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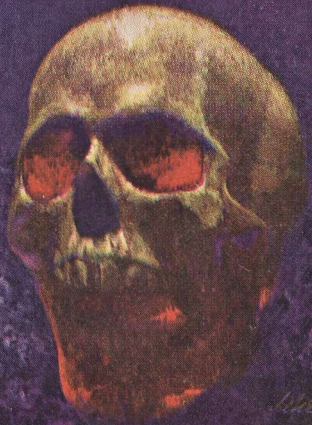
JEAN RAY

GHOULS IN MY GRAVE

A DREAD WORLD
INHABITED BY
THE LIVING DEAD



JUST SOME OF THE GHOULS IN MY GRAVE:

In THE LAST TRAVELER, Mr. Buttercup hears dull, heavy footsteps in his deserted Ocean Queen Hotel and finds a chilling sight in one of his rooms.

> "Mr. Windery was lying with his head sunk deeply into the pillow, his mouth black, opened for a cry that seemed still audible . . ."

In THE CEMETERY WATCHMAN, a passing stranger, hired to guard the mysterious mausoleum of Duchess Opolchenska in Saint Guitton Cemetery has an unexpected visitor one night:

> ". . . I was crushed by a formidable weight . . . Sharp teeth bit into my neck, and cold loathsome lips began greedily sucking my blood . . ."

GHOULS IN MY GRAVE

Jean Ray

Translated from the French
by LOWELL BAIR

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CONTENTS

GOLD TEETH

Abel Teal	Silas Humblet
Rollers.	Coffin: thick oak.
Screwdriver.	Lid: held shut by eight screws and two springs.
Crowbar.	Vault: closed by flat slab and Portland cement.
Four pounds of plaster.	Moonrise: 2:15 A.M.
Portland cement.	Barometer: unsteady.
Begin at 11:00 P.M.	Sky: probably covered by thick clouds.
Flashlight.	Night watchman: last round at 9:15 P.M.
Rubber gloves.	Died of intestinal cancer; rapid decomposition.
Formaldehyde.	

In the foregoing statement of account, Silas Humblet is the dead man and I am the living. And since I have a sense of humor, I might also say that S.H. is the gold mine and A.T. is the miner.

I always draw up a similar list before going to work. In so doing, I am following the example of Dr. Wheeler, my professor of methodology at Cambridge in the days when I intended to go into teaching. Waste no time and reduce unfavorable possibilities to a minimum: such was Wheeler's doctrine. I am indebted to it for my safety and the success of my undertakings.

I carefully read the obituary notices in the newspapers. On various skillfully contrived pretexts, I have

access to the most exclusive hospital in the city, and I know the names of those patients who are about to leave this world. I keep posted on what takes place in the offices of the most famous dentists. As for the cemeteries, they hold no secrets for me.

Why do I do all that? Because I make my living by removing gold teeth from dead people, and I don't think it seriously offends the Lord, because corpses no longer have any need for their artificial teeth, or even for those given to them by Mother Nature.

Silas Humblet was buried in Brompton Cemetery. He died in Dr. Marden's clinic, and he went to his final resting-place with an almost complete set of gold teeth. His grave was in the western part of the cemetery, surrounded by larches and dwarf pines, not far from the wall, which would make my work easier. Before the moon rose, I would already have left the cemetery with a few ounces of eighteen-carat gold in my pocket.

Such rich people's graves, trying to look like mausoleums, are well adapted to my purpose: all I have to do is shovel away a few cubic feet of earth, and I reach the vertical slab that serves as a door for their occupants.

Don't think for a moment that I want to teach you how to rob a grave.

In England, in tombs with a grant in perpetuity, the chambers in which the dead are laid are seldom underground; they are closed with plaster and a few bricks before the tomb itself is closed with the vertical slab.

When the plaster is still fresh, the bricks are easy to take out and put back in place. The hardest part of the job is to take out the coffin. I'm able to do this without difficulty by means of a device I invented myself. It consists only of two steel rollers moved by a crank, and a flat steel bar that slips under the coffin. A few turns on the crank and the coffin obediently comes to you, then it goes back into its hole when you turn the crank in the opposite direction.

Cutting through the sheet of lead, usually an eighth of an inch thick, takes only a few moments, because you only have to cut out a four-inch square over the corpse's mouth. The rest is child's play.

I therefore live by Death and in his company, and I believe I can say we get on quite well together. I won't deny, however, that now and then he tries to drive me mad, as he did in the case of the late Mr. Tottery. After sweating blood to remove a set of screws that had been put in askew, I found that antimony had apparently been mixed with the lead, because I broke a knife blade in it. Finally, when I took out the corpse's bridgework, I discovered to my chagrin that it was made of some sort of third-rate metal that wasn't worth a brass farthing. A plague on all misers who play such tricks on you after their burial!

But Death, my partner, soon made up for this disappointment.

Lady Bollingham had gone to her reward with sixteen gold teeth in her mouth, which had spat out so much gall and venom during her lifetime. When I tried to cut the lead sheet I saw that it wasn't lead at all, but zinc. This was an inconvenience, for in such cases I must use a blowtorch. It's work that turns my stomach, because I can't prevent the flame from touching the dead flesh, which then begins to crackle and smell bad.

And so I had to broil Lady Bollingham a little, but I was rewarded for my trouble because I got some fine chunks of gold from her remains.

But then I saw something glitter in the glow of my flashlight. The noble shrew had had herself buried with her diamond necklace! I told myself she must not have stopped there, and I let the flame of my blowtorch roar again. I wasn't mistaken: there were four heavy diamond rings on her bony fingers, and I relieved her wrists of two bracelets studded with enormous emeralds. That night brought me twenty thousand pounds and took away my appetite for a week. It was the starting-point of my happiness.

I left my furnished room in Stoke-Newington, rented a delightful little house on Bury Square, and bought myself a car.

The car was of great help to me in my nocturnal expeditions, even though I always parked it far from my field of action, preferably in front of a night club or a dance hall.

I now had to find a housekeeper, a species that is becoming increasingly scarce in London and all over England. Luck smiled on me in the person of Miss Margaret Blockson. She was a tall, emaciated, surly woman who had great difficulty in finding work because of her past sojourns in Pentonville and Scrubbs at the government's expense. She blessed me when I took her into my service, and I had many reasons to be satisfied with her.

She had neither friends nor acquaintances, she never went out, she did the shopping as fast as she could, and went to bed at eight o'clock. She cooked fairly well, didn't like to talk, and was interested in nothing but her work. The only complaint I might have made about her was that she wore dirty aprons and an enormous Greenaway hat that she never took off, and that she must have fished out of a rubbish heap. Aside from that, she was a pearl.

And since pearls and flowers are sisters, according to poets, it's now time for me to talk about a flower.

That flower was Ruth Conklin. She lived with her elder sister Elsa a short distance away from my house on Bury Square. I made her acquaintance under circumstances that I regard as rather romantic.

The two ladies were on their way from the butcher's shop on Bloom Street when one of those enormous wandering dogs that haunt London tried to inventory the contents of their shopping basket by force. I hurried to the rescue, gave him a sharp rap with my umbrella, and he ran off to commit his depredations elsewhere.

I bowed to the ladies and introduced myself:

"I'm Abel Teal."

"I'm Elsa Conklin, and this is my sister Ruth."

An icy rain was falling, so I offered them the shelter of my umbrella.

"You're a brave man, Mr. Teal," said Elsa. "That dog might have bitten you."

"Or eaten you up," added Ruth, shuddering but trying to smile.

A pretty woman's smile reveals a row of pearls; Ruth's also released a flash of gold.

"What beautiful gold teeth!" I thought, and since I'm a businessman above all else, I told myself that although

she was quite pretty she was also very pale and might have tuberculosis. . . .

"Mr. Teal," said Elsa, "I'm afraid your nerves may be a bit shaken, and furthermore it's cold and the rain is falling more heavily, so may I offer you a hot toddy?"

From that day on, after I had slowly sipped a good, strong hot toddy, sitting in a comfortable armchair in a pleasant though somewhat old-fashioned living room, I became a regular visitor at the Conklin sisters' house.

Elsa was in her late forties. She was a robust woman with a stern face and cold, piercing eyes. She had an air of wholesome freshness, because she made abundant use of lavender water. Her hair was flaming red.

Her sister, much younger, was dark, as slender and graceful as a Tanagra figurine, and very pleasant to look at. She used no perfume. Despite all this, she was the Cinderella of the house: she did the cooking, washing, cleaning, sewing, and mending.

Elsa, on the other hand, was a woman with a good brain in her head: she read Chaucer, Shakespeare, and the Latin classics, and, what's more, she understood them.

My preference for her dark and gentle sister didn't escape her sharp eyes, but I'm convinced that it didn't upset her. She often left us alone together, and it was during those exquisite moments that the inevitable took place.

I was madly in love and that's only human, but who would have thought that I, Abel Teal, would write poetry for a woman of thirty-five! I admit that I borrowed some of it from Byron and Southey, but my wonderful Ruth wasn't aware of it.

Elsa had called me a brave man. I may be brave when I'm dealing with a dog that's quick to run away, but not in other circumstances, and especially not in love. . . . One evening, however, I decided to plunge ahead, at the risk of burning my bridges behind me: I asked Ruth to marry me.

"You'll have to speak to my sister about it," she replied, and her gold teeth shone like the rays of a setting sun.

After fortifying my courage with two or three shots of

whisky, I opened my heart to Elsa, with her stern face and piercing eyes.

"Marriage is something that mustn't be taken lightly," she said. "I'll have to think it over."

But from then on I considered myself Ruth's fiancé.

Everything was going smoothly, but then. . . .

It was a dark night and the wind was howling; the streets around the old Brompton Cemetery were as deserted as a Pacific atoll.

Around Humblet's tomb, the larches and dwarf pines formed a protective hedge for my work. I quickly shoveled away the loose earth, easily slid the coffin out on my steel rollers, took the screws out without difficulty, and cut through the lead sheet as though it were butter.

But when I slipped my fingers between old Silas Humblet's icy lips, they encountered only emptiness. I might as well have tried to find gold teeth in a sparrow's beak!

I couldn't understand how I could have made such a mistake. I knew the Humblets well enough to be sure that they would never take the old gentleman's gold teeth.

Suddenly I discovered the key to the mystery: on the lead sheet was a fine cut that revealed the passage of an electric soldering iron, and when I examined the screws more closely I found traces of oil.

In short, someone had been there before me! Someone who apparently worked as skillfully and silently as I did, someone who must have had the same tools and—considering the electric soldering iron—others that were even better.

I went home trembling like a leaf in an autumn wind and went to bed, weeping bitterly. . . .

Things soon reached the point where I thought I was going to have to admit defeat and withdraw from the field:

Colonel James Gasket—New Hackney Marsh Cemetery
Mrs. Janet Furlong—Broomley Cemetery
Ebenezer Sharp—Dulwich Cemetery
Ruben Goodwin—Holy Cross Churchyard

Lionel Chapman—Groves Cemetery
Gustav Petersen—Ladywell Cemetery

Seven empty mouths in three weeks! Seven undertakings that had failed utterly, despite the most careful preparations! Seven graves where I had been preceded by some terribly mysterious individual!

And I had to admit that the "terribly mysterious individual" worked better than I did, and with better tools. Without going into technical details, I'll say simply that, despite my long experience, I was overcome with wonder.

Each time I found myself before an empty mouth I had the strange feeling that my partner Death was watching me from behind one of the tombstones, and that our friendly understanding had ended forever.

With Ruth and Elsa, however, I managed to forget my inexplicable mishaps; shadows and ghosts didn't follow me as far as the pink lamp in their little living room. And yet. . . . But let's not get ahead of my story.

One day the three of us were sitting around the table after having eaten a lunch consisting of a turbot, a loin of veal, and a strawberry pudding.

Elsa was giving us a second helping of pudding, when she suddenly turned to her sister and said, "Ruth darling, do you know who was buried this morning in Stoke-Newington?"

"In the Abney Park Cemetery?" I asked automatically.

"Is that the name of the cemetery there?"

"Yes, I used to live in that neighborhood."

Elsa turned back to Ruth.

"None other than 'Gold Mouth,' that old imbecile Gaston Drum, who went to America and had all his teeth pulled out and replaced by a set of solid gold false teeth that were so heavy he could hardly chew. You remember him, don't you, Ruth?"

"Yes, very vaguely."

"He was an unbearable brute. . . . But may God have mercy on his poor soul just the same," concluded Elsa, turning her attention back to the strawberry pudding.

I frowned and felt a touch of ill-humor.

I'd been neglecting my work. There were large gaps in my notes, and I'd even stopped indexing them, so there

was nothing surprising about the fact that Gaston Drum had escaped me. But I decided not to miss the opportunity.

I quickly drank my coffee and took leave of Ruth and Elsa.

My car hurried through the cheerless streets of Stoke-Newington, and within three hours I had all the necessary information for paying a nocturnal visit to the late Mr. Drum.

There are no regular night watchmen in the Abney Park Cemetery; it's not exactly a cemetery for the rich.

The Drum vault was of an easy kind. It was on a side path, near the charnel house, and was surrounded by pines and holly.

There was a new moon above the treetops, but it didn't bother me, because of the mist that was rising from the nearby ponds, and the perfect solitude of the place.

The chambers of the tomb were still closed by wooden walls, for the gravediggers of Abney Park are known for their slowness, and the narrow entrance shaft had not yet been filled.

The coffin came to me with the first few turns of the rollers, the screws and bolts behaved with the same obligingness, and the springs yielded to a slight pressure. The inner metal sheath was of zinc, but it hadn't been soldered, so my crowbar bent it easily.

There was enough moonlight to enable me to do without my flashlight, and Mr. Drum seemed to want to facilitate my work, for he was lying with his mouth wide open. I reached for the prodigious solid gold false teeth.

Snap!

I yelled: the dead man had just closed his mouth and sunk his teeth deep into my fingers, through my rubber gloves.

I tried to pull back my hand, to no avail. By pulling and twisting with all the strength of my horror and desperation, I managed to raise the dead man's head and I even heard the neck vertebrae crack, but I couldn't wrest my fingers from his teeth.

"Let go of me, you son of the devil, or I'll cut off your head!" I cried, and with my free hand I reached for

my tool bag, intending to take out a knife. Hell and damnation! It was out of reach!

I went on pulling, but I succeeded only in making the teeth sink deeper into my flesh while the hideous dead jaws closed tighter and tighter.

An owl hooted in the shadows, a few rats scurried past me: only those vermin of the darkness had heard my cries. A strange feeling of resignation began to come over me. Gaston Drum was holding me prisoner, using his gold teeth instead of steel handcuffs.

My deliverance would also be the end of my career, the complete collapse of all my hopes, and a long stay in prison.

Suddenly something moved behind the hedge and I heard a voice:

"There's no use struggling: it's a wolf trap."

The "terribly mysterious individual"—it could be no one else—was standing less than ten feet away from the tomb.

"It's a miniature trap. but it's just as strong as a full-sized one," continued the voice.

"Get me out of it and I'll give you a clear field from now on!" I begged.

"My conditions are quite different."

I finally recognized the voice and cried out in bewilderment:

"Elsa!"

"Yes, I'm Elsa Conklin, and I expect to be Elsa Teal before long, assuming that you'd like Mr. Drum to let you go."

"Those are your conditions?" I stammered.

"They are, and you can answer with a simple yes or no."

"Yes!" I howled. If a seven-headed dragon had given me the same choice, I would have given the same answer.

A few moments later I was on the other side of the hedge and Elsa was examining my wounded hand.

"It won't be serious. . . . The teeth of the trap were disinfected. With a little iodine and a bandage, you'll be all right again in a few days. . . . You can rest now, I'll close the tomb."

It usually takes me twenty minutes to close a tomb;

Elsa did it in half that time, and she did it very well.

"Take me home," she said, "but don't look for your car where you left it: I saw a policeman paying too much attention to it to suit me, so I took it to Park Street."

We rolled slowly through the deserted streets. After a long silence Elsa said, "I brought you where I wanted you, Abel. I'm sorry for the anxiety and pain I caused you, but I hope it will be forgotten between us. Tomorrow you'll go and take out a marriage licence. Don't worry about Ruth: I'll take care of her. We'll live in your house, and Ruth will be our housekeeper. Give Meg Blockson her notice, a five-pound note, and a favorable letter of reference. There, that settles everything."

I stopped the car in front of her house.

"Good night, Abel," she said. "You're entitled to kiss me."

She put something cold and heavy in my hand.

"Here are Gaston Drum's solid gold false teeth," she said, smiling. "They weigh over a pound."

I now had to announce the great news to Meg Blockson. I resolved to do it as diplomatically as possible.

"Meg," I said, "we're going to have some more people in the house."

"You're going to sublet?" she asked. "I don't mind as long as the tenants aren't too stingy with tips."

