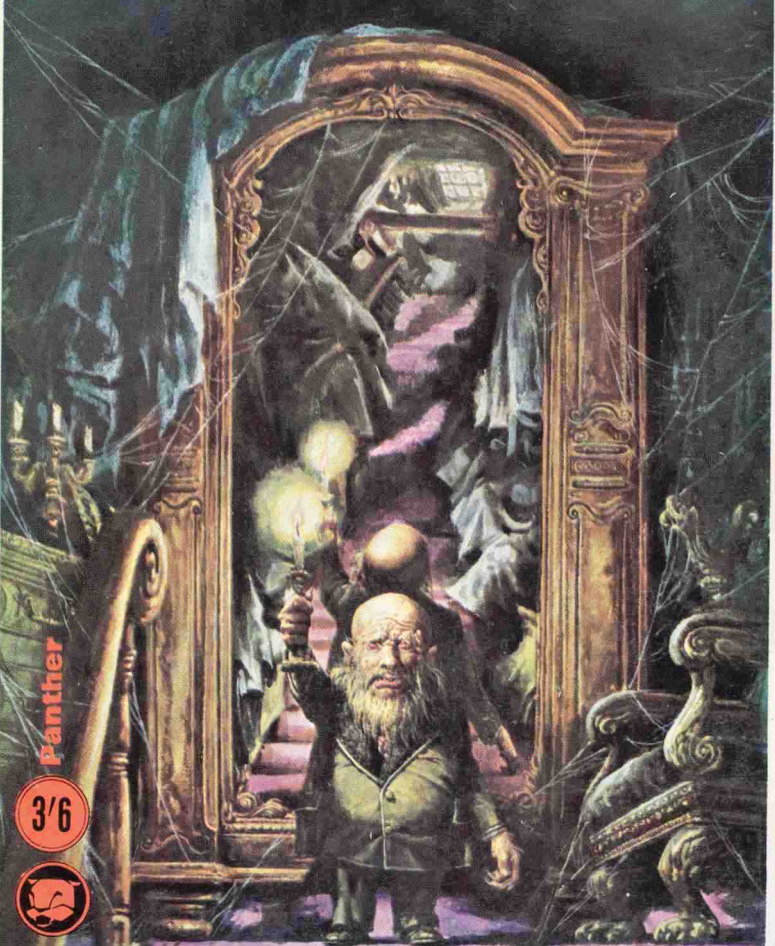
STORIES
STRANGE & SINISTER

EDITED BY LAURETTE PIZER

TALES OF THE UNCANNY, BIZARRE, AND GROTESQUE

BY JORGE LUIS BORGES GUY DE MAUPASSANT
TRUMAN CAPOTE VIRGINIA WOOLF LEO TOLSTOY
AND OTHERS



Panther

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Sorties into life's dark lands
by nine great writers who returned
to tell their tales.

Truman Capote's Miriam, for instance,
a lonely middle-aged widow, made her
sortie – a way of passing an evening – into
the darkness of her local cinema . . . and came
out no longer alone; and horrified.

De Maupassant crossed the frontier one
shocking night in his own familiar garden,
and barely survived . . . to spend the rest of
his life in a home for the insane.

The darkness closed around Yury Olesha in
a public park one brilliantly sunny afternoon
while he was waiting for his girl . . .

In a word, here are nine clawing
demonstrations of a cold truth: The
frontier of the "other place" is a
tremulous one; any of us, quite un-
wittingly, may breach it . . . but not
always return.

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A Panther Book

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Truman Capote

MIRIAM

FOR several years, Mrs. H. T. Miller had lived alone in a pleasant apartment (two rooms with kitchenette) in a remodeled brownstone near the East River. She was a widow: Mr. H. T. Miller had left a reasonable amount of insurance. Her interests were narrow, she had no friends to speak of, and she rarely journeyed farther than the corner grocery. The other people in the house never seemed to notice her: her clothes were matter of fact, her hair iron-gray, clipped and casually waved; she did not use cosmetics, her features were plain and inconspicuous, and on her last birthday she was sixty-one. Her activities were seldom spontaneous: she kept the two rooms immaculate, smoked an occasional cigarette, prepared her own meals and tended a canary.

Then she met Miriam. It was snowing that night. Mrs. Miller had finished drying the supper dishes and was thumbing through an afternoon paper when she saw an advertisement of a picture playing at a neighborhood theater. The title sounded good, so she struggled into her beaver coat, laced her galoshes and left the apartment, leaving one light burning in the foyer: she found nothing more disturbing than a

sensation of darkness.

The snow was fine, falling gently, not yet making an impression on the pavement. The wind from the river cut only at street crossings. Mrs. Miller hurried, her head bowed, oblivious as a mole burrowing a blind path. She stopped at a drugstore and bought a package of peppermints.

A long line stretched in front of the box office; she took her place at the end. There would be (a tired voice groaned) a short wait for all seats. Mrs. Miller rummaged in her leather handbag till she collected exactly the correct change for admission. The line seemed to be taking its own time and, looking around for some distraction, she suddenly became conscious of a little girl standing under the edge of the marquee.

Her hair was the longest and strangest Mrs. Miller had ever seen: absolutely silver-white, like an albino's. It flowed waist-length in smooth, loose lines. She was thin and fragilely constructed. There was a simple, special elegance in the way she stood with her thumbs in the pockets of a tailored plum-velvet coat.

Mrs. Miller felt oddly excited, and when the little girl glanced towards her, she smiled warmly. The little girl walked over and said, "Would you care to do me a favor?"

"I'd be glad to, if I can," said Mrs. Miller.

"Oh, it's quite easy. I merely want you to buy a ticket for me; they won't let me in otherwise. Here, I have the money." And gracefully she handed Mrs. Miller two dimes and a nickel.

They went into the theater together. An usherette directed them to a lounge; in twenty minutes the picture would be over.

"I feel just like a genuine criminal," said Mrs. Miller gaily, as she sat down. "I mean that sort of thing's against the law, isn't it? I do hope I haven't done the wrong thing. Your mother knows where you are, dear? I mean she does, doesn't she?"

The little girl said nothing. She unbuttoned her coat and folded it across her lap. Her dress underneath was prim and dark blue. A gold chain dangled about her neck, and her fingers, sensitive and musical-looking, toyed with it. Examining her more attentively, Mrs. Miller decided the truly distinctive feature was not her hair, but her eyes; they were hazel, steady, lacking any childlike quality whatsoever and, because of their size, seemed to consume her small face. Mrs. Miller offered a peppermint. "What's your name, dear?"

"Miriam," she said, as though, in some curious way, it were information already familiar.

"Why, isn't that funny – my name's Miriam, too. And it's not a terribly common name either. Now, don't tell me your last name's Miller!"

"Just Miriam."

"But isn't that funny?"

"Moderately," said Miriam, and rolled the peppermint on her tongue.

Mrs. Miller flushed and shifted uncomfortably. "You have such a large vocabulary for such a little girl."

"Do I?"

"Well, yes," said Mrs. Miller, hastily changing the topic too: "Do you like the movies?"

"I really wouldn't know," said Miriam. "I've never been before."

Women began filling the lounge; the rumble of the newsreel bombs exploded in the distance. Mrs. Miller rose, tucking her purse under her arm. "I guess I'd better be running now if I want to get a seat," she said. "It was nice to have met you."

Miriam nodded ever so slightly.

It snowed all week. Wheels and footsteps moved soundlessly on the street, as if the business of living continued secretly behind a pale but impenetrable curtain. In the falling quiet there was no sky or earth, only snow lifting in the wind, frosting the window glass, chilling the rooms, deadening and hushing the city. At all hours it was necessary to keep a lamp lighted, and Mrs. Miller lost track of the days: Friday was no different from Saturday and on Sunday she went to the grocery: closed, of course.

That evening she scrambled eggs and fixed a bowl of tomato soup. Then, after putting on a flannel robe and cold-creaming her face, she propped herself up in bed with a hot-water bottle under her feet. She was reading the *Times* when the doorbell rang. At first she thought it must be a mistake and whoever it was would go away. But it rang and rang and settled to a persistent buzz. She looked at the clock: a little after eleven; it did not seem possible, she was

always asleep by ten.

Climbing out of bed, she trotted barefoot across the living room. "I'm coming, please be patient." The latch was caught; she turned it this way and that way and the bell never paused an instant. "Stop it," she cried. The bolt gave way and she opened the door an inch. "What in heaven's name?"

"Hello," said Miriam.

"Oh . . . why, hello," said Mrs. Miller, stepping hesitantly into the hall. "You're that little girl."

"I thought you'd never answer, but I kept my finger on the button; I knew you were home. Aren't you glad to see me?"

Mrs. Miller did not know what to say. Miriam, she saw, wore the same plum-velvet coat and now she had also a beret to match; her white hair was braided in two shining plaits and looped at the ends with enormous white ribbons.

"Since I've waited so long, you could at least let me in," she said.

"It's awfully late. . . ."

Miriam regarded her blankly. "What difference does that make? Let me in. It's cold out here and I have on a silk dress." Then, with a gentle gesture, she urged Mrs. Miller aside and passed into the apartment.

She dropped her coat and beret on a chair. She was indeed wearing a silk dress. White silk. White silk in February. The skirt was beautifully pleated and the sleeves long; it made a faint rustle as she strolled about the room. "I like your place," she said. "I like

the rug, blue's my favorite colour." She touched a paper rose in a vase on the coffee table. "Imitation," she commented wanly. "How sad. Aren't imitations sad?" She seated herself on the sofa, daintily spreading her skirt.

"What do you want?" asked Mrs. Miller.

"Sit down," said Miriam. "It makes me nervous to see people stand."

Mrs. Miller sank to a hassock. "What do you want?" she repeated.

"You know, I don't think you're glad I came."

For a second time Mrs. Miller was without an answer; her hand motioned vaguely. Miriam giggled and pressed back on a mound of chintz pillows. Mrs. Miller observed that the girl was less pale than she remembered; her cheeks were flushed.

"How did you know where I lived?"

Miriam frowned. "That's no question at all. What's your name? What's mine?"

"But I'm not listed in the phone book."

"Oh, let's talk about something else."

Mrs. Miller said. "Your mother must be insane to let a child like you wander around at all hours of the night – and in such ridiculous clothes. She must be out of her mind."

Miriam got up and moved to a corner where a covered bird cage hung from a ceiling chain. She peeked beneath the cover. "It's a canary," she said. "Would you mind if I woke him? I'd like to hear him sing."

"Leave Tommy alone," said Mrs. Miller, anxiously. "Don't you dare wake him."

"Certainly," said Miriam. "But I don't see why I can't hear him sing." And then, "Have you anything to eat? I'm starving! Even milk and a jam sandwich would be fine."

"Look," said Mrs. Miller, arising from the hassock, "look – if I make some nice sandwiches will you be a good child and run along home? It's past midnight, I'm sure."

"It's snowing," reproached Miriam. "And cold and dark."

"Well, you shouldn't have come here to begin with," said Mrs. Miller, struggling to control her voice. "I can't help the weather. If you want anything to eat you'll have to promise to leave."

Miriam brushed a braid against her cheek. Her eyes were thoughtful, as if weighing the proposition. She turned towards the bird cage. "Very well," she said, "I promise."

How old is she? Ten? Eleven? Mrs. Miller, in the kitchen, unsealed a jar of strawberry preserves and cut four slices of bread. She poured a glass of milk and paused to light a cigarette. *And why has she come?* Her hand shook as she held the match, fascinated, till it burned her finger. The canary was singing; singing as he did in the morning and at no other time. "Miriam," she called, "Miriam, I told you not to disturb Tommy." There was no answer. She called again; all she heard was the canary. She inhaled the

cigarette and discovered she had lighted the cork-tip end and – oh, really, she mustn't lose her temper.

She carried the food in on a tray and set it on the coffee table. She saw first that the bird cage still wore its night cover. And Tommy was singing. It gave her a queer sensation. And no one was in the room. Mrs. Miller went through an alcove leading to her bedroom; at the door she caught her breath.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

Miriam glanced up and in her eyes there was a look that was not ordinary. She was standing by the bureau, a jewel case opened before her. For a minute she studied Mrs. Miller, forcing their eyes to meet, and she smiled. "There's nothing good here," she said. "But I like this." Her hand held a cameo brooch. "It's charming."

"Suppose – perhaps you'd better put it back," said Mrs. Miller, feeling suddenly the need of some support. She leaned against the door frame; her head was unbearably heavy; a pressure weighted the rhythm of her heartbeat. The light seemed to flutter defectively. "Please, child – a gift from my husband . . ."

"But it's beautiful and I want it," said Miriam. "*Give it to me.*"

As she stood, striving to shape a sentence which would somehow save the brooch, it came to Mrs. Miller there was no one to whom she might turn; she was alone; a fact that had not been among her thoughts for a long time. Its sheer emphasis was stunning. But here in her own room in the hushed snow-

city were evidences she could not ignore or, she knew with startling clarity, resist.

Miriam ate ravenously, and when the sandwiches and milk were gone, her fingers made cobweb movements over the plate, gathering crumbs. The cameo gleamed on her blouse, the blonde profile like a trick reflection of its wearer. "That was very nice," she sighed, "though now an almond cake or a cherry would be ideal. Sweets are lovely, don't you think?"

Mrs. Miller was perched precariously on the hassock, smoking a cigarette. Her hair net had slipped lopsided and loose strands straggled down her face. Her eyes were stupidly concentrated on nothing and her cheeks were mottled in red patches, as though a fierce slap had left permanent marks.

"Is there a candy – a cake?"

Mrs. Miller tapped ash on the rug. Her head swayed slightly as she tried to focus her eyes. "You promised to leave if I made the sandwiches," she said.

"Dear me, did I?"

"It was a promise and I'm tired and I don't feel well at all."

"Mustn't fret," said Miriam. "I'm only teasing."

She picked up her coat, slung it over her arm, and arranged her beret in front of a mirror. Presently she bent close to Mrs. Miller and whispered, "Kiss me good night."

"Please – I'd rather not," said Mrs. Miller.

Miriam lifted a shoulder, arched an eyebrow. "As

you like," she said, and went directly to the coffee table, seized the vase containing the paper roses, carried it to where the hard surface of the floor lay bare, and hurled it downward. Glass sprayed in all directions and she stamped her foot on the bouquet.

Then slowly she walked to the door, but before closing it she looked back at Mrs. Miller with a slyly innocent curiosity.

Mrs. Miller spent the next day in bed, rising once to feed the canary and drink a cup of tea; she took her temperature and had none, yet her dreams were feverishly agitated; their unbalanced mood lingered even as she lay staring wide-eyed at the ceiling. One dream threaded through the other like an elusively mysterious theme in a complicated symphony, and the scenes it depicted were sharply outlined, as though sketched by a hand of gifted intensity: a small girl, wearing a bridal gown and a wreath of leaves, led a gray procession down a mountain path, and among them there was unusual silence till a woman at the rear asked, "Where is she taking us?" "No one knows," said an old man marching in front. "But isn't she pretty?" volunteered a third voice. "Isn't she like a frost flower . . . so shining and white?"

Tuesday morning she woke up feeling better; harsh slats of sunlight, slanting through Venetian blinds, shed a disrupting light on her unwholesome fancies. She opened the window to discover a thawed, mild-as-spring day; a sweep of clean new clouds crumpled against a vastly blue, out-of-season sky; and across

the low line of rooftops she could see the river and smoke curving from tugboat stacks in a warm wind. A great silver truck plowed the snow-banked street, its machine sound humming on the air.

After straightening the apartment, she went to the grocer's, cashed a cheque and contined to Schrafft's where she ate breakfast and chatted happily with the waitress. Oh, it was a wonderful day – more like a holiday – and it would be so foolish to go home.

She boarded a Lexington Avenue bus and rode up to Eighty-sixth Street; it was here that she had decided to do a little shopping.

She had no idea what she wanted or needed, but she idled along, intent only upon the passers-by, brisk and preoccupied, who gave her a disturbing sense of separateness.

It was while waiting at the corner of Third Avenue that she saw the man: an old man, bowlegged and stooped under an armload of bulging packages; he wore a shabby brown coat and a checkered cap. Suddenly she realized they were exchanging a smile: there was nothing friendly about this smile, it was merely two cold flickers of recognition. But she was certain she had never seen him before.

He was standing next to an El pillar, and as she crossed the street he turned and followed. He kept quite close; from the corner of her eye she watched his reflection wavering on the shopwindows.

Then in the middle of the block she stopped and faced him. He stopped also and cocked his head, grinning. But what could she say? Do? Here, in broad

daylight on Eighty-sixth Street? It was useless and, despising her own helplessness, she quickened her steps.

Now Second Avenue is a dismal street, made from scraps and ends; part cobblestone, part asphalt, part cement; and its atmosphere of desertion is permanent. Mrs. Miller walked five blocks without meeting anyone, and all the while the steady crunch of his footfalls in the snow stayed near. And when she came to a florist's shop, the sound was still with her. She hurried inside and watched through the glass door as the old man passed; he kept his eyes straight ahead and didn't slow his pace, but he did one strange, telling thing: he tipped his cap.

"Six white ones, did you say?" asked the florist. "Yes," she told him, "white roses." From there she went to a glassware store and selected a vase, presumably a replacement for the one Miriam had broken, though the price was intolerable and the vase itself (she thought) grotesquely vulgar. But a series of unaccountable purchases had begun, as if by prearranged plan: a plan of which she had not the least knowledge or control.

She bought a bag of glazed cherries, and at a place called the Knickerbocker Bakery she paid forty cents for six almond cakes.

Within the last hour the weather had turned cold again; like blurred lenses, winter clouds cast a shade over the sun, and the skeleton of an early dusk colored the sky; a damp mist mixed with the wind and

the voices of a few children who romped high on mountains of gutter snow seemed lonely and cheerless. Soon the first flake fell, and when Mrs. Miller reached the brownstone house, snow was falling in a swift screen and foot tracks vanished as they were printed.

The white roses were arranged decoratively in the vase. The glazed cherries shone on a ceramic plate. The almond cakes, dusted with sugar, awaited a hand. The canary fluttered on its swing and picked at a bar of seed.

At precisely five the doorbell rang. Mrs. Miller *knew* who it was. The hem of her housecoat trailed as she crossed the floor. "Is that you?" she called.

"Naturally," said Miriam, the word resounding shrilly from the hall. "Open this door."

"Go away," said Mrs. Miller.

"Please hurry . . . I have a heavy package."

"Go away," said Mrs. Miller. She returned to the living room, lighted a cigarette, sat down and calmly listened to the buzzer; on and on and on. "You might as well leave. I have no intention of letting you in."

Shortly the bell stopped. For possibly ten minutes Mrs. Miller did not move. Then, hearing no sound, she concluded Miriam had gone. She tiptoed to the door and opened it a sliver; Miriam was half-reclining atop a cardboard box with a beautiful French doll cradled in her arms.

"Really, I thought you were never coming," she

said peevishly. "Here, help me get this in, it's awfully heavy."

It was not spell-like compulsion that Mrs. Miller felt, but rather a curious passivity; she brought in the box, Miriam the doll. Miriam curled up on the sofa, not troubling to remove her coat or beret, and watched disinterestedly as Mrs. Miller dropped the box and stood trembling, trying to catch her breath.

"Thank you," she said. In the daylight she looked pinched and drawn, her hair less luminous. The French doll she was loving wore an exquisite powdered wig and its idiot glass eyes sought solace in Miriam's. "I have a surprise," she continued. "Look into my box."

Kneeling, Mrs. Miller parted the flaps and lifted out another doll; then a blue dress which she recalled as the one Miriam had worn that first night at the theatre; and of the remainder she said, "It's all clothes. Why?"

"Because I've come to live with you," said Miriam, twisting a cherry stem. "Wasn't it nice of you to buy me the cherries . . . ?"

"But you can't! For God's sake go away – go away and leave me alone!"

". . . and the roses and the almond cakes? How really wonderfully generous. You know, these cherries are delicious. The last place I lived was with an old man; he was terribly poor and we never had good things to eat. But I think I'll be happy here." She paused to snuggle her doll closer. "Now, if you'll just show me where to put my things . . ."

Mrs. Miller's face dissolved into a mask of ugly red lines; she began to cry, and it was an unnatural, tearless sort of weeping, as though, not having wept for a long time, she had forgotten how. Carefully she edged backward till she touched the door.

She fumbled through the hall and down the stairs to a landing below. She pounded frantically on the door of the first apartment she came to; a short, red-headed man answered and she pushed past him. "Say, what the hell is this?" he said. "Anything wrong, lover?" asked a young woman who appeared from the kitchen, drying her hands. And it was to her that Mrs. Miller turned.

"Listen," she cried, "I'm ashamed behaving this way but – well, I'm Mrs. H. T. Miller and I live upstairs and . . ." She pressed her hands over her face. "It sounds so absurd. . . ."

The woman guided her to a chair, while the man excitedly rattled pocket change. "Yeah?"

"I live upstairs and there's a little girl visiting me, and I suppose that I'm afraid of her. She won't leave and I can't make her and – she's going to do something terrible. She's already stolen my cameo, but she's about to do something worse – something terrible!"

The man asked, "Is she a relative, huh?"

Mrs. Miller shook her head. "I don't know who she is. Her name's Miriam, but I don't know for certain who she is."

"You gotta calm down, honey," said the woman,

stroking Mrs. Miller's arm. "Harry here'll tend to this kid. Go on, lover." And Mrs. Miller said, "The door's open – 5A."

After the man left, the woman brought a towel and bathed Mrs. Miller's face. "You're very kind," Mrs. Miller said. "I'm sorry to act like such a fool, only this wicked child. . . ."

"Sure, honey," consoled the woman. "Now, you better take it easy."

Mrs. Miller rested her head in the crook of her arm; she was quiet enough to be asleep. The woman turned a radio dial; a piano and a husky voice filled the silence and the woman, tapping her foot, kept excellent time. "Maybe we oughta go up too," she said.

"I don't want to see her again. I don't want to be anywhere near her."

"Uh huh, but what you shoulda done, you shoulda called a cop."

Presently they heard the man on the stairs. He strode into the room frowning and scratching the back of his neck. "Nobody there," he said, honestly embarrassed. "She musta beat it."

"Harry, you're a jerk," announced the woman. "We been sitting here the whole time and we woulda seen . . ." she stopped abruptly, for the man's glance was sharp.

"I looked all over," he said, "and there just ain't nobody there. Nobody, understand?"

"Tell me," said Mrs. Miller, rising, "tell me, did you see a large box? Or a doll?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't."

And the woman, as if delivering a verdict, said, "Well, for cryinoutloud. . . ."

Mrs. Miller entered her apartment softly; she walked to the centre of the room and stood quite still. No, in a sense it had not changed: the roses, the cakes, and the cherries were in place. But this was an empty room, emptier than if the furnishings and familiars were not present, lifeless and petrified as a funeral parlor. The sofa loomed before her with a new strangeness: its vacancy had a meaning that would have been less penetrating and terrible had Miriam been curled on it. She gazed fixedly at the space where she remembered setting the box and, for a moment the hassock spun desperately. And she looked through the window: surely the river was real, surely snow was falling – but then, one could not be certain witness to anything: Miriam, so vividly *there* – and yet, where was she? Where, where?

As though moving in a dream, she sank to a chair. The room was losing shape; it was dark and getting darker and there was nothing to be done about it; she could not lift her hand to light a lamp.

Suddenly, closing her eyes, she felt an upward surge, like a diver emerging from some deeper, greener depth. In times of terror or immense distress, there are moments when the mind waits, as though for a revelation, while a skein of calm is woven over thought; it is like a sleep, or a supernatural trance; and during this lull one is aware of a force of quiet

reasoning: well, what if she had never really known a girl named Miriam? that she had been foolishly frightened on the street? In the end, like everything else, it was of no importance. For the only thing she had lost to Miriam was her identity, but now she knew she had found again the person who lived in this room, who cooked her own meals, who owned a canary, who was someone she could trust and believe in: Mrs. H. T. Miller.

Listening in contentment, she became aware of a double sound: a bureau drawer opening and closing; she seemed to hear it long after completion – opening and closing. Then gradually, the harshness of it was replaced by the murmur of a silk dress and this, delicately faint, was moving nearer and swelling in intensity till the walls trembled with the vibration and the room was caving under a wave of whispers. Mrs. Miller stiffened and opened her eyes to a dull, direct stare.

"Hello," said Miriam.

Guy De Maupassant

WHO KNOWS?

My God! My God! So at last I am going to write down what has happened to me. But shall I be able to? Shall I dare? – so fantastic, so inexplicable, so incomprehensible, so crazy is it.

If I were not certain of what I had seen, certain that there has been in my reasoning no faulty link, no error in my investigations, no lacuna in the relentless sequence of my observations, I would have believed myself to be merely the victim of a hallucination, the sport of a strange vision. After all, who knows?

