfect flue. He saw the lighted match leave her hand, fall downward into the box, saw a second one flare and follow it with the quickness that only a woman can give such a gesture, saw her preparing to strike a third one on the sandpaper.

He caught her with both hands, one at the wrist, the other just under the thick knot of hair at the back of her neck. She couldn't turn, gave a sort of heave that was half vocal and half bodily, and billowed out like a flag caught in a high wind. He flung her sideways and around to the back of him, let go his hold, and heard her stumble up against the wall. The silence of the two of them only added to the horror of the situation, in a gloom that was already beginning to be relieved by yellow flashes coming up from the box, each time higher than before. He kicked it further out with the back of his heel, to where he could get at it, then tamped his foot down into the very middle of it, again and again, flattening the papers, stifling the vicious yellow brightness. It snuffed out under the beating; pitch-darkness welled up around him, and he heard the pad of her footfalls running down the long hallway, careening crazily from side to side until they vanished outside in the street. He couldn't go after her yet, he had to make sure.

He made the mistake of reaching down for the box with his hand, intending to drag it after him out into the open. The draft of the abrupt motion must have set a dozen wicked little red eyes gleaming again inside it, then an unevenness between two boards of the rotting floor jogged it, caught it, up-ended it behind him before he could check his progress. It was out from under the stairs now, with an open flume straight up through the roof to the sky above sucking at it. Instantly papers and red sparks went swirling upward in a deadly funnel; before his eyes he saw the sparks fanned brighter, bigger, the scorched papers burst into yellow flame once more as they shot up the long dark chute, striking against this banister and that like so many fireballs setting off the dried woodwork. Before he could reach the nearest of them, on the floor above the whole crazy spiral from top to bottom was alight with concentric rings of brightness, one to a floor. It was too late—she'd accomplished what she'd set out to do, in spite of him! He turned back from the first landing that he'd climbed up to, raced down again and out along the hall, remembering the board at the entrance just in time. A faint crackling already sounded from the shaft behind him, like a lot of mice nibbling at something. He tore out of the tunnel-like doorway, and turned up toward the corner.

He saw her just a few steps ahead of him, she hadn't gone very far after all. She was lingering there about the premises as though she couldn't tear herself away. He caught her by the hand as he swept by, pulled her after him as far as the corner, where the alarm box was. She didn't resist, didn't try to escape from him at all, not even when he let go of her to send in the call. Then he hurried onward with her, not waiting for the apparatus to get there. If he'd been alone it would have been different, but he was afraid she'd say something, give herself away, if they questioned her. He didn't want her arrested—not until he had a chance to find out what was the matter with her first. They were three blocks away already, hurrying homeward, when the engines went roaring and clanging past them up Third Avenue, satanic red lights aglow. He bowed

his head, but she turned and stared after them.

The only time he spoke, the whole way, was once when he asked her in a muffled voice, "How many times did you do it—before tonight?" She didn't answer. When the porter in their own building had taken them up to their floor and said "Good night," she was the one who replied, just as though nothing had happened. Jordan closed the door and locked it on the two of them—and what they both knew, and nobody else. He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, then turned and leaned it against the wall.

"People might have been living in that house," he said heavily.

"But there weren't any, it was vacant," she said simply.

"There were plenty in the houses on either side of it. It doesn't matter even if it was just a pile of brushwood in a vacant lot." He took her by the shoulders and made her look at him. "Don't you feel well? Does you head bother you? What makes you do it?"

She shrank back, suddenly terrified. "No, no, not that! I know what you mean. Oh Harry, don't take my mind from me, you can't! There's nothing the matter with me! They told you that long ago, they proved it, all of them, after my accident!" She would have gone down on her knees, but he held her up.

"Then why do you do it? Why? Why?" he kept asking.

"I don't know. I can't help it." That was all they said that night.