"No, it's not that, Meg. There will be two. . . ."

"Two dogs or two cats, no doubt," she said, with dissatisfaction. "A fine thing for a housekeeper!"

"You've guessed wrong!" I said, laughing and putting a five-pound note on the table; then I announced my marriage to her.

She looked at the banknote as though it were a cockroach and put her fists on her hips.

Whenever she became angry it was immediately apparent that she must have been born in Shadwell or Wapping, and the language she used would have made a longshoreman sound like a schoolboy. She sniffed and spat three times: once on the floor, once on the five-pound note, and once on my feet.

"That's what I think of the female you want to have in your bed, you pig! I'm sorry I don't have a quid of

tobacco in my mouth, because then I'd have spat in your face! Ah, so you want to get married, do you, Your Lordship! And do you think I'll just stand by and watch after working here for years and getting nothing out of it except the miserable pay you give me? No, no, my gold-tooth expert, it's not going to happen that way! Your dirty slut won't come to this house, understand?"

The furniture and the walls began spinning around me: she had called me a "gold-tooth expert," the she-devil! I had no need to question her, because her tongue went on moving with incredible speed:

"If you don't think I know all about it, you're sadly mistaken, you dentist for dead people who were stupid enough to let themselves be put in the ground with their gold teeth! I know everything, you idiot! Till now it was none of my business. Even if you'd been cutting people's throats and taking their gold teeth afterward, I still wouldn't have said anything. But now you want to get married! If you needed a woman to snore in your bed, you could always have had me. Not that you appeal to me, ugly as you are, but I like this place and I have no intention of leaving it. Now that the cards are on the table, I'll give you a choice: me and no one else, or I'll tell what I know."

She did a playful little dance step and said, sneering, "Teal. . . . Teal. . . . Somebody once told me a teal is a bird that's good to eat. The police will lick their lips when it's served to them on a platter, all plucked and roasted."

She laughed, opening her big mouth and revealing the two gold molars I had given her as a gift, to replace the ones a prison companion had taken out with a well-placed punch.

I felt deeply offended: I'm short and plump, and I don't like to be reminded that a teal is a kind of duck. But, despite what Elsa had said, I was far from being a brave man.

"Meg," I said, "I have to go away for a few days; during that time, I'll be thinking over what you've said."

"As you like, but it will be easier to make the Thames flow backward than to make me change my mind!"

That same day I went to Elsa and told her what had happened.

"By tomorrow my secret will be common knowledge," I whimpered.

She remained very calm and gave me a glass of whisky.

"You told her you were going away for a few days," she said. "That's good, because it will give us time. Go and spend those few days in Kingston, at the King's Crown Inn. Eat, drink, sleep, and forget about Meg Blockson."

My short stay at the King's Crown Inn was profitable from every point of view; never in my life have I eaten better eel paté or turkey with cranberries.

On the third morning, at breakfast, as I was waiting for my bacon and eggs to arrive, I read this paragraph in the newspaper:

> *Margaret Blockson, a housekeeper living on Bury Square, was struck by an unknown car on Bloom Street yesterday afternoon at five o'clock. She was killed instantly.*

There was no one in the dining room at that moment and I was glad of it, because I couldn't help chuckling with pleasure. Never had bacon and eggs tasted more delicious to me! I asked for a second serving.

As soon as I left the table I went back to London.

Elsa greeted me with whisky and cigars. "To help you recover from the shock, darling," she said. Then she gave me a little package wrapped in tissue paper.

I opened it and took out the two gold molars I had given Meg Blockson in a moment of foolish generosity.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "How did you. . . ."

"And in broad daylight, too," she said with a tinge of irony.

What a woman! What an admirable woman!

Life was pleasant for the three of us in my little house on Bury Square. I would never have thought a man could be as pampered and coddled as I was.

Nothing in Ruth's attitude had changed; she seemed to regard my marriage to her sister as the most natural thing in the world. She replaced Meg Blockson with consummate skill. The house was gleamingly clean, and

the meals were exquisitely prepared. She behaved toward me as though there had never been any question of love between us.

My respect for my wife increased every day. She perfected my techniques, sailed over the worst difficulties with an ease that astonished me, and broadened the horizon of my affairs. Without her guidance and help, I would never have gone into Torrington Abbey, from which I took eleven solid gold crucifixes embellished with precious stones.

Why did springtime play such a nasty trick on me a short time later, with the cries of its swallows and the perfume of its lilacs?

I met Ruth on the stairs. The sun was glowing in the window, making a saintly halo around her head. She was wearing a low-cut green blouse. . . .

I took her in my arms and kissed her on the eyes and lips.

"Do you still love me?" I murmured.

"I've never stopped loving you, Abel," she replied simply, with her pretty smile made prettier still by the golden glint of her teeth.

A step creaked and we quickly drew apart, but we saw no one except Grimmy, the cat, who was staring at us with his eyes of jade. I thought I had smelled a whiff of lavender water, but I told myself it was only my imagination.

During lunch, when Ruth left the table for a moment, Elsa said to me, "Don't you think Ruth has changed?"

"No, no, not at all," I replied in a rather unsteady voice.

"She's not well. . . . She's been sleeping badly. I'll have to get her some sleeping pills."

I breathed more freely: there was nothing to worry about.

Elsa drank her coffee with the pleasure she always took in savoring good things.

I'm not an early riser; I like to lie in bed until I smell the fragrance of coffee and bacon floating up from the kitchen.

One morning, I waited in vain for that enticing aroma,

even though the sunshine had been playing on the curtains for a long time.

Suddenly I heard Elsa calling me from the foot of the stairs:

"Abel! Come down, hurry! Something's wrong with Ruth. . . ."

Ruth was lying motionless on her back, a little paler than usual, with her lips open and her gold teeth shining in the sunlight.

"Is she asleep?" I asked.

"I'm afraid it's more serious than that. Go and get Dr. Stiller."

The sleeping-pill bottle was on Ruth's bedside table; it was empty.

Dr. Stiller came without too many objections. He was a slovenly man with dirty hands and face, and he already had a strong smell of alcohol on his breath, despite the earliness of the hour.

He leaned over Ruth and made a gesture of approval.

"Now that's what I call being dead!" he said.

He took a few printed forms from his pocket and began writing.

"Yes, yes," he said, covering the pages with wavy handwriting, "life has an end the same as everything else, and a sausage has two. . . . Let's see now, we'll put down 'coronary thrombosis'. . . . Here's the death certificate. That will be six shillings, plus another six shillings for calling me during my office hours, because it cost me several patients; we'll round off the total to an even pound, so that you can keep your small change. And give me a drink: this chilly morning air is bad for me."

After drinking a quarter of a pint of whisky, he patted Ruth's cheek and said, "See you in heaven, sweetheart!" Then he left, whistling.

Elsa and I spared no expense. Ruth is now resting in a granite tomb in Groves Cemetery. She will return to dust there without ever being disturbed, because we will always let her keep her gold teeth.

THE SHADOWY STREET

On a Rotterdam dock, winches were fishing bales of old paper from the hold of a freighter. The wind was fluttering the multicolored streamers that hung from the bales when one of them burst open like a cask in a roaring fire. The longshoremen hastily scooped up some of the rustling mass, but a large part of it was abandoned to the joy of the little children who gleaned in the eternal autumn of the waterfront.

There were beautiful Pearsons engravings, cut in half by order of Customs; green and pink bundles of stocks and bonds, the last echoes of resounding bankruptcies; pitiful books whose pages were still joined like desperate hands. My cane explored that vast residue of thought, in which neither shame nor hope was now alive.

Amid all that English and German prose I found a few pages of France: copies of *Le Magasin Pittoresque,* solidly bound and somewhat scorched by fire.

It was in looking through those magazines, so adorably illustrated and so dismally written, that I found the two manuscripts, one in German, the other in French. Their authors had apparently been unaware of each other, and yet the French manuscript seemed to cast a little light on the black anguish that rose from the German one like a noxious vapor—insofar as any light can be shed on that story which appears to be haunted by such sinister and hostile forces!

The cover bore the name Alphonse Archipetre, followed by the word *Lehrer.* I shall translate the German pages:

The German Manuscript

I am writing this for Hermann, when he comes back from sea.

If he does not find me here, if I, along with my poor friends, have been swallowed up by the savage mystery that surrounds us, I want him to know our days of horror through this little notebook. It will be the best proof of my affection that I can give him, because it takes real courage for a woman to keep a journal in such hours of madness. I am also writing so that he will pray for me, if he believes my soul to be in peril. . . .

After the death of my Aunt Hedwige, I did not want to go on living in our sad Holzdamm house. The Rückhardt sisters offered to let me stay with them. They lived in a big apartment on the Deichstrasse, in the spacious house of Councillor Hühnebein, an old bachelor who never left the first floor, which was littered with books, paintings, and engravings.

Lotte, Eleonore, and Meta Rückhardt were adorable old maids who used all their ingenuity in trying to make life pleasant for me. Frida, our maid, came with me; she found favor in the eyes of the ancient Frau Pilz, the Rückhardts' inspired cook, who was said to have turned down ducal offers in order to remain in the humble service of her mistresses.

That evening. . . .

On that evening, which was to bring unspeakable terror into our calm lives, we had decided against going to a celebration in Tempelhof, because it was raining in torrents. Frau Pilz, who liked to have us stay home, had made us an outstanding supper: grilled trout and a guinea-hen pie. Lotte had searched the cellar and come up with a bottle of Cape brandy that had been aging there for over twenty years. When the table had been cleared, the beautiful dark liquor was poured into glasses of Bohemian crystal. Eleonore served the Lapsang Souchong tea that an old Bremen sailor brought back to us from his voyages.

Through the sound of the rain we heard the clock of

Saint Peter's strike eight. Frida was sitting beside the fire. Her head drooped over her illustrated Bible; she was unable to read it, but she liked to look at the pictures. She asked for permission to go to bed. The four of us who remained went on sorting colored silks for Meta's embroidery.

Downstairs, the councillor noisily locked his bedroom door. Frau Pilz went up to her room, bade us good night through the door, and added that the bad weather would no doubt prevent us from having fresh fish for dinner the next day. A small cascade was splattering loudly on the pavement from a broken rain gutter on the house next door. A strong wind came thundering down the street; the cascade was dispersed into a silvery mist, and a window slammed shut on one of the upper stories.

"That's the attic window," said Lotte. "It won't stay closed." She raised the garnet-red curtain and looked down at the street. "I've never seen it so dark before. I'm not sleepy, and I certainly have no desire to go to bed. I feel as though the darkness of the street would follow me, along with the wind and the rain."

"You're talking like a fool," said Eleonore, who was not very gentle. "Well, since no one is going to bed, let's do as men do and fill our glasses again."

She went off to get three of those beautiful Sieme candles that burn with a pink flame and give off a delightful smell of flowers and incense.

I felt that we all wanted to give a festive tone to that bleak evening, and that for some reason we were unsuccessful. I saw Eleonore's energetic face darkened by a sudden shadow of ill-humor. Lotte seemed to be having difficulty in breathing. Only Meta was leaning placidly over her embroidery, and yet I sensed that she was attentive, as though she were trying to detect a sound in the depths of the silence.

Just then the door opened and Frida came in. She staggered over to the armchair beside the fire and sank into it, staring wild-eyed at each of us in turn.

"Frida!" I cried. "What's the matter?"

She sighed deeply, then murmured a few indistinct words.

"She's still asleep," said Eleonore.

Frida shook her head forcefully and made violent efforts to speak. I handed her my glass of brandy and she emptied it in one gulp, like a coachman or a porter. Under other circumstances we would have been offended by this vulgarity, but she seemed so unhappy, and the atmosphere in the room had been so depressing for the past few minutes, that it passed unnoticed.

"Fräulein," said Frida, "there's. . . ." Her eyes, which softened for a moment, resumed their wild expression. "I don't know. . . ."

Eleonore uttered an impatient exclamation.

"What have you seen or heard? What's wrong with you, Frida?"

"Fräulein, there's. . . ." Frida seemed to reflect deeply. "I don't know how to say it. . . . There's a great fear in my room."

"Oh!" said all three of us, reassured and apprehensive at the same time.

"You've had a nightmare," said Meta. "I know how it is: you hide your head under the covers when you wake up."

"No, that's not it," said Frida. "I hadn't been dreaming. I just woke up, that's all, and then. . . . How can I make you understand? There's a great fear in my room. . . ."

"Good heavens, that doesn't explain anything!" I said.

Frida shook her head in despair:

"I'd rather sit outside in the rain all night than go back to that room. No, I won't go back!"

"I'm going to see what's happening up there, you fool!" said Eleonore, throwing a shawl over her shoulders.

She hesitated for a moment before her father's old rapier, hanging among some university insignia. Then she shrugged, picked up the candlestick with its pink candles, and walked out, leaving a perfumed wake behind her.

"Oh, don't let her go there alone!" cried Frida, alarmed.

We slowly went to the staircase. The flickering glow of Eleonore's candlestick was already vanishing on the attic landing.

We stood in the semidarkness at the foot of the stairs. We heard Eleonore open a door. There was a minute of oppressive silence. I felt Frida's hand tighten on my waist.

"Don't leave her alone," she moaned.

Just then there was a loud laugh, so horrible that I would rather die than hear it again. Almost at the same time, Meta raised her hand and cried out, "There! . . . There! . . . A face. . . . There. . . ."

The house became filled with sounds. The councillor and Frau Pilz appeared in the yellow haloes of the candles they were holding.

"Fräulein Eleonore!" sobbed Frida. "Dear God, how are we going to find her?"

It was a frightening question, and I can now answer it: *We never found her.*

Frida's room was empty. The candlestick was standing on the floor and its candles were still burning peacefully, with their delicate pink flames.

We searched the whole house and even went out on the roof. We never saw Eleonore again.

We could not count on the help of the police, as will soon be seen. When we went to the police station, we found that it had been invaded by a frenzied crowd; some of the furniture had been overturned, the windows were covered with dust, and the clerks were being pushed around like puppets. Eighty people had vanished that night, some from their homes, others while they were on their way home!

The world of ordinary conjectures was closed to us; only supernatural apprehensions remained.

Several days went by. We led a bleak life of tears and terror.

Councillor Hühnebein had the attic sealed off from the rest of the house by a thick oak partition.

One day I went in search of Meta. We were beginning to fear another tragedy when we found her squatting in front of the partition with her eyes dry and an expression of anger on her usually gentle face. She was holding her father's rapier in her hand, and seemed annoyed at having been disturbed.

We tried to question her about the face she had glimpsed, but she looked at us as though she did not understand. She remained completely silent. She did not answer us, and even seemed unaware of our presence.

All sorts of wild stories were being repeated in the town. There was talk of a secret criminal league; the police were accused of negligence, and worse; public officials had been dismissed. All this, of course, was useless.

Strange crimes had been committed: savagely mutilated corpses were found at dawn. Wild animals could not have shown more ardent lust for carnage than the mysterious attackers. Some of the victims had been robbed, but most of them had not, and this surprised everyone.

But I do not want to dwell on what was happening in the town; it will be easy to find enough people to tell about it. I will limit myself to the framework of our house and our life, which, though narrow, still enclosed enough fear and despair.

The days passed and April came, colder and windier than the worst month of winter. We remained huddled beside the fire. Sometimes Councillor Hühnebein came to keep us company and give us what he called courage. This consisted in trembling in all his limbs, holding his hands out toward the fire, drinking big mugs of punch, starting at every sound, and crying out five or six times an hour, "Did you hear that? Did you hear? . . ."

Frida tore some of the pages out of her Bible, and we found them pinned or pasted on every door and curtain, in every nook and cranny. She hoped that this would ward off the spirits of evil. We did not interfere, and since we spent several days in peace we were far from thinking it a bad idea.

We soon saw how terribly mistaken we were. The day had been so dark, and the clouds so low, that evening had come early. I was walking out of the living room to put a lamp on the broad landing—for ever since the terrifying night we had placed lights all over the house, and even the halls and stairs remained lighted till dawn —when I heard voices murmuring on the top floor.

It was not yet completely dark. I bravely climbed the

stairs and found myself before the frightened faces of Frida and Frau Pilz, who motioned me to be silent and pointed to the newly-built partition.

I stood beside them, adopting their silence and attention. It was then that I heard an indefinable sound from behind the wooden wall, something like the faint roar of giant conch shells, or the tumult of a faraway crowd.

"Fräulein Eleonore, . . ." moaned Frida.

The answer came immediately and hurled us screaming down the stairs: a long shriek of terror rang out, not from the partition above us, but from downstairs, from the councillor's apartment. Then he called for help at the top of his lungs. Lotte and Meta had hurried out onto the landing.

"We must go there," I said courageously.

We had not taken three steps when there was another cry of distress, this time from above us.

"Help! Help!"