I am today in a private asylum; but I entered it voluntarily, urged thereto by prudence, and fear. Only one living creature knows my story. The doctor here. I am going to write it. I hardly know why. To rid myself of it, for it fills my thoughts like an unendurable nightmare.

Here it is:

I have always been a recluse, a dreamer, a sort of detached philosopher, full of kindly feeling, content with little, with no bitterness against men or resentment against heaven. I lived alone, all my life, because of a sort of uneasiness that the presence of other people induces in me! How can I explain it? I could

not explain it. I don't refuse to see people, to talk to them, to dine with friends, but when I have endured their nearness for some time, even those with whom I am most intimate, they weary me, exhaust me, get on my nerves, and I suffer an increasing exasperating longing to see them go or to go myself, to be alone.

This longing is more than a desire, it is an irresistible necessity. And if I had to endure the continued presence of the people in whose company I was, if I were compelled, not to listen but to go on for any length of time hearing their conversation, some accident would certainly befall me. What? Ah, who knows? Perhaps merely a fainting fit? Yes, probably that!

I have such a passion for solitude that I cannot even endure the nearness of other people sleeping under my roof: I cannot live in Paris because of the indefinable distress I feel there. I die spiritually, and I am as tortured in my body and my nerves by the vast crowd that swarms and lives round me, even when it sleeps. Oh, the slumber of other people is more unendurable than their speech! And I can never rest when at the other side of the wall I am aware of lives held in suspense by these regular eclipses of consciousness.

Why am I so made? Who knows? The cause is perhaps quite simple. I am quickly wearied of all that exists outside myself. And there are many people similarly constituted.

There are two races dwelling on earth. Those who need other people, who are distracted, occupied, and refreshed by other people, and who are worried, ex-

hausted, and unnerved by solitude as by the ascension of a terrible glacier or the crossing of a desert; and those, on the other hand, who are wearied, bored, embarrassed, utterly fatigued by other people, while isolation calms them and the detachment and imaginative activity of their minds bathes them in peace.

In effect, this is a usual psychical phenomenon. Some people are made to live an outward life, others to live within themselves. I myself have a short and quickly exhausted power of attention to the outside world, and as soon as it has reached its limit I suffer in my whole body and my whole mind an intolerable distress.

The result is that I attach myself, that I attached myself strongly to inanimate things that assume for me the importance of living creatures, and that my house has become, had become a world where I lived a solitary and active life, surrounded by things, furniture, intimate trifles, as sympathetic to my eyes as faces. I had filled it with them little by little. I had decorated it so, and I felt myself housed, content, satisfied, as happy as in the arms of a loving woman whose familiar caress was become a calm and pleasant need.

I had had this house built in a beautiful garden which shut it off from the roads, and at the gate of a town where I could, when occasion arose, find the social resources to which, at odd moments, I felt impelled. All my servants slept in a distant building at the end of the kitchen garden, which was surrounded by a great wall. The sombre folding down of the

nights, in the silence of my habitation, lost, hidden, drowned under the leaves of great trees, was so tranquillizing, so pleasant to me, that every evening I delayed going to bed for several hours, to enjoy it the longer.

That particular day, *Sigurd* had been played at the local theater. It was the first time I had heard this beautiful fairylike musical drama, and it had given me the greatest pleasure.

I walked home, at a brisk pace, my head full of sounding rhythms, my eyes filled with visions of loveliness. It was dark, dark, so unfathomably dark that I could hardly make out the high road and several times almost went headlong into the ditch. From the toll gate to my house is about two thirds of a mile, perhaps a little more, maybe about twenty minutes slow walking. It was one o'clock in the morning, one or half past; the sky was growing faintly light in front of me, and a slip of a moon rose, the wan slip of the moon's last quarter. The crescent moon of the first quarter, that rises at four or five o'clock in the evening, is brilliant, gay, gleaming like silver, but the moon that rises after midnight is tawny, sad and sinister: it is a real Witches' Sabbath of a moon. Every walker by night must have made this observation. The moon of the first quarter, be it thin as a thread, sends out a small joyous light that fills the heart with gladness and flings clear shadows over the earth; the moon of the last quarter scarcely spreads a dying light, so wan that it hardly casts any shadow at all.

I saw from some way off the somber mass of my garden, and, sprung from I know not where, there came to me a certain uneasiness at the idea of entering it. I slackened my step. It was very mild. The heavy weight of trees wore the aspect of a tomb where my house was buried.

I opened my gateway and made my way down the long avenue of sycamore trees, which led to the house, arched and vaulted overhead like a high tunnel, crossing shadowy groves and winding round lawns where under the paling shadows clumps of flowers jeweled the ground with oval stains of indeterminate hues.

As I approached the house, a strange uneasiness took possession of me. I halted. There was no sound. There was not a breath of air in the leaves. "What's the matter with me?" I thought. For ten years I had entered in like manner without feeling the faintest shadow of disquietude. I was not afraid. I have never been afraid at night. The sight of a man, a marauder, a thief, would have filled me with fury, and I would have leaped on him without a moment's hesitation. I was armed, moreover. I had my revolver. But I did not touch it, for I wished to master this sense of terror that was stirring in me.

What was it? A presentiment? The mysterious presentiment that takes possession of one's senses when they are on the verge of seeing the inexplicable? Perhaps? Who knows?

With every step I advanced, I felt my skin creep, and when I was standing under the wall of my vast

house, with its closed shutters, I felt the need of waiting a few moments before opening the door and going inside. So I sat down on a bench under the windows of my drawing room. I remained there, a little shaken, my head leaning against the wall, my eyes open on the shadows of the trees. During these first instants, I noticed nothing unusual round me. I felt a sort of droning sound in my ears, but that often happened to me. It sometimes seems to me that I hear trains passing, that I hear clocks striking, that I hear the footsteps of a crowd.

Then shortly, these droning sounds became more distinct, more differentiated, more recognizable. I had been mistaken. It was not the usual throbbing sound of my pulse that filled my ears with these clamorings, but a very peculiar, though very confused noise that came, no doubt about it, from the interior of my house.

I made it out through the wall, this continuous noise, which was rather a disturbance than a noise, a confused movement of a crowd of things, as if all my furniture was being pushed, moved out of its place and gently dragged about.

Oh, for an appreciable time longer I doubted the evidence of my ears. But when I had pressed myself against the shutter the better to make out this strange disturbance of my house, I became convinced, certain, that something abnormal and incomprehensible was taking place in my house. I was not afraid, but I was – how shall I say it? – stunned with astonishment.

I did not draw my revolver – having a strong suspicion that I should not need it. I waited.

I waited a long time, unable to come to any decision, my mind quite lucid, but wildly anxious. I waited, standing there, listening the whole time to the noise that went on increasing: at times it rose to a violent pitch, and seemed to become a muttering of impatience, of anger, of a mysterious tumult.

Then, suddenly ashamed of my cowardice, I seized my bunch of keys, I chose the one I wanted, I thrust it in the lock, I turned it twice, and pushing the door with all my force, I sent the door clattering against the inner wall.

The crash rang out like a pistol shot, and, amazingly, from top to bottom of my house, a formidable uproar broke out in answer to this explosive sound. It was so sudden, so terrible, so deafening, that I recoiled some steps and, although I still felt it to be useless, I drew my revolver from its holster.

I went on waiting, oh, some little time. I could distinguish, now, an extraordinary tap-tapping on the steps of my staircase, on the floors, on the carpets, a tap-tapping, not of shoes, of slippers worn by human beings, but of crutches, wooden crutches, and iron crutches that rang out like cymbals. And then all at once I saw, on the threshold of my door, an armchair, my big reading chair, come swaggering out. It set off through the garden. Others followed it, the chairs out of my drawing room, then the low couches dragging themselves along like crocodiles on their short legs,

then all my chairs, leaping like goats, and the little stools trotting along like hares.

Imagine the tumult of my mind! I slipped into a grove of trees, where I stayed, crouched, watching the whole time this march-past of my furniture, for they were all taking their departure, one after the other, quickly or slowly, according to their shapes and weight. My piano, my large grand, passed, galloping like a runaway horse, with a murmur of music in its depths; the smallest objects gliding over the gravel like ants, brushes, glass dishes, goblets, where the moonlight hung glowworm lamps. The hangings slithered past in whorls, like octopuses. I saw my writing table appear, a rare piece of the last century, which contained all the letters I have received, the whole story of my heart, an old story which caused me so much suffering. And it held photographs too.

Suddenly, I was no longer afraid. I flung myself on it and seized it as one seizes a thief, as one seizes a flying woman; but it pursued its irresistible course, and in spite of my efforts, in spite of my anger, I could not retard its progress. As I was making a desperate resistance to this terrible force I fell on the ground, struggling with it. Thereupon it tumbled me over, and dragged me over the gravel, and the pieces of furniture that were following it were already beginning to walk over me, trampling over my legs and bruising them; then, when I had loosed my hold of it, the others passed over my body like a cavalry charge over a dismounted soldier.

Mad with fear at last, I managed to drag myself

out of the main avenue and to hide myself again among the trees, to watch the disappearance of the meanest, smallest, most overlooked by me, most insignificant objects that had belonged to me.

Then far away, in my house, now as full of echoing sounds as empty houses are, I heard the dreadful sound of shutting doors. They clashed shut from top to bottom of the building, until the hall door that I myself, in my mad folly, had opened for their flight, had finally shut itself, last of all.

I fled too, running towards the town, and I did not recover my self-control until I was in the streets and meeting belated wayfarers. I went and rang at the door of a hotel where I was known. I had beaten my clothes with my hands to remove the dust, and I explained that I had lost my bunch of keys which contained also the key of the kitchen garden, where my servants were sleeping in a house isolated behind the enclosing wall that preserved my fruit and my vegetables from marauding visitors.

I buried myself up to my eyes in the bed they gave me. But I could not sleep, and I waited for daybreak, listening to the beating of my heart. I had given orders that my people were to be warned at dawn, and my man knocked on my door at seven o'clock in the morning.

His face seem convulsed with emotion.

"A terrible thing happened last night, sir," he said.

"What's that?"

"The whole furniture of the house has been stolen,

sir, everything, everything, down to the very smallest articles."

This news pleased me. Why? Who knows? I had myself absolutely in hand, absolutely determined to dissimilate, to say nothing to anyone about what I had seen, to hide it: bury it in my conscience like a frightful secret. I answered:

"They must be the same people who stole my keys. We must warn the police at once. I will get up and be with you in a few moments."

The investigations lasted five months. They discovered nothing, they did not find the smallest of my possessions, not the faintest trace of the thieves. Lord! if I had told what I knew. If I had told . . . they would have shut me up: me – not the robbers, but the man who had been able to see such a thing.

Oh, I knew enough to hold my tongue. But I did not refurnish my house. It was quite useless. The thing would have happened again and gone on happening. I did not want to enter the house again. I did not enter it. I never saw it again.

I went to Paris, to a hotel, and I consulted doctors on my nervous state, which had been giving me much uneasiness since that deplorable night.

They ordered me to travel. I followed their advice.

II

I began by traveling in Italy. The sun did me good. For six months, I wandered from Genoa to Venice, Venice to Florence, Florence to Rome, Rome to

Naples. Then I went over Sicily, a country alike notable for its climate and its monuments, relics of the Greek and Norman occupation. I turned to Africa, I peacefully crossed the huge calm yellow desert over which camels, gazelles, and vagabond Arabs wander, and almost nothing haunts the light, crystalline air, neither by night nor day.

I returned to France by Marseille, and, despite the gaiety of the province, the dimmer light of the sky saddened me. Once more I felt, on returning to the Continent, the curious fancy of a sick man who believed himself cured and whom a dull pain warns that the flame of his malady is not quite extinguished.

Then I came back to Paris. A month later, I was bored with it. It was autumn, and before winter came on, I wanted to make an expedition across Normandy, with which I had no acquaintance.

I began at Rouen, of course, and for eight days I wandered ecstatically, enthusiastically, through this medieval city, in this amazing mirror of extraordinary Gothic monuments.

Then about four o'clock one afternoon, as I was attempting some unreal street in which a stream, black as the ink they call Robec Water, flows, my attention wholly fixed on the bizarre and antiquated character of the houses, was suddenly distracted by a glimpse of a line of secondhand dealers' shops which succeeded each other from door to door. How well they had chosen, these obscene traffickers in rubbish, their pitch in this fantastic alley, perched above the evil watercourse, beneath the roofs bristling with tiles and

slates on which still creaked the weathercocks of bygone days!

In the depths of those dark stairs, all higgledy-piggledy could be seen carved presses, Rouen, Neders, Moustiers, pottery, painted statues, or some in oak, Christs, Virgins, saints, church ornaments, chasubles, copes, even chalices, and even painted shrines from which the Almighty had been dismantled. Curious, are they not? these caverns in these tall houses, in these huge towns, filled from cellar to attic with every kind of article whose existence seemed ended, but which outlived their natural owners, their century, their period, their fashion, to be bought by new generations as curiosities.

My weakness for trinkets reawakened in this city of antiquaries. I went from stall to stall, crossing in two strides the bridges made of four rotten planks thrown across the nauseous Robec Water.

Heavens! What a shock! One of my most handsome wardrobes met my eyes at the end of a vault crowded with articles, looking like the entrance to the catacombs of a cemetery for old furniture. I drew nearer, trembling in every limb, trembling so much that I dared not touch it. I put out my hand, I hesitated. It was really it, after all: a unique Louis XIII wardrobe, easily recognizable by anyone who had ever seen it. Suddenly casting my eyes a little further, into the deeper shadows of the shop, I caught sight of three of my armchairs, covered with petit point tapestry; then, still further back, my two Henri II tables, so rare that people came to Paris to look at them.

Think! Think of my state of mind!

But I went on, incapable, tortured with emotion. But I went forward, for I am a brave man, as a knight of the Dark Ages thrust his way into a nest of sorcery. Step by step, I found everything which had belonged to me, my chandeliers, my books, my pictures, my hangings, my armors, everything except the desk full of my letters, which I could see nowhere.

I went on, climbing down dim galleries, climbing up to higher floors. I was alone. I shouted; no one answered. I was alone; there was no one in this vast house, tortuous as a maze.

Night fell, and I had to sit down in the shadows of my own chairs, for I would not go away. From time to time I called: "Hallo! Hallo! Is anyone there?"

I must have been there for certainly more than an hour when I heard steps, light footsteps and slow, I don't know where. I was on the point of fleeing, but taking heart, I called once more and saw a light in an adjoining room.

"Who is there?" said a voice.

I replied: "A customer."

The answer came:

"It is very late to come into shops like this."

"I have been waiting for more than an hour," I returned.

"You could come back tomorrow!"

"Tomorrow, I shall have left Rouen."

I did not dare go forward, and he did not come. All the time, I was watching the reflection of his light illuminating a tapestry on which two angels hovered

above the bodies on a battlefield. It, too, belonged to me, I said:

"Well! Are you coming?"

He answered:

"I am waiting for you."

I rose and went towards him.

In the middle of a large room stood a tiny man, tiny and very fat, the fatness of a freak, a hideous freak.

He had an extraordinary beard of straggling hair, thin-grown and yellowish, and not a hair on his head. Not a hair! As he held his candle at arm's length to see me the better, his skull looked to me like a little moon in this vast room cluttered with old furniture. His face was wrinkled and swollen, his eyes scarcely visible,

I bargained for three chairs, which were mine, and paid for them on the spot an enormous sum, giving only the number of my room at the hotel. They were to be delivered before nine o'clock on the following morning.

Then I departed. He accompanied me to the door with many polite expressions.

I at once betook me to the head police station, where I related the story of the theft of my furniture and of the discovery I had just made.

They immediately asked for information by telegram from the department which had had charge of the burglary, asking me to wait for the reply. An hour later a quite satisfactory answer arrived.

"I shall have this man arrested and questioned at once," the chief told me, "for he may possibly have

been suspicious and made away with your belongings. If you dine and come back in a couple of hours, I will have him here and make him undergo a fresh examination in your presence."

"Most certainly, sir. My warmest thanks. . . ."

I went to my hotel and dined with a better appetite than I could have believed possible. Still I was contented enough. They had him. Two hours later I went back to the chief inspector, who was waiting for me.

"Well, sir," he said, as soon as he saw me, "they haven't found your man. My fellows haven't been able to put their hands on him!"

"Ah!" I felt that I should faint. "But . . . you have found his house all right?" I asked.

"Quite. It will be watched and held until he comes back. But as for himself, vanished!"

"Vanished?"

"Vanished. Usually he spends the evenings with his neighbor, herself a dealer, a queer old witch. Widow Bidoin. She has not seen him this evening and can give no information about him. We must wait till tomorrow."

I departed. How sinister, how disturbing, how haunted the streets of Rouen seemed to me.

I slept badly enough, with nightmares to drag me out of each bout of sleep. As I did not want to appear either too worried or in too much haste, I waited on the following day until ten o'clock before going to the police station.

The dealer had not appeared. His shop remained closed.

The inspector said to me:

"I have taken all the necessary steps. The department has charge of the affair; we will go off together to this shop and have it opened, and you shall point out your belongings to me."

We were driven there in a carriage. Some policemen with a locksmith were posted in front of the shop door, which stood open.

When I entered, I found neither my wardrobe, my armchairs, nor my tables, nor anything – nothing of what had furnished my house – absolutely nothing, even though on the previous evening I could not move a step without meeting one of my pieces.

The inspector, surprised, at first looked at me with distrust.

"Good God, sir!" I said, "the disappearance of this furniture coincides amazingly with the disappearance of the dealer."

He smiled:

"True enough. You were wrong to buy and pay for those things of yours yesterday. It put him on his guard!"

I replied:

"What seems incomprehensible to me is that all the places where my furniture stood are now occupied by other pieces!"

"Oh," answered the inspector, "he had the whole night, and accomplices too, no doubt. This house probably communicates with its neighbors. Never mind, sir, I am going to move very quickly in this matter. This rogue won't keep out of our hands very

long, now we hold his retreat!"

Ah, my heart, my poor heart, how it was beating.

I stayed in Rouen for a fortnight. The man did not return. My God! My God! Is there any man alive who could confound, could overreach him? Then on the morning of the sixteenth day, I received from my gardener, the caretaker of my pillaged and still empty house, the following strange letter:

SIR:

I beg to inform you that last night there occurred something which no one can fathom, the police no more than ourselves. All the furniture has come back, everything without exception, down to the very smallest objects. The house is now exactly the same as it was on the night of the burglary. It is enough to drive one off one's head. It happened during the night of Friday-Saturday. The drive is cut up as if they had dragged everything from the gate to the door – exactly as it was on the day of the disappearance.

We await you, sir, while remaining,

Your obedient servant,

PHILIPPE RAUDIN.

Ah, no, no, no, no! I will never go back there!

I took the letter to the police inspector.

"This restitution has been made very skillfully," he said. "Let's pretend to do nothing now. We'll catch our man one of these days."

But he is not caught. No. They haven't got him, and I am as afraid of him now as if he was a wild beast lurking behind me.

Not to be found! He is not to be found, this moon-headed monster. Never will he be caught. He will never again come back to his house. What does that matter to him! I am the only person who could confront him, and I will not.

I will not! I will not! I will not!

And if he returns, if he comes back to his shop, who could prove that my furniture was in his place? Mine is the only evidence against him; and I am well aware that it is regarded with suspicion.

Oh, no, such a life was no longer bearable. And I could not keep the secret of what I had seen. I could not go on living like anyone else with the dread that such happenings would begin again.

I went to see the doctor in charge of this private asylum, and told him the whole story.

After questioning me for a long time, he said:

"Would you be willing to remain here for some time?"

"Very willing."

"You have means?"

"Yes."

"You would like separate quarters?"

"Yes."

"Would you care to see friends?"

"No, not a soul. The man from Rouen might dare, for vengeance' sake, to follow me here."

And I have been alone, alone, quite alone, for three months. I am almost at peace. I have only one fear. . . . Suppose the antique dealer went mad . . . and suppose they brought him to this retreat. . . . The prisoners themselves are not safe. . . .

Leo Tolstoy

THE PORCELAIN DOLL

(A LETTER written six months after his marriage by Tolstoy to his wife's younger sister, the Natasha of *War and Peace*. The first few lines are in his wife's handwriting, the rest in his own.)

21st March 1863

Why, Tanya, have you dried up? . . . You don't write to me at all and I so love receiving letters from you, and you have not yet replied to Levochka's (Tolstoy's) crazy epistle, of which I did not understand a word.

23rd March

There, she began to write and suddenly stopped, because she could not continue. And do you know why, Tanya dear? A strange thing has befallen her and a still stranger thing has befallen me. As you know, like the rest of us she has always been made of flesh and blood, with all the advantages and disadvantages of that condition: she breathed, was warm and sometimes hot, blew her nose (and how loud!) and so on, and above all she had control of her limbs, which – both arms and legs – could assume different positions: in a word she was corporeal like all of us. Suddenly on March 21st 1863, at ten o'clock in the

evening, this extraordinary thing befell her and me. Tanya! I know you always loved her (I do not know what feeling she will arouse in you now); I know you felt a sympathetic interest in me, and I know your reasonableness, your sane view of the important affairs of life, and your love of your parents (please prepare them and inform them of this event), and so I write to tell you just how it happened.

I got up early that day and walked and rode a great deal. We lunched and dined together and had been reading (she was still able to read) and I felt tranquil and happy. At ten o'clock I said goodnight to Auntie (Sonya was still then as usual and said she would follow me) and I went off to bed. Through my sleep I heard her open the door and heard her breathe as she undressed . . . I heard how she came out from behind the screen and approached the bed. I opened my eyes . . . and saw – not the Sonya you and I have known – but a porcelain Sonya! Made of that very porcelain about which your parents had a dispute. You know those porcelain dolls with bare cold shoulders, and necks and arms bent forward, but made of the same lump of porcelain as the body. They have black painted hair arranged in large waves, the paint of which gets rubbed off at the top, and protruding porcelain eyes that are too wide and are also painted black at the corners, and the stiff porcelain folds of their skirts are made of the same one piece of porcelain as the rest. And Sonya was like that! I touched her arm - she was smooth, pleasant to feel, and cold porcelain. I thought I was

asleep and gave myself a shake, but she remained like that and stood before me immoveable. I said: Are you porcelain? And without opening her mouth (which remained as it was, with curved lips painted bright red) she replied: Yes, I am porcelain. A shiver ran down my back. I looked at her legs: they also were porcelain and (you can imagine my horror) fixed on a porcelain stand, made of one piece with herself, representing the ground and painted green to depict grass. By her left leg, a little above and at the back of the knee, there was a porcelain column, colored brown and probably representing the stump of a tree. This too was in one piece with her. I understood that without this stump she could not remain erect, and I became very sad, as you who loved her can imagine. I still did not believe my senses and began to call her. She could not move without that stump and its base, and only rocked a little - together with the base - to fall in my direction. I heard how the porcelain base knocked against the floor. I touched her again, and she was all smooth, pleasant, and cold porcelain. I tried to lift her hand, but could not. I tried to pass a finger, or even a nail, between her elbow and her side – but it was impossible. The obstacle was the same porcelain mass, such as is made at Auerbach's, and of which sauce-boats are made. She was planned for external appearance only. I began to examine her chemise, it was all of one piece with the body, above and below. I looked more closely, and noticed that at the bottom a bit of the fold of her chemise was broken off and it showed brown. At the top of her

head it showed white where the paint had come off a little. The paint had also come off a lip in one place, and a bit was chipped off one shoulder. But it was all so well made and so natural that it was still our same Sonya. And the chemise was one I knew, with lace, and there was a knot of black hair behind, but of porcelain, and the fine slender hands, and large eyes, and the lips – all were the same, but of porcelain. And the dimple in her chin and the small bones in front of her shoulders were there too, but of porcelain. I was in a terrible state and did not know what to say or do or think. She would have been glad to help me, but what could a porcelain creature do? The half-closed eyes, the eyelashes and eyebrows, were all like her living self when looked at from a distance. She did not look at me, but past me at her bed. She evidently wanted to lie down, and rocked on her pedestal all the time. I quite lost control of myself, seized her, and tried to take her to her bed. My fingers made no impression one her cold porcelain body, and what surprised me yet more was that she had become as light as an empty flask. And suddenly she seemed to shrink, and became quite small, smaller than the palm of my hand, although she still looked just the same. I seized a pillow, put her in a corner of it, pressed down another corner with my fist, and placed her there, then I took her nightcap, folded it in four, and covered her up to the head with it. She lay there still just the same. Then I extinguished the candle and placed her under my beard. Suddenly I heard her voice from the corner of the pillow:

"Leva, why have I become porcelain?" I did not know what to reply. She said again: "Does it make any difference that I am porcelain?" I did not want to grieve her, and said that it did not matter. I felt her again in the dark – she was still as before, cold and porcelain. And her stomach was the same as when she was alive, protruding upwards – rather unnatural for a porcelain doll. Then I experienced a strange feeling. I suddenly felt it pleasant that she should be as she was, and ceased to feel surprised – it all seemed natural. I took her out, passed her from one hand to the other, and tucked her under my head. She liked it all. We fell asleep. In the morning I got up and went out without looking at her. All that had happened the day before seemed so terrible. When I returned for lunch she had again become such as she always was. I did not remind her of what had happened the day before, fearing to grieve her and Auntie. I have not yet told anyone but you about it. I thought it had all passed off, but all these days, every time we are alone together, the same thing happens. She suddenly becomes small and porcelain. In the presence of others she is just as she used to be. She is not oppressed by this, nor am I. Strange as it may seem, I frankly confess that I am glad of it, and though she is porcelain we are very happy.