He was still in the same clothes, hadn't been to bed at all, when the morning paper was left at the door. He lifted himself stiffly off the chair that he had tilted on its two hind legs against the door, to make sure that she stayed in the place, took the paper inside and looked for the account. It wasn't played up much, they'd put it out after it had destroyed the staircase, and they were inclined to think that two tramps who had found shelter on one of the upper floors had inadvertently started it, either by smoking or cooking their food. One had run away but one had been found with a broken leg, in the rear yard where he'd

leaped down trying to save himself, and was in the hospital. Jordan got an envelope and jotted down the fellow's name and the hospital on the outside of it, then stuck two five-dollar bills in it with a note, just two words: *Sorry, buddy.*

Then he got the police on the wire. "Are there going to be charges against the vag So-and-so with the broken leg, in connection with that fire last night?" There certainly were, he was assured: vagrancy, unlawful entry, and setting fire to the premises, and who wanted to know anyway? "I'm an investigator for the Herk Insurance Company. He'll have to take the rap on the first two counts maybe, but I'd like to say a word for him on the fire charge. Let me know at my office when the case comes up." Time enough to figure out a way of clearing the man without involving her, when the time came.

Then he telephoned his boss. "Cancel that report I turned in on the fire night before last, the Lapolla property, and hold up the indemnity." He swallowed hard. "It wasn't accidental—it was arson."

Parmenter got excited right away. "Who was responsible, got any idea?"

"An unknown woman," said Jordan limply. "That's all I can tell you right now. Lapolla himself had no connection with it, take my word for it. I'll give you a new report when I get a little more evidence—and—and I won't be in until late today."

He went to the bedroom door, took the key out of his pocket, and unlocked it. The room was dark, he'd nailed down the Venetian blinds to the window sills the night before. Looking at her lying there so calm, so innocent, he wondered if she was insane, or what. Yet the specialists who had examined her when he and she had brought suit against the taxi company whose cab she had fallen out of, hadn't been able to find anything, not even a fracture or concussion; she was right about that. They had lost the suit as a result. But maybe things like that came on slowly, or maybe there was no connection, it was something deeper, more inexplicable. He woke her up gently, and said, "Better

go in and get the kid ready for school. Don't say anything about last night in front of him, understand?"

When the boy had left he said, "Let's go out and get some air, I don't have to go to work today, Parmenter's laid up." She got her hat and coat without a word. They set out without seeming to have any fixed destination, but Jordan led toward Fifth Avenue and there he flagged a bus. He pulled the cord at 168th, and she followed him out in silence. But when he stopped a little further on, she looked up at the building. "Why, this is the Psychiatric Institute!" she said, and got white.

"Parmenter's in there undergoing treatment, they told me about it when I telephoned the office," he said. "You come in and wait, I want to go up and see how he's getting along."

She went in with him without further protest. He left her sitting there out in the reception room, and asked to see one of the staff members. He closed his eyes, could hardly answer when he was asked what they could do for him. "I'd like to have my wife put under observation." He had rehearsed what he was going to say on the way there; he still couldn't bear to tell them the whole truth—not yet anyway. She would be liable to imprisonment if sane, commitment to one of the hideous state institutions if unbalanced, he couldn't let that happen to her. There were always private sanitariums, nursing-homes, he could put her in himself—but he had to find out first. What symptoms, if any, did she show, he was asked.

"Nothing very alarming," he said, "she—she goes for short walks by herself in the middle of the night, that's all, claims she can't sleep." The fire must stay out of this at all costs; reluctantly he brought out a small bottle of chocolate-colored liquid that he had collected from the pan of the radiator before leaving the flat. "I have reason to believe she tried to give me a sleeping potion, so that I wouldn't worry about her going out. You can tell if you'll analyze this. We have a child; I think for his sake you should set my mind at rest."

He could, they told him, engage a private room for her if

he wanted to and leave her there for the night, have one of the staff doctors look at her when he came in. It would have to be voluntary, though, they couldn't commit her against her will merely at his request and without a physician's certificate.

He nodded. "I'll go out and talk it over with her." He went back and sat down beside her. "Marie, would you trust me enough to stay here overnight so they can tell us whether there's anything the matter with you?"

She got frightened at first. "Then it wasn't your boss! I knew that, I knew you were going to do this from the time we left the house!" She lowered her voice to a whisper, so they wouldn't be overheard. "Harry, I'm sane! You know it! Don't do this to me, you can't!"

"It's either that, or I'll have to go to the police about you. Which is it going to be?" he asked her, also in a whisper. "I've got to, I'm an accessory if I don't. You'll end up by killing somebody, if you haven't already without my knowing it. It's for your own sake, Marie."