We recognized Frau Pilz's voice. We heard her call again, feebly.

Meta picked up the lamp I had placed on the landing. Halfway up the stairs we found Frida alone. Frau Pilz had disappeared.

At this point I must express my admiration of Meta Rückhardt's calm courage.

"There's nothing more we can do here," she said, breaking the silence she had stubbornly maintained for several days. "Let's go downstairs. . . ."

She was holding her father's rapier, and she did not look at all ridiculous, for we sensed that she would use it as effectively as a man.

We followed her, subjugated by her cold strength.

The councillor's study was as brightly lighted as a traveling carnival. The poor man had given the darkness no chance to get in. Two enormous lamps with white porcelain globes stood at either end of the mantelpiece, looking like two placid moons. A small Louis XV chandelier hung from the ceiling, its prisms flashing like handfuls of precious stones. Copper and stone candlesticks stood on the floor in every corner of the room. On the table, a row of tall candles seemed to be illuminating an invisible catafalque.

We stopped, dazzled, and looked around for the councillor.

"Oh!" Frida exclaimed suddenly. "Look, there he is! He's hiding behind the window curtain."

Lotte abruptly pulled back the heavy curtain. Herr Hühnebein was there, leaning out the open window, motionless.

Lotte went over to him, then leapt back with a cry of horror.

"Don't look! For the love of heaven, don't look! He . . . he . . . his head is gone!"

I saw Frida stagger, ready to faint. Meta's voice called us back to reason:

"Be careful! There's danger here!"

We pressed up close to her, feeling protected by her presence of mind. Suddenly something blinked on the ceiling, and we saw with alarm that darkness had invaded two opposite corners of the room, where the lights had just been extinguished.

"Hurry, protect the lights!" panted Meta. "Oh! . . . There! . . . There he is!"

At that moment the white moons on the mantelpiece burst, spat out streaks of smoky flame, and vanished.

Meta stood motionless, but she looked all around the room with a cold rage that I had never seen in her before.

The candles on the table were blown out. Only the little chandelier continued to shed its calm light. I saw that Meta was keeping her eyes on it. Suddenly her rapier flashed and she lunged forward into empty space.

"Protect the light!" she cried. "I see him! I've got him! . . . Ah! . . ."

We saw the rapier make strange, violent movements in her hand, as though an invisible force were trying to take it away from her.

It was Frida who had the odd but fortunate inspiration that saved us that evening. She uttered a fierce cry, picked up one of the heavy copper candlesticks, leapt to Meta's side, and began striking the air with her gleaming club. The rapier stopped moving; something very light seemed to brush against the floor, then the door opened by itself, and a heartrending clamor arose.

"That takes care of one of them," said Meta.

One might wonder why we stubbornly went on living in that murderously haunted house.

At least a hundred other houses were in the same situation. People had stopped counting the murders and disappearances, and had become almost indifferent to them. The town was gloomy. There were dozens of suicides, for some people preferred to die by their own hands rather than be killed by the phantom executioners. And then, too, Meta wanted to take vengeance. She was now waiting for the invisible beings to return.

She had relapsed into her grim silence; she spoke to us only to order us to lock the doors and shutters at nightfall. As soon as darkness fell, the four of us went into the living room, which was now a dormitory and dining room as well. We did not leave it until morning.

I questioned Frida about her strange armed intervention. She was able to give me only a confused answer.

"I don't know," she said. "It seemed to me I saw something. . . . A face. . . . I don't know how to say what it was. . . . Yes, it was the great fear that was in my room the first night."

That was all I could get out of her.

One evening toward the middle of April, Lotte and Frida were lingering in the kitchen. Meta opened the living-room door and told them to hurry. I saw that the shadows of night had already invaded the landings and the hall.

"We're coming," they replied in unison.

Meta came back into the living room and closed the door. She was horribly pale. No sound came from downstairs. I waited vainly to hear the footsteps of the two women. The silence was like a threatening flood rising on the other side of the wall.

Meta locked the door.

"What are you doing?" I asked. "What about Lotte and Frida?"

"It's no use," she said dully.

Her eyes, motionless and terrible, stared at the rapier. The sinister darkness arrived.

It was thus that Lotte and Frida vanished into mystery.

Dear God, what was it? There was a presence in the house, a suffering, wounded presence that was seeking help. I did not know whether Meta was aware of it or not. She was more taciturn than ever, but she barricaded the doors and windows in a way that seemed designed more to prevent an escape than an intrusion. My life had become a fearful solitude. Meta herself was like a sneering specter.

During the day, I sometimes came upon her unexpectedly in one of the halls; in one hand she held the rapier, and in the other she held a powerful lantern with a reflector and a lens that she shone into all the dark corners.

During one of these encounters, she told me rather impolitely that I had better go back to the living room, and when I obeyed her too slowly she shouted furiously at me that I must never interfere with her plans.

Her face no longer had the placid look it had worn as she leaned over her embroidery only a few days before. It was now a savage face, and she sometimes glared at me with a flame of hatred in her eyes. For I had a secret. . . .

Was it curiosity, perversity, or pity that made me act as I did? I pray to God that I was moved by nothing more than pity and kindness.

I had just drawn some fresh water from the fountain in the wash-house when I heard a muffled moan: "Moh. . . . Moh. . . ."

I thought of our vanished friends and looked around me. I saw a well-concealed door that led into a storeroom in which poor Hühnebein had kept stacks of books and paintings, amid dust and cobwebs.

"Moh. . . . Moh. . . ."

It was coming from inside the storeroom. I opened the door and looked into the gray semidarkness. Everything seemed normal. The lamentation had stopped. I stepped inside. Suddenly I felt something seize my dress. I cried out. I immediately heard the moaning very close to me, plaintive, supplicating, and something tapped on my pitcher.

I put it down. There was a slight splashing sound, like that of a dog lapping, and the level of the water in my pitcher began to sink. The thing, the being, was drinking!

"Moh! . . . Moh! . . ."

Something caressed my hair more softly than a breath.

"Moh. . . . Moh. . . ."

Then the moaning changed to a sound of human weeping, almost like the sobbing of a child, and I felt pity for the suffering invisible monster. But there were footsteps in the hall; I put my hands over my lips and the being fell silent.

Without a sound, I closed the door of the secret storeroom. Meta was coming toward me in the hall.

"Did I hear your voice just now?" she asked.

"Yes. My foot slipped and I was startled. . . ."

I was an accomplice of the phantoms.

I brought milk, wine, and apples. Nothing manifested itself. When I returned, the milk had been drunk to the last drop, but the wine and the apples were intact. Then a kind of breeze surrounded me and passed over my hair for a long time. . . .

I went back, bringing more fresh milk. The soft voice was no longer weeping, but the caress of the breeze was longer and seemed to be more ardent.

Meta began looking at me suspiciously and prowling around the storeroom.

I found a safer refuge for my mysterious protégé. I explained it to him by signs. How strange it was to make gestures to empty space! But he understood me. He was following me along the hall like a breath of air when I suddenly had to hide in a corner.

A pale light slid across the floor. I saw Meta coming down the spiral staircase at the end of the hall. She was walking quietly, partially hiding the glow of her lantern. The rapier glittered. I sensed that the being beside me was afraid. The breeze stirred around me, feverishly, abruptly, and I heard that plaintive "Moh! . . . Moh! . . ."

Meta's footsteps faded away in the distance. I made a reassuring gesture and went to the new refuge: a large closet that was never opened.

The breeze touched my lips and remained there a moment. I felt a strange shame.

May came.

The twenty square feet of the miniature garden, which poor, dear Hühnebein had spattered with his blood, were dotted with little white flowers.

Under a magnificent blue sky, the town was almost silent. The cries of the swallows were answered only by the peevish sounds of closing doors, sliding bolts, and turning keys.

The being had become imprudent. He sought me out. All at once I would feel him around me. I cannot describe the feeling; it was like a great tenderness surrounding me. I would make him understand that I was afraid of Meta, and then I would feel him vanish like a dying wind.

I could not bear the look in Meta's fiery eyes.

On May 4, the end came abruptly.

We were in the living room, with all the lamps lighted. I was closing the shutters. Suddenly I sensed his presence. I made a desperate gesture, turned around, and met Meta's terrible gaze in a mirror.

"Traitress!" she cried.

She quickly closed the door. He was imprisoned with us.

"I knew it!" she said vehemently. "I've seen you carrying pitchers of milk, daughter of the devil! You gave him strength when he was dying from the wound I gave him on the night of Hühnebein's death. Yes, your phantom is vulnerable! He's going to die now, and I think that dying is much more horrible for him than it is for us. Then your turn will come, you wretch! Do you hear me?"

She had shrieked this in short phrases. She uncovered her lantern. A beam of white light shot across the room, and I saw it strike something like thin, gray smoke. She plunged her rapier into it.

"Moh! . . . Moh! . . ." cried the heartrending voice, and then suddenly, awkwardly, but in a loving tone, my name was spoken. I leapt forward and knocked over the lantern with my fist. It went out.

"Meta, listen to me," I begged, "have pity. . . ."

Her face was contorted into a mask of demoniac fury.

"Traitress!" she screamed.

The rapier flashed before my eyes. It struck me below the left breast and I fell to my knees.

Someone was weeping violently beside me, strangely beseeching Meta. She raised her rapier again. I tried to find the words of supreme contrition that reconcile us with God forever, but then I saw Meta's face freeze and the sword fell from her hand.

Something murmured near us. I saw a thin flame stretch out like a ribbon and greedily attack the curtains.

"We're burning!" cried Meta. "All of us together!"

At that moment, when everything was about to sink into death, the door opened. An immensely tall old woman came in. I saw only her terrible green eyes glowing in her unimaginable face.

A flame licked my left hand. I stepped back as much as my strength allowed. I saw Meta still standing motionless with a strange grimace on her face, and I realized that her soul, too, had flown away. Then the monstrous old woman's eyes, without pupils, slowly looked around the flame-filled room and came to rest on me.

I am writing this in a strange little house. Where am I? Alone. And yet all this is full of tumult, an invisible but unrestrained presence is everywhere. He has come back. I have again heard my name spoken in that awkward, gentle way. . . .

* * * * * *

Here ends the German manuscript, as though cut off with a knife.

* * * * * *

The French Manuscript

The town's oldest coachman was pointed out to me in

the smoky inn where he was drinking heady, fragrant October beer.

I bought him a drink and gave him some tobacco. He swore I was a prince. I pointed to his droshky outside the inn and said, "And now, take me to Saint Beregonne's Lane."

He gave me a bewildered look, then laughed.

"Ah, you're very clever!"

"Why?"

"You're testing me. I know every street in this town —I can almost say I know every paving-stone! There's no Saint Bere. . . . What did you say?"

"Beregonne. Are you sure? Isn't it near the Mohlenstrasse?"

"No," he said decisely. "There's no such street here, no more than Mount Vesuvius is in Saint Petersburg."

No one knew the town, in all its twisting byways, better than that splendid beer-drinker.

A student sitting at a nearby table looked up from the love letter he had been writing and said to me, "There's no saint by that name, either."

And the innkeeper's wife added, with a touch of anger, "You can't manufacture saints like sausages!"

I calmed everyone with wine and beer. There was great joy in my heart.

The policeman who paced up and down the Mohlenstrasse from dawn till dark had a face like a bulldog, but he was obviously a man who knew his job.

"No," he said slowly, coming back from a long journey among his thoughts and memories, "there's no such street here or anywhere else in town."

Over his shoulder I saw the beginning of Saint Beregonne's Lane, between the Klingbom distillery and the shop of an anonymous seed merchant.

I had to turn away with impolite abruptness in order not to show my elation. Saint Beregonne's Lane did not exist for the coachman, the student, the policeman, or anyone else: it existed only for me!

How did I make that amazing discovery? By an almost scientific observation, as some of my pompous fellow-

teachers would have said. My colleague Seifert, who taught natural science by bursting balloons filled with strange gases in his pupils' faces, would not have been able to find any fault with my procedure.

When I walked along the Mohlenstrasse, it took me two or three seconds to cover the distance between the distillery and the seed merchant's shop. I noticed, however, that when other people passed by the same place they went immediately from the distillery to the shop, without visibly crossing the entrance of Saint Beregonne's Lane.

By adroitly questioning various people, and by consulting the town's cadastral map, I learned that only a wall separated the distillery from the shop.

I concluded that, for everyone in the world except myself, that street existed outside of time and space.

I knew that mysterious street for several years without ever venturing into it, and I think that even a more courageous man would have hesitated. What laws governed that unknown space? Once it had drawn me into its mystery, would it ever return me to my own world?

I finally invented various reasons to convince myself that that world was inhospitable to human beings, and my curiosity surrendered to my fear. And yet what I could see of that opening into the incomprehensible was so ordinary, so commonplace! I must admit, however, that the view was cut off after ten paces by a sharp bend in the street. All I could see was two high, badly whitewashed walls with the name of the street painted on one of them in black letters, and a stretch of worn, greenish pavement with a gap in which a viburnum bush was growing. That sickly bush seemed to live in accordance with our seasons, for I sometimes saw a little tender green and a few lumps of snow among its twigs.

I might have made some curious observations concerning the insertion of that slice of an alien cosmos into ours, but to do so I would have had to spend a considerable amount of time standing on the Mohlenstrasse; and Klingbom, who often saw me staring at some of his windows, became suspicious of his wife and gave me hostile looks.

I wondered why, of all the people in the world, I was the only one to whom that strange privilege had been

given. This led me to think of my maternal grandmother. She was a tall, somber woman, and her big green eyes seemed to be following the happenings of another life on the wall in front of her.

Her background was obscure. My grandfather, a sailor, was supposed to have rescued her from some Algerian pirates. She sometimes stroked my hair with her long, white hands and murmured, "Maybe he. . . . Why not? After all. . . ." She repeated it on the night of her death, and while the pale fire of her gaze wandered among the shadows she added, "Maybe he'll go where I wasn't able to return. . . ."

A black storm was blowing that night. Just after my grandmother died, while the candles were being lit, a big stormy petrel shattered the window and lay dying, bloody and threatening, on her bed.

That was the only odd thing I remembered in my life; but did it have any connection with Saint Beregonne's Lane?

It was a sprig of the viburnum bush that set off the adventure.

But am I sincere in looking there for the initial tap that set events in motion? Perhaps I should speak of Anita.

Several years ago, in the Hanseatic ports one could see the arrival of little lateen-rigged ships creeping out of the mist like crestfallen animals.

Colossal laughter would immediately shake the port, down to the deepest beer cellars.

"Aha! Here come the dream ships!"

I always felt heartbroken at the sight of those heroic dreams dying in formidable Germanic laughter.

It was said that the sad crews of those ships lived on the golden shores of the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian Sea in a mad dream, for they believed in a fantastic land of plenty, related to the Thule of the ancients, lying somewhere in our cruel North. Not having much more knowledge than their forefathers of a thousand years ago, they had carefully nurtured a heritage of legends about islands of diamonds and emeralds, legends that had been

born when their forefathers encountered the glittering vanguard of an ice floe.

The compass was one of the few items of progress that their minds had seized upon in the course of the centuries. Its enigmatic needle, always pointing in the same direction, was for them a final proof of the mysteries of the North.

One day when a dream was walking like a new Messiah on the choppy waters of the Mediterranean, when the nets had brought up only fish poisoned by the coral on the bottom, and when Lombardy had sent neither grain nor flour to the poverty-stricken lands of the South, they had hoisted their sails in the offshore wind.

Their flotilla had dotted the sea with its hard wings; then, one by one, their ships had melted into the storms of the Atlantic. The Bay of Biscay had nibbled the flotilla and passed the remainder on to the granite teeth of Brittany. Some of the hulls were sold to firewood merchants in Germany and Denmark; one of the ships died in its dream, killed by an iceberg blazing in the sun off the Lofoten Islands.

But the North adorned the grave of that flotilla with a sweet name: "the dream ships." Although it made coarse sailors laugh, I was deeply moved by it, and I might well have been willing to set sail with those dreamers.

Anita was their daughter.

She came from the Mediterranean when she was still a baby in her mother's arms, aboard a tartan. The ship was sold. Her mother died, and so did her little sisters. Her father set out for America on a sailing ship that never returned. Anita was left all alone, but the dream that had brought the tartan to those moldering wooden docks never left her: she still believed in the fortune of the North, and she wanted it fiercely, almost with hatred.

In Tempelhof, with its clusters of white lights, she sang, danced, and threw red flowers that either fell on her like a rain of blood or were burned in the short flames of the Argand lamps. She would then pass among the crowd, holding out a pink conch shell. Silver was dropped into it, or sometimes gold, and only then did her eyes smile as they rested for a second, like a caress, on the generous man.

I gave gold—I, a humble teacher of French grammar in the Gymnasium, gave gold for one look from Anita.