I write to you of all this, dear Tanya, only that you should prepare her parents for the news, and through papa should find out from the doctors what this occurrence means, and whether it will not be bad for our expected child. Now we are alone, and she is

sitting under my neck tie and I feel how her sharp little nose cuts into my neck. Yesterday she had been left in a room by herself. I went in and saw that Dora (our little dog) had dragged her into a corner, was playing with her, and nearly broke her. I whipped Dora, put Sonya in my waistcoat pocket and took her to my study. Today however I am expecting from Tula a small wooden box I have ordered, covered outside with morocco and lined inside with raspberry-colored velvet, with a place arranged in it for her so that she can be laid in it with her elbows, head, and back all supported evenly so that she cannot break. I shall also cover it completely with chamois leather.

I had written this letter when suddenly a terrible misfortune occurred. She was standing on the table, when Natalya Petrovna pushed against her in passing, and she fell and broke off a leg above the knee with the stump. Alexey says that it can be mended with a cement made of the white of eggs. If such a recipe is known in Moscow please send me it.

Ryunosuke Akutagawa

AUTUMN MOUNTAIN

"AND speaking of Ta Ch'ih, have you ever seen his Autumn Mountain painting?"

One evening, Wang Shih-ku, who was visiting his friend Yün Nan-t'ien, asked this question.

"No, I have never seen it. And you?"

Ta Ch'ih, together with Meitao-jen and Huang-hao-shan-ch'iao, had been one of the great painters of the Mongol dynasty. As Yün Nan-t'ien replied, there passed before his eyes images of the artist's famous works, the Sandy Shore painting and the Joyful Spring picture scroll.

"Well, strange to say," said Wang Shih-ku, "I'm really not sure whether or not I have seen it. In fact..."

"You don't know whether you have seen it or you haven't?" said Yün Nan-t'ien, looking curiously at his guest. "Do you mean that you've seen an imitation?"

"No, not an imitation. I saw the original. And it is not I alone who have seen it. The great critics Yen-k'o and Lien-chou both became involved with the Autumn Mountain." Wang Shih-ku sipped his tea and smiled thoughtfully. "Would it bore you to hear about it?"

"Quite the contrary," said Yün Nan-t'ien, bowing his head politely. He stirred the flame in the copper lamp.

At the time (began Wang Shih-ku) the old master Yüan Tsai was still alive. One evening while he was discussing paintings with Yen-k'o, he asked him whether he had ever seen Ta Ch'ih's Autumn Mountain. As you know, Yen-k'o made a veritable religion of Ta Ch'ih's painting and was certainly not likely to have missed any of his works. But he had never set eyes on this Autumn Mountain.

"No, I haven't seen it," he answered shamefacedly, "and I've never even heard of its existence."

"In that case," said Yüan Tsai, "please don't miss the first opportunity you have of seeing it. As a work of art it's on an even higher level than his Summer Mountain or Wandering Storm. In fact, I'm not sure that it isn't the finest of all Ta Ch'ih's paintings."

"Is it really such a masterpiece? Then I must do my best to see it. May I ask who owns this painting?"

"It's in the house of a Mr. Chang in the County of Jun. If you ever have occasion to visit the Chin-shan Temple, you should call on him and see the picture. Allow me to give you a letter of introduction."

As soon as Yen-k'o received Yüan Tsai's letter, he made plans to set out for the County of Jun. A house which harbored so precious a painting as this would, he thought, be bound to have other great works of different periods. Yen-k'o was quite giddy with anticipation as he started out.

When he reached the County of Jun, however, he was surprised to find that Mr. Chang's house, though imposing in structure, was dilapidated. Ivy was coiled about the walls, and in the garden grass and weeds grew rank. As the old man approached, chicken, ducks, and other barnyard fowl looked up, as if surprised to see any stranger enter here. For a moment he could not help doubting Yüan Tsai's words and wondering how a masterpiece of Ta Ch'ih's could possibly have found its way into such a house. Upon a servant's answering his knock, he handed over the letter, explaining that he had come from far in the hope of seeing the Autumn Mountain.

He was led almost immediately into the great hall. Here again, though the divans and tables of red sandalwood stood in perfect order, a moldy smell hung over everything and an atmosphere of desolation had settled even on the tiles. The owner of the house, who now appeared, was an unhealthy-looking man; but he had a pleasant air about him and his pale face and delicate hands bore signs of nobility. Yen-k'o, after briefly introducing himself, lost no time in telling his host how grateful he would be if he might be shown the famous Ta Ch'ih painting. There was an urgency in the master's words, as if he feared that were he not to see the great painting at once, it might somehow vanish like a mist.

Mr. Chang assented without hesitation and had the painting hung on the bare wall of the great hall.

"This," he said, " is the Autumn Mountain to which you refer."

At the first glance Yen-k'o let out a gasp of admiration. The dominant color was a dark green. From one end to the other a river ran its twisting course; bridges crossed the river at various places and along its banks were little hamlets. Dominating it all rose the main peak of the mountain range, before which floated peaceful wisps of autumn cloud. The mountain and its neighboring hills were fresh green, as if newly washed by rain, and there was an uncanny beauty in the red leaves of the bushes and thickets scattered along their slopes. This was no ordinary painting, but one in which both design and color had reached an apex of perfection. It was a work of art instinct with the classical sense of beauty.

"Well, what do you think of it? Does it please you?" said Mr. Chang, peering at Yen-k'o with a smile.

"Oh, it is truly of godlike quality!" cried Yen-k'o, while he stared at the picture in awe. "Yüan Tsai's lavish praise was more than merited. Compared to this painting, everything I have seen until now seems second-rate."

"Really? You find it such a masterpiece?"

Yen-k'o could not help turning a surprised look at his host. "Can you doubt it?"

"Oh no, it isn't that I have any doubts," said Mr. Chang, and he blushed with confusion like a schoolboy. Looking almost timidly at the painting, he continued: "The fact is that each time I look at this picture I have the feeling that I am dreaming, though my eyes are wide open. I cannot help feeling that it is

I alone who see its beauty, which is somehow too intense for this world of ours. What you just said brought back these strange feelings."

But Yen-k'o was not much impressed by his host's evident attempt at self-vindication. His attention was absorbed by the painting, and Mr. Chang's speech seemed to him merely designed to hide a deficiency in critical judgment.

Soon after, Yen-k'o left the desolate house.

As the weeks passed, the vivid image of the Autumn Mountain remained fresh in Yen-k'o's mind (continued Wang Shih-ku after accepting another cup of tea). Now that he had seen Ta Ch'ih's masterpiece, he felt ready to give up anything whatsoever to possess it. Inveterate collector that he was, he knew that not one of the great works that hung in his own house – not even Li Ying-ch'iu's Floating Snowflakes, for which he had paid five hundred taels of silver – could stand comparison with that transcendent Autumn Mountain.

While still sojourning in the County of Jun, he sent an agent to the Chang house to negotiate for the sale of the painting. Despite repeated overtures, he was unable to persuade Mr. Chang to enter into any arrangement. On each occasion that pallid gentleman would reply that while he deeply appreciated the master's admiration of the Autumn Mountain and while he would be quite willing to lend the painting, he must ask to be excused from actually parting with it.

These refusals only served to strengthen the impetuous Yen-k'o's resolve. "One day," he promised himself, "that great picture will hang in my own hall." Confident of the eventual outcome, he finally resigned himself to returning home and temporarily abandoning the Autumn Mountain.

"About a year later, in the course of a further visit to the County of Jun, he tried calling once more at the house of Mr. Chang. Nothing had changed: the ivy was still coiled in disorder about the walls and fences, and the garden was covered with weeds. But when the servant answered his knock, Yen-k'o was told that Chang was not in residence. The old man asked if he might have another look at the Autumn Mountain despite the owner's absence, but his importunacy was of no avail: the servant repeated that he had no authority to admit anyone until his master returned. As Yen-k'o persisted, the man finally shut the door in his face. Overcome with chagrin, Yen-k'o had to leave the house and the great painting that lay somewhere in one of the dilapidated rooms.

Wang Shih-ku paused for a moment.

"All that I have related so far," he said, "I heard from the master Yen-k'o himself."

"But tell me," said Yün Nan-t'ien, stroking his white beard, "did Yen-k'o ever really see the Autumn Mountain?"

"He said that he saw it. Whether or not he did, I cannot know for certain. Let me tell you the sequel, and

then you can judge for yourself."

Wang Shih-ku continued his story with a concentrated air, and now he was no longer sipping his tea.

When Yen-k'o told me all this (said Wang Shih-ku) almost fifty years had passed since his visits to the County of Jun. The master Yüan Tsai was long since dead and Mr. Chang's large house had already passed into the hands of two successive generations of his family. There was no telling where the Autumn Mountain might be – nor if the best parts of the scroll might not have suffered hopeless deterioration. In the course of our talk old Yen-k'o described that mysterious painting so vividly that I was almost convinced I could see it before my eyes. It was not the details that had impressed the master but the indefinable beauty of the picture as a whole. Through the words of Yen-k'o, that beauty had entered into my heart as well as his.

It happened that, about a month after my meeting with Yen-k'o, I had myself to make a journey to the southern provinces, including the County of Jun. When I mentioned this to the old man, he suggested that I go and see if I could not find the Autumn Mountain. "If that painting ever comes to light again," he said, "it will indeed be a great day for the world of art."

Needless to say, by this time I also was anxious to see the painting, but my journey was crowded and it soon became clear that I would not find time to visit

Mr. Chang's house. Meanwhile, however, I happened to hear a report that the Autumn Mountain had come into the hands of a certain nobleman by the name of Wang. Having learned of the painting, Mr. Wang had despatched a messenger with greetings to Chang's grandson. The latter was said to have sent back with the messenger not only the ancient family documents and the great ceremonial cauldron which had been in the family for countless generations, but also a painting which fitted the description of Ta Ch'ih's Autumn Mountain. Delighted with these gifts, Mr. Wang had arranged a great banquet for Chang's grandson, at which he had placed the young man in the seat of honor and regaled him with the choicest delicacies, gay music, and lovely girls; in addition he had given him one thousand pieces of gold.

On hearing this report I almost leaped with joy. Despite the vicisitudes of half a century, it seemed that the Autumn Mountain was still safe! Not only that, but it actually had come within my range. Taking along only the barest necessities, I set out at once to see the painting.

I still vividly remember the day. It was a clear, calm afternoon in early summer and the peonies were proudly in bloom in Mr. Wang's garden. On meeting Mr. Wang, my face broke into a smile of delight even before I had completed my ceremonial bow. "To think that the Autumn Mountain is in this very house!" I cried. "Yen-k'o spent all those years in

vain attempts to see it again – and now I am to satisfy my own ambition without the slightest effort. . . ."

"You come at an auspicious time," replied Mr. Wang. "It happens that today I am expecting Yen-k'o himself, as well as the great critic Lien-chou. Please come inside, and since you are the first to arrive you shall be the first to see the painting."

Mr. Wang at once gave instructions for the Autumn Mountain to be hung on the wall. And then it all leaped forth before my eyes: the little villages on the river, the flocks of white cloud floating over the valley, the green of the towering mountain range which extended into the distance like a succession of folding-screens – the whole world, in fact, that Ta Ch'ih had created, a world far more wonderful than our own. My heart seemed to beat faster as I gazed intently at the scroll on the wall.

These clouds and mists and hills and valleys were unmistakably the work of Ta Ch'ih. Who but Ta Ch'ih could carry the art of drawing to such perfection that every brush-stroke became a thing alive? Who but he could produce colors of such depth and richness, and at the same time hide all mechanical trace of brush and paint? And yet . . . and yet I felt at once that this was not the same painting that Yen-k'o had seen once long ago. No, no, a magnificent painting it surely was, yet just as surely not the unique painting which he had described with such religious awe!

Mr. Wang and his entourage had gathered around

me and were watching my expression, so I hastened to express my enthusiasm. Naturally I did not want him to doubt the authenticity of his picture, yet it was clear that my words of praise failed to satisfy him. Just then Yen-k'o himself was announced – he who had first spoken to me of this Autumn Mountain. As the old man bowed to Mr. Wang, I could sense the excitement inside him, but no sooner had his eyes settled on the scroll than a cloud seemed to pass before his face.

"What do you think of it, Master?" asked Mr. Wang, who had been carefully observing him. "We have just heard the teacher Wang Shih-ku's enthusiastic praise, but . . ."

"Oh, you are sir, a very fortunate man to have acquired this painting," answered Yen-k'o promptly "Its presence in your house will add lustre to all your other treasures."

Yen-k'o's courteous words only seemed to deepen Mr. Wang's anxiety; he, like me, must have heard in them a note of insincerity. I think we were all a bit relieved when Lien-chou, the famous critic, made his appearance at this juncture. After bowing to us, he turned to the scroll and stood looking at it silently, chewing his long moustaches.

"This, apparently, is the same painting that the master Yen-k'o last saw half a century ago," Mr. Wang explained to him. "Now I would much like to hear your opinion of the work. Your candid opinion," Mr. Wang added, forcing a smile.

Lien-chou sighed and continued to look at the

picture. Then he took a deep breath and, turning to Mr. Wang, said: "This, sir, is probably Ta Ch'ih's greatest work. Just see how the artist has shaded those clouds. What power there was in his brush! Note also the color of his trees. And then that distant peak which brings the whole composition to life." As he spoke, Lien-chou pointed to various outstanding features of the painting, and needless to say, a look of relief, then of delight, spread over Mr. Wang's face.

Meanwhile I secretly exchanged glances with Yen-k'o. "Master," I whispered, "is that the real Autumn Mountain?" Almost imperceptibly the old man shook his head, and there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"It's all like a dream," he murmured. "I really can't help wondering if that Mr. Chang wasn't some sort of hobgoblin."

"So that is the story of the Autumn Mountain," said Wang Shih-ku after a pause, and took a sip of his tea. "Later on it appears that Mr. Wang made all sorts of exhaustive enquiries. He visited Mr. Chang, but when he mentioned to him the Autumn Mountain, the young man denied all knowledge of any other version. So one cannot tell if that Autumn Mountain which Yen-k'o saw all those years ago is not even now hidden away somewhere. Or perhaps the whole thing was just a case of faulty memory on an old man's part. It would seem unlikely, though, that Yen-k'o's story about visiting Mr. Chang's house to see the Autumn Mountain was not based on solid fact."

"Well, in any case the image of that strange painting is no doubt engraved forever on Yen-k'o's mind. And on yours too."

"Yes," said Wang Shih-ku, "I still see the dark green of the mountain rock, as Yen-k'o described it all those years ago. I can see the red leaves of the bushes as if the painting were before my eyes this very moment."

"So even if it never existed, there is not really much cause for regret!"

The two men laughed and clapped their hands with delight.

Virginia Woolf

LAPPIN AND LAPINOVA

THEY were married. The wedding march pealed out. The pigeons fluttered. Small boys in Eton jackets threw rice; a fox terrier sauntered across the path; and Ernest Thorburn led his bride to the car through that small inquisitive crowd of complete strangers which always collects in London to enjoy other people's happiness or unhappiness. Certainly he looked handsome and she looked shy. More rice was thrown, and the car moved off.

That was on Tuesday. Now it was Saturday. Rosalind had still to get used to the fact that she was Mrs. Ernest Thorburn. Perhaps she never would get used to the fact that she was Mrs. Ernest Anybody, she thought, as she sat in the bow window of the hotel looking over the lake to the mountains and waited for her husband to come down to breakfast. Ernest was a difficult name to get used to. It was not the name she would have chosen. She would have preferred Timothy, Anthony, or Peter. He did not look like Ernest either. The name suggested the Albert Memorial, mahogany sideboards, steel engravings of the Prince Consort with his family – her mother-in-law's dining room in Porchester Terrace in short.

But here he was. Thank goodness he did not look like Ernest – no. But what did he look like? She glanced at him sideways. Well, when he was eating toast he looked like a rabbit. Not that anyone else would have seen a likeness to a creature so diminutive and timid in this spruce, muscular young man with the straight nose, the blue eyes, and the very firm mouth. But that made it all the more amusing. His nose twitched very slightly when he ate. So did her pet rabbit's. She kept watching his nose twitch; and then she had to explain, when he caught her looking at him, why she laughed.

"It's because you're like a rabbit, Ernest," she said. "Like a wild rabbit," she added, looking at him. "A hunting rabbit; a King Rabbit; a rabbit that makes laws for all the other rabbits."

Ernest had no objection to being that kind of rabbit, and since it amused her to see him twitch his nose – he had never known that his nose twitched – he twitched it on purpose. And she laughed and laughed; and he laughed too, so that the maiden ladies and the fishing man and the Swiss waiter in his greasy black jacket all guessed right; they were very happy. But how long does such happiness last? they asked themselves; and each answered according to his own circumstances.

At lunch time, seated on a clump of heather beside the lake, "Lettuce, rabbit?" said Rosalind, holding out the lettuce that had been provided to eat with the hard-boiled eggs. "Come and take it out of my hand," she added, and he stretched out and nibbled the lettuce and twitched his nose.

"Good rabbit, nice rabbit," she said, patting him, as she used to pat her tame rabbit at home. But that was absurd. He was not a tame rabbit, whatever he was. She turned it into French "Lapin," she called him. But whatever he was, he was not a French rabbit. He was simply and solely English – born at Porchester Terrace, educated at Rugby; now a clerk in His Majesty's Civil Service. So she tried "Bunny" next; but that was worse. "Bunny" was someone plump and soft and comic; he was thin and hard and serious. Still, his nose twitched. "Lappin," she exclaimed suddenly; and gave a little cry as if she had found the very word she looked for.

"Lappin, Lappin, King Lappin," she repeated. It seemed to suit him exactly; he was not Ernest, he was King Lappin. Why? She did not know.

When there was nothing new to talk about on their long solitary walks – and it rained, as everyone had warned them that it would rain; or when they were sitting over the fire in the evening, for it was cold, and the maiden ladies had gone and the fishing man, and the waiter only came if you rang the bell for him, she let her fancy play with the story of the Lappin tribe. Under her hands – she was sewing; he was reading – they became very real, very vivid, very amusing. Ernest put down the paper and helped her. There were the black rabbits and the red; there were the enemy rabbits and the friendly. There were the wood in which they lived and the outlying prairies and the swamp. Above all there was King Lappin, who far, from having only the one trick – that he twitched his

nose – became as the days passed an animal of the greatest character; Rosalind was always finding new qualities in him. But above all he was a great hunter.

"And what," said Rosalind, on the last day of the honeymoon, "did the King do today?"

In fact they had been climbing all day; and she had worn a blister on her heel; but she did not mean that.

"Today," said Ernest, twitching his nose as he bit the end off his cigar, "he chased a hare." He paused; struck a match, and twitched again.

"A woman hare," he added.

"A white hare!" Rosalind exclaimed, as if she had been expecting this. "Rather a small hare; silver gray; with big bright eyes?"

"Yes," said Ernest, looking at her as she had looked at him, "a smallish animal; with eyes popping out of her head, and two little front paws dangling." It was exactly how she sat, with her sewing dangling in her hands; and her eyes, that were so big and bright, were certainly a little prominent.

"Ah, Lapinova," Rosalind murmured.

"Is that what she's called?" said Ernest – "the real Rosalind?" He looked at her. He felt very much in love with her.

"Yes; that's what she's called," said Rosalind. "Lapinova." And before they went to bed that night it was all settled. He was King Lappin; she was Queen Lapinova. They were the very opposite of each other; he was bold and determined; she wary and undependable. He ruled over the busy world of rabbits; her world was a desolate, mysterious place,

which she ranged mostly by moonlight. All the same, their territories touched, they were King and Queen.

Thus when they came back from their honeymoon they possessed a private world, inhabited, save for the one white hare, entirely by rabbits. No one guessed that there was such a place, and that of course made it all the more amusing. It made them feel, more even than most young married couples, in league together against the rest of the world. Often they looked slyly at each other when people talked about rabbits and woods and traps and shooting. Or they winked furtively across the table when Aunt Mary said that she could never bear to see a hare in a dish – it looked so like a baby; or when John, Ernest's sporting brother, told them what price rabbits were fetching that autumn in Wiltshire, skins and all. Sometimes when they wanted a gamekeeper, or a poacher, or a Lord of the Manor, they amused themselves by distributing the parts among their friends. Ernest's mother, Mrs. Reginald Thorburn, for example, fitted the part of the Squire to perfection. But it was all secret – that was the point of it; nobody save themselves knew that such a world existed.

Without that world, how, Rosalind wondered that winter, could she have lived at all? For instance, there was the golden-wedding party, when all the Thorburns assembled at Porchester Terrace to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of that union which had been so blessed – had it not produced Ernest Thorburn? and so fruitful – had it not produced

nine other sons and daughters into the bargain, many themselves married and also fruitful? She dreaded that party. But it was inevitable. As she walked upstairs she felt bitterly that she was an only child and an orphan at that, a mere drop among all those Thorburns assembled in the great drawing room with the shiny satin wallpaper and the lustrous family portraits. The living Thorburns much resembled the painted; save that instead of painted lips they had real lips; out of which came jokes; jokes about schoolrooms, and how they had pulled the chair from under the governess; jokes about frogs and how they had put them between the virgin sheets of maiden ladies. As for herself, she had never even made an apple-pie bed. Holding her present in her hand she advanced toward her mother-in-law sumptuous in yellow satin; and toward her father-in-law decorated with a rich yellow carnation. All round them on tables and chairs there were golden tributes, some nestling in cotton wool; others branching resplendent - candlesticks, cigar boxes, chains, each stamped with the goldsmith's proof that it was solid gold, hallmarked, authentic. But her present was only a little pinchbeck box pierced with holes; an old sand caster, an eighteenth-century relic, once used to sprinkle sand over wet ink. Rather a senseless present she felt – in an age of blotting paper; and as she proffered it, she saw in front of her the stubby black handwriting in which her mother-in-law when they were engaged had expressed the hope that "my son will make you happy." No, she was not happy. Not

at all happy. She looked at Ernest, straight as a ramrod with a nose like all the noses in the family portraits; a nose that never twitched at all.

Then they went down to dinner. She was half hidden by the great chrysanthemums that curled their red and gold petals into large tight balls. Everything was gold. A gold-edged card with gold initials intertwined recited the list of all the dishes that would be set one after another before them. She dipped her spoon in a plate of clear golden fluid. The raw white fog outside had been turned by the lamps into a golden mesh that blurred the edges of the plates and gave the pineapples a rough golden skin. Only she herself in her white wedding dress peering ahead of her with her prominent eyes seemed insoluble as an icicle.

As the dinner wore on, however, the room grew steamy with heat. Beads of perspiration stood out on the men's foreheads. She felt that her icicle was being turned to water. She was being melted; dispersed; dissolved into nothingness; and would soon faint. Then through the surge in her head and the din in her ears she heard a woman's voice exclaim, "But they breed so!"

The Thorburns – yes; they breed so, she echoed, looking at all the round red faces that seemed doubled in the giddiness that overcame her and magnified in the gold mist that enhaloed them. "They breed so." Then John bawled:

"Little devils! . . . Shoot 'em! Jump on 'em with

big boots! That's the only way to deal with em' . . . rabbits!"