"I'll never do it again—I swear I won't!" she pleaded, so convincingly, with such childlike earnestness, that he saw where the real risk lay. It was like water off a duck's back; she didn't seem to realize even now the heinousness of having done it at all, and certainly she would keep on doing it again and again, every time she got the chance.

"But you said yourself you didn't know why you did it, you couldn't help it."

"Well, keep matches away from me, then; don't let me see any, don't smoke in front of me."

"Now, I haven't said a word to them about the fire—we'll keep that to ourselves, until we find out one way or the other. But don't lie to them, Marie. They're only trying to help you. If they ask you, tell them openly about this craving of yours, this fascination matches have for you, without letting them know you've already given in to it." He stroked her hand reassuringly. "How about it?"

She was much calmer now, she was over her first fright. "Do you swear they won't try to hold me here against my will, use force—a strait jacket or something?"

"I'm your husband, I wouldn't let anything like that happen to you," he said. "You stay here just for tonight of your own free will, and I'll come back tomorrow for you, without fail, and we'll hear what they have to say."

"I don't like to leave the kid like that. Who'll look after him, Harry? Who'll get his meals?"

"I'll send him over to Mrs. Klein, let him eat supper there and stay overnight—the mother of that little fellow he plays with."

"All right," she agreed. "I'll do it—but you'll see, they'll tell you there's nothing the matter with me. Wait'll you hear what they say." And as they stood up, she smiled confidently, as if already sure what the outcome would be. He made the necessary arrangements with the reception clerk, and as the nurse led her away she was still smiling. He didn't like that.

He went to the office but he couldn't keep his mind on what he was doing, tried three times to make out a new report on the Lapolla fire and tore up each attempt. How could he keep faith with his firm, present eivdence that it was arson, and not involve her? There must be a way, but it would have to wait until he was calmer, could think more clearly. He went back to the flat at three, to meet the kid when he came back from school.

"Your mother's on a visit," he told him. "You ask Mrs. Klein if it's all right for you to stay overnight at their house." The kid was tickled, and went sailing out. Then in about ten minutes he came back again; the Kleins lived on the next block. "Darn it, Sammy's getting a new brother and they can't have any company in their house!"

Jordan knew he could have taken him out to a cafeteria with him, if the meal was all that mattered, but the kid was so disappointed he felt sorry for him. "Got any other pals you could stay with?" he asked him.

"Sure, I could go to Frankie's house, he's a swell guy!"

"All right, but you give me the address first. I'll stop up there later on tonight, and if I don't like the looks of the place I'm bringing you home with me again." Vizetelly was the name; he jotted down the number of the house, it

was in their own immediate neighborhood but a little farther to the east. It was a jim-dandy place, the kid assured him, he'd been there lots of times before. Jordan just smiled and let him go. Then he gave a sigh and went back to the office again.

He stayed on at his desk long after everyone else had gone, moiling over the Lapolla report under a shaded light when it got too dark to see any more. The best he could do with it was to doctor up the statement of the taxi driver who had turned in the alarm, making it appear he had seen an unknown woman run out of the doorway 15 to 20 minutes before the fire had been discovered. The Herk Company wouldn't cross-question the driver over and above his say-so, he felt pretty sure; the trouble was, if it ever got to the ears of the Fire Marshal's office—ouch! It was the first time he'd ever put down a deliberate falsehood in one of his reports, he thought wryly; but to let it go down on the record as being accidental, knowing what he did, would have been an even greater misstatement. That Washington Heights affair of the week before ought to be reopened too, he realized, but an indemnity payment had already been made, and it would be a mess to tackle it now. He clasped his head dejectedly between his hands. Finally he shoved the report out of sight in the drawer, got up and looked at the clock. It was after nine, he'd stayed hours overtime. He snapped out the light, felt his way out, and locked up the silent office after him.

He went into a beanery and bought some food, just out of pure habit, then found he couldn't touch it after all. He sat there smoking one cigarette after the other, wondering what the verdict was going to be. They must have examined her by this time. They wouldn't wait to do it at one or two in the morning. Maybe he could find out if he called. Maybe they'd let him talk to her. He could cheer her up, find out how she was taking it. Why not? She wasn't bedridden, there was nothing the matter with her physically. Finally he couldn't stand it any more, had to know, took a deep breath, and stood up. Ten-twenty-five, the clock said. He shut himself in a booth and called the Psychiatric.