Brief notes:

I sold my Voltaire. I had sometimes read my pupils extracts from his correspondence with the King of Prussia; it pleased the principal.

I owed two months' room and board to Frau Holz, my landlady. She told me she was poor. . . .

I asked the bursar of the school for another advance on my salary. He told me with embarrassment that it was difficult, that it was against regulations. . . . I did not listen any longer. My colleague Seifert curtly refused to lend me a few thalers.

I dropped a heavy gold coin into the conch shell. Anita's eyes burned my soul. Then I heard someone laughing in the laurel thickets of Tempelhof. I recognized two servants of the Gymnasium. They ran away into the darkness.

It was my last gold coin. I had no more money, none at all. . . .

As I was walking past the distillery on the Mohlenstrasse, I was nearly run over by a carriage. I made a frightened leap into Saint Beregonne's Lane. My hand clutched the viburnum bush and broke off a sprig of it.

I took the sprig home with me and laid it on my table. It had opened up an immense new world to me, like a magician's wand.

Let us reason, as my stingy colleague Seifert would say.

First of all, my leap into Saint Beregonne's Lane and my subsequent return to the Mohlenstrasse had shown that the mysterious street was as easy to enter and leave as any ordinary thoroughfare.

But the viburnum sprig had enormous philosophical significance. It was "in excess" in our world. If I had taken a branch from any forest in America and brought it here, I would not have changed the number of branches on earth. But in bringing that sprig of viburnum from Saint Beregonne's Lane I had made an intrinsic addition that could not have been made by all the tropical growths

in the world, because I had taken it from a plane of existence that was real only for me.

I was therefore able to take an object from that plane and bring it into the world of men, where no one could contest my ownership of it. Ownership could never be more absolute, in fact, because the object would owe nothing to any industry, and it would augment the normally immutable patrimony of the earth. . . .

My reasoning flowed on, wide as a river, carrying fleets of words, encircling islands of appeals to philosophy; it was swollen by a vast system of logical tributaries until it reached a conclusive demonstration that a theft committed in Saint Beregonne's Lane was not a theft in the Mohlenstrasse.

Fortified by this nonsense, I judged that the matter was settled. My only concern would be to avoid the reprisals of the mysterious inhabitants of the street, or of the world to which it led.

When the Spanish conquistadores spent the gold they had brought back from the new India, I think they cared very little about the anger of the faraway peoples they had despoiled.

I decided to enter the unknown the following day.

Klingbom made me waste some time. I think he had been waiting for me in the little square vestibule that opened into his shop on one side and his office on the other. As I walked past, clenching my teeth, ready to plunge into my adventure, he grabbed me by my coat.

"Ah, professor," he said, "how I misjudged you! It wasn't you! I must have been blind to suspect you! She's left me, professor, but not with you. Oh, no, you're a man of honor! She's gone off with a postmaster, a man who's half coachman and half scribe. What a disgrace for the House of Klingbom!"

He had dragged me into the shadowy back room of his shop. He poured me a glass of orange-flavored brandy.

"And to think that I mistrusted you, professor! I always saw you looking at my wife's windows, but I know now that it was the seed merchant's wife you had your eye on."

I masked my embarrassment by raising my glass.

"To tell you the truth," said Klingbom, pouring me out some more of the reddish liquid, "I'd be glad to see you put one over on that malicious seed merchant: he's delighted by my misfortune."

He added, with a smile, "I'll do you a favor: the lady of your dreams is in her garden right now. Why don't you go and see her?"

He led me up a spiral staircase to a window. I saw the poisonous sheds of the Klingbom distillery smoking among a tangled array of little courtyards, miniature gardens, and muddy streams narrow enough to step across. It was through that landscape that the secret street ought to run, but I saw nothing except the smoky activity of the Klingbom buildings and the seed merchant's nearby garden, where a thin form was leaning over some arid flower beds.

One last swallow of brandy gave me a great deal of courage. After leaving Klingbom, I walked straight into Saint Beregonne's Lane.

Three little yellow doors in the white wall. . . .

Beyond the bend in the street, the viburnum bushes continued to place spots of green and black among the paving stones; then the three little doors appeared, almost touching each other. They gave the aspect of a Flemish Beguine convent to what should have been singular and terrible.

My footsteps resounded clearly in the silence.

I knocked on the first of the doors. Only the futile life of an echo was stirred behind it.

Fifty paces away, the street made another bend.

I was discovering the unknown parsimoniously. So far I had found only two thinly whitewashed walls and those three doors. But is not any closed door a powerful mystery in itself?

I knocked on all three doors, more violently this time. The echoes departed loudly and shattered the silence lurking in the depths of prodigious corridors. Sometimes their dying murmurs seemed to imitate the sound of light footsteps, but that was the only reply from the enclosed world.

The doors had locks on them, the same as all the

other doors I was used to seeing. Two nights before, I had spent an hour picking the lock on my bedroom door with a piece of bent wire, and it had been as easy as a game.

There was a little sweat on my temples, a little shame in my heart. I took the same piece of wire from my pocket and slipped it into the lock of the first little door. And very simply, just like my bedroom door, it opened.

Later, when I was back in my bedroom among my books, in front of the table on which lay a red ribbon that had fallen from Anita's dress, I sat clutching three silver thalers in my hand.

Three thalers!

I had destroyed my finest destiny with my own hand. That new world had opened for me alone. What had it expected of me, that universe more mysterious than those that gravitate toward the bottom of Infinity? Mystery had made advances to me, had smiled at me like a pretty girl, and I had entered it as a thief. I had been petty, vile, absurd.

Three thalers!

My adventure should have been so prodigious, and it had become so paltry!

Three thalers reluctantly given to me by Gockel, the antique dealer, for that engraved metal dish. Three thalers. . . . But they would buy one of Anita's smiles.

I abruptly threw them into a drawer: someone was knocking on my door.

It was Gockel. It was difficult for me to believe that this was the same malevolent man who had contemptuously put down the metal dish on his counter cluttered with barbarous and shabby trinkets. He was smiling now, and he constantly mingled my name—which he mispronounced—with the title of "Herr Doktor" or "Herr Lehrer."

"I think I did you a great injustice, Herr Doktor," he said. "That dish is certainly worth more."

He took out a leather purse and I saw the bright yellow smile of gold.

"It may be," he went on, "that you have other objects from the same source . . . or rather, of the same kind."

The distinction did not escape me. Beneath the urbanity of the antique dealer was the spirit of a receiver of stolen goods.

"The fact is," I said, "that a friend of mine, an erudite collector, is in a difficult situation and needs to pay off certain debts, so he wants to sell part of his collection. He prefers to remain unknown: he's a shy scholar. He's already unhappy enough over having to part with some of the treasures in his showcases. I want to spare him any further sadness, so I'm helping him to sell them."

Gockel nodded enthusiastically. He seemed overwhelmed with admiration for me.

"That's my idea of true friendship!" he said. "Ach, Herr Doktor, I'll reread Cicero's *De Amicitia* this evening with renewed pleasure. How I wish that I had a friend like your unfortunate scholar has found in you! But I'll contribute a little to your good deed by buying everything your friend is willing to part with, and by paying very good prices. . . ."

I had a slight stirring of curiosity:

"I didn't look at the dish very closely," I said loftily. "It didn't concern me, and besides, I don't know anything about such things. What kind of work is it? Byzantine?"

Gockel scratched his chin in embarrassment.

"Uh . . . I couldn't say for sure. Byzantine, yes, maybe. . . . I'll have to study it more carefully. . . . But," he went on, suddenly recovering his serenity, "in any case it's sure to find a buyer." Then, in a tone that cut short all further discussion: "That's the most important thing to us . . . and to your friend, too, of course."

Late that night I accompanied Anita in the moonlight to the street where her house stood half-hidden in a clump of tall lilacs.

But I must go back in my story to the tray I sold for thalers and gold, which gave me for one evening the friendship of the most beautiful girl in the world.

The door opened onto a long hall with a blue stone floor. A frosted window pane cast light into it and broke up the shadows. My first impression of being in a Flemish Beguine convent became stronger, especially when

an open door at the end of the hall led me into a broad kitchen with a vaulted ceiling and rustic furniture, gleaming with wax and polish.

This innocuous scene was so reassuring that I called aloud:

"Hello! Is there anyone upstairs?"

A powerful resonance rumbled, but no presence cared to manifest itself.

I must admit that at no time did the silence and absence of life surprise me; it was as though I had expected it. In fact, from the time when I first perceived the existence of the enigmatic street, I had not thought for one moment of any possible inhabitants. And yet I had just entered it like a nocturnal thief.

I took no precautions when I ransacked the drawers containing silverware and table linen. My footsteps clattered freely in the adjoining rooms furnished like convent visiting-rooms, and on a magnificent oak staircase that. . . . Ah, there *was* something surprising in my visit! That staircase led nowhere! It ran into the drab wall as though it continued on the other side of it.

All this was bathed in the whitish glow of the frosted glass that formed the ceiling. I saw, or thought I saw, a vaguely hideous shape on the rough plaster wall, but when I looked at it attentively I realized that it was composed of thin cracks and was of the same order as those monsters that we distinguish in clouds and the lace of curtains. Furthermore, it did not trouble me, because when I looked a second time I no longer saw it in the network of cracks in the plaster.

I went back to the kitchen. Through a barred window, I saw a shadowy little courtyard that was like a pit surrounded by four big, mossy walls.

On a sideboard there was a heavy tray that looked as though it ought to have some value. I slipped it under my coat. I was deeply disappointed: I felt as though I had just stolen a few coins from a child's piggy bank, or from an old-maid aunt's shabby woolen stocking.

I went to Gockel, the antique dealer.

The three little houses were identical. In all of them, I found the same clean, tidy kitchen, the same sparse,

gleaming furniture, the same dim, unreal light, the same serene quietness, the same senseless wall that ended the staircase. And in all three houses, I found identical candlesticks and the same heavy tray.

I took them away, and . . . and the next day I always found them in their places again. I took them to Gockel, who smiled broadly as he paid me for them.

It was enough to drive me mad; I felt my soul becoming monotonous, like that of a whirling dervish. Over and over again, I stole the same objects from the same house, under the same circumstances. I wondered whether this might not be the first vengeance of that unknown without mystery. Might not damnation be the unvarying repetition of sin for all eternity?

One day I did not go. I had resolved to space out my wretched incursions. I had a reserve of gold; Anita was happy and was showing wonderful tenderness toward me.

That same evening, Gockel came to see me, asked me if I had anything to sell, and, to my surprise, offered to pay me even more than he had been paying. He scowled when I told him of my decision.

"You've found a regular buyer, haven't you?" I said to him as he was leaving.

He slowly turned around and looked me straight in the eyes.

"Yes, Herr Doktor. I won't tell you anything about him, just as you never speak to me of . . . your friend, the seller." His voice became lower: "Bring me objects every day; tell me how much gold you want for them, and I'll give it to you, without bargaining. We're both tied to the same wheel, Herr Doktor. Perhaps we'll have to pay later. In the meantime, let's live the kind of life we like: you with a pretty girl, I with a fortune."

We never broached the subject again. But Anita suddenly became very demanding, and Gockel's gold slipped between her little fingers like water.

Then the atmosphere of the street changed, if I may express it that way. I heard melodies. At least it seemed to me that it was marvelous, faraway music. Summoning up my courage again, I decided to explore the street beyond the bend and go on toward the song that vibrated in the distance.

When I passed the third door and entered a part of the street where I had never gone before, I felt a terrible tightening in my heart. I took only three or four hesitant steps.

I turned around. I could still see the first part of the street, but it looked much smaller. It seemed to me that I had moved dangerously far away from my world. Nevertheless, in a surge of irrational temerity, I ran a short distance, then knelt, and, like a boy peering over a hedge, ventured to look down the unknown part of the street.

Disappointment struck me like a slap. The street continued its winding way, but again I saw nothing except three little doors in a white wall, and some viburnum bushes.

I would surely have gone back then if the wind of song had not passed by, like a distant tide of billowing sound. . . . I surmounted an inexplicable terror and listened to it, hoping to analyze it if possible.

I have called it a tide: it was a sound that came from a considerable distance, but it was enormous, like the sound of the sea.

As I listened to it, I no longer heard the harmonies I had thought I discerned in it at first; instead, I heard a harsh dissonance, a furious clamor of wails and hatred.

Have you ever noticed that the first whiffs of a repulsive smell are sometimes soft and even pleasant? I remember that when I left my house one day I was greeted in the street by an appetizing aroma of roast beef. "Someone's doing some good cooking early in the morning," I thought. But when I had walked a hundred paces, this aroma changed into the sharp, sickening smell of burning cloth: a draper's shop was on fire, filling the air with sparks and smoky flames. In the same way, I may have been deceived by my first perception of the melodious clamor.

"Why don't I go beyond the next bend?" I said to myself. My apprehensive inertia had almost disappeared. Walking calmly now, I covered the space before me in a few seconds—and once again I found exactly the same scene that I had left behind.

I was overwhelmed by a kind of bitter fury that engulfed my broken curiosity. Three identical houses, then

three more identical houses. I had plumbed the mystery merely by opening the first door.

Gloomy courage took possession of me. I walked forward along the street, and my disappointment grew at an incredible rate.

A bend, three little yellow doors, a clump of viburnum bushes, then another bend, the same three little doors in the white wall, and the shadow of spindle trees. This repetition continued obsessively while I walked furiously, with loud footsteps.

Suddenly, when I had turned one more bend in the street, this terrible symmetry was broken. There were again three little doors and some viburnum bushes, but there was also a big wooden portal, darkened and worn smooth by time. I was afraid of it.

I now heard the clamor from much closer, hostile and threatening. I began walking back toward the Mohlenstrasse. The scenes went by like the quatrains of a ballad: three little doors and viburnum bushes, three little doors and viburnum bushes. . . .

Finally I saw the first lights of the real world twinkling before me. But the clamor had pursued me to the edge of the Mohlenstrasse. There it stopped abruptly, adapting itself to the joyous evening sounds of the populous streets, so that the mysterious and terrible shouting ended in a chorus of children's voices singing a roundelay.

The whole town is in the grip of an unspeakable terror.

I would not have spoken of it in these brief memoirs, which concern only myself, if I had not found a link between the shadowy street and the crimes that steep the town in blood every night.

Over a hundred people have suddenly disappeared, a hundred others have been savagely murdered.

I recently took a map of the town and drew on it the winding line that must represent Saint Beregonne's Lane, that incomprehensible street that overlaps our terrestrial world. I was horrified to see that *all the crimes have been committed along that line.*

Thus poor Klingbom was one of the first to disappear. According to his clerk, he vanished like a puff of smoke

just as he was entering the room containing his stills. The seed merchant's wife was next, snatched away while she was in her sad garden. Her husband was found in his drying-room with his skull smashed.

As I traced the fateful line on the map, my idea became a certainty. I can explain the victims' disappearance only by their passage into an unknown plane; as for the murders, they are easy for invisible beings.

All the inhabitants of a house on Old Purse Street have disappeared. On Church Street, six corpses have been found. On Post Street, there have been five disappearances and four deaths. This goes on and on, apparently limited by the Deichstrasse, where more murders and disappearances are taking place.

I now realize that to talk about what I know would be to place myself in the Kirchhaus insane asylum, a tomb from which no Lazarus ever arises; or else it would give free rein to a superstitious crowd that is exasperated enough to tear me to pieces as a sorcerer.

And yet, ever since the beginning of my monotonous daily thefts, anger has been welling up inside me, driving me to vague plans of vengeance.

"Gockel knows more about this than I do," I thought. "I'm going to tell him what I know: that will make him more inclined to confide in me."

But that evening, while Gockel was emptying his heavy purse into my hands, I said nothing, and he left as usual with polite words that made no allusion to the strange bargain that had attached us to the same chain.

I had a feeling that events were about to leap forward and rush like a torrent through my tranquil life. I was becoming more and more aware that Saint Beregonne's Lane and its little houses were only a mask concealing some sort of horrible face.

So far, fortunately for me, I had gone there only in broad daylight, because for some reason I dreaded to encounter the shadows of evening there. But one day I lingered later than usual, stubbornly pushing furniture around, turning drawers inside out, determined to discover something new. And the "new" came of itself, in the form of a dull rumble, like that of heavy doors moving on rollers. I looked up and saw that the opales-

cent light had changed into an ashy semidarkness. The panes of glass above the staircase were livid; the little courtyards were already filled with shadow.

My heart tightened, but when the rumbling continued, reinforced by the powerful resonance of the house, my curiosity became stronger than my fear, and I began climbing the stairs to see where the noise was coming from.

It was growing darker and darker, but before leaping back down the stairs like a madman and running out of the house, I was able to see. . . . There was no more wall! The staircase ended at the edge of an abyss dug out of the night, from which vague monstrosities were rising.