At that word, that magic word, she revived. Peeping between the chrysanthemums she saw Ernest's nose twitch. It rippled, it ran with successive twitches. And at that a mysterious catastrophe befell the Thorburns. The golden table became a moor with the gorse in full bloom; the din of voices turned to one peal of lark's laughter ringing down from the sky. It was a blue sky – clouds passed slowly. And they had all been changed – the Thorburns. She looked at her father-in-law, a furtive little man with dyed mustaches. His foible was collecting – seals, enamel boxes, trifles from eighteenth-century dressing tables which he hid in the drawers of his study from his wife. Now she saw him as he was – a poacher, stealing off with his coat bulging with pheasants and partridges to drop them stealthily into a three-legged pot in his smoky little cottage. That was her real father-in-law – a poacher. And Celia, the unmarried daughter, who always nosed out other people's secrets, the little thing they wished to hide – she was a white ferret with pink eyes and a nose clotted with earth from her horrid underground nosings and pokings. Slung round men's shoulders, in a net, and thrust down a hole – it was a pitiable life – Celia's; it was none of her fault. So she saw Celia. And then she looked at her mother-in-law – whom they dubbed the Squire. Flushed, coarse, a bully – she was all that, as she stood returning thanks, but now that Rosalind – that

is Lapinova – saw her, she saw behind her the decayed family mansion, the plaster peeling off the walls, and heard her, with a sob in her voice, giving thanks to her children (who hated her) for a world that had ceased to exist. There was a sudden silence. They all stood with their glasses raised; they all drank; then it was over.

"Oh, King Lappin!" she cried as they went home together in the fog, "if your nose hadn't twitched just at that moment, I should have been trapped!"

"But you're safe," said King Lappin, pressing her paw.

"Quite safe," she answered.

And they drove back through the Park, King and Queen of the marsh, of the mist, and of the gorse-scented moor.

Thus time passed; one year; two years of time. And on a winter's night, which happened by a coincidence to be the anniversary of the golden-wedding party – but Mrs. Reginald Thorburn was dead; the house was to let; and there was only a caretaker in residence – Ernest came home from the office. They had a nice little home; half a house above a saddler's shop in South Kensington, not far from the tube station. It was cold, with fog in the air, and Rosalind was sitting over the fire, sewing.

"What d'you think happened to me today?" she began as soon as he had settled himself down with his legs stretched to the blaze. "I was crossing the stream when –"

"What stream?" Ernest interrupted her.

"The stream at the bottom, where our wood meets the black wood," she explained.

Ernest looked completely blank for a moment.

"What the deuce are you talking about?" he asked.

"My dear Ernest!" she cried in dismay. "King Lappin," she added, dangling her little front paws in the firelight. But his nose did not twitch. Her hands – they turned to hands – clutched the stuff she was holding; her eyes popped half out of her head. It took him five minutes at least to change from Ernest Thorburn to King Lappin; and while she waited she felt a load on the back of her neck, as if somebody were about to wring it. At last he changed to King Lappin; his nose twitched; and they spent the evening roaming the woods much as usual.

But she slept badly. In the middle of the night she woke, feeling as if something strange had happened to her. She was stiff and cold. At last she turned on the light and looked at Ernest lying beside her. He was sound asleep. He snored. But even though he snored, his nose remained perfectly still. It looked as if it had never twitched at all. Was it possible that he was really Ernest; and that she was really married to Ernest? A vision of her mother-in-law's dining room came before her; and there they sat, she and Ernest, grown old, under the engravings, in front of the sideboard. . . . It was their golden-wedding day. She could not bear it.

"Lappin. King Lappin!" she whispered, and for a moment his nose seemed to twitch of its own accord.

But he still slept. "Wake up, Lappin, wake up!" she cried.

Ernest woke; and seeing her sitting bolt upright beside him he asked:

"What's the matter?"

"I thought my rabbit was dead!" she whimpered Ernest was angry.

"Don't talk such rubbish, Rosalind," he said. "Lie down and go to sleep."

He turned over. In another moment he was sound asleep and snoring.

But she could not sleep. She lay curled up on her side of the bed, like a hare in its form. She had turned out the light, but the street lamp lit the ceiling faintly, and the trees outside made a lazy network over it as if there were a shadowy grove on the ceiling in which she wandered, turning, twisting, in and out, round and round, hunting, being hunted, hearing the bay of hounds and horns; flying, escaping . . . until the maid drew the blinds and brought their early tea.

Next day she could settle to nothing. She seemed to have lost something. She felt as if her body had shrunk; it had grown small, and black and hard. Her joints seemed stiff too, and when she looked in the glass, which she did several times as she wandered about the flat, her eyes seemed to burst out of her head, like currants in a bun. The rooms also seemed to have shrunk. Large pieces of furniture jutted out at odd angles and she found herself knocking against them. At last she put on her hat and went out. She walked along the Cromwell Road; and every room

she passed and peered into seemed to be a dining room where people sat eating under steel engravings, with thick yellow lace curtains and mahogany sideboards. At last she reached the Natural History Museum; she used to like it when she was a child. But the first thing she saw when she went in was a stuffed hare standing on sham snow with pink glass eyes. Somehow it made her shiver all over. Perhaps it would be better when dusk fell. She went home and sat over the fire, without a light, and tried to imagine that she was out alone on a moor; and there was a stream rushing; and beyond the stream a dark wood. But she could get no further than the stream. At last she squatted down on the bank on the wet grass, and sat crouched in her chair, with her hands dangling empty, and her eyes glazed, like glass eyes, in the firelight. Then there was the crack of a gun. . . . She started as if she had been shot. It was only Ernest, turning his key in the door. She waited, trembling. He came in and switched on the light. There he stood tall, handsome, rubbing his hands that were red with cold.

"Sitting in the dark?" he said.

"Oh, Ernest, Ernest!" she cried, starting up in her chair.

"Well, what's up, now?" he asked briskly, warming his hands at the fire.

"It's Lapinova . . ." she faltered, glancing wildly at him out of her great startled eyes. "She's gone, Ernest. I've lost her!"

Ernest frowned. He pressed his lips tight together. "Oh, that's what's up, is it?" he said, smiling rather

grimly at his wife. For ten seconds he stood there, silent; and she waited, feeling hands tightening at the back of her neck.

"Yes," he said at length. "Poor Lapinova. . . ." He straightened his tie at the looking glass over the mantelpiece.

"Caught in a trap," he said, "killed," and sat down and read the newspaper.

So that was the end of that marriage.

Marcel Ayme

THE UBIQUITOUS WIFE

ONCE, in Montmartre, in the rue de l'Abreuvoir, there lived a young woman by the name of Sabina who possessed the gift of ubiquity. Whenever she wished, she was able to multiply herself and be at the same time, in body and in spirit, in as many places as she pleased. Since she was married and such a rare gift could not have failed to disturb her husband, she was forced to keep this knowledge to herself and she seldom utilized her gift except in her apartment when she was quite alone. In the morning, for instance, when she was dressing, she doubled herself or tripled herself for the added convenience of studying her features or her figure in the mirror. Her examination ended, she would hurry to reassemble, that is, to melt back into one and the same person.

Antoine Lemurier, her husband, an assistant in the legal department of the S.B.N.C.A., suspected nothing and thought, of course, that he had, like everyone else in the world, an indivisible wife.

One day, coming home unexpectedly, he found himself, however, in the presence of three absolutely identical wives, all in practically the same position, gazing at him with their six eyes the same limpid

blue, before whose gaze he stood with his mouth as open as a sprung barrel-head. When Sabina immediately reassembled, he thought he was the victim of some kind of illness, an opinion in which he was later confirmed by the family doctor who diagnosed a glandular insufficiency and prescribed expensive remedies.

One April evening, after dinner, Antoine Lemurier was checking over some accounts at the dining room table and Sabina, in an armchair, was reading a moving picture magazine. Lifting his eyes toward his wife, he was surprised at her position in the chair and the expression on her face. Her head was drooped on her shoulder, and she had let her magazine slip to the floor. Her eyes shone with a soft glow, her lips smiled, her whole face was resplendent with ineffable joy. Moved and marvelling, Antoine tiptoed to her chair and leaned over devotedly, but she drew back with an impatient movement he could not understand.

Eight days before, at the corner of the Avenue Junot, Sabina had run into a young fellow of about twenty-five, with black eyes. He deliberately blocked her passing and said: "Madame." And Sabina, her chin in the air and her eyes flashing, had said: "But Monsieur!" Barely a week later, she found herself, that April evening, at the same moment in her own home and at the young man's with the black eyes, whose real name was Théorème and who pretended to be a painter.

At the very moment she was shying away from her

husband, sending him back to his accounts, Théorème, in his studio in the rue Chevalier-de-la-Barre, was holding the hands of the young woman and saying: "My heart, my wings, my soul!" and other pretty things which come easily to the lips of a lover in the first days of his tenderness. Sabina had promised herself to reassemble at ten o'clock in the evening, and not to consent to a single important sacrifice, but, at midnight, she was still at Théorème's and her scruples had been reduced to little more than remorse. The following day she did not reassemble until two o'clock in the morning and the days after that it was even later.

Each evening, Antoine Lemurier marvelled at the face of his wife as it glowed in an expression of a joy so wonderful that she seemed no longer to be of this earth. One day when he was exchanging confidences with a colleague in his office, he let himself go so far as to say in a moment of emotion: "If you could only see my wife when we sit up together in the evening in the dining room! You would think that she spoke with the angels."

For four months, Sabina continued to speak with the angels. Her vacation that year was the most wonderful of her life. She was, at the same time, on a lake in Auvergne with Lemurier and at a little beach in Brittany with Théorème. "I have never seen you so beautiful," her husband told her. "Your eyes are like the lake at seven-thirty in the morning."

Meantime, on the sands of the little Breton beach, Sabina tanned herself in the sun with Théorème, both

of them nearly naked. The young man with the black eyes said nothing, as if sunk in a sentiment so profound that words could not express it; actually it was because he was already repeating over and over the same things. While the young wife marvelled at a silence which seemed to conceal an inexpressible passion, Théorème, numb with animal happiness, waited tranquilly for meal times, reflecting with satisfaction that his vacation was not costing him a cent.

Sabina, indeed, had sold some of her girlhood jewelery and had begged her companion to have the kindness to let the expenses of their stay in Brittany be her contribution. Somewhat astonished that she made so much of a fuss to have him accept something one might take for granted, Théorème accepted with the best grace in the world. It was his opinion that an artist ought in no case to kow-tow to stupid conventions, and he less so than others. "I do not recognize the right," he said, "of letting any scruples of mine stand in the way if they should hinder me from achieving the work of an El Greco or a Velasquez."

Living on a meagre allowance from an uncle from Limoges, Théorème did not count wholly on painting to support him. A conception of art, haughty and inviolable, forbade him from painting when he was not driven to it by inspiration. "If I have to wait ten years for it," he said, "I'll wait." And that is about what he did. Generally, he worked at enriching his sensibilities in the cafés of Montmartre or refined his critical sense in watching his friends paint, and when

they questioned him on his own painting, he had a reflective way of replying, "I am finding myself," which commanded respect. Besides, the big shoes, the *sabots*, and the voluminous velvet pants which were part of his winter wardrobe, had acquired for him between the rue Caulaincourt, the place du Tertre and the rue des Abbesses, the reputation of being a very fine artist. The most ill-willed still had to admit that Théorème was a man of formidable potentiality.

One morning on one of the last days of their vacation, the two lovers had just finished dressing in their room in the little Breton inn. Five or six hundred kilometres from there, in Auvergne, the Lemuriers had already been up for three hours, and to her husband, who was rowing on the lake and praising the beauties of the site, Sabina was responding, from further and further away, in monosyllables. But in the Breton bedroom she was singing as she looked out upon the sea. She sang: "*Mes amours ont de fins doigts blancs. Le corps et l'âme à l'adevenant.*" Théorème took his wallet from the mantelpiece and before slipping it into his back pocket, he pulled out a photograph.

"Hmmm! Look what I've found," he said. "That's me, last winter, taken at the Moulin de la Galette."

"Oh, my love!" exclaimed Sabina, and her eyes filled with a mist of fervor and trust.

In the photograph Théorème was in his winter outfit, and, gazing at his sabots and the wide velvet pants so prettily pinched in at the ankles, Sabina could well

see what a genius he was. She felt a twinge of remorse in her heart for having hidden something from this dear boy who was not only such a tender lover but also such an artist.

"You are handsome," she said to him. "You are big. Those *sabots!* Those velvet pants. That rabbit-skin cap! Oh, my dearest, you are an artist so pure, so understanding, and I, who was so lucky to find you, my heart! My beloved! My sweet treasure! – *I* have been hiding from you a secret!"

"What are you talking about?"

"My dear, I am going to tell you something I swore I would never confide to a soul: I have the gift of ubiquity."

Théorème began to laugh, but Sabina said: "Look!"

At the same time, she multiplied herself by nine and Thêorème felt his senses totter as around him evolved nine Sabinas, exactly alike.

"You're not angry?" asked one of them timidly.

"Not at all," replied Thêorème. "On the contrary."

He smiled happily, as if he were grateful, and Sabina, reassured, kissed him in a transport of joy, with all her nine mouths.

At the beginning of October, about a month after their return from vacation, Lemurier noticed that his wife hardly ever spoke any more with the angels. She seemed pensive and melancholy.

"You are not as cheerful as you used to be," he

told her one evening. "You don't go out enough. Tomorrow, if you like, we shall go to the cinema."

At the same moment, Théorème was pacing his studio and shouting: "How do I know where you are this very minute? How do I know you are not at Javel or Montparnasse in the arms of some tramp? Or at Lyons in the arms of some silk man? Or at Narbonne in bed with a wine-waterer? Or in Persia sleeping with the Shah? . . . You swear to me, you swear to me! . . . And if you were in the arms of twenty other men you would swear to me just the same, eh? This is insane! My head is going round. I am just about ready to do – I don't know what – something terrible!"

He raised his eyes to an ancient *yatagan* he had bought the year before at the Flea Market. In order to prevent him from committing a crime, Sabina, having multiplied by twelve, held herself ready to bar his access to the oriental blade. Théorème calmed down and Sabina reassembled.

"I am so wretched," the painter concluded. "All this suffering on top of all the other troubles I have."

He was alluding to troubles of both a material and a spiritual order. To hear him tell it, he was in a difficult spot. His landlord, to whom he owed three months rent, was threatening seizure of his things. His uncle from Limoges had just brutally suspended his monthly allowance. On the spiritual side, Théorème was passing through a serious crisis, however fecund it was in promise. The creative powers of his genius were boiling up within him, shaping them-

selves, and now a lack of money was holding him back from doing anything about it. How could he paint a masterpiece, with the sheriff and the wolf both at the door?

Trembling, distressed, Sabina felt her heart in her throat. The week before, she had sold the last of her jewelery to settle a debt of honor contracted by Théorème in some den in the rue Norvins, and was in despair today at not having a single thing more to sacrifice to the aid of his talent. Actually, the situation with Théorème was neither worse nor better than usual. The uncle from Limoges, as in the past, still bled affectionately from all veins so that his nephew might become a great painter, and the landlord, naively speculating on the poverty of an artist with a future, was as willing as before that his tenant pay him on account with any old turnip of a canvas he might have tossed off without half trying. But Théorème, over and above the pleasure it gave him to play the outcast artist, the hero of Bohemia, hoped that the somber picture he was presenting would inspire the young woman to even more daring resolves.

That night, fearing to leave him alone with his woes, Sabina stayed at Théorème's and did not reassemble at all in her home in the rue de l'Abreuvoir. The next morning, she awoke at his side with a fresh and happy smile.

"I was dreaming," she said, "that we had a little grocery shop in the rue Saint-Rustique, a tiny place with hardly six feet frontage on the street. We had only one customer, a schoolboy who used to come to

buy barley-sugar candy. I was wearing a blue apron with great big pockets. You, you had on a grocer's jacket. In the evening, in the little room in back, you would write in a huge book: Day's receipts: six cents, candy. When I woke up you were just saying to me: 'For our business to succeed perfectly, we must have another customer. I see him with a little white beard . . .' I was just about to object that with another customer one wouldn't know what to do, but I didn't have time. I woke up."

"In short," said Théorème (and he spoke with a bitter nasal sneer, and his grin was bitter too), "in short," he said (and mortified and vexed, a flush of anger mounted to his ears, and his black eyes darted at her), "in short," he repeated, "your ambition would be to make me into a grocer."

"No, no! It was just a dream I was telling you."

"That's exactly what I said. You dream of seeing me a grocer. In a grocer's coat!"

"Oh, darling," Sabina protested tenderly. "If you could only have seen yourself. You looked so nice in it – in your grocer's jacket!"

His indignation made Théorème spring from the bed, crying he had been betrayed. It wasn't enough that his landlord had to throw him out in the streets, that his uncle from Limoges refused him the right to eat, and all at the very moment when there was something in him just about ready to hatch. That something, a work grandiose but fragile, which he carried inside himself, he must now lose since the woman he had loved the most turned from him in derision to

dream of making him lose it. She consecrated him to a grocery! Why not to the Academy? Théorème, striding about his studio in his pyjamas, shouting himself hoarse, asked what kind of misery was this? And many times he made as if to tear his heart out in order to distribute it to his landlord, to his uncle from Limoges and to her whom he loved.

On reaching home, at the noon hour, Lemurier found his wife in a state of great distraction. She had even forgotten to reassemble, and when he went into the kitchen she presented to his eyes four distinct persons, all taken up with different tasks, but all imbued alike with the same melancholy. He was extremely annoyed.

"Well," he said, "that does it! My glandular deficiency is up to its tricks again. I've got to go back to my treatments." And for some time after Lemurier remained disturbed by the pernicious sadness into which Sabina day by day sank more deeply.

"Binette," (that was the diminutive which excellent sentiments had forced this good and kindly man to choose for his young and adored wife) "Binette," he said, "I cannot stand seeing you any longer so depressed. It will make me sick myself. In the street or in the office, when I think of your sad eyes, my heart suddenly breaks and I cry all over my blotter. . . . Binette, this morning Monsieur Porteur, of our legal department, a charming fellow, with a perfect education and a competency a person can't praise too highly, had the kindness to present me with a ticket for Longchamp, for it appears his brother-in-law, who is

a very Parisian fellow, has a big job at the track. And since you need some distraction . . ."

That afternoon, for the first time in her life, Sabina played the horses at Longchamp. Having bought a newspaper on the way out, she already had begun to dream about a horse named Théocrate VI, a name which represented an onomatopoetic link with her beloved Théorème and seemed a most favourable sign. Dressed in a blue coat, wearing a Tonkinese hat with a half-veil, Sabina was noticed by a number of racing fans, mostly men.

The first race or two left her almost indifferent. Her mind was still full of her beloved painter, a prey to the torments of baffling inspiration, and she could still see vividly the brilliance of his black eyes as he worked in his studio exhausting himself in a battle with sordid reality. A sudden desire came to her to double and transport herself at once to the rue du Chevalier-de-la-Barre in order to lay her cool hands on the burning forehead of the artist, as is customary with lovers in agonizing situations. The fear of disturbing him in his work held her back and she let the idea go, which turned out just as well since Théorème, instead of being in his studio, was lifting a glass at a bar in the rue Caulaincourt and pondering whether the afternoon was too far spent to catch a full show at the movies.

At last the horses lined up for the start of the *Grand Prix* of the Ministry of Registration, and Sabina settled down to "hatch out" a winner in Théocrate VI. She had put 150 francs on him, all her

current savings, figuring to win enough to appease Théorème's landlord. The jockey who rode Théocrate VI was wearing a fetching cap, half white, half green, a green so tender, delicate, light, frail and fresh it might have been lettuce grown in paradise. The horse itself was ebony black. From the start he took the lead by three lengths. Such a start, turf followers know, doesn't necessarily presage the final result of the race, but Sabina, already sure of victory and carried away by enthusiasm, jumped to her feet and shouted: "Théocrate! Théocrate!"

Around her were smiles and grins. Seated at her right an elderly gentleman in gloves, and wearing a monocle, glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, sympathetic and moved by her ingenuousness. But then, in the intoxication of victory, Sabina began yelling: "Théorème! Théorème!" Her neighbors were so noisily amused they almost forgot the race. She finally realized this and blushed with confusion. Upon seeing this, the old gentleman, so distinguished with his gloves and monocle, stood up shouting as loud as he could: "Théocrate! Théocrate!" The laughs in the crowd stopped immediately and from the whispers of those near her Sabina learned that the gallant man was no other than Lord Burbury.

Nevertheless, Théocrate VI lost his head start and finished in the cabbages. Seeing her hopes destroyed and Théorème condemned to misery, and as far as being an artist went, condemned to impotence, Sabina at first gave way to a sigh and then to a dry sob. Her nostrils quivering, a little moisture suddenly

came to her eyes. Lord Burbury experienced great compassion. After an exchange of a few words, he asked her if she would not like to become his wife, for he had an annual income of two hundred thousand pounds sterling. At the same instant, Sabina had a vision, that of Théorème expiring on a hospital cot and cursing the name of his savior and that of his landlord. For the love of her lover and perhaps also for the love of painting, she replied to the old man that she would become his wife, informing him nevertheless that she possessed nothing, not even a family name, only a given name, and that the most ordinary: Marie, or Mary. Lord Burbury found this singularity most piquant, delighted with the effect she would produce on his sister Emily, a virgin of a certain age who had devoted her existence to the upholding of the honorable traditions of the historic families of the realm. Without waiting for the finish of the last race, he left in a car with his fiancée for the airport of Le Bourget. At six o'clock they arrived in London and at seven they were married.

While she was being married in London, Sabina was dining in the rue de l'Abrevoir opposite her husband, Antoine Lemurier. He found her looking much better and he spoke to her with approving kindness. Touched at his solicitude, she suffered a twinge of conscience, and asked herself if she could espouse Lord Burbury without contravening human and divine laws. It was a thorny question which involved another, that of the consubstantiality of the spouse of Antoine and that of the spouse of Lord Burbury.

Even if each of her were one autonomous physical person, the fact remained that marriage, if it is consummated in the mortal flesh, is first of all a union of souls. In fact, her qualms were excessive. The legislation of marriage having failed to consider the case of ubiquity, Sabina was free to act according to her own will and might even, in all good faith, believe herself in order with Heaven, since there was no bull, brief, rescript or decretal which had ever specifically touched upon the problem. Still, she had too high a sense of conscience to take advantage of such lawyer's reasons. Furthermore, she believed it a duty to consider her marriage with Lord Burbury as a consequence of and a prolongation of adultery, which justified itself in no way and was, of course, perfectly damnable. In amends to God, to society and to her husband, since she had thus offended all three, she forbade herself ever to see Théorème again. Besides, she would have been ashamed to show herself before him after the consummation of a marriage *alimentaire consenti.*

It must be said, the beginnings of her life in England rendered Sabina's remorse and even the pain of absence supportable. Lord Burbury was truly a remarkable person. Besides being extremely rich he was a descendant in direct line from Jean sans Terre, or John Lackland, who had contracted a morganatic marriage with Ermessinde de Trencavel, a circumstance little known to historians, and by her had seventeen children, all dead at an early age with the exception of the fourteenth, Richard Hughes, found-

er of the house of Burbury. Among other privileges envied by all the British nobility, Lord Burbury had one, exclusively: He could open his umbrella in the king's chambers and his wife, her parasol. His marriage with Sabina was quite an event. The new Lady was the object of well-wishing curiosity, although her sister-in-law tried to circulate a rumor that she was formerly a dancer at the Bal Tabarin. Sabina, who in England was called Marie, was very much taken up with her obligations as a great lady: receptions, teas, knitting for charity, golf, fittings, never permitted a moment to yawn in. Still, all her various occupations did not make her forget Théorème.

The painter had no doubt as to the source of the checks which he received regularly from England and he accommodated himself perfectly to not seeing Sabina any more in his studio. Delivered from his material concerns by the monthly allowances which had risen to some hundreds of thousand francs, he recognized that he was going through a period of hypersensibility little conducive to the accomplishment of his work and what he needed was, so to say, to "decant" himself. Consequently, he allowed himself a year for rest, more if it appeared to him he might need it. One saw him less and less at Montmartre. He decanted himself in the bars of Montparnasse and the *boites* along the Champs-Elysées where he lived on caviar and champagne with expensive girls. Having learned that he was leading a rather disordered life, Sabina, her fervor intact, imagined he was following some Goyaesque formula for art,

blending the play of light with the immodest subjacencies of the female masque.

One afternoon, after returning from three weeks at Burbury Castle, Lady Burbury, entering her sumptuous residence on M—— Square, found four boxes containing, respectively, a silk dress, an afternoon gown in Roman crêpe, a woolen sports dress and a classic tailor-made in *sparadra.* Having dismissed her chambermaid, she multiplied by five in order to try on all the dresses at once. Inadvertently, Lord Burbury walked in.

"My dear, my dear!" he cried, "What four ravishing sisters you have! And you never told me anything about them!"

Instead of reassembling, Lady Burbury was confused and felt obliged to say:

"They've just arrived. Alphonsine is my elder by a year. Bridget is my twin sister. Barbara and Rosalie are my two younger sisters, also twins. People say they resemble me a lot."

The four sisters were well received in high society and fêted everywhere. Alphonsine married a millionaire American, a king of stamped leather, and crossed the Atlantic with him; Bridget married the Maharajah of Gorisapour who took her to his princely residence; Barbara married an illustrious Neapolitan tenor whom she accompanied on his world tours; Rosalie wed a Spanish explorer who took her with him to New Guinea to study the curious customs of the Papuans.