"Would it be at all possible for me to say a word to Mrs. Marie Jordan?" he asked timidly. "She was entered for observation at noon, room 210. This is her husband."

"This is not a hotel, Mr. Jordan," was the tart rejoinder. "It's absolutely against the regulations."

"Not allowed to call her to the phone, eh?" he asked forlornly.

"Not only that," the voice answered briskly, "the patient was discharged half an hour ago at her own request, as of perfectly sound mind and body."

Jordan straightened up. "Oh Lord!" he groaned, "do you people know what you've done?"

"We usually do," she snapped. "Just a second, I'll look up the report the examiner left with us, for your information." He was sweating freely as he waited for her to come back. Then she began to read: *"Marie Jordan, age thirty-eight, weight one hundred forty, eyes blue, hair*—is that your wife?"

"Yes, yes! What has he got to say?"

"Perfectly normal," she quoted. *"Strongly developed maternal instinct, metabolism sound, no nervous disorders whatever. In short, no necessity for undergoing treatment of any kind.* I would like to call your attention, Mr. Jordan, to a short postscript in Dr. Grenell's own handwriting. Dr. Grenell, you may not know, is one of our biggest authorities in this field. He usually knows what he's saying and he seems to feel rather strongly about your wife's case." She cleared her throat meaningly. *"This seems to my mind a glaring instance of willful persecution on the part of the patient's husband. The shoe seems to fit on the other foot, judging by his habit of following her furtively along the street, so that she was finally compelled to go out only when she thought him asleep, as well as the fact that he imprisoned her in a locked room, mounting guard outside her door, and had hallucinations that the food she prepared for him was drugged. A chemical analysis of the specimen submitted to us proved the charge unfounded. Subjection to treatment of this sort over a period of months or years will undoubtedly have an adverse effect on this woman's mind and bodily health, but*

so far there are no signs of it. I have told her she is entitled to police protection if it recurs. Case discharged. Grenell, M.D."

"Tell Dr. Grenell I congratulate him," groaned Jordan. "He's turned a pyromaniac loose on the sleeping city!" And he hung up and just stood there weaving back and forth on his heels for a minute in the narrow confines of the booth.

Maybe she was sane, maybe they were right—but then she was a criminal, in the worst sense of the word, without even the usual criminal's excuse for her actions, hope of gain! He kept shaking his head. No, he was right and they were wrong, in spite of all their experts and all their findings. She'd been lucky and she'd fooled them, that was all. Her actions alone convinced him that bedtime drink had had something in it, but the sediment must have gone to the bottom of the radiator pan and in scooping it up he hadn't gotten any of it. He didn't blame them in a way, he'd deliberately withheld the key to the whole thing from them, thinking only to spare her; as a result it had boomeranged. Sure he'd locked her in her bedroom and sure he'd followed her along the street—what they didn't know was he'd caught her dropping burning matches into a box of kindling under the staircase of a vacant tenement at one in the morning! Well, the hell with them, they hadn't helped him any! It was in his own hands again, as it had been at the start. He'd have to handle it the best he could without outside help.

Strongly developed maternal instinct! Sure she had it, why not? She was perfect in every way, A-1, except for this one horrible quirk that had cropped up? *Strongly developed*— The kid! His extremities got cold all at once. She'd been discharged half an hour ago, she'd look him up the first thing, he'd told her where he was going to take him! He didn't trust her in anything now. He was going up there and get the kid quick, before she did! He didn't think she'd really harm him, but she might take him away with her, not show up at home any more, disappear, afraid of him now or sore at what he'd done to her. Not while he knew it! He wasn't going to let that kid out of his sight from

now on, sleep right in the same room with him even if she had come back to the flat! A woman that didn't have any more moral sense than to cremate people alive, slip a sedative to her own husband—no telling what she'd end up by doing!

He nearly shattered the glass, by the speed with which he got out of the phone booth. He tossed money at the cashier without waiting for change, jumped into a cab in front of the place, gave the fellow the Kleins' address. "Hurry it up will you—every minute counts!"

"Do the best I can, Cap," the driver promised.

"That ain't good enough," Jordan grunted. "Double it, and it'll still be too slow to suit me!"