I reached the door; behind me, something was furiously knocked over.

The Mohlenstrasse gleamed before me like a haven. I ran faster. Something suddenly seized me with extreme savagery.

"What's the matter with you? Can't you see where you're going?"

I found myself sitting on the pavement of the Mohlenstrasse, before a sailor who was rubbing his sore skull and looking at me in bewilderment. My coat was torn, my neck was bleeding.

I immediately hurried away without wasting any time on apologies, to the supreme indignation of the sailor, who shouted after me that after colliding with him so brutally I should at least buy him a drink.

Anita is gone, vanished!

My heart is broken; I collapse, sobbing, on my useless gold.

And yet her house is far from the zone of danger. Good God! I failed through an excess of prudence and love! One day, without mentioning the street, I showed her the line I had drawn on the map and told her that all the danger seemed to be concentrated along that sinuous trail. Her eyes glowed strangely at that moment. I should have known that the great spirit of adventure that animated her ancestors was not dead in her.

Perhaps, in a flash of feminine intuition, she made a

connection between that line and my sudden fortune. . . . Oh, how my life is disintegrating!

There have been more murders and disappearances. And my Anita has been carried off in the bloody, inexplicable whirlwind!

The case of Hans Mendell has given me a mad idea: those vaporous beings, as he described them, may not be invulnerable.

Although Hans Mendell was not a distinguished man, I see no reason not to believe his story. He was a scoundrel who made his living as a mountebank and a cutthroat. When he was found, he had in his pocket the purses and watches of two unfortunate men whose corpses lay bleeding on the ground a few paces away from him.

It would have been assumed that he was guilty of murder if he himself had not been found moaning with both arms torn from his body.

Being a man with a powerful constitution, he was able to live long enough to answer the feverish questions of the magistrates and priests.

He confessed that for several days he had followed a shadow, a kind of black mist, and robbed the bodies of the people it killed. On the night of his misfortune, he saw the black mist waiting in the middle of Post Street in the moonlight. He hid in an empty sentry-box and watched it. He saw other dark, vaporous, awkward forms that bounced like rubber balls, then disappeared.

Soon he heard voices and saw two young men coming up the street. The black mist was no longer in sight, but he suddenly saw the two men writhe on their backs, then lie still.

Mendell added that he had already observed the same sequence in those nocturnal murders on seven other occasions. He had always waited for the shadow to leave, then robbed the bodies. This shows that he had remarkable self-control, worthy of being put to a better use.

As he was robbing the two bodies, he saw with alarm that the shadow had not left, but had only risen off the ground, interposing itself between him and the moon. He then saw that it had a roughly human shape. He tried to

go back to the sentry-box but did not have time: the figure pounced on him.

Mendell was an extraordinarily strong man. He struck an enormous blow and encountered a slight resistance, as though he were pushing his hand through a strong current of air.

That was all he was able to say. His horrible wound allowed him to live only another hour after telling his story.

The idea of avenging Anita has now taken root in my brain. I said to Gockel, "Don't come any more. I need revenge and hatred, and your gold can no longer do anything for me."

He looked at me with that profound expression that was familiar to me by now.

"Gockel," I said, "I'm going to take vengeance."

His face suddenly brightened, as though with great joy:

"And . . . do you believe . . . Herr Doktor, that they will disappear?"

I harshly ordered him to have a cart filled with fagots and casks of oil, raw alcohol and gunpowder, and to leave it without a driver early in the morning on the Mohlenstrasse. He bowed low like a servant, and as he was leaving he said to me, "May the Lord help you! May the Lord come to your aid!"

I feel that these are the last lines I shall write in this journal.

I piled up the fagots, streaming with oil and alcohol, against the big door. I laid down trails of gunpowder connecting the nearby small doors with other oil-soaked fagots. I placed charges of powder in all the cracks in the walls.

The mysterious clamor continued all around me. This time I discerned in it abominable lamentations, human wails, echoes of horrible torments of the flesh. But my heart was agitated by tumultuous joy, because I felt around me a wild apprehension that came from *them.* They saw my terrible preparations and were unable to prevent them, for, as I had come to realize, only night released their frightful power.

I calmly struck a light with my tinderbox. A moan passed, and the viburnum bushes quivered as though blown by a sudden stiff breeze. A long blue flame rose into the air, the fagots began crackling, fire crept along the trails of gunpowder. . . .

I ran down the winding street, from bend to bend, feeling a little dizzy, as though I were going too fast down a spiral staircase that descended deep into the earth.

The Deichstrasse and the whole surrounding neighborhood were in flames. From my window, I could see the sky turning yellow above the rooftops. The weather was dry and the town's water supply was nearly exhausted. A red band of sparks and flames hovered high above the street.

The fire had been burning for a day and a night, but it was still far from the Mohlenstrasse. Saint Beregonne's Lane was there, calm with its quivering viburnum bushes. Explosions rumbled in the distance.

Another cart was there, loaded and left by Gockel. Not a soul was in sight: everyone had been drawn toward the formidable spectacle of the fire. *It was not expected here.*

I walked from bend to bend to bend, sowing fagots, pools of oil and alcohol, and the dark frost of gunpowder. Suddenly, just as I had turned another bend, I stopped and stared. Three little houses, the everlasting three little houses, were burning calmly with pretty yellow flames in the peaceful air. It was as though even the fire respected their serenity, for it was doing its work without noise or ferocity. I realized that I was at the red edge of the conflagration that was destroying the town.

With anguish in my soul, I moved back from that mystery that was about to die.

I was near the Mohlenstrasse. I stopped in front of the first of the little doors, the one I had opened, trembling, a few weeks earlier. It was there that I would start the new fire.

For the last time, I saw the kitchen, the austere parlor, and the staircase, which now ended at the wall, as before; and I felt that all this had become familiar, almost dear to me.

On the big tray, the one I had stolen so many times before only to find it waiting for me again the next day, I saw some sheets of paper covered with elegant feminine handwriting.

I picked them up. This was going to be my last theft on the shadowy street.

Vampires! Vampires! Vampires!

* * * * * *

So ends the French manuscript. The last words, evoking the impure spirits of the night, are written across the page in sharp letters that cry out terror and despair. Thus must write those who, on a sinking ship, want to convey a last farewell to the families they hope will survive them.

It was last year in Hamburg. I was strolling through the old city, with its good smell of fresh beer. It was dear to my heart, because it reminded me of the cities I had loved in my youth. And there, on an empty, echoing street, I saw a name on the front of an antique shop: Lockmann Gockel.

I bought an old Bavarian pipe with truculent decorations. The shopkeeper seemed friendly. I asked him if the name of Archipetre meant anything to him. His face had been the color of gray earth; in the twilight it now turned so white that it stood out from the shadows as though illuminated by an inner flame.

"Archipetre," he murmured slowly. "Oh! What are you saying? What do you know?"

I had no reason to conceal the story I had found on the dock. I told it to him.

He lit an archaic gaslight. Its flame danced and hissed foolishly.

I saw that his eyes were weary.

"He was my grandfather," he said, when I mentioned Gockel the antique dealer.

When I had finished my story I heard a great sigh from a dark corner.

"That's my sister," he said.

I nodded to her. She was young and pretty, but very

pale. She had been listening to me, motionless among grotesque shadows.

"Our grandfather talked to our father about it nearly every evening," he said in a faltering voice, "and our father used to discuss it with us. Now that he's dead too, we talk about it with each other."

"And now," I said nervously, "thanks to you, we're going to be able to do some research on the subject of that mysterious street, aren't we?"

He slowly raised his hand.

"Alphonse Archipetre taught French in the Gymnasium until 1842."

"Oh!" I said, disappointed. "That's a long time ago!"

"It was the year of the great fire that nearly destroyed Hamburg. The Mohlenstrasse and the vast section of the city between it and the Deichstrasse were a sea of flames."

"And Archipetre?"

"He lived rather far from there, toward Bleichen. The fire didn't reach his street, but in the middle of the second night, on May 6—a terrible night, dry and without water—his house burned down, all alone among the others that were miraculously spared. He died in the flames; or at least he was never found."

"The story. . . ." I began.

Lockmann Gockel did not let me finish. He was so happy to have found an outlet that he seized upon the subject greedily, Fortunately he told me more or less what I wanted to hear.

"The story compressed time, just as space was compressed at the fateful location of Saint Beregonne's Lane. In the Hamburg archives, there are accounts of atrocities committed *during the fire* by a band of mysterious evildoers. Fantastic crimes, looting, riots, red hallucinations on the part of whole crowds—all those things are precisely described, and yet they took place *before the fire.* Do you understand my reference to the contraction of space and time?"

His face became a little calmer.

"Isn't modern science driven back to Euclidean weakness by the theory of that admirable Einstein for whom the whole world envies us? And isn't it forced to accept, with horror and despair, that fantastic Fitzgerald-

Lorentz law of contraction? Contraction! Ah, there's a word that's heavy with meaning!"

The conversation seemed to be going off on an insidious tangent.

The young woman silently brought tall glasses filled with yellow wine. Gockel raised his toward the flame and marvelous colors flowed onto his frail hand like a silver river of gems.

He abandoned his scientific dissertation and returned to the story of the conflagration:

"My grandfather, and other people of the time, reported that enormous green flames shot up from the debris. There were hallucinated people who claimed to see figures of indescribably ferocious women in them."

The wine had a soul. I emptied the glass and smiled at Gockel's terrified words.

"Those same green flames," he went on, "rose from Archipetre's house and roared so horribly that people were said to have died of fear in the street."

"Mr. Gockel," I said, "did your grandfather ever speak of the mysterious purchaser who came every evening to buy the same trays and the same candlesticks?"

A weary voice replied for him, in words that were almost identical with those that ended the German manuscript:

"A tall old woman, an immense old woman with fishy eyes in an incredible face. She brought bags of gold so heavy that our grandfather had to divide them into four parts to carry them to his coffers."

The young woman continued:

"When Professor Archipetre came to my grandfather, the Gockel firm was about to go bankrupt. It became rich, and we're still enormously rich, from the gold of the . . . yes, from the gold of those beings of the night!"

"They're gone now," murmured her brother, refilling our glasses.

"Don't say that! They can't have forgotten us. Remember our nights, our horrible nights! All I can hope for now is that there is, or was, a human presence with them that they cherish and that may intercede for us."

Her lovely eyes opened wide before the black abyss of her thoughts.

"Kathie!" exclaimed Gockel. "Have you again seen? . . ."

"You know the things are here every night," she said in a voice as low as a moan. "They assail our thoughts as soon as sleep comes over us. Ah, to sleep no more! . . ."

"To sleep no more," repeated her brother in an echo of terror.

"They come out of their gold, which we keep, and which we love in spite of everything; they rise from everything we've acquired with that infernal fortune. . . . They'll always come back, as long as we exist, and as long as this wretched earth endures!"

I KILLED ALFRED HEAVENROCK

I leaned my bicycle against a milestone and unfolded the map that had been given to me in the offices of Colson, Mivvins & Mivvins. It was a map of Kent and part of Surrey. The girl who handed it to me had claimed that Kent was a more lucrative territory.

She was lying, because I've never seen people less inclined than the people of Kent to buy Sheffield razors, shaving cream, after-shave lotion—in short, everything it takes to make a man's face smooth and clean.

The map was complete enough to guide me to St. Mary Cray after leaving London by way of Lewisham, but from Orpington on it had annoying mistakes and omissions. I was now vainly trying to find Chelsfield, which the girl had marked with a red pencil to make me believe it was a good place for sales. Fortunately a gaunt, shaggy man came to my assistance.

He popped out of a thicket, where he had probably just finished a little nap, for he was covered with twigs and red sand.

"Have you got a light?" he asked, touching the remains of a hat.

I told him I had.

"I'm out of cigarettes, too," he added.

I gave him a cigarette and a match.

"Are you looking for something around here?" he asked between two puffs.

"Yes, I'm looking for Chelsfield."

"You're headed away from it, but don't be sorry: it's full of idiots. This is Ruggleton."

"Ruggleton? That's not on my map."

"It's no longer necessary. We can thank the German

buzz bombs for that. You've just leaned your bicycle against the last vestige of my house."

"This milestone?"

"It's the cornerstone of the dining-room fireplace. Now and then I come here to visit it and clear the dead leaves off of Maggie's grave."

"Oh. . . . Your wife?"

"No, my donkey. She was a wonderful animal. I can't imagine how her death could have helped the Germans to win the war." He prepared to leave. "If you've come here to sell something, go to Elms instead of Chelsfield: the people are a little less stupid there."

"So this is all that's left of Ruggleton?" I said, stroking the stone.

"Not quite. There's Miss Florence Bee's house, which was miraculously spared. You'll pass it on your way to Elms. It's almost opposite the cemetery. It's for rent, but what madman would want it?" He made a circular gesture with his hand. "Ruggleton and Maggie, I bid you farewell forever," he said dramatically.

"Forever?"

"I've got myself a job on a freighter that's going to the Caribbean. When I get there, I intend to jump ship and find some way of making a living."

Leading my bicycle, I walked past the cemetery, which had been more conscientiously excavated by German bombs than the Valley of the Kings by Lord Carnarvon's expedition. I saw Miss Florence Bee leaning on her garden gate, watching me approach.

She was a woman in her late thirties, with an attractive though somewhat stern face. She smiled when she saw me glance at the yellow sign that protruded from the holly hedge.

"If you're from the rental agency . . . ," she began.

I shook my head.

"If you were a man, I'd try to sell you a pound of shaving soap," I said, smiling back at her.

Opportunities to exchange a few words with a fellow human being were apparently rare for Miss Bee, because she made some commonplace remarks about the hard and uncertain times we were living in, for the obvious

purpose of not having to return to silence and solitude too soon.

When I first smiled at Florence Bee, I had no other intention than to sell razors and soap to the inhabitants of Kent. A moment later, I began elaborating a plan that was totally different from those that were supposed to supply me with my daily bread.

And it was at that moment that Alfred Heavenrock was born.

I took a long look around me, and thoughtfully nodded my head.

"It's odd," I said softly, "really odd. . . ."

As I said this, my eyes went from the sign to the cemetery, without stopping on Miss Bee.

"Odd?" she asked.

"Yes. I was thinking of what Alfred said to me the other day. Alfred Heavenrock is my cousin, a man who's not like others, especially where his thoughts are concerned. Even though he's my cousin, I don't mind telling you he's a queer fellow."

"Heavenrock," she said meditatively. "I've heard that name before. . . ."

She was lying, of course, in the hope of prolonging our unexpected chat.

"I doubt that there was a Heavenrock in the Battle of Hastings," I said. "Alfred is the only one in the family who has any money. During the war, I was content to serve in the army."

She looked at me approvingly.

"Would you like to sit down, sir?"

"My name is David Heavenrock. My friends used to call me Dave. I say 'used to' because they all died on French soil, fighting the Germans."

We sat down on a bench in the garden.

"Why did you say it was odd when you looked at the sign and the cemetery?" she asked abruptly.

I gave a good imitation of a man whose innermost thoughts have just been discovered.

"Did you really notice what I was looking at?" I asked naïvely. "Well, I'll tell you. . . ."

There was a silence. It was full of expectation for her, and of skillfully feigned discomposure for me.

But my plan was taking shape. . . .

"Well, I'll tell you," I began again, in a tone of great embarrassment, "the other day Alfred said to me, 'You know, David'—he never calls me Dave—'I've had enough of London and big cities and traveling.' 'Try Bath or Margate,' I advised him. He grunted and said, 'Close your travel brochures. You probably expect to get a commission, but with me it won't work. What I want is a house in a desert, near a cemetery that no longer receives any corpses or visitors.' That's what he said to me."

Florence Bee opened her eyes wide.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "Can it be possible?"

"Alfred is a strange man," I said. "I won't say he's mad, because there's no one shrewder when it comes to lining his pockets, but he's a little . . . eccentric."

"As eccentric as all that?"

"Well, you see, his hobby is holding séances and reading books on spiritualism. He's a devoted follower of Dr. Dee, an Elizabethan wizard who claimed to raise the dead from their graves."

"How horrible!" said Florence, her eyes shining with joy and the hope of hearing more.

But I was careful not to give her a larger portion.

"I find that nonsense disgusting," I went on, "but I have to listen to Alfred talk about it because now and then he helps me a little—very little, I might add. However, maybe I'll do him a favor by telling him about your house, which just happens to be for rent."

I stood up to take leave of her, even though my plan required a longer conversation.

"Would you like . . . a glass of wine?" she asked after a slight hesitation.

I made a polite gesture of refusal.

"I never drink wine or liquor."

She gave me a look full of admiration.

"In that case, let me offer you a cup of tea."

I accepted, after showing a certain hesitation of my own.

She led me into a living room with a pleasant and even luxurious appearance; I saw two paintings by Histler and an ostentatious set of silverware, but I showed no surprise.