These four marriages, which were celebrated al-

most simultaneously, made a stir in England and even on the Continent. In Paris the newspaper accounts were accompanied by pictures. One evening, in the dining room in the rue de l'Abreuvoir, Antoine Lemurier said to Sabina:

"You've seen the photos of Lady Burbury and her four sisters? It's astonishing how much they look like you, except that you have lighter eyes, a more elongated face, a smaller mouth, a shorter nose and not so strong a chin. Tomorrow I am going to take the newspaper and your own photograph to show to Monsieur Porteur. He'll never get over it.

Antoine was pleased to be able to confound M. Porteur, legal chief of the S.B.N.C.A.

"I have to laugh when I think of Monsieur Porteur scratching his head," he explained. "Incidentally, he has given me another ticket for the races on Wednesday. What should a person do in return, in your opinion?"

"I don't know," Sabina replied. "It's a very delicate situation."

Would it be proper, or not, she asked thoughtfully, for Lemurier to send flowers to Mme. Porteur, the wife of his hierarchial superior? And at the same moment, Lady Burbury, seated at a bridge table *en face* the Duke of Leicester; the Begum of Gorisapour stretched out on her palanquin on the back of an elephant; Mrs. Smithson, busy in Pennsylvania doing the honors of her synthetic Renaissance chateau; Barbara Cazzarini in a loge at the Vienna Opera where her tenor was singing illustriously; Rosalie

Valdez y Samaniego, lying under the mosquito-netting in a Papuan village hut – all alike were absorbed in whether or not to offer flowers to Mme. Porteur.

Théorème, informed by the newspapers on these nuptial festivities, had not the slightest doubt, when he saw the photographs illustrating the reports, that all these brides were new incarnations of Sabina. Except in the case of the explorer, who he considered practiced a not very lucrative trade, he found the choices of the brides entirely judicious. It was at about this time he felt a need to go back to Montmartre. The rainy climate of Montparnasse and the noisy aridity of the Champs-Elysées had worn him out. Further, the monthly allowances from Lady Burbury had afforded him more relief in the cafés on the Butte than in these other foreign establishments. He had not changed anything in his way of living and it was not long before he was making a reputation at Montmartre as a noctambulous roisterer, good drinker and go-anywhere-do-anything fellow. His friends amused themselves with stories of his pranks and, a little envious of his new opulence from which, of course, they profited, they repeated with satisfaction that he was lost forever to painting. They did take the trouble to add that it was a pity, though, in view of the fact he had the authentic temperament of an artist.

Sabina learned of Théorème's bad conduct and realized he was making a fatal misstep. Her faith in him

and his destiny was shaken, but she loved him all the more tenderly for it and blamed herself for being the cause of his downfall. For nearly a week she wrung her hands in all four quarters of the world.

One night, toward midnight, when she was coming back from the movies in company with her husband, Sabina saw, at the intersection of the rues Junot and Girardon, Théorème, hanging between the arms of two hilarious girls. Intoxicated, Théorème was losing all the wine he had drunk and at the same time delivering himself of disgraceful insults directed at the two creatures with him, one of whom was holding his head and familiarly addressing him as her "pig," while the other, in army terms, was rating his resources in love. Having recognized Sabina, Théorème turned his bleary face toward her, hiccoughed the name of Burbury followed by a brief but revolting commentary, and then sank in a heap at the foot of a lamp post. From the date of that encounter, Théorème was no more to Sabina than an object of hatred and disgust which she promised herself to forget.

Two weeks later, Lady Burbury, who was then with her husband in their domain of Burbury, fell in love with a young pastor of the neighborhood who had come to lunch at the castle. He did not have black eyes; his eyes were pale blue, and his mouth was not voluptuous, but rather pinched and sunk in; he had an air of well-cleansed propriety and a conscience cold and scrubbed and rescrubbed, common to people who condemn things they do not understand.

But from the first luncheon, Lady Burbury was desperately in love. That evening she said to her husband:

"I have never told you, but I have still another sister. Her name is Judith."

The following week, Judith came to the castle where she lunched in the company of the pastor who showed himself to be polished but distant, as was proper in regard to a Catholic, a receptable and vehicle of false ideas. After luncheon, the two made a little tour of the grounds together and Judith, with pertinence but as if by chance, quoted the Book of Job, the Book of Numbers and Deuteronomy. The reverend saw that here was fertile soil. Eight days later he had converted Judith, fifteen days later he married her. Their happiness was brief. The pastor had nothing but the most edifying conversation, and right up to the very bed pillow he pronounced words revealing a great elevation of thought. Judith was so bored in his company that when they made a walking trip together around a lake in Scotland, she took the opportunity to drown herself accidentally. Actually, she merely let herself slip under a while, holding her breath, and once she had disappeared from her husband's sight she contrived a partial reassemblage in the bosom of Lady Burbury. The reverend suffered a frightful grief, thanked Heaven nevertheless for having sent him this trial of his soul and had a little pedestal erected in his garden *in memoriam.*

Meantime, Théorème began to worry over not having received his last monthly allowance. Thinking

first it was a mere delay, he forced himself to have patience, but after having survived on his credit for more than a month, he resolved to talk these boring things over with Sabina. For three mornings in a row he posted himself in vain in the rue de l'Abreuvoir hoping to surprise her. He ran into her by chance one evening at six o'clock.

"Sabina," he said, "I've been looking for you for three days."

"But, monsieur," replied Sabina, "I don't know you."

She started to move on, but Théorème put his hand on her shoulder.

"Look, Sabina, what reason have you for being angry? I've done everything you wanted. Then one fine day you decide not to come to my place any more. And I've suffered in silence, without even asking why you've given up coming."

"Monsieur, I do not understand anything you say, but your intimate form of address and your incomprehensible allusions are an insult. Let me pass."

"But Sabina, you can't have forgotten *everything*! Remember, now!"

Not yet daring to broach the matter of subsidy, Théorème strained to recreate an aura of intimacy. Pathetically, he evoked the most touching memories and retraced the history of their love. But Sabina looked at him with astonished eyes, a little frightened, and protested with less indignation than stupor. The young man nevertheless was stubborn.

"Finally," he said, "remember last summer – the

vacation we spent together in Britanny – our room on the sea!"

"Last summer? But I spent my vacation with my husband in Auvergne!"

"Naturally! If you keep on pulling the wool over your own eyes!"

"What! Pulling the wool – You are either joking with me, or you have lost your senses. Let me go by or I'll scream!"

Théorème, irritated by a bad faith sufficiently evident by now, seized her by the arm and began shaking her and swearing by the name of God. Sabina saw her husband passing on the other side of the street without having seen them and she called out his given name. He came up and, without understanding the situation, bowed to Théorème.

"This gentleman," explained Sabina, "whom I have just met for the first time in my life, stopped me here in the street. And, not content with speaking to me familiarily, he treats me as if I had been his mistress, calling me chérie and raising up a lot of so-called memories of what might have been our past loves."

"What kind of thing is this, Monsieur?" asked Antoine Lemurier.

"All right," grumbled Théorème, "I don't want to take advantage of the situation."

"Take advantage! Don't trouble yourself, sir," Sabina said, laughing. And she turned to Antoine. "Among other souvenirs of our supposed loves, monsieur just remembered a three-week trip he made

with me last summer to a beach in Brittany. What do you say to that?"

"Let's say that I never said anything," sulked Théorème.

"You certainly couldn't do better," approved the husband. "I want you to know, monsieur, that my wife and I never left each other the whole summer and that we spent our vacation – "

"On a lake in Auvergne," cut in Théorème. "That's agreed."

"How do you know that?" asked Sabina ingenuously.

"A little bird told me one day when he was in bathing trunks on a beach in Brittany."

This response appeared to make the young woman thoughtful. The painter looked at her with his very black eyes. She smiled and added:

"In short, if I understand it, you pretend that I found myself at the same time on a lake in Auvergne with my husband and on a Breton beach with you?"

Théorème winked, a sign of yes. His case became clear then to Antoine Lemurier who restrained himself from giving the young man a good kick in the stomach.

"Monsieur," the good man said, patiently, "I suppose that you are not alone in the world. No doubt you have someone who takes care of you: a friend, a wife, parents. If you live in this quarter I should be glad to conduct you to your place."

"You don't know who I am, then?" The painter was astonished.

"Excuse me – "

"I am Vercingetorix. As for my return, don't bother. I am going to take the *metro* to Lamarck and I will get back to Alesia, in Burgundy, for dinner. So, goodnight, and go back home quickly and caress your little bourgeoisie."

With these last words, Théorème looked Sabina up and down with all the insolence possible and withdrew with atrociously audible sneers. The poor lad did not dissimulate his madness, and he was astounded himself at not having had his revelation sooner. It was not hard to prove his madness. If the Breton vacation and the ubiquity of Sabina had never had any reality other than in his mind, the whole thing was certainly the illusion of a madman. On the other hand, supposing everything were true. Théorème was in the position of a man who was witness to an absurd truth, one fit only for a mental patient. The certitude of his dementia affected the painter deeply. He became somber, withdrawn, suspicious, avoiding his friends and discouraging their advances. He also fled the society of girls, no longer frequenting the cafés of the Butte and confining himself to his studio to meditate on his madness. Unless he lost his memory, he could not say how he would ever be cured.

Solitude had the happy result of bringing Théorème back to painting. He set himself before his easel with a wild intensity, a violence often demential. His wonderful genius, which he had thrown away in the old days in the cafés, bars and obscure byways,

began to gleam a little, then to glitter and then to flash. After six months of effort, of passionate trials and experiments, he came to full realization of himself and painted nothing but masterpieces, nearly all of them immortal. Among others should be cited his famous "Woman With Nine Heads" which made such a hullaballoo, and his pure but nonetheless troubling "Voltairean Armchair." His uncle from Limoges was well satisfied.

Meanwhile Lady Burbury rounded out with the good works of the pastor. Let us hasten to say there was nothing in the conduct of either one or the other which had been contrary to honor, but Judith, enfolding herself in the bosom of her sister, had carried with her there the fruit, still in the state of promise, of her union with the reverend. Lady Burbury was brought to bed, not without a little moral uneasiness, with a well-shaped baby boy which the pastor baptized with indifference. The child was given the name of Antony, and there is nothing more to be said of it. At about the same time, the Begum of Gorisapour brought into the world a pair of twins owing nothing to the Maharajah himself. There was great rejoicing and the people, according to custom, offered to the new-born infants their weight in fine gold. On their parts, Barbara Cazzarini and Rosalie Valdez y Samaniego became mothers, one to a boy, the other a girl. There was rejoicing there too.

Mrs. Smithson, the wife of the millionaire, failed to follow the examples of her sisters and fell quite seriously ill. During her convalescence, which she

passed in California, she began to read those dangerous novels which show you, on days too beautiful for words, infamous couples deep in sin.

Mrs. Smithson had the weakness of letting them take hold of her. At first she sighed, and then she thought. "I have," she told herself, "five husbands, and I have had as many as six at a time. I have had only one lover, and yet he gave me more joy in six months than all my husbands put together in a year. Still, he was unworthy of my love. I abandoned him in a qualm of conscience." (Here Mrs. Smithson sighed and let the pages of her novel riffle under her thumb.) "Alas, the lovers in *Love Awakens Me* don't know what it is to have a qualm of conscience. They are as happy as bulls (she meant to say happy as gods). My scruples, to me, are unjustified, for what does the sin of adultery consist of? Adultery is simply doing unto others what only one should do unto you. . . . Well, from now on, nothing is going to stop me from having a lover, to keep me intact for Smithson."

Such reflections would not be long, of course, in bearing fruit. The worst of it was that she was not alone in this, since the poison, according to the laws of ubiquity, had insinuated itself at the same time into the souls of her sisters. Toward the end of her convalescence on the sands of California, Mrs. Smithson attended a concert. They played the "Moonlight Sonata" in hot jazz. The charm of Beethoven and his bedeviled music acted on her imagination in such a way that she became amorous of the percus-

sionist who, two days later, embarked for the Philippines. Two weeks later, Mrs. Smithson despatched a double to Manila to pick up the musician on his arrival. At the same time Lady Burbury became enamored of a panther hunter upon seeing his photograph in a magazine, and delegated a double to Java. The wife of the tenor, upon leaving Stockholm, posted a double there to make the acquaintance of a young chorister she had noticed at the Opera, while Rosalie Valdez y Samaneigo, whose husband had just been eaten by a Papuan tribe during a religious fête, multiplied herself by four for the love of as many handsome boys she met in different ports of Oceana.

It was not long before the unfortunate ubiquitist was seized with a sort of frenzy and had lovers in all quarters of the globe. The number increased at a geometric ratio of 2.7. The dispersed phalanx was made up of men of every kind: sailors, planters, Chinese pirates, officials, cowboys, a champion chess player, Scandinavian athletes, pearl fishermen, a commissaire of the people's government, high school students, cattle drovers, a matador, a young butcher, fourteen movie fans, a porcelain mender, sixty-seven doctors, some marquises, four Russian princes, two employees of the state railway of France, a professor of geometry, a harness-maker, eleven lawyers, and the list might be extended. Let us note, finally, one member of the Academie Française, on a lecture tour in the Balkans, with all his beard. In one island of the Marquesa group, where the natives appear to be quite handsome, the insatiable sweetheart multip-

lied herself by thirty-nine. In three months time, she had come out into the society of the world in nine hundred and fifty models. Six months later, this number attained in the neighborhood of eighteen thousand, which is considerable.

In the rue de l'Abreuvoir, Sabina Lemurier, with apparent calmness, continued to lead the life of an attentive wife and a good housekeeper, going to market, cooking a steak, sewing on buttons, seeing that her husband had clean linen, exchanging visits with the wives of his colleagues and writing punctually to an old uncle in Clermont-Ferrand. In contrast to her four sisters, she seemed not to have wished to follow the perfidious suggestions of Mrs. Smithson's novels and she had forbidden herself to multiply and chase after lovers. One would judge this caution specious, artificial and hypocritical, in view of the fact that Sabina and her innumerable sinner sisters were all one and the same person. But even the greatest sinners are never entirely abandoned by God, who maintains a tiny gleam of light in the shadow of these poor souls. Indeed, from the first, her attitude was always one of homage to Antoine Lemurier, as much as for his priority, as for his being her lawful husband. Her conduct in this regard was a constant witness to such an honorable attitude. When Lemurier was taken ill and fell heavily in debt, it happened that the household found itself in extreme difficulties, on the verge of misery itself. Quite often there was no money to pay the pharmacy, the baker or the rent. Sabina lived through agonizing days, but even when

the sheriff rapped at the door and Antoine called for the priest, she steeled herself against the temptation of resorting to the millions of Lady Burbury or those of Mrs. Smithson. However, seated at the bedside of the sick man and watching his difficult breathing, she remained attentive to the diversions of her sisters (they were then 47,000) and, present at all their goings-on and listening to that immense lascivious rumor of sound, sometimes she had to sigh. Her complexion heightened, the pupils of her eyes slightly dilated, she sometimes resembled a telephone operator watching with passionate attention over an immense switchboard.

However a participant to (and a participant of) that voluptuous melée, Sabina herself remained unappeased. It was at this time she took up again her love of Théorème: Perhaps her forty-seven thousand lovers were nothing more than derivatives of that hopeless love. Sabina learned first from her milkwoman, then from the newspapers, of Théorème's success and at an exposition, fluttery at heart and misty-eyed, she admired his "Woman with Nine Heads," so tender and so tragically unreal and, for her, so allusive. Her one-time lover appeared to her purified, atoned, redeemed, resilvered, brand new and shiny.

Théorème still had his black eyes, but his madness had left him, although he still employed the same arguments to test it. Philosophically, he told himself there were excellent reasons for many things, no matter what, and, while surely there must exist some reasons which would invalidate the proof of his madness, he

had simply not taken the trouble to find them. Nevertheless, his life went on nearly the same, laborious and often solitary. True to Sabina's wish, his painting became more and more beautiful and the critics said very fine things on the spirituality of his canvases. One scarcely ever ran into him in the cafés, and among his friends he rarely spoke, his face and manner sad as that of a man who espoused a great grief. What happened was he had conducted a real self-examination and could now judge his past conduct in regard to Sabina. Conscious of his baseness, he blushed with shame twenty times a day, regaling himself with such terms as churl, snout, bowlegged and poisonous toad, and stuck-up pig. He would have liked to accuse himself in front of Sabina, to implore her pardon, but he judged himself as too unworthy. Having made a pilgrimage to the beach in Brittany, he brought back two admirable canvases that would have made a grocer weep, and, also, a heightened remembrance of his piggishness. He took on so much humility in his suffering for Sabina that he regretted now ever having been loved at all.

Antoine Lemurier, who had failed to die, emerged happily out of his illness, resumed his work in his office and, as well as he could, dressed his wounds with money. During his ordeal, the neighbors had all rejoiced in the belief that the husband would kick off, the furniture be sold, and the wife turned out in the street. All were excellent people, of course, with hearts of gold, like everyone else, and wished nothing against the Lemurier menage, but, realizing a somber

tragedy was unfolding under their eyes, with all sorts of reverberations, sudden shifts of the wind, bellowings of the landlord, the sheriff, and a mounting fever, they lived in the anxious expectation of a denouement worthy of the production. Then Lemurier had to knock it all into a cocked hat.

In retaliation, the neighbors began to commiserate with his wife and to praise her. "Madame Lemurier," they said, "what courage you've had." "We all think so highly of you and I wanted to tell you so," said one, "but Frederick said no, it would bother you, but let me tell you I know what goes on and I often said, and said it again yesterday to M. Brevet: 'Madame Lemurier is extraordinary; admirable is the word for her'."

Such things were said as much as possible in front of Lemurier, or else repeated by the concierge or by the three-room apartment on the fifth floor or by the one on the third in front, and voiced with such feeling that the poor man came to consider the expression of his own gratitude insufficient. One evening, by the light of the dining room lamp, Sabina seemed worn out. She was with her fifty-six thousandth lover, a captain of gendarmes, a handsome fellow, who was unbuckling his swordbelt in a hotel in Casablanca and remarking that after having stuffed oneself well and smoked a good cigar, love was divine. Antoine Lemurier, who was regarding his wife with veneration, took her hand and let his lips rest upon it.

"My darling," he said, "you are a saint. The sweetest, the most beautiful. A true saint."

The unwitting mockery of such respect and his adoring gaze overwhelmed Sabina. She withdrew her hand, burst into tears, and, blaming her nerves, left for her room. On the following morning, in expiation of the life of deceit she had lived with her good husband, Antoine Lemurier, Sabina divided herself for the last time.

Under the name of Louise Megnin, she picked out one of the most miserable hovels of the Saint-Ouen quarter for a life of penance. Among the heaps of refuse, and foul odors of cinders and humanity, she found a shack of scrap lumber and tar paper. Its two rooms were separated by a partition of planks and one room sheltered a catarrhal, debilitated old man who was cared for by an idiot boy he abused day and night with the voice of one dying.

Louise Megnin was obliged to put in a long time getting used to the neighborhood, as well as to the vermin, rats, odors, noisy squabbles, the grossness of the denizens, and all the sordid inconveniences of this final circle of hell on earth. For several days Lady Burbury and her married sisters, as well as the fifty-six thousand inamoratas, lost their taste for food. Lord Burbury was astonished at times to notice his wife grow pale and shiver from head to foot, her eyes expressing a look of revulsion. "She is hiding something from me," he thought. The fact was that in her squalid hut, Louise Megnin was grimacing before a big-bellied rat, or battling the fleas for her miserable cot, but he could not know that.

One would perhaps suppose that this expiatory

descent to the region of the damned, the ragpickers, stench, starvation, knives, sour wine and slaverings of sots, might have provided for the multicorporal sinner an appreciable step on the road to virtue. But no; on the contrary. Her fifty-six thousand sisters and Louise Megnin tried to deaden themselves to forget the zone of Saint-Ouen. Instead of delighting in her sufferings, as it would have been right and proper, Louise forced herself to see nothing, hear nothing, and dispersed herself over five continents to take in the spectacle of games of l'amour.

Happily, Providence was on the job. One evening, at dusk, the air was very soft; the exhalations from the shacks and the piles of rubbish were no stronger than usual; and over the zone floated a light fog, half veiling the bandy-legged huts and the alleys of clinkers. Louise Megnin was filling a water can at the public hydrant when she saw coming out of one of the hovels a monstrous-looking man making his way to the water tap. Built like a gorilla in the breadth of his shoulders and having the features and the knee-length arms of such a creature, he was shod in house slippers and socks which did not match. He rolled his shoulders as he walked and when he stopped near Louise he said nothing, his small eyes shining in his hairy face.

Some of the other men, hanging around, had already accosted her at the hydrant, a few had even prowled around her shack, but even the most hardened of them had always observed some ritual of approach. This one obviously thought nothing of

such niceties and his attitude seemed as calm as if he was simply waiting for a street bus. Louise did not dare raise her eyes as she glimpsed with terror the enormous hanging hands, covered with a black and dirty mat of bristles. Her water bucket filled, she started back, the gorilla walking beside her with small steps, his knock-kneed legs short and disproportionate to his trunk, and from time to time he spat tobacco juice.

"Why are you following me?" asked Louise.

"My wound is beginning to open again," said the gorilla and as he walked he plucked at the cloth of his breeches which stuck to his thigh. They reached the shack. Chilled with fright, Louise stepped quickly ahead and slammed the door in his face. But before she had time to lock it, he pushed it open with one hand, pinning her behind it on the floor. In the room next door, the old man could be heard rattling off blasphemies in a moribund voice. Louise, terrified, looked up from the floor, her eyes fixed on the gorilla.

At Paris, London, Shanghai, Bamako, Baton Rouge, Vancouver, New York, Breslau, Warsaw, Rome, Pondichery, Sydney, Barcelona and other parts of the earth, Sabina holding her breath, followed the movements of the gorilla. Lady Burbury was just making her entry at a fashionable salon and the mistress of the place was advancing to meet her when she saw her ladyship recoil, her nose twitching and her eyes full of horror, and fall back, suddenly, in the lap of an old colonel. At Napier, New Zealand, Ernestine dug her nails deep in the hands of a young

bank employee who found himself asking what in the world had happened. Sabina would have been able to reabsorb Louise Megnin in one of her numerous bodies – she was not beyond considering it – but it seemed to her that she did not have the right to bypass this ordeal.

The gorilla violated Louise Megnin several times. In the intervals, he picked up the quid of tobacco he had calmly deposited on a chair, and later put it back on the chair. From the other side of the partition the old man continued his litanies and with one debilitated hand hurled his sabots across the room trying to brain his young companion who broke out each time with an imbecile laugh. It was almost dark. In the half-light, the movement of the gorilla stirred the heavy odors of the place, which seemed concentrated in his rags and skin. Finally, having picked up his quid for good, he put a two-franc piece on the table (a man who knew how to live), and threw back over his shoulder as he left, "I'll be back."

That night not one of the sixty-five thousand sisters was able to find sleep and their tears seemed never to stop. They could see well enough now that the pleasures of love described in novels were deceitful illusions and that the handsomest man in the world, outside the sacred ties of wedlock, was not able to give anything other than, *au fond*, pretty much the same thing as the gorilla. Several thousand among them, starting quarrels with their lovers, who exasperated them to tears and disgust, broke their liaisons as soon as possible and sought an honorable livelihood.

One morning the gorilla arrived at Louise Megnin's with a huge gunny sack containing eight tins of *pâté de foie gras*, six of salmon, three of goat cheese, three boxes of camembert, six hard-boiled eggs, fifteen cents worth of pickles, a pot of minced pork, a sausage, four kilos of fresh bread, twelve bottles of red wine, one of rum, and also a phonograph made in 1912 with three cylinder records which, he made clear, he preferred in the following order: the "*Chanson des Blés d'Or*," a broad monologue, and the duet from "Charlotte and Werther."

Arriving, then, with his sack on his shoulder, the gorilla shut himself in the hovel with Louise Megnin and never left it until five o'clock two days later. Of the horrors perpetrated during those two days of *tête-à-tête*, it is better to say nothing. What must be said, however, is that at the same time twenty thousand sweethearts, disillusioned, abandoned their lovers in order to consecrate themselves to lowly tasks and the aid of the afflicted. It is also true that nine thousand, or nearly half of them, fell again into sin. But the benefits were good. From then on, the gains were nearly constant, in spite of all the slips and falls.