But they'd started from way downtown, very near his office. Quarter-to-eleven had run up to nearly 40 after, even with the driver using a stagger system on the lights, before they got up into the East Side Eighties. He jumped out in front of the Kleins' place, paid the cab, and ran in. He rang the bell of their flat like fury. Klein came to the door himself, there was subdued excitement in the place, all the lights lit. "Sh!" he warned proudly, "my wife's presenting me with an addition to the family." He whipped a long black cigar out of his vest pocket, poked it at Jordan with a grin. Jordan fell back a step in sudden recollection.

"Oh, I remember now! He told me that this afternoon, he didn't come here after all, went someplace else—my kid—" He fumbled in his clothes for the slip of paper he'd written the name and address on.

"Yeah, your wife was here asking for him a little while ago. She thought he was up here too," Klein said. "I didn't know anything about it, but I heard Sammy, that's my youngster, telling her he'd gone to some other boy's house—" He broke off short in surprise, watched the other man go tumbling down the stairs again, holding a scrap of paper in one hand; looked down at his feet and saw the cellophaned cigar he'd just presented him with lying there. He bent down and picked it up, shaking his head. "No fatherly feeling at all," he muttered.

Jordan was hanging onto the paper for dear life, as

though that would get him over there quicker. Vizetelly, that was the name, why hadn't he remembered sooner! She must have beaten him to it by this time, been there and already taken the kid away. If she went home with him from there, all right, but if she took it into her poor warped mind to beat it off with him, hide herself away someplace, how was he ever going to—?

The sickening keen of a fire siren, off someplace in the distance, stopped him for a minute like a bullet, turned his spine to ice; he went right on again with a lurch. Too far away to mean anything, but Lord, what a thought that had been just now! But it didn't fade out, instead it rose and rose and rose, and suddenly it burst into a full-throated scream as the trucks went tearing across the lower end of the side street he was following, first one and then a second and then a third; and when he turned the corner he saw people running, just like he was running himself only not so fast and not so scared, toward another side street two blocks up. And that was the one the paper in his hand told him to go to.

He shot across the thronged avenue with the immunity of a drunk or a blind man, and felt some squealing car sweep his hat off his head, and didn't even blink or turn to look. *Oh no!* he was praying, *there are 20 other houses on that block, it can't be just that very one, 322, that's laying it on too thick, that's rubbing it in too strong—give a guy a break once in awhile!* He turned the corner, and he saw the ladders going up, the hoses already playing on the roof, the smoke quilting the sky, black on top, red underneath, and it was on the near side, the even-numbered side. He had to slow up, he was knocking people over every minute as the crowd tightened around him. 316—gee, he'd better get him out in a hurry, those people must live in the house right next door! 318—a cop tried to motion him back and he ducked under his arm. Then he came up flat against a solid wall of humanity dammed up by the ropes they'd already stretched out, and a yell of agony wrenched from him as his eyes went on ahead unimpeded. One more doorway, 320, with people banked up in it, kept back by a fireman, and then

the one beyond, just a hazy sketch through the smoke-pall, blurred oilskinned figures moving in and out, highlighted with orange by some hidden glare inside. Glass tinkling and the crowd around him stampeding back and axes hacking woodwork and thin screams from way up, as in an airplane, and a woman coming down a ladder with a bird cage, and somebody hollering, "My kid! My kid!" right next to him until he thought he'd go nuts. Then when he turned to look, it was himself.

He quit struggling and grappling with them after a while because he found out it used up too much strength, and he only lost ground, they shoved him further back each time. He just pleaded with them after that, and asked them over and over, and never got any answer. Then finally, it seemed like hours had gone by, they had everyone out—and no sign of his kid anywhere. He didn't even know what the people looked like, he ran amuck among the huddled survivors yelling, "Vizetelly! Vizetelly!" He found the man in as bad a shape as he was himself, gibbering in terror, "I don't know! I can't find my own! I was in the tavern on the corner when they came and told me!"

This time they had to fling him back from within the black hallway of the building itself, coughing and kicking like a maniac, and the cop they turned him over to outside had to pin him down flat on his back on the sidewalk before he'd quit struggling. "He's up there, I tell you! Why don't they get him out! I'm going to get him myself!"

"Quiet, now, quiet, or I'll have to give you the club! They've gone up again to look."