Her tea was excellent, and so were her cigarettes.

"Tell me about your cousin," she said, "since he may become my tenant."

"Oh, I haven't promised you anything! Alfred is really strange, and although he's tremendously superstitious you mustn't expect to get a lot of money out of him. Whenever money is involved, he becomes as cold and precise as an electronic computer."

"I have no such intention!" she protested. "I'll be glad to rent this house, furnished, for a reasonable amount, so that I can leave this cursed place forever. I plan to retire to Doncaster, where I own an estate."

"How lucky you are to be able to say that!" I murmured.

Women have often told me that my mouth is attractive when it expresses bitterness by a rapid lowering of the corners. I think they are not wrong. I made a quick grimace of that kind, and Florence noticed it.

"Don't be sad, Mr. . . . Dave," she stammered. "An estate in Doncaster can't bring happiness."

"A bullet in the heart would have at least made me less unhappy," I said, taking on a somber expression, "a bullet like the one Percy Woodside got at Octeville, or the one Bram Stone got a little further on. . . ."

Neither Percy Woodside nor Bram Stone had ever existed, and it would only have been by the most freakish of accidents that a bullet could have hit me, because I had served my time in the army far from the front lines, as a hospital attendant.

"Don't be bitter, Dave." She put her hand on mine. "Everyone has troubles and worries. . . . By the way, are you married?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"No, thank God. I couldn't have given a wife anything but love, and it's well known that you can't live on that."

This time I wasn't lying.

I saw her smile. She was a pleasant sight. I looked with pleasure at her rather wide mouth, her dazzling teeth, and her dark eyes. At the same time, I admired the magnificent cameo she was wearing; I appraised it at about a hundred pounds.

"Tell me about your cousin," she said again, obviously

regretting that she was obliged to give the conversation a different turn.

"I can describe him to you. He thinks he's handsome, but he's deplorably ugly with his little curled-up mustache, his thick red eyebrows, and his horrible dark glasses. He's getting paunchy—I can't stand fat men—his hands are always dirty, as though he'd just been going through old things in an attic, and . . . and . . . he drinks!"

"And as for you," said Florence, smiling, "you're a sober man, which explains your repugnance, although you're not being very charitable."

"If he drank whisky or even gin like everyone else, it wouldn't be so bad, but he never goes out without a flask of kirschwasser, and it's abominable stuff! And if only he stopped there! But no, he feels insulted if you refuse to drink his kirschwasser, because it's the only thing in the world he likes to share. He's made me suffer so much by forcing that loathsome liquor on me!"

Florence laughed.

"You're exaggerating! Personally, I have no objection to a little glass of cool, fragrant kirschwasser."

I frowned and looked dissatisfied.

"Don't be cross," she said sweetly. "We mustn't judge others too severely. We must forgive their little shortcomings. Haven't you any yourself?"

I looked straight into her eyes.

"Yes, and I not only have small ones, but also big ones that are real faults, not just shortcomings. First of all, I want the dead to be respected and not to be disturbed in their divine rest by outrageous practices of sorcery. . . ."

"But that's not a fault!"

"It wouldn't be if I didn't behave like a drunken sailor whenever someone violates what I regard as a sacred law."

"Are you . . . a little violent?"

"Yes, I am. I've punched Alfred in the nose more than once because of what I'm talking about. I'm one of those people who believe in defending their friends. My friends are dead, but I go on defending them just the same."

I saw her lips quiver.

"Dave," she said slowly, "you're a man."

I stood up and waited for her to hold out her hand to me.

"Perhaps we'll see each other again."

I lowered my eyes, and my lips made a quick bitter grimace.

"Perhaps. . . . But no, I. . . . I. . . . Good-by."

I strode away without looking back and got onto my bicycle. As I pedaled away, I kept my eyes on her reflection in the rearview mirror.

Standing by her garden gate with her hand pressed to her heart, Miss Florence Bee watched me ride off down the road.

It took me a few days to work out my plan completely and get hold of five or six pounds.

The bicycle belonged to Colson, Mivvins & Mivvins, but I sold my Shakespeare, a beautiful edition whose loss I shall always regret. I bet the two shillings I got for it on a horse named Halifax that was running at Norwood. The devil must have been on my side, because the horse won ten pounds for me.

I had some difficulty in getting a bottle of good kirschwasser, but almost none in getting a bottle of prussic acid, since I had worked in a hospital during the war, as I have already said.

A hair dye that would give me a head of flaming red hair and then vanish as soon as I wanted it to was harder to find, but I managed to get it.

A false mustache, a well-cut but gaudy suit, a pair of dark glasses—all that was only a question of hours.

When I was in school, I played a few parts in drawing-room comedies and everyone said I was meant to be an actor. Life delights in belying prophecies. I had done dozens of different kinds of work, but I had never been an actor.

Nevertheless, the mirror showed me the image of a perfect Alfred Heavenrock. According to my plans, that newborn individual with mustache and glasses had only twenty-four hours to live.

"Mr. Alfred Heavenrock," said Miss Florence Bee,

"your cousin gave me such an accurate description of you that I recognized you at once."

"He must have said a lot of nasty things about me," I replied in an unpleasant, rasping voice.

"Not at all."

"Don't expect me to believe that. I know David: he's an envious man who hasn't been successful in life. He claims there's nothing better than abject honesty. What an imbecile, eh?"

"I don't think so," said Florence, pursing her lips.

"Then you're wrong. And he's a brute, too. He doesn't hesitate to use his fists, even when he's not being attacked directly. That part of his character was useful to him during the war, it's true. I must admit he has courage, although I'm not one of those who admire that military virtue. . . . What do you think of his looks? You like them, I suppose?"

"Yes, he's quite handsome," Florence replied frankly.

"You see? All women say the same thing, and yet do you think he takes advantage of it, the way he could if he wanted to? Not at all! The poor fool is virtuous!"

"Would you like to see the house?" Florence asked icily.

"That's why I'm here," I said. And I added heavily, with a loud laugh, "I'm also here to see if you're as pretty as he said!"

"What? Did he say. . . ."

"Yes, he did, but don't expect anything from that paragon of virtue."

Florence threw back her head. Her cheeks were aflame.

"Let's drop that subject, Mr. Alfred Heavenrock," she said, stressing the first name. "Please come with me."

The house was attractive, comfortably furnished, and very well kept.

"Are your servants expensive?" I asked.

I awaited her answer with anxiety.

"I haven't had any for months now. This is a lonely place, but I like it anyway. However, the upkeep of this house is becoming too much for me to handle by myself."

I made a gesture of dissatisfaction.

"You'll surely be able to find servants in Elms," she said quickly.

"Or in London. Don't worry about that. Actually, the loneliness of this place is what suits me about it."

I turned to the window and contemplated the cemetery. Now and then, as though lost in profound thoughts, I murmured, "Yes, yes, that's it. . . . It might suit me. . . ."

I looked at her and my voice became harsher than ever: "Listen, sweetheart" (I saw her control a movement of indignation) "I'm a very frank man, but that doesn't mean I like to throw my money away. I like your house well enough to rent it, but don't ask an exorbitant price for it, or I'll walk away and that will be the end of it."

"How about a hundred pounds a year, and a three-year lease?"

"Not on your life!" I shouted. "I'll pay you half that much, no more."

"Then let's not discuss it any further," she said wearily. "My price is reasonable."

"Let's say sixty pounds and I'll pay cash."

I took a roll of banknotes from my pocket. They were "play money" notes that I had bought in a toy shop. We agreed on sixty pounds, and I did not hide my joy.

"Make out a receipt, my dear. You've just made a very good bargain and I won't complain, even though I think the price is a little high. Let's drink to it, eh?"

"I have no wine to give you," she said curtly.

"I have what I need," I said, taking my flask from my pocket and plucking two glasses from the sideboard.

The die was cast: Florence was going to die. The liquor I was about to pour into her glass would kill her in a few seconds.

I had already spotted the safe, her handbag full of money, and a few valuable pieces of jewelry. As soon as I had taken care of them, Alfred would disappear and become David again.

But then I suddenly abandoned that plan and conceived another one, which did not lie in the shadow of the gallows.

I cannot say how long this took. In fact, I believe it

was so immediate and spontaneous that no question of time was involved.

I put the glasses back down on the sideboard.

"Let me tell you something, sweetheart," I said: "David isn't as stupid as I thought!"

She paused with her pen in her hand, for she was getting ready to write out the receipt, and gave me a questioning look.

"Yes, you *are* pretty, by God! I didn't notice it till now because my mind was on our business, and business has to come first, isn't that right, sweetheart? And that spineless David doesn't want to see you again!"

The pen fell from her hand and made an inkspot on the paper.

"It's because he's in love with you," I went on. "He claims it was love at first sight! And here's the funniest part of it: he says he can never love any woman but you! Yes, he actually said that, the imbecile!"

I saw her pass her hand over her forehead and quiver from head to toe.

"The stupid fool!" I cried in a still more piercing voice. "If I'd been in his place, do you know what I'd have done?"

She remained silent and motionless, but I saw a tear roll down her cheek.

"Here's what I'd have done!"

I went over to her and abruptly pressed my lips to her neck. Ah, what a tigress! She jumped up, her chair fell over with a loud clatter, and I received the mightiest slap that ever dishonored a man's cheek.

"Get out and never come back!" she shrieked.

"But . . . what about the house?"

"I'd rather turn it into a home for stray cats than rent it to a foul beast like you! Get out, Alfred Heavenrock!"

How harshly and contemptuously she spat out the name Alfred!

I slipped my flask of kirschwasser into my pocket and walked out. When I was in the garden, I turned around and shouted the most ignoble insult that a man can throw in a woman's face.

Alfred Heavenrock disappeared that same day, with

his false mustache, his red hair, his dark glasses, and his flask of kirschwasser; and David Heavenrock resumed his place in life.

Two days later I rang Florence's doorbell. For a moment I thought she was going to faint.

I quickly closed the door behind me.

"I don't think anyone saw me," I said. "I came here by a roundabout way."

"Why?" she asked. "Is there any reason why you can't be seen coming here?"

"Yes," I answered dully.

Only then did she notice my disheveled appearance, my haggard face, my trembling hands.

"I wanted to see you one last time, Florence."

"Good heavens! What's happened, Dave?"

"I. . . . I. . . . No, let me ask you a question, only one, but it will be horrible!"

"I already know you well enough to be sure that you couldn't ask me a really horrible question," she said, taking my hands.

"This one will be."

"Ask it!"

I spoke very softly: "Alfred told me that . . . that you. . . . Good God, the words won't come out of my mouth! No, I can't ask you that!"

"I insist," she said, and her lips were very close to mine.

"He said he made advances to you, that you gave in to him, that. . . . Oh, no! . . ."

I suddenly felt her lips on mine.

"He lied! He's a disgusting swine! Do you believe me, Dave?"

I drew back from her and clasped my head between my hands.

"I believe you now, but. . . . Forgive me, I believed him, and. . . ."

"And?"

I drew myself erect and said fiercely, "I lost my head, I saw red; I picked up something from the table, something heavy, and I hit him with it. He fell. He didn't move."

"He didn't move?" she said slowly.

"He was dead."

There was an almost frighteningly long silence, then she sobbed violently and collapsed against my chest.

"My friend. . . . You did that for me!"

I gently pushed her away from me.

"I must leave. Don't regret anything, Florence, because I myself don't regret anything. May my destiny be fulfilled! Good-by."

"No!"

She bolted the door.

She asked me only one question about my "crime": "Where's the body?"

"In the river," I answered. "It's horrible, isn't it?"

"It's as it should be."

I had expected her to offer me the money I would need to go abroad and make a new life for myself. Things worked out quite differently. After spending a few days together in Ruggleton, we went to Doncaster and were married three weeks later.

No marriage was ever happier. Florence was very rich and would not allow me to look for a job. After a year our first child was born, a boy.

When our son Lionel was twenty months old, Florence came back from a walk one day, trembling and greatly upset.

"Dave, are you sure Alfred is dead?" she asked.

I looked at her in stupefaction.

"Of course, darling. Why do you ask."

"Because I've just seen him!"

"Impossible!"

"But it's true. I was walking along the wall of the cemetery when the gate opened and I saw him in front of me. He was unmistakable, with his red hair, his ugly little mustache, his dirty hands, and his dark glasses."

"It must have been someone who looks like him," I said weakly.

"No! He sneered at me, and then, in that shrill, nasty voice of his, he called me that vile name again, the same one he called me when he left my house!"

Everything seemed to whirl around me, and I suddenly knew the meaning of terror.

A few days later, when Florence was sitting at the window, she screamed in alarm:

"There he is!"

The day was ending; a nightjar cried out in the gathering darkness. I pressed my forehead against the window pane. Outside I saw a figure blurred by the mist: Alfred Heavenrock!

But mist and twilight often gave birth to illusions.

My dearest Dave,

I can't go on! He has come back. He talks to me. He demands, threatens. I must give in for your sake, my love, and for Lionel's. I'm going away with him. I don't think I shall ever see you again.

May God have mercy on me!

Your unhappy Florence

It has been three years since I received that letter, and I have reread it every day. Florence has not come back. She will never come back, I feel it, I know it. One does not tempt the forces of hell with impunity.

Lionel is growing. His hair is flaming red, his voice is harsh and shrill. Despite frequent washings, his hands are always dirty. He is malicious and has a fierce love of money; nothing gives him more pleasure than shiny new coins. When he goes out for a walk, he always pulls his nursemaid toward the cemetery.

"What's under those stones?" he asked once.

"Why . . . dead people."

"I want to make them come out!" he bawled.

In a neighbor's house the other day, liqueurs were being served. Lionel looked over the bottles and suddenly began shouting, "I want some! I want some!" He was eagerly pointing to a bottle of kirschwasser.

Ah, my handsome Shakespeare, how I miss you, and how your dark, profound words resound in my terrified memory: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. . . ."

THE CEMETERY WATCHMAN

You want to know why I became a watchman in the Saint-Guitton Cemetery, Your Honor? It's simple: I did it because of hunger and cold.

Imagine a man wearing a summer suit who has left a town where he was unable to find work and all help was refused to him, and has walked forty miles to a town that's his last hope. Imagine him eating nothing but frozen carrots that smell of manure, and hard, sour pippin apples from a deserted orchard; imagine him soaked by an October rain and leaning into a blustery north wind, and you'll have an idea of what I was like when I reached the outskirts of your gloomy town.

I went into the Two Plovers Inn. The owner was a charitable man: he fortified me with hot coffee, bread, and a herring. When he had heard the story of my distress, he told me that one of the watchmen in the Saint-Guitton Cemetery had just left and that a man was wanted to replace him.

Why should I have been afraid of the dead? The living had made me suffer so much that I didn't think the dead could be any worse.

I was hired on the spot by the two remaining watchmen, who seemed to be in complete charge of the cemetery. I was overjoyed, because I was immediately given warm clothes and a meal. And what a meal! Big slices of red meat, juicy pâtés, generous servings of fried fish.

Before I go any further, let me say a few words about the Saint-Guitton Cemetery. It's a big cemetery, but no one has been buried in it for twenty years. The tombstones are badly weatherbeaten, and their inscriptions have been partly effaced by lichens and rain. Some of the

monuments have fallen into ruin. Others have sunk into the ground until only a few inches of gray stone are showing. A kind of scrawny underbrush has invaded the paths, and the lawns are like a jungle.

The town, which is poor and now sends its dead to sleep in the enormous new Western Cemetery, had considered the idea of converting the old cemetery into an industrial area. But the manufacturers would have no part of it; they were no doubt as superstitious as the people of the neighborhood who, when they hear the wind moaning in the yew trees of the cemetery, huddle around their coke fires and tell horrifying ghost stories.

Eight years ago, shortly before her death, the enormously rich Duchess Opolchenska—Russian or Bulgarian nobility—offered to buy the cemetery from the town for a fantastic sum on condition that she be buried in it and that no one else would ever be buried in it after her. She added that the cemetery would be guarded night and day by three watchmen who would be paid with funds from a special legacy. Two of the watchmen would be former servants of hers, and the third would be hired later. As I have said, the town was poor; it accepted the offer as soon as it was made.

A crowd of workmen immediately began building a mausoleum the size of a small palace in the most remote corner of the cemetery, and the surrounding wall was made three times as high as before and studded with iron spikes.

As soon as the mausoleum was finished, it received the duchess's body. No one saw anything in all this except a touch of eccentricity: the millionairess, intending to be buried with jewelry worth a fortune, had wanted to protect her last resting-place against grave robbers.

To go on with my story:

The two watchmen gave me a warm welcome. They were two giants with faces like bulldogs. I felt that they were kind, however, when I saw how pleased they were to see me eating with such a hearty appetite, because only kind people smile at the appetite of paupers.