But the habits of existence, particularly the most everyday habits, the most lulling ones, the most apparently insignificant, cling to us like the soul clings to the skin. One saw this clearly with Sabina. Those of her sisters who led a life of indulgence – one lover today, another tomorrow – became the first to repent. Most of the others took their vice like an *apéritif* at a regular time, or like a comfortable apartment,

or a smile from the doorman, a Siamese cat, a greyhound, a weekly hair-do, the radio, a dressmaker, an easy chair, or a partner at bridge, and, in short, adapted themselves almost completely to the regular presence of a man.

Each week the gorilla passed two or three days in a row with Louise and he was monstrous in the warmth of his heartiness. Thousands of sweethearts fought against sin, hurled themselves at purity and good works, went back to their degradation, hesitated, stumbling, losing themselves and finding themselves again until, in the end, most of them settled down in their own corners, snug in a life of chastity, work and abnegation.

Marveling, breathless, the angels leaned over the barricades of heaven to follow the glorious contest, and when they saw the gorilla go into Louise Megnin's place, they could not help intoning a canticle of joy. Now and then God himself glanced down. But He was far from sharing the enthusiasm of the angels. He rebuked them (but paternally): "Now then," He said, "That's just one soul like any other. I realize that the contest is quite spectacular, but what you are seeing there is only what takes place in all poor souls to whom I have not taken the trouble to give fifty-six thousand bodies."

Meanwhile, in the rue de l'Abreuvoir, Sabina led an anxious and meditative existence, watching over the movements of her soul and writing them down in figures on a household account pad. When her penitent sisters reached a total of forty thousand, her

face took on a more serene expression, even though she remained on the *qui vive*. Often, in the evenings, in the dining room, she smiled, and from the luminous quality of her face, more than ever it seemed to Antoine that she spoke with the angels.

One Sunday morning she was shaking a bedside rug out the window and at her side Lemurier was dreaming over a difficult crossword puzzle when Théorème walked down the rue de l'Abreuvoir.

"Look," said Lemurier, "there's that crazy fellow. It's been a long time since we've seen him."

"You shouldn't say crazy," Sabina protested quietly. "M. Théorème is such a great painter."

Strolling along, Théorème went toward his destiny, which made him first descend the rue des Saules and follow it as far as the Flea Market outside the porte de Clignancourt. Paying no attention to the bargains, he walked idly on, finding himself, finally, in the village of the "zone." The zone-dwellers watched him pass with the discreet hostility of pariahs for a well-dressed stranger in whom they detect the idler nosing into their picturesque misery.

Théorème quickened his steps and, reaching the last hovel, came almost face to face with Louise Megnin who was carrying her bucket of water. Her feet were bare in her sabots and she was dressed in a thin black dress that was patched and mended. Without a word, he took the pail and went into the poverty-stricken shack behind her. The old man behind the partition had dragged himself out as far as the Flea Market to buy a second-hand soup plate and the

place was quiet.

Théorème took Sabina's hands, and neither of them found words to ask forgiveness for the evil each thought he had done to the other. As he knelt at her feet, she tried to pull him up, but instead fell to her knees beside him and tears came to the eyes of them both. It was at that moment the gorilla made his entrance.

He was packing on his back a gunny sack of victuals, for he had come to install himself for a week with Louise. Without uttering a word, he set his sack down and, still saying nothing, took the two lovers by the throats – one neck in each hand – raised them up, shook them like medicine bottles, and strangled them. They died at the same time, face to face and eye to eye. Wedging each in a chair, the gorilla seated himself at the table with them, slit open a tin of *pâté de foie gras* and drank a bottle of red. He passed the day eating and drinking and winding up the phonograph to listen to the "*Chanson des Blés d'Or*." When night came, he tied one body to another and crammed them into his big sack.

Leaving the hovel with his burden on his shoulder, he experienced in the upper part of his chest a kind of shiver which resembled compassion and he took the trouble to open the sack and shove in a geranium blossom he picked from the window of one of the hovels.

Through the main streets he went down to the Seine, which he reached at about eleven o'clock that night. The whole adventure had induced in the

gorilla a faint touch of imagination. On the Quai de la Mégisserie, while he was dangling the two cadavers over the river, the idea struck him suddenly to end it all; but instead of throwing himself into the water, the gorilla had the delicacy to go and cut his throat under a portal in the rue des Lavandières-Sainte-Opportune.

At the same second that Louise Megnin was strangled, her sixty-some-odd thousand sisters also gave up their last breath, with a happy smile, their hands at their throats. Some, like Lady Burbury and Mrs. Smithson, repose in costly tombs, others under simple mounds of earth which time quickly effaces. Sabina was buried at Montmartre in the little cemetery of Saint-Vincent and from time to time her friends go to visit her. They believe that she is in paradise and on the Day of Judgement she will be resurrected like all the rest of us – for her a more than usual pleasure affecting as it will all her sixty-seven thousand bodies.

Jorge Luis Borges

THE ZAHIR

IN Buenos Aires the Zahir is an ordinary coin worth twenty centavos. The letters N T and the number 2 are scratched as if with a razor-blade or penknife; 1929 is the date on the obverse. (In Guzerat, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Zahir was a tiger; in Java, a blind man from the Mosque of Surakarta whom the Faithful pelted with stones; in Persia, an astrolabe which Nadir Shah caused to be sunk to the bottom of the sea; in the Mahdi's prisons, along about 1892, it was a little compass which Rudolf Carl von Slatin touched, tucked into the fold of a turban; in the Mosque of Cordova, according to Zotenberg, it was a vein in the marble of one of the twelve-hundred pillars; in the Tetuan ghetto, it was the bottom of a well.) Today is the thirteenth of November; the Zahir came into my possession at dawn on June seventh. I am no longer the "I" of that episode; but it is still possible for me to remember what happened, perhaps even to tell it. I am still, however incompletely, Borges.

Clementina Villar died on the sixth of June. Around 1930, her pictures were clogging the society magazines: perhaps it was this ubiquity that con-

tributed to the legend that she was extremely pretty, although not every portrait bore out this hypothesis unconditionally. At any rate, Clementina Villar was interested less in beauty than in perfection. The Hebrews and the Chinese codified every conceivable human eventuality; it is written in the *Mishnah* that a tailor is not to go out into the street carrying a needle once the Sabbath twilight has set in, and we read in the *Book of Rites* that a guest should assume a grave air when offered the first cup, and a respectfully contented air upon receiving the second. Something of this sort, though in much greater detail, was to be discerned in the uncompromising strictness which Clementina Villar demanded of herself. Like any Confucian adept or Talmudist, she strove for irreproachable correctness in every action; but her zeal was more admirable and more exigent than theirs because the tenets of her creed were not eternal, but submitted to the shifting caprices of Paris or Hollywood. Clementina Villar appeared at the correct places, at the correct hour, with the correct appurtenances and the correct boredom; but the boredom, the appurtenances, the hour and the places would almost immediately become passé and would provide Clementina Villar with the material for a definition of cheap taste. She was in search of the Absolute, like Flaubert; only hers was an Absolute of a moment's duration. Her life was exemplary, yet she was ravaged unremittingly by an inner despair. She was forever experimenting with new metamorphoses, as though trying to get away from herself; the color of her hair

and the shape of her coiffure were celebratedly unstable. She was always changing her smile, her complexion, the slant of her eyes. After thirty-two she was scrupulously slender . . . The war gave her much to think about: with Paris occupied by the Germans, how could one follow the fashions? A foreigner whom she had always distrusted presumed so far upon her good faith as to sell her a number of cylindrical hats; a year later it was divulged that those absurd creations *had never been worn in Paris at all!* – consequently they were not hats, but arbitrary, unauthorized eccentricities. And troubles never come singly: Dr. Villar had to move to Aráoz Street, and his daughter's portrait was now adorning advertisements for cold cream and automobiles. (The cold cream that she abundantly applied, the automobiles she *no longer* possessed.) She knew that the successful exercise of her art demanded a large fortune, and she preferred retirement from the scene to halfway effects. Moreover, it pained her to have to compete with giddy little nobodies. The gloomy Aráoz apartment was too much to bear: on the sixth of June Clementina Villar committed the solecism of dying in the very middle of the Southern district. Shall I confess that I – moved by that most sincere of Argentinian passions, snobbery – was enamored of her, and that her death moved me to tears? Probably the reader has already suspected as much.

At a wake, the progress of corruption brings it about that the corpse reassumes its earlier faces. At some stage of that confused night of the sixth,

Clementina Villar was magically what she had been twenty years before: her features recovered that authority which is conferred by pride, by money, by youth, the awareness of rounding off a hierarchy, by lack of imagination, by limitations, by stolidity. Somehow, I thought, no version of that face which has disturbed me so will stay in my memory as long as this one; it is right that it should be the last, since it might have been the first. I left her rigid among the flowers, her disdain perfected by death. It must have been about two in the morning when I went away. Outside, the predictable rows of one- and two-story houses had taken on the abstract appearance that is theirs at night, when darkness and silence simplify them. Drunk with an almost impersonal piety, I walked through the streets. At the corner of Chile and Tacuarí I saw an open shop. And in that shop, unhappily for me, three men were playing cards.

In the figure of speech called oxymoron a word is modified by an epithet which seems to contradict it: thus, the Gnostics spoke of dark light, and the alchemists of a black sun. For me it was a kind of oxymoron to go straight from my last visit with Clementina Villar to buy a drink at a bar; I was intrigued by the coarseness of the act, by its ease. (The contrast was heightened by the circumstance that there was a card game in progress.) I asked for a brandy. They gave me the Zahir in my change. I stared at it for a moment and went out into the street, perhaps with the beginnings of a fever. I reflected that every coin in the world is a symbol of those famous

coins which glitter in history and fable. I thought of Charon's obol; of the obol for which Belisarius begged; of Judas' thirty coins; of the drachmas of Laïs, the famous courtesan; of the ancient coin which one of the Seven Sleepers proffered; of the shining coins of the wizard in the 1001 Nights, that turned out to be bits of paper; of the inexhaustible penny of Isaac Laquedem; of the sixty thousand pieces of silver, one for each line of an epic, which Firdusi sent back to a king because they were not of gold; of the doubloon which Ahab nailed to the mast; of Leopold Bloom's irreversible florin; of the louis whose pictured face betrayed the fugitive Louis XVI near Varennes. As if in a dream, the thought that every piece of money entails such illustrious connotations as these, seemed to me of huge, though inexplicable, importance. My speed increased as I passed through the empty squares and along the empty streets. At length, weariness deposited me at a corner. I saw a patient iron grating and, beyond, the black and white flagstones of the Concepcion. I had wandered in a circle and was now a block away from the store where they had given me the Zahir.

I turned back. The dark window told me from a distance that the shop was now closed. In Belgrano Street I took a cab. Sleepless, obsessed, almost happy, I reflected that there is nothing less material than money, since any coin whatsoever (let us say a coin worth twenty centavos) is, strictly speaking, a repertory of possible futures. Money is abstract, I repeated; money is the future tense. It can be an evening in

the suburbs, or music by Brahms; it can be maps, or chess, or coffee; it can be the words of Epictetus teaching us to despise gold; it is a Proteus more versatile than the one on the isle of Pharos. It is unforeseeable time, Bergsonian time, not the rigid time of Islam or the Porch. The determinists deny that there is such a thing in the world as a single possible act, *id est* an act that could or could not happen; a coin symbolizes man's free will. (I did not suspect that these "thoughts" were an artifice opposed to the Zahir and an initial form of its demoniacal influence.) I fell asleep after much brooding, but I dreamed that I was the coins guarded by a griffon.

The next day I decided that I had been drunk. I also made up my mind to get rid of the coin that had caused me so much worry. I looked at it: there was nothing out of the ordinary about it except for some scratches. The best thing to do would be to bury it in the garden or hide it in some corner of the library, but I wanted to remove myself from its orbit. I preferred to lose it. I did not go to the Pilar that morning, or to the cemetery; I took the underground to Constitución and from Constitución to the corner of San Juan and Boedo. I got off, on an impulse, at Urquiza and walked west and south. With scrupulous lack of plan I rounded a number of corners, and in a street which looked to me like all the others I went into a wretched little tavern, asked for a drink of brandy, and paid for it with the Zahir. I half closed my eyes behind my dark spectacles, managing not to see the house-numbers or the name of the street. That night I took a

veronal tablet and slept peacefully.

Up till the end of June I was busy writing a tale of fantasy. This contained two or three enigmatic circumlocutions, or "kennings": for example, instead of *blood* it says *sword-water*, and *gold* is the *serpent's bed*; the story is told in the first person. The narrator is an ascetic who has abjured the society of men and who lives in a kind of wilderness. (The name of this place is Gnitaheidr.) Because of the simplicity and candor of his life there are those who consider him an angel; but this is a pious exaggeration, for there is no man who is free of sin. As a matter of fact, he has cut his own father's throat, the old man having been a notorious wizard who by magic arts had got possession of a limitless treasure. To guard this treasure from the insane covetousness of human beings is the purpose to which our ascetic has dedicated his life: day and night he keeps watch over the hoard. Soon, perhaps too soon, his vigil will come to an end: the stars have told him that the sword has already been forged which will cut it short forever. (Gram is the name of that sword.) In a rhetoric increasingly more complex he contemplates the brilliance and the flexibility of his body: in one paragraph he speaks distractedly of his scales; in another he says that the treasure which he guards is flashing gold and rings of red. In the end we understand that the ascetic is the serpent Fafnir, that the treasure upon which he lies is the treasure of the Nibelungs. The appearance of Sigurd brings the story to an abrupt end.

I have said that the composition of this trifle (into

which I inserted, in a pseudo-erudite fashion, a verse or two from the *Fáfnismál*) gave me a chance to forget the coin. There were nights when I felt so sure of being able to forget it that I deliberately recalled it to mind. What is certain is that I overdid these occasions: it was easier to start the thing than to have done with it. It was in vain that I told myself that that abominable nickel disc was no different from others that pass from one hand to another, alike, countless, innocuous. Attracted by this idea, I tried to think of other coins; but I could not. I remember, too, a frustrated experiment I made with Chilean five- and ten-centavo pieces and an Uruguayan *vintén*. On the sixteenth of July I acquired a pound sterling. I did not look at it during the day, but that night (and other nights) I put it under a magnifying glass and studied it by the light of a powerful electric lamp. Afterwards I traced it on paper with a pencil. But the brilliance and the dragon and Saint George were of no help to me: I could not manage to change obsessions.

In August I decided to consult a psychiatrist. I did not tell him the whole of my ridiculous story; I said I was bothered by insomnia, that I was being haunted by the image of something or other . . . let us say a poker-chip or a coin. A little later, in a bookshop in Sarmiento Street, I dug up a copy of Julius Barlach's *Urkunden zur Geschichte der Zahirsage* (Breslau, 1899).

In this book my disease was clearly revealed. According to the preface, the author proposed "to gather together in one handy octavo volume all the

documents having to do with the Zahir superstition, including four papers from the Habicht collection and the original manuscript of the study by Philip Meadows Taylor." Belief in the Zahir is of Islamic origin, and seems to date from the eighteenth century. (Barlach rejects the passages which Zotenberg attributes to Abulfeda). *Zahir* in Arabic means "notorious," "visible"; in this sense it is one of the ninety-nine names of God, and the people (in Muslim territories) use it to signify "beings or things which possess the terrible property of being unforgettable, and whose image finally drives one mad." The first irrefutable testimony is that of the Persian Lutf Ali Azur. In the precise pages of the biographical encyclopedia entitled *Temple of Fire* this polygraph dervish writes that in a school at Shiraz there was a copper astrolabe "fashioned in such a way that whoever looked once upon it could thereafter think of nothing else; whence the King ordered that it should be sunk in the deepest part of the sea, lest men forget the universe." The study of Meadows Taylor is more detailed (he was in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and wrote the famous novel, *Confessions of a Thug*). In about 1832, in the outskirts of Bhuj, Taylor heard the unusual expression "Verily he has looked on the Tiger," to signify madness or saintliness. He was informed that the reference was to a magic tiger which was the ruin of whoever beheld it, even from far away, since the beholder continued to think about it to the end of his days. Someone said that one of these unfortunates had fled to Mysore, where he had

painted the figure of the tiger on the walls of some palace. Years later, Taylor was inspecting the jails of the kingdom; and in the one at Nittur the governor showed him a cell where the floor, the walls and the ceiling had been covered, in barbaric colours which time was subtilizing before erasing them, by a Muslim fakir's elaboration of a kind of infinite Tiger. This Tiger was composed of many tigers in the most vertiginous fashion: it was traversed by tigers, scored by tigers, and it contained seas and Himalayas and armies which seemed to reveal still other tigers. The painter had died many years ago in this very cell; he had come from Sind, or maybe Guzerat, and his original purpose had been to design a map of the world. Indeed, some traces of this were yet to be discerned in the monstrous image. . . . Taylor told the story to Mohammed Al-Yemeni, of Fort William; Mohammed informed him that there was no created thing in this world which could not take on the properties of *Zaheer*,* but that the All-merciful does not allow two things to be it at the same time, since one alone is able to fascinate multitudes. He said that there is always a Zahir; that in the Age of Innocence it was an idol named Yaúq; and later, a prophet of Jorasán who used to wear a veil embroidered with stones, or a golden mask.† He also said that God is inscrutable.

*Such is Taylor's spelling of the word.

†Barlach observes that Yaúq; is mentioned in the Koran (71, 23) and that the Prophet is Al-Mokanna (the Veiled One), and that no one except Philip Meadows Taylor's surprising informant has identified them with the Zahir.

I read Barlach's monograph – read it and reread it. I hardly need describe my feelings. I remember my despair when I realized that nothing could save me; the sheer relief of knowing that I was not to blame for my predicament; the envy I felt for those whose Zahir was not a coin, but a piece of marble, or a tiger. How easy it would be not to think of a tiger! And I also remember the odd anxiety with which I studied this paragraph: "A commentator on the *Gulshan i Raz* says that he who has seen the Zahir will soon see the Rose; and he cites a verse interpolated in the *Asrar Nama* (Book of Things Unknown) of Attar: 'The Zahir is the shadow of the Rose, and the Rending of the Veil.' "

That night at Clementina's house I had been surprised not to see her younger sister, Mrs. Abascal. In October one of her friends told me about it: "Poor Julie! She got awfully *queer*, and they had to shut her up in the Bosch. She's just going to be the *death* of the nurses who have to *spoon*-feed her! Why, she keeps on talking about a *coin*, just like Morena Sackmann's *chauffeur*."

Time, which generally attenuates memories, only aggravates that of the Zahir. There was a time when I could visualize the obverse, and then the reverse. Now I see them simultaneously. This is not as though the Zahir were crystal, because it is not a matter of one face being superimposed upon another; rather, it is as though my eyesight were spherical, with the Zahir in the center. Whatever is not the Zahir comes to me fragmentarily, as if from a great distance: the arro-

gant image of Clementina; physical pain. Tennyson once said that if we could understand a single flower, we should know what we are and what the world is. Perhaps he meant that there is no fact, however insignificant that does not involve universal history and the infinite concatenation of cause and effect. Perhaps he meant that the visible world is implicit in every phenomenon, just as the will, according to Schopenhauer, is implicit in every subject. The Cabalists pretend that man is a microcosm, a symbolic mirror of the universe; according to Tennyson, everything would be. Everything, even the intolerable Zahir.

Before 1948 Julia's destiny will have caught up with me. They will have to feed me and dress me, I shall not know whether it is afternoon or morning, I shall not know who Borges was. To call this prospect terrible is a fallacy, for none of its circumstances will exist for me. One might as well say that an anesthetized man feels terrible pain when they open his cranium. I shall no longer perceive the universe: I shall perceive the Zahir. According to the teaching of the Idealists, the words "live" and "dream" are rigorously synonymous. From thousands of images I shall pass to one; from a highly complex dream to a dream of utter simplicity. Others will dream that I am mad; I shall dream of the Zahir. When all the men on earth think, day and night, of the Zahir, which will be a dream and which a reality – the earth or the Zahir?

In the empty night hours I can still walk through the streets. Dawn may surprise me on a bench in Garay Park, thinking (trying to think) of the passage

in the *Asrar Nama* where it says that the Zahir is the shadow of the Rose and the Rending of the Veil. I associate that saying with this bit of information: In order to lose themselves in God, the Sufis recite their own names, or the ninety-nine divine names, until they become meaningless. I long to travel that path. Perhaps I shall conclude by wearing away the Zahir simply through thinking of it again and again. Perhaps behind the coin I shall find God.

Yury Olesha

LOVE

SHUVALOV was waiting for Lelya in the park. It was midday and hot. A lizard showed up on a stone. Shuvalov thought: on the stone the lizard is quite defenseless; it can be detected at once. "Mimicry," he reflected, and that made him think of the chameleon. "Hello," he said, "that's all that was needed: a chameleon!"

The lizard slipped away.

Annoyed, Shuvalov got up from the bench and walked rapidly along the path. He was vexed. Suddenly he felt like opposing something. He stood still and said rather loudly: "Oh, to hell with it! Why should I be thinking about mimicry and a chameleon? I haven't any use for such notions."

He came to an open space and sat down on a stump. Insects were darting about. Stalks were quivering. The architecture of the flight of birds, flies, and bugs was spectral, but one could discern the faint outlines of arches, bridges, towers, terraces – a shifting city that changed its shape from moment to to moment. "I'm beginning to lose my grip," he thought; "the field of my attention is getting messy. I'm becoming an eclectic. What's got hold of me

anyway? I'm beginning to see things that don't exist."

There was no sign of Lelya. He had not meant to stay in the park so long. He resumed his stroll. He became aware of the existence of many species of insects. A gnat was climbing up a grass-blade. He took it off and placed it on the palm of his hand. Suddenly its tiny belly flashed in the sun. Shuvalov grew angry. "Damn it, if this keeps up, in half an hour I'll become a naturalist!"

The tree trunks were of many kinds, and so were the stems and leaves; he saw grass jointed like bamboo; he was struck by the many colours of the greensward; the varied colours of the soil itself were a complete surprise to him. "I don't want to be a naturalist," he pleaded. "I have no use for these chance observations."

But there was no sign of Lelya. He had already made some statistical deductions, done some classifying. He could assert that the greater number of trees in this park had broad trunks and leaves shaped like the ace of clubs. He distinguished the noises of the various insects. Against his will, his attention was fastened upon matters of absolutely no interest to him.

Still there was no sign of Lelya. He was filled with longing and irritation. Coming toward him, instead of Lelya, was a citizen in a black hat whom he had never seen before. The citizen sat down on the green bench beside Shuvalov. There was a despondent air about him as he sat there with hanging head, a white

hand on each knee. He was young and quiet. It appeared later that the young man was suffering from color blindness. The two fell to talking.

"I envy you," said the young man. "They say that leaves are green. I've never seen green leaves. I have to eat blue pears."

"Blue," said Shuvalov, "is not edible. A blue pear would turn my stomach."

"I eat blue pears," repeated the color-blind youth gloomily.

Shuvalov shuddered.

"Tell me," said he, "have you noticed that when birds fly around you, the result is a city, imaginary lines . . . ?"

"Can't say I have," answered the color-blind one.

"So you perceive the world as it actually is?"

"Yes, except for some details of color."

The color-blind young man turned a pale face to Shuvalov.

"Are you in love?" he asked.

"Yes, I am," answered Shuvalov candidly.

"Aside from a slight confusion in the matter of color, everything's as it should be," said the color-blind youth more cheerfully, and he made a patronizing gesture in the direction of his neighbor.

"But blue pears, that's no trifle!" Shuvalov grinned.

Lelya appeared in the distance. Shuvalov jumped up. The color-blind youth arose and, lifting his black hat, started to walk away.

"You're not a violinist?" Shuvalov called after him.

"You see things that don't exist," answered the young man.

"You look like a violinist!" Shuvalov shouted heatedly.

The color-blind one, continuing on his way, made a reply that Shuvalov did not catch, but he thought he heard him say: "You're in a bad way."

Lelya was walking rapidly. He got up and took a few steps toward her. The branches with club-shaped leaves were waving. Shuvalov stood in the middle of the path. The branches were making a noise. As she approached, the foliage gave her an ovation. The color-blind youth, turning off the path, thought: "It's getting windy," and looked up at the leaves. They were behaving like any leaves agitated by the wind. He saw blue treetops swaying. Shuvalov saw green treetops. But Shuvalov drew an unnatural conclusion. He thought that the trees were giving Lelya an ovation. The color-blind young man was mistaken, but Shuvalov was even more seriously mistaken.

"I see things that don't exist," Shuvalov repeated.

Lelya came up to him. In one hand she had a bag of apricots. The other hand she held out to him. The world changed precipitously.

"Why are you making such a face?" she asked.

"I feel as if I were wearing glasses."