The cop had let him up again but was holding onto him, the two of them pressed flat against the wall of the adjoining building as close as they dared go, when he saw the two firemen coming down the ladder again. One of them crumpled as he touched the ground and had to be carried away. And he heard what the other one yelled hoarsely to his commanding officer, "Yeah, there is something up there in the back room of that top floor flat, can't tell if it's a kid or just a burnt log, couldn't get near enough. I'm going up

again, had to get Marty down first." A boom like dynamite from inside, as if in answer.

"There goes the roof!" said somebody. A tornado of smoke, cinders, and embers blew from the door like an explosion, swirling around them where they stood. In that instant of cringing confusion Jordan slipped the cop's revolver out of its holster with his free hand, hid it under his own coat. The man, wheezing, eyes smarting, already disheveled from their previous struggle, never missed it.

It was only later, tottering down the street alone, that he began to fully understand why he'd done it. She'd done this, like the others, and he'd known it from the beginning, that was why he had the gun on him now. Some day, sooner or later, he'd find her again. He'd never rest from now on until he had, and when he did! He didn't have to overhear what that woman tenant had been gabbling hysterically to one of the assistant marshals, to know. "I tell you I saw a woman that didn't belong in the house running out of the door only ten minutes or so before it started! I happened to be by the window, watching for my husband to come home! She was all untidy-looking and she kept looking back all the way to the corner, like she'd done something she shouldn't!" He didn't have to see the man Vizetelly straining a kid to him and rolling grateful eyes upward, to know what that "burnt log" in the top floor-rear stood for now. The only life lost, the only person missing, still unaccounted for, out of all that houseful of people—his kid and hers! It couldn't have worked out more damnably if she'd plotted it that way on purpose. And maybe she had at that, demented fire worshiper that she was! *Strongly developed maternal instinct*, and fire was happiness to her, and she'd wanted her kid happy too. He sucked in his breath as he stumbled along. He was going to go crazy himself pretty soon, if he kept on thinking of it that way. Maybe he already was.

They'd wanted to ship him off in an ambulance at first, to be treated for shock, but he'd talked them out of it. He had the cure right with him now under his coat, the best cure.

He was going home first, wait awhile, see if she'd show up not knowing that he already knew, and if she didn't, then he was going out after her.

The porter took him up when he sagged in, and stared at the strange whiteness of him, the hand clutched to his side under his coat as if he had a pain, but didn't say anything. When the operator had gone down again he got his key out and put it to the door and went in.

He was too dazed for a minute to notice that he didn't have to put the lights on, and by that time he'd already seen her, crouched away from him in the furthest corner of the living-room, terror and guilt written all over her face. There was the answer right there, no need to ask. But he did anyway. He shut the living-room door after him and said in a lifeless voice, "Did you do that to 322 tonight?"

Death must have been written on his face; she was too abjectly frightened to deny it. "I only went there—I—I—oh, Harry, I couldn't help it! I didn't want to, but I couldn't help it—my hands did it by themselves. Take me back to the hospital—"

"You'd only beat that rap again, like you did before." He was choking. "You know what you've taken from us, don't you?" She began to shake her head, faster and faster, like a pendulum. "Come closer to me, Marie. Don't look down, keep looking at my face—"

It went off with a roar that seemed to lift them both simultaneously, so close together had they come, almost touching. She didn't fall; there was a mantel behind her; she staggered backward, caught it with both upturned hands, and seemed to hang there, gripping life with ten fingers. Her eyes glazed. "You shouldn't have—done that," she whispered. "You'll wake up the kid."

The door came open behind him; he turned and saw the kid standing there, staring from one to the other. She was still upright, lower now, one hand slipped from the mantel edge. "Almighty God," he said. He stood staring at the boy. Then he said, "You go out to the telephone and say you want a policeman. You're a big guy, son, you know how to use it. Close the door. Don't stand there looking in at us."

Just because he's a big bad man
and his taste runs to arsenic
and he is subtly sneaky, diabolically
clever, fiendishly mean and quaffs
cobra venom for breakfast...

WHO'S AFRAID OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK?

who selected in cold blood these
thirteen stories by:

Ray Bradbury John Buchan
Hugh Walpole H. G. Wells
John Collier Henry S. Whitehead
H. R. Wakefield M. R. James
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