Before going to work, I had to swear strict obedience to the rules: not to leave the cemetery during the period of my employment (a year), not to have any relations

with anyone on the outside, and never to go near the duchess's mausoleum.

Velicho, whose duty was to guard that part of the cemetery, told me that his orders were to shoot anyone who came near the tomb. Having said this, he casually pointed his rifle toward a distant poplar tree in which a tiny shadow was moving. He pulled the trigger and a jay with blue-speckled plumage fell to the ground. Velicho was a remarkably good shot.

He proved it every day, because the cemetery was swarming with wild rabbits, ringdoves, and even pheasants that sometimes fled swiftly in the shade of the thickets.

Ossip, the second watchman, the only one who left the cemetery to do the shopping, made exquisite dishes with the game killed by Velicho. I particularly remember an amazing galantine, frozen in golden juice, that melted in my mouth; it was a smooth cream of tender meat, truffles, pistachio nuts, and pimentos.

I spent my days eating and walking in the melancholy park that the cemetery had become. I borrowed a rifle from Velicho, but I was such a poor shot that I succeeded only in rousing echoes that passed among the forsaken graves for a few seconds like plaintive lamentations.

In the evening, in our little guardroom, we gathered around our stove, whose red mica eye glowed maliciously. Ossip and Velicho spoke little. Looking in the direction of the dark windows, they always seemed to be listening, and their big watchdog faces seemed to reflect anxiety.

I smiled at the superstition of their simple souls, and at those moments I felt superior to them. What was there to be afraid of? Outside, there was nothing but the darkness of a winter night and the moaning of the wind.

Sometimes, high in the sky, nocturnal birds of prey would cry out to death, and when the moon shone small and bright through the top of the window, I could hear stones cracking in the cold.

Toward midnight, Ossip would prepare a hot drink that he called *shur*. It was almost black, with a pleasing aroma of strange plants. I drank it with great pleasure. As soon as I had taken the last swallow of it, exquisite warmth would flow through my whole body, I would have an ineffable feeling of well-being, and I would want to

laugh and talk, if only to ask for a second cup, but I was unable to: a multicolored wheel would begin turning before my eyes and I would barely have time to lie down on my cot before I was fast asleep.

No, I wasn't afraid of night in the cemetery. The only thing I dreaded was boredom, and that was what led me to keep a diary, or rather to write down my impressions, because it's not really a diary, since it has no dates.

I've gone through that notebook and selected only the passages dealing with my terrible adventure, Your Honor, because I didn't want to make you read my poetic descriptions of snow-capped tombstones, my ideas on Grieg and Wagner, my literary preferences, or my philosophical musings on fear and solitude.

Passages from my notebook:

Ossip and Velicho are pampering me! What admirable meals they give me! And the other day, when I hadn't shown my usual appetite, they became almost ludicrously upset. Velicho violently accused Ossip of not having prepared the meal with enough care. Since then, Ossip has been constantly asking me about my tastes and preferences. They're such good-hearted people!

On this diet, I ought to be getting fat as a pig, but I'm not. Strangely enough, I sometimes think I look very sick.

Yesterday I had my first feeling of fear, although I must admit I had no reason to be anything but disagreeably startled.

At dusk, as I was emerging from a little side path, the silence was broken by a terrible cry. I saw Velicho come out of the guardroom and run into a thicket.

When I went over to where he had disappeared, I found Ossip attentively scanning the dark underbrush. I asked him what had made the cry and he told me it was a curlew. The next day, Velicho brought me one that he had killed. It was a strange-looking bird, with a beak as long as a dagger. And what an ugly noise from such a graceful bird!

I laughed as I stroked its ash-gray feathers, but my

laugh rang false and my feeling of anxiety didn't vanish entirely, as I would have liked.

My health obviously isn't as good as it should be. I'm still eating like a horse and Ossip's cooking is better than ever, but every morning a strange torpor makes me lie languidly in bed while the sun streams in through the window and I hear the crack of Velicho's rifle and the clatter of Ossip's pots and pans.

I have an ache behind my left ear. I looked in the mirror and discovered a red spot around a little swelling with a hole in the middle. It's only a scratch, but it hurts very much.

Today, as I was walking through a thicket, on the lookout for a ringdove or a woodcock, something moved in the nearby branches. I saw a magnificent cock pheasant sticking his head through the leaves. It was too good a chance to miss; I shot. The wounded bird ran away from me with one wing dragging on the ground.

I ran after him and a long chase began. Suddenly I stopped, abandoning my quarry. I had just heard a voice. It was hoarse and plaintive; it was speaking in an unknown language, pitifully and almost beseechingly.

I looked around me. Behind a thick row of cypresses and firs was a dark mass: the duchess's tomb. I was in forbidden territory.

Remembering Velicho's warning, I beat a hasty retreat, just in time to see him coming out of a clump of pines, bareheaded and pale as a ghost.

That evening I looked at him and saw a long, livid scratch on his right cheek. It seemed to me that he tried to hide it from me.

Later, when it was nearly midnight and my two companions were playing dice, my heart suddenly stopped, frozen with fear: another curlew had shrieked, just outside the house. What a terrifying sound! It was as though the Saint-Guitton Cemetery were crying out its horror.

Velicho sat as motionless as a statue, with the leather dice-cup in his hand. Ossip uttered a muffled exclamation and rushed over to the stove on which the *shur* was heating. He almost forced the cup on me, and I saw that his hand was trembling.

Yesterday I walked along the east wall. It's a sinister part of the cemetery, and I had never ventured into it before.

I came to a high holly hedge that went from the east wall to the north wall, closing off a patch of ground that was invisible to me.

What strange foreboding made me want to see that isolated space? It was difficult, because the hedge was thick and each holly leaf was like a little claw that tore my skin. There was nothing in the enclosure except eight crosses whose respective states of decrepitude formed an orderly progression: that is, the first one was rotting and weatherbeaten, while the last one looked quite new. They seemed to be marking eight recent graves.

That night my sleep was haunted by nightmares; I felt as though an enormous weight were crushing my chest, and, in my torpor, the sore behind my ear made me suffer atrociously.

I'm afraid. . . . Something is going on. How can I have failed to notice it sooner? Neither Ossip nor Velicho drink *shur*. This morning they left the three cups on the table: only mine had a little *shur* remaining at the bottom, theirs were clean and dry!

Last night I was determined to stay awake. I wanted to see. I drank my *shur* and lay down on my cot. I concentrated all my will power on staying awake. I had to struggle violently against the leaden drowsiness that was pressing down on me.

Ossip and Velicho looked at me. They thought I was asleep. I was feeling as though I wouldn't be able to stay awake for more than another minute when I was galvanized by alarm: a curlew had shrieked just outside the window.

Then I saw the ghastly apparition. A hellish face was staring in through the window. It had terrible glassy eyes, the eyes of a corpse, snow-white hair that bristled up like a forest of little lances, and an immense mouth grinning over black teeth, a mouth as red as fire, or fresh blood. Then the wheel of flame began spinning in my head and sleep came, with its nightmares.

I still drink my *shur* every evening. Ossip and Velicho guard me like tigers, and I sense that something horrible happens every night.

What is it I don't know; I can't think any more, I can only suffer. . . .

Today, driven by some mysterious force, I went back to the enclosure with eight crosses in it. I noticed a piece of wood half-buried near the eighth cross. Without thinking, I pulled it out of the ground. It was a board on which a few words had been awkwardly written. They had been badly damaged by time and dampness, but I was able to read them:

> *Friend, if you can't get away your grave will be here. They've killed seven men already. I'll be the eighth, because I don't have any strength left. I don't know what's going on here. It's a horrible mystery. You must escape!*
>
> *Pierre Brunen*

Pierre Brunen! I remembered that it was my predecessor's name. The eight crosses marked the graves of the eight watchmen who had succeeded one another for the past eight years.

Today I tried to run away. I climbed the north wall at a place where I'd already discovered a few footholds. The iron spikes on top of the wall were nearly within my reach when a stone was suddenly shattered a few inches from my hand, then a second and a third. At the foot of the wall, Velicho was calmly pointing his rifle at me and his eyes had the cold gleam of metal, the kind of metal from which bells are made for tolling death.

I later went back to the little enclosure. *Beside Brunen's cross I saw a freshly dug grave.* It's meant for me, soon.

I must get away! I won't mind suffering from hunger and cold on hostile roads, as long as I don't have to die in this mystery and horror!

But they guard me closely and their gazes are fastened to me like chains.

I've made a discovery that may save me: Ossip pours something from a dark little bottle into my *shur*. But where does he keep it?

I found the bottle and poured its contents—a colorless, sweet-smelling liquid—into their tea. My heart pounded in painful anxiety as I watched them. Then they drank, and there was sunshine in my soul.

Ossip was the first to fall asleep. Velicho looked at me with great astonishment, then his eyes flashed fiercely and he reached for his pistol, but before his hand could touch it he fell unconscious onto the table.

I took Ossip's keys. As I was opening the heavy gate of the cemetery, however, it occurred to me that my task was not finished, that behind me there were eight deaths to avenge and a mystery to solve, and that as long as the guards were alive I might be the victim of infernal persecutions.

I went back, took Velicho's pistol and shot both guards behind the left ear, just where my little sore had caused me so much pain. Except for a brief shudder on Ossip's part, they didn't move.

I sat down by the corpses to wait for the midnight mystery. I placed the three cups on the table in the usual way. I put each guard's cap over the red hole in his head so that, seen from the window, he would look as though he were sleeping.

The wait began. How slowly the hands of the clock crept toward midnight, the time when I usually drank my *shur*!

The dead men's blood was dripping onto the floor with a soft little sound, like that of water falling from leaves after a springtime shower.

Then the curlew shrieked. . . .

I lay down on my cot and pretended to be asleep. The curlew shrieked again, from much closer. Something brushed against the window pane.

Silence. . . .

The door was opened very gently. Someone or something came into the room.

What an overpowering cadaverous smell!

Footsteps moved softly toward my cot. Suddenly I was

crushed beneath a formidable weight. Sharp teeth bit into my painful wound, and cold, loathesome lips began greedily sucking my blood. I sat up with a scream. I was answered by a scream more hideous than mine.

It took all my strength to keep from fainting at the sight of what was before me. The nightmarish face I had previously seen in the window was now staring at me with eyes of flame, and blood was oozing from its red mouth: my blood!

I understood. Duchess Opolchenska, from one of those mysterious regions where it has not been possible to deny the existence of lemures and vampires, had prolonged her wretched life by drinking the young blood of eight unfortunate watchmen!

Her surprise lasted only a second. She leapt at me and her clawlike hands seized my neck.

The pistol quickly spat out all its remaining bullets. With a violent gasp that spattered black blood on the wall, the vampire fell to the floor.

And that's why, Your Honor, beside the bodies of Velicho and Ossip you'll find that of Duchess Opolchenska, who died eight years ago and was buried in the Saint-Guitton Cemetery.

THE MAINZ PSALTER

A man who is about to die is not likely to be very elegant in his last words: being in a hurry to sum up his whole life, he tends to make them rigorously concise.

But it was different with Ballister as he lay dying in the forecastle of the trawler *North Caper,* from Grimsby.

We had tried in vain to stop the flow of blood that was draining his life away. He had no fever; his speech was steady and rapid. He did not seem to see the bandages or the bloody basin: his eyes were following remote and formidable images.

Reines, the radio man, was taking notes.

Reines spends all his spare time writing stories and essays for short-lived literary magazines. As soon as one of them is born in Paternoster Row, his name is sure to appear on the list of contributors. Do not be surprised, therefore, by the rather special style given to this final monologue of a mortally wounded sailor. The blame must fall on Reines, a literary man without glory, who transcribed it. But I can testify that the facts it contains are the same as those reported before four members of the crew of the *North Caper*: Benjamin Cormon, the captain; yours truly John Copeland, first mate; Ephraim Rose, engineer; and the aforementioned Archibald Reines.

Thus spoke Ballister:

It was in the Merry Heart Tavern that I first met the schoolmaster, and it was there that we struck our bargain and he gave me his orders.

The Merry Heart is more of a meeting-place for bargemen than for sailors. Its dilapidated façade is reflected in the water of one of Liverpool's back docks, where barges from the inland waterways are moored.

I looked at the well-drawn plan of a small schooner.

"She's almost a yacht," I said. "In heavy weather, she must be able to sail close to the wind, and that broad stern will make it possible for us to maneuver well when there's a head wind."

"There's an auxiliary engine, too," he said.

I frowned, having always loved sailing.

"Built by Hallet & Hallet, Glasgow, 1909," I said. "She's very well rigged. With her sixty tons and a crew of six, she'll take to the sea better than a transatlantic liner."

His face took on a look of satisfaction, and he ordered a round of expensive drinks.

"Why are you changing her name from the *Hen-Parrot*?" I asked. "It's a nice name. I've always liked parrots."

He hesitated slightly.

"It's a matter of . . . sentiment, or of gratitude, if you prefer."

"So the ship will be called the *Mainz Psalter*. . . . It's odd, but I suppose it's original."

Alcohol had made him a little loquacious.

"That's not the reason," he said. "A year ago a grand-uncle of mine died and left me a trunk full of old books."

"So?"

"Wait! I was looking through them without enthusiasm when one of them caught my attention. It was an incunabulum. . . ."

"A what?"

"An incunabulum," he said with a slight air of superiority, "is a book published shortly after the invention of the printing press. And I was amazed to recognize the almost heraldic mark of Fust and Schaeffer! Those names probably mean nothing to you. Fust and Schaeffer were partners of Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press. The book I had in my hands was nothing less than a rare and splendid copy of the famous *Mainz Psalter*, published toward the end of the fifteenth century."

I gave him a look of polite attention and false understanding.

"What will impress you more, Mr. Ballister," he said, "is that a Mainz Psalter is worth a fortune."

"Ah!" I said, suddenly interested.

"Yes, it's worth a fine bundle of banknotes big enough to buy the former *Hen-Parrot* and pay ample wages to a crew of six men for the cruise I want to make. Now do you understand why I want to give such an unmaritime name to our little ship?"

I understood it perfectly, and I congratulated him on his greatness of soul.

"And yet it would seem more logical to me," I said, "to name the ship after that dear uncle who left you the book."

He burst into loud, disagreeable laughter. I was disconcerted by such coarseness on the part of an educated man.

"You'll leave from Glasgow," he said, "and sail the ship through the North Minch to Cape Wrath."

"Those are hellish waters," I said.

"I chose you precisely because you know them, Mr. Ballister."

No finer praise can be given a sailor than to say that he knows the horrible corridor of water that is the Minch Channel. My heart swelled with pride.

"That's true," I said. "In fact, I was once nearly killed between Chicken and Tiumpan Head."

"South of Cape Wrath," he went on, "there's a sheltered little bay that's known only to a few bold sailors, by a name that doesn't appear on the map: Big Toe Bay."

I looked at him in surprised admiration.

"Do you know Big Toe?" I said. "That's something that would make you respected by Customs, and would probably get you stabbed by certain men of the coast."

He made a gesture of indifference.

"I'll rejoin the ship at Big Toe Bay."

"And from there?"

He indicated a precise westerly direction.

"Hm, that's a nasty place," I said, "a real desert of water strewn with sharp rocks. We won't see many trails of smoke on the horizon."

"You're quite right," he said.

I winked at him, thinking I understood.

"As long as you pay the way you've said," I replied, "I don't care what you do."

"I think you're mistaken about my plans, Mr. Ballister.

They're of a rather . . . scientific nature, but I don't want to have a discovery stolen from me by some envious rival. In any case, it doesn't matter, because I'll pay as I said."

We spent a few minutes drinking. Then, just as we were about to discuss the question of the crew, our conversation veered off strangely.

"I'm not a sailor," he said brusquely, "so don't count on me to help with handling the ship. Let me be specific: I'm a schoolmaster."

"I respect learning," I said, "and I'm not entirely lacking in it myself. A schoolmaster? Good, good!"

"Yes, in Yorkshire."

"Let's go over the crew now," I said. "First of all there's Turnip. It's an odd name, but he's a good man and a good sailor. There's . . . a prison term in his recent past. Is that a drawback?"

"Not in the least."

"Good. You can have him for reasonable wages, especially if you take a little rum on board. It can be cheap rum: he's not particular about quality as long as the quantity is there. And then there's Steevens, a Fleming. He never talks, but he can break a mooring chain as easily as you can bite through the stem of a clay pipe."

"And I suppose he also has a prison term in his past?"

"It's not unlikely."

"I'll take him. What did you say his name was again?"

"Steevens."

"Steevens. . . . Is he expensive?"

"Not at all. He makes up for his low pay by eating vast amounts of bacon and biscuits. And currant jam, if you buy any."

"We'll take half a ton of it on board if you like."

"He'll be your slave. . . . I might suggest Walker to you now, but he's very ugly."