Lelya took an apricot out of the bag, tore its tiny buttocks and threw away the pit. It fell into the grass. Shuvalov looked around frightened. He looked around and saw that where the pit had fallen, a tree had sprung up, a slim radiant sapling, a miraculous

parasol. At that he said to Lelya:

"Something absurd is going on. I'm beginning to think in images. The laws of nature don't exist for me any more. In five years there will be an apricot tree on this spot. It may well be so. It's perfectly possible, scientifically. But in defiance of all that's natural, I've just seen this tree five years in advance. How ridiculous! I'm becoming an idealist."

"It's because you're in love," she said, shedding apricot juice.

She was sitting on pillows, waiting for him. The bed had been moved into the corner. The garlands on the wallpaper had a golden gleam. He came up to her, and she put her arms about him. She was so young and so slight that when she was wearing nothing but her chemise, her nakedness appeared preternatural. The first embrace was tempestuous. The childish locket flew from her throat and was caught in her hair like a golden almond. Shuvalov bent over her face which sank into the pillows as slowly as the face of one dying.

The lamp was burning.

"I'll blow it out," said Lelya.

Shuvalov lay next to the wall. The corner moved down upon him. He traced the design on the wallpaper with his finger. It dawned upon him that the portion of the wallpaper pattern near which he was falling asleep had a double existence: one, its ordinary daytime existence with nothing remarkable about it, simply garlands; the other, nocturnal, perceived five

minutes before falling asleep. Suddenly looming up close to him, the elements of the design grew larger, more detailed, and strange. Upon the verge of falling asleep, his perceptions grown childlike, he made no protest against the transformation of familiar and proper shapes – all the more so, since this transformation had something touching about it: instead of circles and curlicues, he saw a goat, a chef's cap . . .

"And here is a treble clef," said Lelya, catching on.

"And a chameleon," he lisped, falling asleep.

He woke up early in the morning. Very early. He woke up, looked about him, and uttered a cry. A beatific sound issued from his throat. During the night just past, the transformation of the world which had begun with their first meeting had been completed. He woke up on a new earth. The radiance of morning filled the room. He noticed the window ledge and on it pots of varicolored flowers. Lelya was asleep, with her back turned toward him. She lay curled up, her back curved, and under her skin her spine showed like a slender reed. "A fishing rod," thought Shuvalov, "a bamboo cane." On this new earth everything was absurd and touching. Voices reached him through the open window. People were talking about the flowerpots ranged on her window ledge.

He got up and dressed, keeping a hold on the earth with an effort. Terrestrial gravitation had ceased to exist. He hadn't yet grasped the laws of this new world and therefore acted cautiously, timidly, fearing that some rash movement might have a devastating

effect. Even just to think, merely to perceive objects, was a risky business. And what if suddenly, during the night, he had been gifted with the ability to materialize thoughts? There was some basis for such a supposition. Thus, for instance, his buttons just buttoned themselves. Again, as soon as he thought of wetting his brush in order to plaster down his hair, he heard water dripping from the tap. He looked around. Hanging against the sun-bright wall a heap of Lelya's dresses were blazing with all the colors of a montgolfier balloon.

"I'm here," the voice of the tap sounded from the heap.

Under the heap he discovered the tap and the washbasin. A piece of pink soap lay near by. Now Shuvalov was afraid that he might think of something terrible. "A tiger entered the room," he almost thought against his will. But somehow he managed to escape the thought. . . . He looked at the door, however, in terror. The materialization took place, but since the thought had not been fully formed, the effect of the materialization was approximate and remote: a wasp flew in through the window. . . . It was striped and bloodthirsty.

"Lelya, a tiger!" shouted Shuvalov.

Lelya woke up. The wasp hung on the edge of a plate. It buzzed gyroscopically. Lelya jumped out of bed and the wasp flew at her. Lelya waved it away. The wasp and the locket circled about her. Shuvalov swatted the locket with his palm. The pair of them

pursued the wasp determinedly. Lelya covered it with her creaky straw hat.

Shuvalov had to leave. They said good-by standing in a draft, which in this new world proved amazingly active and many-voiced. . . . It blew open a door below stairs. It sang like a washerwoman. It whirled the flowers on the window ledge. If lifted Lelya's hat, freeing the wasp, and hurled the hat into the salad bowl. It made Lelya's hair stand on end. It whistled. It puffed up Lelya's chemise.

They parted. And Suvalov, too happy to feel the steps underfoot, walked downstairs and out into the courtyard. No, he didn't feel the steps, or the porch, or the pavement. It was then that he discovered that all this was not a mirage but reality: his feet were suspended in the air, he was flying.

"He is flying on the wings of love," he heard as he passed a window.

He shot up, his long, belted blouse turned into a crinoline, there was fever on his lip, he flew, snapping his fingers.

At two o'clock he arrived in the park. Fatigued with love and happiness, he fell asleep on a green bench. He slept on. The sweat on his face boiled in the sun. He slept, his collarbone sticking out of his open blouse.

A stranger, wearing something like a cassock, a black hat, and heavy blue spectacles, was walking slowly along the path with the gait of a priest, his

hands clasped behind his back and his head bobbing up and down. He approached Shuvalov and sat down beside him.

"I am Isaac Newton," said the stranger, lifting his hat. Through his spectacles he saw his blue, photographic world.

"How do you do?" murmured Shuvalov.

The great scientist was sitting up straight, alert, on pins and needles. He listened intently, his ears twitching, and the forefinger of his left hand raised as though he were calling to order an invisible choir, ready to burst into song any moment at his signal. All nature held its breath. Shuvalov quietly hid behind a bench. Once the gravel screeched under his heel. The celebrated physicist harkened to the vast silence of nature. Far off, under a clump of greenery, a star shone, as during an eclipse, and it became cool.

"There!" Newton exclaimed suddenly. "You hear?"

Without looking, he stretched out his hand, seized Shuvalov by his blouse, and, getting up, pulled him out of his hiding place. They walked on the lawn. The scientist's roomy shoes trod softly and left white imprints on the grass. A lizard darted ahead of them, glancing back at them every now and then. They passed through a thicket, which decorated the steel frame of the scientist's spectacles with fluff and ladybugs. They came to a clearing. Shuvalov recognized the sapling that had sprung up the previous day.

"Apricots?" he asked.

"No," snapped the scientist with irritation. "It's

an apple tree."

The skeleton of the apple tree, the cagelike framework of its crown, light and fragile as the framework of a montgolfier balloon, was visible through the scanty cover of foliage. Everything was still and motionless.

"Here," said the scientist, stooping, and because of his bent back his voice sounded like a growl. "Here!" He had an apple in his hand. "What does this mean?"

It was obvious that he did not often have occasion to stoop. Having straightened out, he threw back his shoulders several times, humoring his spine, the old bamboo cane of the spine. The apple rested on three fingers.

"What does this mean?" he repeated, with a wheeze that muffled his speech. "Will you tell me why the apple fell down?"

Shuvalov looked at the apple as Wilhelm Tell once did.

"It's the law of gravitation," he lisped.

Then after a pause the great physicist asked:

"Do I understand that you were flying this morning, young man?" He spoke like a professor examining a student. His eyebrows soared above his spectacles.

"Do I understand that you were flying this morning, my young Marxist?"

A ladybug crawled from his finger onto the apple. Isaac Newton eyed it. The ladybug appeared dazzlingly blue to him. He frowned. It rose from the highest point on the apple and flew away with the aid of wings

which it had produced from behind somewhere, like a man in a frock coat pulling a handkerchief from a back pocket.

"Do I understand that you were flying this morning?"

Shuvalov was silent.

"Pig!" said Isaac Newton.

Shuvalov woke up.

"Pig!" said Lelya, standing over him. "You're waiting for me and you fall asleep! Pig!"

She took a ladybug from his forehead and smiled at the metallic sheen of its little belly.

"Damn it!" he swore. "I hate you. There was a time when I knew that this was a ladybug and that was all I knew about it. Well, perhaps I might have concluded too that there was something antireligious about its name*. But ever since we met, something's happened to my eyesight. I see blue pears and I take a fly agaric for a ladybug."

She wanted to hug him.

"Leave me, leave me!" he cried. "I'm fed up with you. I'm ashamed."

Shouting, he ran off like a deer. He ran, snorting and leaping wildly, shying away from his own shadow and squinting his eyes. Finally he stopped, out of breath. Lelya vanished. He decided that he must forget everything. He must find once more the world he had lost. "Good-by," he sighed, "we shall never see each other again."

He sat down above a slope on a ledge overlooking

*The Russian for "ladybug" is, literally, "God's little cow."

a wide landscape dotted with summer homes. He sat on the apex of a prism, his legs dangling over the incline. Below him the huge parasol of an ice-cream vendor was circling about, and the man's whole outfit somehow gave the impression of an African village.

"I am living in paradise," said the young Marxist in a crushed voice.

"Are you a Marxist?" he heard himself addressed.

A young man in a black hat, the color-blind youth whose acquaintance Shuvalov had already made, was sitting close beside him.

"Yes, I'm a Marxist," answered Shuvalov.

"Then you mayn't live in paradise."

The color-blind youth was playing with a twig. Shuvalov kept sighing.

"But what can I do? Earth has turned into paradise."

The color-blind young man whistled, scratching his ear with the twig.

"Do you know," Shuvalov continued in a whimper, "to what lengths I've gone? This morning I was flying."

A kite hung in the sky like a postage stamp pasted askew.

"If you like, I'll show you. I'll fly over there," and Shuvalov stretched out his hand.

"No, thanks. I don't want to be a witness to your disgrace."

"Yes, it's terrible," Shuvalov let fall, after a pause. "I know it's terrible. I envy you," he continued.

"Really?"

"Honest. It's wonderful to perceive everything correctly and to be confused only about some details of color, like you. You don't have to live in paradise. The world hasn't been blotted out for you. Everything's in proper order. And me – just think of it! I'm perfectly well, I'm a materialist. And suddenly, a criminal, antiscientific distortion of substances, of matter takes place before my very eyes!"

"Yes, it's terrible," the color-blind young man agreed, "and all because of love!"

Shuvalov suddenly seized his neighbor's hand.

"Listen!" he exclaimed heatedly. "I agree. Give me your retina and take my love."

The color-blind young man started climbing down the slope.

"Excuse me," he said."I have no time. Good-by. Go on living in your paradise."

It was difficult for him to make his way down the incline. He was climbing with legs wide apart, and looking less like a man than like the reflection of one in water. Finally he reached level ground and trudged off gaily. Then, throwing the twig into the air, he blew Shuvalov a kiss, and shouted:

"Remember me to Eve!"

Meanwhile Lelya was sleeping. An hour after his meeting with the color-blind youth Shuvalov found her in the depths of the park, in the very heart of it. He was no naturalist, he could not identify the vegetation surrounding him: hazelnut, hawthorn, elderberry, or eglantine. Branches, shrubbery, pressed

upon him from every side. He walked like a peddler loaded with baskets of interwoven twigs knotted thickly at the center. He kept throwing away the baskets that poured over him leaves, petals, thorns, berries, birds.

Lelya lay on her back in a pink dress open at the throat. She was asleep. He could hear a faint crackling in her nose, congested in sleep. He sat down near her.

Then he laid his head on her breast, fingering the cotton print she wore. His head lay on her breast damp with perspiration, he could see the pink nipple, faintly wrinkled like the skin on milk. He was deaf to the sounds of leaves rustling, twigs crackling, of breathing.

Suddenly the color-blind young man loomed up behind the bars of a bush. The bush did not let him pass.

"Listen," said the color-blind youth.

Shuvalov lifted his head, sweetness clinging to his cheek.

"Don't follow me around like a dog," said Shuvalov.

"Listen: I agree. You take my retina and give me your love."

"Go and eat blue pears," answered Shuvalov.

Isak Dinesen

THE YOUNG MAN WITH THE CARNATION

THREE-QUARTERS of a century ago there lay in Antwerp, near the harbour, a small hotel named the Queen's Hotel. It was a neat, respectable place, where sea captains stayed with their wives.

To this house there came, on a March evening, a young man, sunk in gloom. As he walked up from the harbour, to which he had come on a ship from England, he was, he felt, the loneliest being in the world. And there was no one to whom he could speak of his misery, for to the eyes of the world he must seem safe and fortunate, a young man to be envied by everyone.

He was an author who had had a great success with his first book. The public had loved it; the critics had been at one in praising it; and he had made money on it, after having been poor all his life. The book, from his own experience, treated the hard lot of poor children, and it had brought him into contact with social reformers. He had been enthusiastically received within a circle of highly cultivated, noble men and women. He had even married into their community, the daughter of a famous scientist, a beautiful young woman, who idolized him.

He was now going to Italy with his wife, there to finish his next book, and was, at the moment, carrying the manuscript in his portmanteau. His wife had preceded him by a few days, for she wanted to visit her old school in Brussels on the way. "It will do me good," she had said, smiling, "to think and talk of other things than you." She was now waiting for him at the Queen's Hotel, and would wish to think and talk of nothing else.

All these things looked pleasant. But things were not what they looked. They hardly ever were, he reflected, but in his case they were even exactly the opposite. The world had been turned upside down upon him; it was no wonder that he should feel sick, even to death, within it. He had been trapped, and had found out too late.

For he felt in his heart that he would never again write a great book. He had no more to tell, and the manuscript in his bag was nothing but a pile of paper that weighed down his arm. In his mind he quoted the Bible, because he had been to a Sunday School when he was a boy, and thought: "I am good for nothing but to be cast out and be trodden under foot by men."

How was he to face the people who loved him, and had faith in him: his public, his friends and his wife? He had never doubted but that they must love him better than themselves, and must consider his interests before their own, on account of his genius, and because he was a great artist. But when his genius had gone, there were only two possible future courses left. Either the world would despise and desert him,

or else it might go on loving him, irrespective of his worthiness as an artist. From this last alternative, although in his thoughts he rarely shied at anything' he turned in a kind of *horror vaccui*; it seemed in itself to reduce the world to a void and a caricature, a Bedlam. He might bear anything better than that.

The idea of his fame augmented and intensified his despair. If in the past he had been unhappy, and had at times contemplated throwing himself in the river, it had at least been his own affair. Now he had had the glaring searchlight of renown set on him; a hundred eyes were watching him; and his failure, or suicide, would be the failure and the suicide of a world-famous author.

And even these considerations were but minor factors in his misfortune. If worse came to worst, he could do without his fellow-creatures. He had no great opinion of them, and might see them go, public, friends and wife, with infinitely less regret than they would ever have suspected, as long as he himself could remain face to face, and on friendly terms, with God.

The love of God and the certainty that in return God loved him beyond other human beings had upheld him in times of poverty and adversity. He had a talent for gratitude as well; his recent good luck had confirmed and sealed the understanding between God and him. But now he felt that God had turned away from him. And if he were not a great artist, who was he that God should love him? Without his visionary powers, without his retinue of fancies, jests and tragedies, how could he even approach the Lord

and implore Him to redress him? The truth was that he was then no better than other people. He might deceive the world, but he had never in his life deceived himself. He had become estranged from God, and how was he now to live?

His mind wandered, and on its own brought home fresh material for suffering. He remembered his father-in-law's verdict on modern literature. "Superficiality," the old man had thundered, "is the mark of it. The age lacks weight; its greatness is hollow. Now your own noble work, my dear boy . . ." Generally the views of his father-in-law were to him of no consequence whatever, but at the present moment he was so low in spirits that they made him writhe a little. Superficiality, he thought, was the word which the public and the critics would use about him, when they came to know the truth – lightness, hollowness. They called his work noble because he had moved their hearts when he described the sufferings of the poor. But he might as well have written of the sufferings of kings. And he had described them, because he happened to know them. Now, that he had made his fortune, he found that he had got no more to say of the poor, and that he would prefer to hear no more of them. The word "superficiality" made an accompaniment to his steps in the long street.

While he had meditated upon these matters he had walked on. The night was cold, a thin, sharp wind ran straight against him. He looked up, and reflected that it was going to rain.

The young man's name was Charlie Despard. He was a small, slight person, a tiny figure in the lonely street. He was not yet thirty, and looked extraordinarily young for his age; he might have been a boy of seventeen. He had brown hair and skin, but blue eyes, a narrow face and a nose with a faint bend to one side. He was extremely light of movement, and kept himself very straight, even in his present state of depression, and with the heavy portmanteau in his hand. He was well dressed, in a havelock, all his clothes had a new look on him, and were indeed new.

He turned his mind towards the hotel, wondering whether it would be any better to be in a house than out in the street. He decided that he would have a glass of brandy when he came there. Lately he had turned to brandy for consolation; sometimes he found it there and at other times not. He also thought of his wife, who was waiting for him. She might be asleep by now. If only she would not have locked the door, so that he should have to wake her up and talk, her nearness might be a comfort to him. He thought of her beauty and her kindness to him. She was a tall young woman with yellow hair and blue eyes, and a skin as white as marble. Her face would have been classic if the upper part of it had not been a little short and narrow in proportion to the jaw and chin. The same peculiarity was repeated in her body; the upper part of it was a little too short and slight for the hips and legs. Her name was Laura. She had a clear, grave, gentle gaze, and her blue eyes easily filled with tears of emotion, her admiration for him in itself would

make them run full when she looked at him. What was the good of it all to him? She was not really his wife; she had married a phantom of her own imagination, and he was left out in the cold.

He came to the hotel, and found that he did not even want the brandy. He only stood in the hall, which to him looked like a grave, and asked the porter if his wife had arrived. The old man told him that Madame had arrived safely, and had informed him that Monsieur would come later. He offered to take the traveller's portmanteau upstairs for him, but Charlie reflected that he had better bear his own burdens. So he got the number of the room from him, and walked up the stairs and along the corridor alone. To his surprise he found the double door of the room unlocked, and went straight in. This seemed to him the first slight favour that fate had shown him for a long time.

The room, when he entered it, was almost dark; only a faint gas-jet burned by the dressing-table. There was a scent of violets in the air. His wife would have brought them and would have meant to give them to him with a line from a poem. But she lay deep down in the pillows. He was so easily swayed by little things at the present time that his heart warmed at his good luck. While he took off his shoes he looked around and thought: "This room, with its sky-blue wallpaper and crimson curtains, has been kind to me; I will not forget it."

But when he got into bed he could not sleep. He heard a clock in the neighborhood strike the quarter-

stroke once, and twice, and three times. He felt that he had forgotten the art of sleeping and would have to lie awake for ever. "That is," he thought, "because I am really dead. There is no longer any difference to me between life and death."

Suddenly, without warning, for he had heard no steps approaching, he heard somebody gently turning the handle of the door. He had locked the door when he came in. When the person in the corridor discovered that, he waited a little, then tried it once more. He seemed to give it up, and after a moment softly drummed a little tune upon the door, and repeated it. Again there was a silence, then the stranger lowly whistled a bit of a tune. Charlie became deadly afraid that in the end all this would wake up his wife. He got out of bed, put on his green dressing-gown and went and opened the door with as little noise as possible.

The corridor was more clearly lighted than the room, and there was a lamp on the wall above the door. Outside, beneath it, stood a young man. He was tall and fair, and so elegantly dressed that Charlie was surprised to meet him in the Queen's Hotel. He had on evening clothes, with a cloak flung over them, and he wore in a buttonhole a pink carnation that looked fresh and romantic against the black and white. But what struck Charlie the moment he looked at him was the expression in the young man's face. It was so radiant with happiness, it shone with such gentle, humble, wild, laughing rapture that Charlie had never seen the like of it. An angelic

messenger straight from Heaven could not have displayed a more exuberant, glorious ecstasy. It made the poet stare at him for a minute. Then he spoke, in French – since he took it that the distinguished young man of Antwerp must be French, and he himself spoke French well, for he had in his time been apprenticed to a French hairdresser. "What is it you want?" he asked. "My wife is asleep and I very much want to sleep myself."

The young man with the carnation had appeared as deeply surprised at the sight of Charlie as Charlie at the sight of him. Still, his strange beatitude was so deeply rooted within him that it took him some time to change his expression into that of a gentleman who meets another gentleman. The light of it remained on his face, mingled with bewilderment, even when he spoke and said: "I beg your pardon. I infinitely regret to have disturbed you. I have made a mistake." Then Charlie closed the door and turned. With the corner of his eye he saw that his wife was sitting up in her bed. He said, shortly, for she might still be only half awake: "It was a gentleman. I believe he was drunk." At his words she lay down again, and he went back to bed himself.

The moment he was in his bed he was seized by a tremendous agitation; he felt that something irreparable had happened to him. For a while he did not know what it was, nor whether it was good or bad. It was as if a gigantic, blazing light had gone up on him, passed, and left him blinded. Then the impression slowly formed and consolidated, and made

itself known in a pain so overwhelming that it contracted him as in a spasm.

For here, he knew, was the glory, the meaning and the key of life. The young man with the carnation had it. That infinite happiness which beamed on the face of the young man with the carnation was to be found somewhere in the world. The young man was aware of the way to it, but he, he had lost it. Once upon a time, it seemed to him, he too had known it, and had let go his hold, and here he was, forever doomed. O God, God in Heaven, at what moment had his own road taken off from the road of the young man with the carnation?

He saw clearly now that the gloom of his last weeks had been but the foreboding of this total perdition. In his agony, for he was really in the grip of death, he caught at any means of salvation, fumbled in the dark and struck at some of the most enthusiastic reviews of his book. His mind at the next moment shrank from them as if they had burnt him. Here, indeed, lay his ruin and damnation: with the reviewers, the publishers, the reading public, and with his wife. They were the people who wanted books, and to obtain their end would turn a human being into printed matter. He had let himself be seduced by the least seductive people in the world; they had made him sell his soul at a price which was in itself a penalty. "I will put enmity," he thought, "between the author and the readers, and between thy seed and their seed; thou shalt bruise their heel, but they shall bruise thine head." It was no wonder that God had

ceased to love him, for he had, from his own free will, exchanged the things of the Lord – the moon, the sea, friendship, fights – for the words that describe them. He might now sit in a room and write down these words, to be praised by the critics, while outside, in the corridor, ran the road of the young man with the carnation into that light which made his face shine.

He did not know how long he had lain like this; he thought that he had wept, but his eyes were dry. In the end he suddenly fell asleep and slept for a minute. When he woke up he was perfectly calm and resolved. He would go away. He would save himself, and he would go in search of that happiness which existed somewhere. If he were to go to the end of the world for it, it did not signify; indeed it might be the best plan to go straight to the end of the world. He would now go down to the harbour and find a ship to take him away. At the idea of a ship he became calm.

He lay in bed for an hour more; then he got up and dressed. The while he wondered what the young man with the carnation had thought of him. He will have thought, he said to himself: "Ah, le pauvre petit bonhomme à la robe de chambre verte." Very silently he packed his portmanteau; his manuscript he first planned to leave behind, then took it with him in order to throw it into the sea, and witness its destruction. As he was about to leave the room he bethought himself of his wife. It was not fair to leave a sleeping woman, forever, without some word of farewell. Theseus, he remembered, had done that.

But it was hard to find the word of farewell. In the end, standing by the dressing-table he wrote on a sheet from his manuscript, "I have gone away. Forgive me if you can." Then he went down. In the loge the porter was nodding over a paper. Charlie thought: "I shall never see him again. I shall never again open this door."

When he came out the wind had lowered, it rained, and the rain was whispering and murmuring on all sides of him. He took off his hat; in a moment his hair was dripping wet, and the rain ran down his face. In this fresh, unexpected touch there was a purport. He went down the street by which he had come, since it was the only street he knew in Antwerp. As he walked, it seemed as if the world was no longer entirely indifferent to him, nor was he any longer absolutely lonely in it. The dispersed, dissipated phenomena of the universe were consolidating, very likely into the devil himself, and the devil had him by the hand or the hair.

Before he expected it, he was down by the harbour and stood upon the wharf, his portmanteau in his hand, gazing down into the water. It was deep and dark, the lights from the lamps on the quay played within it like young snakes His first strong sensation about it was that it was salt. The rainwater came down on him from above; the salt water met him below. That was as it should be. He stood here for a long time, looking at the ships. He would go away on one of them.

The hulls loomed giant-like in the wet night. They

carried things in their bellies, and were pregnant with possibilities; they were porters of destinies, his superiors in every way, with the water on all sides of them. They swam; the salt sea bore them wherever they wanted to go. As he looked, it seemed to him that a kind of sympathy was going forth from the big hulks to him; they had a message for him, but at first he did not know what it was. Then he found the word; it was superficiality. The ships were superficial, and kept to the surface. Therein lay their power; to ships the danger is to get to the bottom of things, to run aground. They were even hollow, and hollowness was the secret of their being; the great depths slaved for them as long as they remained hollow. A wave of happiness heaved Charlie's heart; after a while he laughed in the dark.

"My sisters," he thought, "I should have come to you long ago. You beautiful, superficial wanderers, gallant, swimming conquerors of the deep! You heavy, hollow angels, I shall thank you all my life. God keep you afloat, big sisters, you and me. God preserve our superficiality." He was very wet by now; his hair and his havelock were shining softly, like the sides of the ships in the rain. "And now," he thought, "I shall hold my mouth. My life has had altogether too many words; I cannot remember now why I have talked so much. Only when I came down here and was silent in the rain was I shown the truth of things. From now on I shall speak no more, but I shall listen to what the sailors will tell me, the people who are familiar with the floating ships, and

keep off the bottom of things. I shall go to the end of the world, and hold my mouth."

He had hardly made this resolution before a man on the wharf came up and spoke to him. "Are you looking for a ship?" he asked. He looked like a sailor, Charlie thought, and like a friendly monkey as well. He was a short man with a weather-bitten face and a neckbeard. "Yes, I am," said Charlie. "For which ship?" asked the sailor. Charlie was about to answer: "For the ark of Noah, from the flood." But in time he realized that it would sound foolish. "You see," he said, "I want to get aboard a ship, and go for a journey." The sailor spat, and laughed. "A journey?" he said. "All right. You were staring down into the water, so that in the end I believed that you were going to jump in." "Ah, yes, to jump in!" said Charlie. "And so you would have saved me? But there it is, you are too late to save me. You should have come last night, that would have been the right moment. The only reason why I did not drown myself last night," he went on, "was that I was short of water. If the water had come to me then! Here lies the water – good; here stands the man – good. If the water comes to him he drowns himself. It all goes to prove that the greatest of poets make mistakes, and that one should never become a poet." The sailor by this time had made up his mind that the young stranger was drunk, "All right, my boy," he said, "if you have thought better about drowning yourself, you may go your own way, and good night to you." This was a great disappointment to Charlie, who

thought that the conversation was going extraordinarily well. "Nay, but can I not come with you?" he asked the sailor. "I am going into the inn of La Croix du Midi," the sailor answered, "to have a glass of rum." "That," Charlie exclaimed, "is an excellent idea, and I am in luck to meet a man who has such ideas."

They went together into the inn of La Croix du Midi close by, and there met two more sailors, whom the first sailor knew, and introduced them to Charlie as a mate and a supercargo. He himself was captain of a small ship riding at anchor outside the harbour. Charlie put his hand in his pocket and found it full of the money which he had taken with him for his journey. "Let me have a bottle of your best rum for these gentlemen," he said to the waiter, "and a pot of coffee for myself." He did not want any spirits in his present mood. He was actually scared of his companions, but he found it difficult to explain his case to them. "I drink coffee," he said, "because I have taken" – he was going to say: a vow, but thought better of it – "a bet. There was an old man on a ship – he is, by the way, an uncle of mine – and he bet me that I could not keep from drink for a year, but if I won, the ship would be mine." "And have you kept from it?" the captain asked. 'Yes, as God lives," said Charlie. "I declined a glass of brandy not twelve hours ago, and what, from my talk, you may take to be drunkenness, is nothing but the effect of the smell of the sea." The mate asked: "Was the man who bet you a small man with a big belly and only one eye?"

"Yes, that is Uncle!" cried Charlie. "Then I have met him myself, on my way to Rio," said the mate, "and he offered me the same terms, but I would not take them."

Here the drinks were brought and Charlie filled the glasses. He rolled himself a cigarette, and joyously inhaled the aroma of the rum and of the warm room. In the light of a dim hanging-lamp the three faces of his new acquaintances glowed fresh and genial. He felt honoured and happy in their company and thought: "How much more they know than I do." He himself was very pale, as always when he was agitated. "May your coffee do you good," said the captain. "You look as if you had got the fever." "Nay, but I have had a great sorrow," said Charlie. The others put on condolent faces, and asked him what sorrow it was. "I will tell you," said Charlie. "It is better to speak of it, although a little while ago I thought the opposite. I had a tame monkey I was very fond of; his name was Charlie. I had bought him from an old woman who kept a house in Hong-kong, and she and I had to smuggle him out in the dead of midday, otherwise the girls would never have let him go, for he was like a brother to them. He was like a brother to me, too. He knew all my thoughts, and was always on my side. He had been taught many tricks already when I got him, and he learned more while he was with me. But when I came home the English food did not agree with him, nor did the English Sunday. So he grew sick, and he grew worse, and one Sabbath evening he died on me." "That was

a pity," said the captain compassionately. "Yes," said Charlie. "When there is only one person in the world whom you care for, and that is a monkey, and he is dead, then that is a pity."

The supercargo, before the others came in, had been telling the mate a story. Now for the benefit of the others he told it all over. It was a cruel tale of how he had sailed from Buenos Aires with wool. When five days out in the doldrums the ship had caught fire, and the crew, after fighting the fire all night, had got into the boats in the morning and left her. The supercargo himself had had his hands burnt; all the same he had rowed for three days and nights, so that when they were picked up by a steamer from Rotterdam his hand had grown round his oar, and he could never again stretch out the two fingers. "Then," he said, "I looked at my hand, and I swore an oath that if I ever came back on dry land, the Devil take me and the Devil hold me if ever I went to sea again." The other two nodded their heads gravely at his tale, and asked him where he was off to now. "Me?" said the supercargo. "I have shipped for Sydney."

The mate described a storm in the Bay, and the captain gave them a story of a blizzard in the North Sea, which he had experienced when he was but a sailor-boy. He had been set to the pumps, he narrated, and had been forgotten there, and as he dared not leave, he had pumped for eleven hours. "At that time," he said, "I too, swore to stay on land, and never to set foot on the sea again."

Charlie listened, and thought: "These are wise men.

They know what they are talking about. For the people who travel for their pleasure when the sea is smooth, and smiles at them, and who declare that they love her, they do not know what love means. It is the sailors, who have been beaten and battered by the sea, and who have cursed and damned her, who are true lovers. Very likely the same law applies to husbands and wives. I shall learn more from the seamen. I am a child and a fool, compared to them."

The three sailors were conscious, from his silent, attentive attitude, of the young man's reverence and wonder. They took him for a student, and were content to divulge their experiences to him. They also thought him a good host, for he steadily filled their glasses, and ordered a fresh bottle when the first was empty. Charlie, in return for their stories, gave them a couple of songs. He had a sweet voice and tonight was pleased with it himself; it was a long time since he had sung a song. They all became friendly. The captain slapped him on the back and told him that he was a bright boy and might still be turned into a sailor.

But as, a little later, the captain began to talk tenderly of his wife and family, whom he had just left, and the supercargo, with pride and emotion, informed the party that within the last three months two barmaids of Antwerp had had twins, girls with red hair like their father's, Charlie remembered his own wife and became ill at ease. These sailors, he thought, seemed to know how to deal with their women. Probably there was not one of them so afraid of his

wife as to run away from her in the middle of night. If they knew that he had done so, he reflected, they would think less well of him.

The sailors had believed him to be much younger than he was; so in their company he had come to feel himself like a very young man, and his wife now looked to him more like a mother than a mate. His real mother, although she had been a respectable trades-woman, had had a drop of gypsy blood in her, and none of his quick resolutions had ever taken her by surprise. Indeed, he reflected, she kept upon the surface through everything, and swam there, majestically, like a proud, dark, ponderous goose. If tonight he had gone to her and told her of his decision to go to sea, the idea might very well have excited and pleased her. The pride and gratitude which he had always felt towards the old woman, now, as he drank his last cup of coffee, were transferred to the young. Laura would understand him, and side with him.

He sat for some time, weighing the matter. For experience had taught him to be careful here. He had, before now, been trapped as by a strange optical delusion. When he was away from her, his wife took on all the appearance of a guardian angel, unfailing in sympathy and support. But when again he met her face to face, she was a stranger, and he found his road paved with difficulties.

Still tonight all this seemed to belong to the past. For he was in power now; he had the sea and the ships with him, and before him the young man with

the carnation. Great images surrounded him. Here, in the inn of La Croix du Midi he had already lived through much. He had seen a ship burn down, a snowstorm in the North Sea, and the sailor's homecoming to his wife and children. So potent did he feel that the figure of his wife looked pathetic. He remembered her as he had last seen her, asleep, passive and peaceful, and her whiteness, and her ignorance of the world, went to his heart. He suddenly blushed deeply at the thought of the letter he had written to her. He might go away, he now felt, with a lighter heart, if he had first explained everything to her. "Home," he thought, "where is thy sting? Married life, where is thy victory?"

He sat and looked down at the table, where a little coffee had been spilled. The while the sailors' talk ebbed out, because they saw that he was no longer listening; in the end it stopped. The consciousness of silence round him woke up Charlie. He smiled at them. "I shall tell you a story before we go home. A blue story," he said.

"There was once," he began, "an immensely rich old Englishman who had been a courtier and a councillor to the Queen and who now, in his old age, cared for nothing but collecting ancient blue china. To that end he travelled to Persia, Japan and China, and he was everywhere accompanied by his daughter, the Lady Helena. It happened, as they sailed in the Chinese Sea, that the ship caught fire on a still night, and everybody went into the lifeboats and left her. In the dark and the confusion the old peer was separated

from his daughter. Lady Helena got up on deck late, and found the ship quite deserted. In the last moment a young English sailor carried her down into a life-boat that had been forgotten. To the two fugitives it seemed as if fire was following them from all sides, for the phosphorescence played in the dark sea, and, as they looked up, a falling star ran across the sky, as if it was going to drop into the boat. They sailed for nine days, till they were picked up by a Dutch merchantman, and came home to England.

"The old lord had believed his daughter to be dead. He now wept with joy, and at once took her off to a fashionable watering-place so that she might recover from the hardships she had gone through. And as he thought it must be unpleasant to her that a young sailor, who made his bread in the merchant service, should tell the world that he had sailed for nine days alone with a peer's daughter, he paid the boy a fine sum, and made him promise to go shipping in the other hemisphere and never come back. 'For what,' said the old nobleman, 'would be the good of that?'

"When Lady Helena recovered, and they gave her the news of the Court and of her family, and in the end also told her how the young sailor had been sent away never to come back, they found that her mind had suffered from her trials, and that she cared for nothing in all the world. She would not go back to her father's castle, in its park, nor go to Court, nor travel to any gay town of the continent. The only thing which she now wanted to do was to go, like her father before her, to collect rare blue china. So she began to sail,

from one country to the other, and her father went with her.

"In her search she told the people, with whom she dealt, that she was looking for a particular blue colour, and would pay any price for it. But although she bought many hundred blue jars and bowls, she would always after a time put them aside and say: 'Alas, alas, it is not the right blue.' Her father, when they had sailed for many years, suggested to her that perhaps the colour which she sought did not exist. 'O God, Papa,' said she, 'how can you speak so wickedly? Surely there must be some of it left from the time when all the world was blue.'

"Her two old aunts in England implored her to come back, still to make a great match. But she answered them: 'Nay, I have got to sail. For you must know, dear aunts, that it is all nonsense when learned people tell you that the seas have got a bottom to them. On the contrary, the water, which is the noblest of the elements, does, of course, go all through the earth, so that our planet really floats in the ether, like a soap-bubble. And there, on the other hemisphere, a ship sails, with which I have got to keep pace. We two are like the reflection of one another, in the deep sea, and the ship of which I speak is always exactly beneath my own ship, upon the opposite side of the globe. You have never seen a big fish swimming underneath a boat, following it like a dark-blue shade in the water. But in that way this ship goes, like the shadow of my ship, and I draw it to and fro wherever I go, as the moon draws the tides, all through the bulk

of the earth. If I stopped sailing, what would those poor sailors who make their bread in the merchant service do? But I shall tell you a secret,' she said. 'In the end my ship will go down, to the centre of the globe, and at the very same hour the other ship will sink as well – for people call it sinking, although I can assure you that there is no up and down in the sea – and there, in the midst of the world, we two shall meet.'

"Many years passed, the old lord died and Lady Helena became old and deaf, but she still sailed. Then it happened, after the plunder of the summer palace of the Emperor of China, that a merchant brought her a very old blue jar. The moment she set eyes on it she gave a terrible shriek. 'There it is!' she cried. 'I have found it at last. This is the true blue. Oh, how light it makes one. Oh, it is as fresh as a breeze, as deep as a deep secret, as full as I say not what.' With trembling hands she held the jar to her bosom, and sat for six hours sunk in contemplation of it. Then she said to her doctor and her lady-companion: 'Now I can die. And when I am dead you will cut out my heart and lay it in the blue jar. For then everything will be as it was then. All shall be blue around me, and in the midst of the blue world my heart will be innocent and free, and will beat gently, like a wake that sings, like the drops that fall from an oar blade.' A little later she asked them: 'Is it not a sweet thing to think that, if only you have patience, all that has ever been, will come back to you?' Shortly afterwards the old lady died."

The party now broke up, the sailors gave Charlie their hands and thanked him for the rum and the story. Charlie wished them all good luck. "You forgot your bag," said the captain, and picked up Charlie's portmanteau with the manuscript in it. "No," said Charlie, "I mean to leave that with you, till we are to sail together." The captain looked at the initials on the bag. "It is a heavy bag," he said. "Have you got anything of value in it? Yes, it is heavy, God help me," said Charlie, "but that shall not happen again. Next time it will be empty." He got the name of the captain's ship, and said good-bye to him.

As he came out he was surprised to find that it was nearly morning. The long spare row of street lamps held up their melancholy heads in the grey air.

A thin young girl with big black eyes, who had been walking up and down in front of the inn, came up and spoke to him, and, when he did not answer, repeated her invitation in English. Charlie looked at her. "She too," he thought, "belongs to the ships, like the mussels and seaweeds that grow on their bottoms. Within her many good seamen, who escaped the deep, have been drowned. But all the same she will not run aground, and if I go with her I shall still be safe." He put his hand in his pocket, but found only one shilling left there. "Will you let me have a shilling's worth?" he asked the girl. She stared at him. Her face did not change as he took her hand, pulled down her old glove and pressed the palm, rough and clammy as fish-skin, to his lips and tongue.

He gave her back her hand, placed a shilling in it, and walked away.

For the third time he walked along the street between the harbour and the Queen's Hotel. The town was now waking up, and he met a few people and carts. The windows of the hotel were lighted. When he came into the hall there was no one there, and he was about to walk up to his room, when, through a glass door, he saw his wife sitting in a small, lighted dining room next to the hall. So he went in there.

When his wife caught sight of him her face cleared up. "Oh, you have come!" she cried. He bent his head. He was about to take her hand and kiss it when she asked him: "Why are you so late?" "Am I late?" he exclaimed, highly surprised by her question, and because the idea of time had altogether gone from him. He looked at a clock upon the mantelpiece, and said: "It is only ten past seven." "Yes, but I thought you would be here earlier!" said she. "I got up to be ready when you came." Charlie sat down by the table. He did not answer her, for he had no idea what to say. "Is it possible," he thought, "that she has the strength of soul to take me back in this way?"

"Will you have some coffee?" said his wife. "No, thank you," said he, "I have had coffee." He glanced round the room. Although it was nearly light and the blinds were up, the gas lamps were still burning, and from his childhood this had always seemed to him a great luxury. The fire on the fireplace played on a somewhat worn Brussels carpet and on the red plush chairs. His wife was eating an egg. As a little boy he

had had an egg on Sunday mornings. The whole room, that smelled of coffee and fresh bread, with the white tablecloth and the shining coffee-pot, took on a sabbath-morning look. He gazed at his wife. She had on her grey travelling cloak, her bonnet was lying beside her, and her yellow hair, gathered in a net, shone in the lamplight. She was bright in her own way, a pure light came from her, and she seemed enduringly fixed on the sofa, the one firm object in a turbulent world.

An idea came to him: "She is like a lighthouse," he thought, "the firm, majestic lighthouse that sends out its kindly light. To all ships it says: 'Keep off.' For where the lighthouse stands, there is shoal water, or rocks. To all floating objects the approach means death." At this moment she looked up, and found his eyes on her. "What are you thinking of?" she asked him. He thought: "I will tell her. It is better to be honest with her, from now, and to tell her all." So he said, slowly: "I am thinking that you are to me, in life, like a lighthouse. A steady light, instructing me how to steer my course." She looked at him, then away, and her eyes filled with tears. He became afraid that she was going to cry, even though till now she had been so brave. "Let us go up to our own room," he said, for it would be easier to explain things to her when they were alone.

They went up together, and the stairs, which, last night, had been so long to climb, now were so easy, that his wife said: "No, you are going up too high. We are there." She walked ahead of him down the

corridor, and opened the door to their room.

The first thing that he noticed was that there was no longer any smell of violets in the air. Had she thrown them away in anger? Or had they all faded when he went away? She came up to him and laid her hand on his shoulder and her face on it. Over her fair hair, in the net, he looked round, and stood quite still. For the dressing-table, on which, last night, he had put his letter for her, was in a new place, and so, he found, was the bed he had lain in. In the corner there was now a cheval-glass which had not been there before. This was not his room. He quickly took in more details. There was no longer a canopy to the bed, but above it a steel-engraving of the Belgian Royal family that till now he had never seen. "Did you sleep here last night?" he asked. "Yes," said his wife. "But not well. I was worried when you did not come; I feared that you were having a bad crossing." "Did nobody disturb you?" he asked again. "No," she said. "My door was locked. And this is a quiet hotel, I believe."

As Charlie now looked back on the happenings of the night, with the experienced eye of an author of fiction, they moved him as mightily as if they had been out of one of his own books. He drew in his breath deeply. "Almighty God," he said from the bottom of his heart, "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are thy short stories higher than our short stories."

He went through all the details slowly and surely, as a mathematician sets up and solves an equation. First he felt, like honey on his tongue, the longing and

the triumph of the young man with the carnation. Then, like the grip of a hand round his throat, but with hardly less artistic enjoyment, the terror of the lady in the bed. As if he himself had possessed a pair of firm young breasts he was conscious of his heart stopping beneath them. He stood perfectly still, in his own thoughts, but his face took on such an expression of rapture, laughter and delight that his wife, who had lifted her head from his shoulder, asked him in surprise: "What are you thinking of now?"

Charlie took her hand, his face still radiant. "I am thinking," he said very slowly, "of the Garden of Eden, and the cherubim with the flaming sword. Nay," he went on in the same way, "I am thinking of Hero and Leander. Of Romeo and Juliet. Of Theseus and Ariadne, and the Minotaur as well. Have you ever tried, my dear, to guess how, upon the occasion, the Minotaur was feeling?"

"So you are going to write a love story, Troubadour?" she asked, smiling back upon him. He did not answer at once, but he let go her hand, and after a while asked: "What did you say?" "I asked you if you were going to write a love story?" she repeated timidly. He went away from her, up to the table, and put his hand upon it.

The light that had fallen upon him last night was coming back, and from all sides now – from his own lighthouse as well, he thought confusedly. Only then it had shone onward, upon the infinite world, while at this moment it was turned inwards, and was lightening up the room of the Queen's Hotel. It was very

bright; it seemed that he was to see himself, within it, as God saw him, and under this test he had to steady himself by the table.

While he stood there the situation developed into a dialogue between Charlie and the Lord.

The Lord said: "Your wife asked you twice if you are going to write a love story. Do you believe that this is indeed what you are going to do?" "Yes, that is very likely," said Charlie. "Is it," the Lord asked, "to be a great and sweet tale, which will live in the hearts of young lovers?" "Yes, I should say so," said Charlie. "And are you content with that?" asked the Lord.

"O Lord, what are you asking me?" cried Charlie. "How can I answer yes? Am I not a human being, and can I write a love story without longing for that love which clings and embraces, and for the softness and warmth of a young woman's body in my arms?" "I gave you all that last night," said the Lord. "It was you who jumped out of bed, to go to the end of the world from it." "Yes, I did that," said Charlie. "Did you behold it and think it very good? Are you going to repeat it on me? Am I to be, forever, he who lay in bed with the mistress of the young man with the carnation, and, by the way, what has become of her, and how is she to explain things to him? And who went off, and wrote to her: 'I have gone away. Forgive me, if you can.' " "Yes," said the Lord.

"Nay, tell me, now that we are at it," cried Charlie, "am I, while I write of the beauty of young women, to get, from the live women of the earth, a shilling's

worth, and no more?" "Yes," said the Lord. "And you are to be content with that." Charlie was drawing a pattern with his finger on the table; he said nothing. It seemed that the discourse was ended here, when again the Lord spoke.

"Who made the ships, Charlie?" he asked. "Nay, I know not," said Charlie, "did you make them?" "Yes," said the Lord, "I made the ships on their keels, and all floating things. The moon that sails in the sky, the orbs that swing in the universe, the tides, the generations, the fashions. You make me laugh, for I have given you all the world to sail and float in, and you have run aground here, in a room of the Queen's Hotel to seek a quarrel."

"Come," said the Lord again, "I will make a covenant between me and you. I, I will not measure you out any more distress than you need to write your books." "Oh, indeed!" said Charlie. "What did you say?" asked the Lord. "Do you want any less than that?" "I said nothing," said Charlie. "But you are to write the books," said the Lord. "For it is I who want them written. Not the public, not by any means the critics, but ME!" "Can I be certain of that?" Charlie asked. "Not always," said the Lord. "You will not be certain of it at all times. But I tell you now that it is so. You will have to hold on to that." "O good God," said Charlie. "Are you going," said the Lord, "to thank me for what I have done for you tonight?" "I think," said Charlie, "that we will leave it at what it is, and say no more about it."

His wife now went and opened the window. The

cold raw morning air streamed in, with the din of carriages from the street below, human voices and a great chorus of sparrows, and with the smell of smoke and horse manure.

When Charlie had finished his talk with God, and while it was still so vivid to him that he might have written it down, he went to the window and looked out. The morning colours of the grey town were fresh and delicate, and there was a faint promise of sunshine in the sky. People were about; a young woman in a blue shawl and slippers was walking away quickly; and the omnibus of the hotel, with a white horse to it, was halting below, while the porter helped out the travellers and took down their luggage. Charlie gazed down into the street, a long way under him.

"I shall thank the Lord for one thing all the same," he thought. "That I did not lay my hand on anything that belonged to my brother, the young man with the carnation. It was within my reach, but I did not touch it." He stood for a while in the window and saw the omnibus drive away. Where, he wondered, amongst the houses in the pale morning, was now the young man of last night?

"O the young man," he thought. "Ah, le pauvre jeune homme à l'œillet."

IN THE ASTRAL LIGHT
John Symonds

Madame Blavatsky, the founder of modern occultism, probably attracted more acclaim and abuse than any other woman in the latter half of the 19th century.
Fantastic stories of her powers spread throughout the world: how she could 'materialise' objects out of the air by sheer strength of will, the appearance of strange spirits in her presence, the tolling of astral bells....
Her claim to be in contact with the 'Hidden Masters' of our world was accepted by eminent persons of her day—and of our day.
John Symonds, who wrote *The Great Beast*, has written a book that throws new light on this eccentric, intelligent, and altogether fascinating woman.

3/6

MISS HARGREAVES
Frank Baker

Norman and Henry are two young men of highly fanciful imagination: one of their amusements is to invent, with a wealth of eccentric detail and power of creation, weird and wonderful characters for the entertainment of their friends.
One of their finest efforts is 'Miss Hargreaves', dreamed up during a walking tour in Ireland. But with her they seem to have overshot themselves—they discover, to their profound horror, that their highly-imagined flight of fancy actually exists.
Or does she?

3/6

THE EDGE OF RUNNING WATER

William Sloane

He was a scientist, a seeker after knowledge—in this case, forbidden knowledge.
He brought his delicate, formidable skills to bear against the intractable physical laws of our Universe with one terrible purpose in mind: to bridge the void, to make passionate contact with his beautiful, young, *dead* wife.
And finally he made contact, but assuredly not with her . . . With a blank, an icy, anti-world that absorbed him into its chill embrace.

3/6

GREAT GHOST STORIES

edited by Herbert Van Thal

Mr. Van Thal is famous for his collections of horror stories, and in this one he has surpassed himself. This volume includes such masters as Wilkie Collins, R. L. Stevenson, Sheridan Le Fanu, Lord Lytton, and half-a-dozen other experts in the art of chilling the readers' blood.

2/6

UNCANNY . . .
BIZARRE . . .
GROTESQUE . . .
TALES OF IMAGINATION AND FANTASY . . .

All the stories in this collection plunge us into a world of subconscious fear, nightmare illusion, surrealist fantasy — those nether regions of our consciousness which, in everyday life, we take great care to keep securely fastened. The effect is highly disturbing. Each of these stories has its own peculiarly eerie atmosphere, pregnant with menace; each seems to contain a threat to our sanity, a hint of daemonic madness at work within the cosmos. To read this book, then, is to live dangerously. But the danger here is less transparent, more insidious than that provided by the visceral horror of a Poe or Lovecraft. And the resultant sense of fear and insecurity, because independent of any purely physical phenomena, becomes a thousand times more profound . . . .