"Are you joking?"

"No. His face lacks half a nose, part of a chin, and a whole ear, so it's not pleasant to look at for someone who's not used to Madame Tussaud's museum of horrors, especially since the operation was sloppily performed by some Italian sailors who were in a bit of a hurry."

"And who else?"

"Two excellent men: Jellewyn and Friar Tuck. Friar Tuck—I don't know him by any other name—is a cook, among other things, a seagoing Jack-of-all-trades. He and Jellewyn are always together. If you see one, you see the other, and if you hire one, you must hire the other. They're rather mysterious. It's said that Jellewyn has royal blood in his veins and that Friar Tuck is a devoted servant who has stayed with him in adversity."

"And their price is in keeping with their mystery?"

"Precisely. The fallen prince must have driven a car in the past, so he'll be the one to take care of your auxiliary engine."

It was then that an incident took place that has little bearing on the events of this story, but that I remember with a certain uneasiness.

A poor devil had just been blown into the bar by the gusty night wind. He was a kind of emaciated, rain-soaked clown, faded by all the miseries of the sea and the waterfront.

He ordered a glass of gin and greedily raised it to his lips. Suddenly I heard the sound of breaking glass and saw the derelict throw up his hands, stare at the schoolmaster with unspeakable terror, then hurry outside into the wind and rain, without picking up his change from the bar. I don't think the schoolmaster noticed the incident, or at least he didn't seem to; but I still dare not imagine the formidable reason that drove that poor wretch to drop his gin on the floor, abandon his money, and flee into the icy street when the bar was filled with exquisite warmth.

On one of the first days of a very mild spring, the North Minch opened before us as though for a brotherly embrace. A few angry currents were still moving craftily beneath the surface, but we could detect them by their green backs, writhing like segments of mutilated snakes.

One of those curious southeastern breezes that blow only in that region brought us the fragrance of the early Irish lilacs from two hundred miles away and helped the auxiliary engine to take us to Big Toe Bay.

There, things changed radically. Whirlpools dug holes in the water, hissing like steam engines. We avoided them

only with great difficulty. The moss-green hull of a sunken ship, raised from the depths of the Atlantic, shot up almost under the bobstay of our bowsprit and was hurled against a rock wall, where it exploded in a dark burst of rotten wood.

A dozen times, the *Mainz Psalter* was in danger of being dismasted as though by a stroke of a giant razor. Fortunately, she was a beautiful sailer and she lay to with the elegance of a true lady of the sea. A few hours of calm enabled us to run the engine at full speed and pass through the narrow channel of Big Toe Bay just as another furious tide came thundering after us in a green spray of tormented water.

"We're in inhospitable waters," I said to my men. "If the coastal scavengers find us here, we'll have to give them an explanation, and since they'll try to chase us away before hearing what we have to say, we'd better have our guns ready."

The scavengers did put in an appearance, but in so doing they met with a disaster that was as disturbing as it was incomprehensible to us.

For a week, we had been lying at anchor in that little bay, which was as calm as a duck pond. Life was pleasant. Our supplies of food and drink were worthy of a royal yacht. By swimming twelve strokes, or rowing seven times, we could reach a little red sand beach and, further on, a stream of icy fresh water.

Turnip caught halibut on a line. Steevens went inland to the deserted moors, and sometimes, if the wind was right, we could hear the boom of his shotgun. He brought back partridges, grouse, occasionally a big-pawed hare, and always some of those delicious heath rabbits with fragrant flesh.

The schoolmaster had not appeared. We did not worry: we had been paid in cash for six weeks in advance, and Turnip had said he would not leave until the last drop of rum was gone.

One morning this serenity was shattered. Steevens had just filled a keg with fresh water when a shrill sound vibrated above him and, a foot away from his face, a rock exploded into dust. He was a phlegmatic man; with-

out haste, he waded into the bay, spotted a puff of blue smoke rising from a cleft in a rock, ignored the angry little slaps that struck the surface of the water beside him, and calmly swam back to the ship. He went into the forecastle, where the crew was waking up, and said, "Someone's shooting at us."

His words were punctuated by three sharp blows against the hull. I took a rifle from the rack and went up on deck. I instinctively ducked at the sound of a whining bullet; an instant later, a handful of wooden splinters leapt into the air, and the bronze rolling-gear of the boom clanged beneath the impact of a lead slug.

I raised my rifle toward the cleft that Steevens pointed out to me. I saw billows of black-powder smoke coming from it. But suddenly the shooting stopped and was replaced by vociferations and shouts of fear.

Something struck the dark red beach with a heavy thud. I started in horror: a man had just fallen three hundred feet from the top of the cliff. His broken body was almost entirely buried in the sand, but I was able to recognize the coarse leather clothing of the wreckers of Cape Wrath.

I had scarcely turned my eyes away from that lifeless mass when Steevens touched me on the shoulder.

"Here comes another one," he said.

An awkward, ridiculous shape was hurtling toward the ground; it was like the loose, ungainly fall of a big bird that has been hit by shotgun pellets at a great height, and, conquered by gravity and betrayed by the air, comes tumbling down without dignity.

For the second time there was a soft, ghastly thud on the sand. This time a villainous face quivered for a few seconds, spewing crimson froth. Steevens slowly pointed to the top of the cliff.

"One more," he said in a slightly faltering voice.

Wild screams rang out from above. Suddenly we saw the bust of a man against the sky, struggling with something invisible. He made a desperate gesture, then flew from the cliff as though propelled by a catapult. His cry was still floating down to us in a slow tailspin of despair when his body was smashed beside the two others.

We stood still.

"It's true they were trying to kill us," said Jellewyn, "but I'd still like to avenge those poor devils. Please give me your rifle, Mr. Ballister. Friar Tuck, come here!"

Friar Tuck's shaved head emerged from the depths of the ship.

"Friar Tuck is as good as a hunting dog," Jellewyn explained with a touch of condescension. "Or rather he's as good as a whole pack of them: he smells the quarry from very far off. He's phenomenal. . . . And what do you think of *this* quarry, old boy?"

Friar Tuck hoisted his round, massive body onto the deck and waddled over to the rail. He scrutinized the mangled corpses and showed deep surprise; then an ashen pallor came over his face.

"Friar," said Jellewyn with a nervous laugh, "you've seen some strong sights in your day, yet you're turning pale like a young chambermaid."

"No, no, it's not that," Friar Tuck replied dully. "There's something ugly behind this. . . . There's. . . . Shoot, Your Grace!" he suddenly shouted. "Up there! Hurry!"

Jellewyn turned on him furiously:

"I've warned you about calling me by that damned name!"

Friar Tuck made no reply. He shook his head, then murmured, "Too late, it's gone."

"What's gone?" I asked.

"Why, the thing that was watching us from the cliff," he said foolishly.

"What was it?"

He gave me a crafty look.

"I don't know. Anyway, it's gone."

I did not pursue my questioning. Two loud whistles came from the top of the cliff, then a shadow moved against the patch of sky behind it.

Jellewyn raised his rifle. I pushed it aside.

"Pay attention to what you're doing!"

The schoolmaster was coming down toward the beach from the cliff, following a path we had not noticed before.

A beautiful cabin in the stern had been reserved for

the schoolmaster, and the adjoining room had been made into a bedroom for me, with two bunks.

As soon as he arrived on board, the schoolmaster shut himself up in his cabin and spent his time going through a pile of books. Once or twice a day he went topside, had the sextant brought to him, and carefully took the sun.

We were sailing northwest.

"We're headed for Iceland," I said to Jellewyn.

He attentively looked at a map and wrote down a figure.

"No," he said, "we're headed for Greenland."

"Well, what's the difference?"

We had left Big Toe Bay on a clear morning, leaving the Ross Mountains to warm their humps in the rising sun behind us. That day we passed a ship from the Hebrides manned by a flat-faced * crew whom we insulted lavishly. Toward evening we saw a ketch in full sail just above the horizon.

Next day, the sea was rising. To starboard, we saw a Danish steamer fighting against the waves. She was surrounded by so much smoke that we could not read her name.

That was the last ship we saw, although on the third day there were two trails of smoke to the south that Walker said were from a dispatch boat of the British Navy.

Every evening the schoolmaster invited me to have a drink in his cabin. He himself did not drink; he was no longer the loquacious companion of the Merry Heart Tavern, but he was still a well-bred man, for he never left my glass empty, and while I drank he kept his eyes on his books.

I must admit that I have few memories of those days. Life was monotonous; and yet the crew seemed apprehensive to me, perhaps because of an incident that occurred one evening.

We were all seized with violent nausea at almost the same time, and Turnip shouted that we had been poi-

* The inhabitants of the Hebrides have, in general, disagreeable flat faces.

soned. I sternly ordered him to be silent. The nausea passed quickly, and a sudden shift of wind forced us to perform a strenuous maneuver that made us forget everything else.

The sun had risen on the eighth day of our voyage.

I found the crew with anxious, sullen faces. I was familiar with such faces; at sea, they are not a good sign. They indicate an uneasy, gregarious, and hostile feeling that groups men and makes them merge in a single fear or hatred; an evil force surrounds them and poisons the atmosphere of the ship. It was Jellewyn who spoke first:

"Mr. Ballister, we want to talk to you, and we want to talk to you as our friend and shipmate, rather than as our captain."

"That's a fine preamble," I said, laughing.

"We're being nice about it because you're our friend," said Walker, and his horrible shapeless face twisted.

"Tell me what's on your mind," I said.

"Something's wrong," said Jellewyn, "and the worst of it is that none of us can explain it."

I cast a dark glance around me, then held out my hand to him.

"It's true, Jellewyn, I feel it the same as you do."

The faces brightened; the men had found an ally in their captain.

"Look at the sea, Mr. Ballister."

"I've seen it too," I said, looking down.

Yes, I had seen it! The water had taken on a strange appearance that I had never seen before in all my twenty years at sea. It had oddly colored streaks, and it sometimes bubbled suddenly and loudly; unknown sounds, something like laughter, would burst from a rapidly approaching wave and make the men look around in alarm.

"Not one bird is following us any more," said Friar Tuck.

It was true.

"Last night," he said in his deep, slow voice, "a little herd of rats that had been living in the storeroom ran topside and all jumped overboard at once. I never saw anything like it."

"Never!" said the other sailors in a somber echo.

"I've sailed in these waters before," said Walker, "and at about this same time of year, too. The air ought to be full of scoter ducks, and schools of porpoises ought to be following us from morning till night. Do you see any?"

"Did you look at the sky last night, Mr. Ballister?" Jellewyn asked me softly.

"No," I admitted, and I must have blushed a little. I had drunk a great deal in the schoolmaster's silent company, and I had not come up on deck, for I had been in the grip of a powerful intoxication that was still pressing my temples with a lingering headache.

"Where is that devil of a man taking us?" asked Turnip.

"Devil, yes," said the taciturn Steevens.

Everyone had had his say.

I made a sudden decision.

"Jellewyn," I said, "listen to me. I'm the captain, it's true, but I'm not ashamed to admit in front of everyone that you're the most intelligent man on board, and I also know that you're not an ordinary sailor."

He smiled sorrowfully.

"You know more about this than the rest of us, don't you?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "But Friar Tuck is a rather . . . curious phenomenon. As I've already told you, he senses certain things without being able to explain them. It's as though he had one more sense than the rest of us: a sense of danger. . . . Speak, Friar Tuck."

"I know very little, almost nothing," said the low voice. "I know only that something is around us, something worse than anything else, worse than death!"

We looked at each other in alarm.

"The schoolmaster," continued Friar Tuck, seeming to choose his words with difficulty, "is not alien to it."

"Jellewyn," I said, "I don't have the courage myself, but I want you to go and tell him."

"Very well," he replied.

He went below. We heard him knock on the door of the schoolmaster's cabin, knock again and again, then finally open the door.

Minutes of silence went by.

Jellewyn came back up on deck. He was pale.

"He's not there," he said. "Search the whole ship. There's no place where a man can hide for long."

We searched the ship, then went topside one by one, looking at each other uneasily. The schoolmaster had vanished.

At nightfall, Jellewyn motioned to me to come up on deck. When I was beside him he pointed upward.

I think I fell to my knees.

A strange sky was arched above the roaring sea. The familiar constellations were no longer there; unknown stars in new geometrical groupings were shining dimly in a frighteningly black sidereal abyss.

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "Where are we?"

Heavy clouds were rolling across the sky.

"That's better," Jellewyn said calmly. "The others might have seen it and gone mad. . . . You want to know where we are? How should I know? Let's turn back, Mr. Ballister, even though it's useless, in my opinion. . . ."

I took my head between my hands.

"The compass has been inert for two days," I murmured.

"I know," said Jellewyn.

"But where are we? Where are we?"

"Be calm, Mr. Ballister," he said rather ironically. "You're the captain, don't forget that. I don't know where we are. I might make a hypothesis, to use an erudite word that sometimes covers an imagination that's too daring."

"Even so," I replied, "I'd rather hear stories of witches and demons than that demoralizing 'I don't know.' "

"We're probably on another plane of existence. You have some mathematical knowledge; it will help you to understand. Our three-dimensional world is probably lost to us, and I'll define this one as the world of the *N*th dimension, which is very vague. If, by some inconceivable magic or some monstrous science, we were transported to Mars or Jupiter, or even to Aldebaran, it wouldn't prevent us from seeing the same constellations we see from earth."

"But the sun. . . ."

"A similarity, a coincidence of the infinite, a kind of equivalent star, perhaps. Anyway, these are only suppositions, words; and since, I believe, we'll be permitted to die in this strange world the same as in our own, I feel that we can remain calm."

"Die?" I said. "I'll defend myself!"

"Against whom?" he asked sarcastically.

"It's true that Friar Tuck talked about things worse than death. If there's anyone's opinion that shouldn't be ignored in time of danger, it's his." I returned to what he called his hypothesis: "What do you mean by the *N*th dimension?"

"For the love of heaven," he said nervously, "don't give my idea such real importance! There's no proof that existence is possible outside of our three ordinary dimensions. Just as we've never discovered any two-dimensional beings from the world of surfaces, or one-dimensional beings from the linear world, we must be indiscernible to beings, if there are any, who live in worlds having more dimensions than ours. I'm in no mood to give you a lesson in hypergeometry, Mr. Ballister, but I'm sure of one thing: there are spaces different from ours. The space we're aware of in our dreams, for example, which presents the past, the present, and perhaps the future, on a single plane; and then there's the world of atoms and electrons, and relative and immense spaces with mysterious kinds of life. . . ." He made a gesture of lassitude. "What was that enigmatic schoolmaster's purpose in bringing us to this devilish region? How, and especially why, did he disappear?"

I suddenly clapped my hand to my forehead. I had just remembered Friar Tuck's expression of fear, and that of the poor derelict in the Merry Heart Tavern.

I related the incident to Jellewyn. He slowly nodded.

"I mustn't exaggerate Friar Tuck's clairvoyant powers," he said. "When he first saw the schoolmaster, he said to me, 'That man makes me think of an unscalable wall behind which something immense and terrible is taking place.' I didn't question him because it would have been useless: that was all he knew. His occult perceptions take the form of images, and he's incapable of analyzing them. In this case, his apprehension goes back even

further. As soon as he heard the name of our schooner, he seemed upset and said there was great malice behind it. . . ."

"How shall we sail?" I asked, abandoning nearly all authority.

"We're on the starboard tack," he said. "The wind seems very steady."

"Shall we heave to?"

"Why? Let's go on making headway. I don't see any sign of a storm, but I think we'd better reef our sails a little just the same."

"Walker will take the helm to begin with," I said. "All he'll have to do is watch for patches of white water. If we hit a submerged rock. . . ."

"It might be the best solution for all of us," said Jellewyn.

I could not have agreed with him more.

While a known danger strengthens a leader's authority, the unknown brings him closer to the level of his men.

That evening the forecastle was deserted and everyone crowded into the narrow room that served as my cabin. Jellewyn gave us two demijohns of excellent rum from his personal provisions, and we used it to make a gigantic bowl of punch.

Turnip was soon in an amiable mood. He began an endless story about two cats, a young lady, and a house in Ipswich, a story in which he had played a favorable part.

Steevens had made some fantastic sandwiches of hardtack and corned beef.

Heavy tobacco smoke made a dense fog around the kerosene lamp hanging motionlessly from its gimbals.

The atmosphere was pleasant and friendly. With the help of the punch, I was on the verge of smiling at the fairy tales Jellewyn had told me earlier.

Walker took his share of warm punch in a thermos bottle, picked up a lighted lantern, bade us good night, and went up to take the helm.

My clock slowly struck nine.

An accentuated movement of the ship told us that the sea was growing rougher.

"We don't have much sail set," said Jellewyn.

I silently nodded.

Turnip's voice droned on, addressed to Steevens, who listened as he ground hardtack between the admirable millstones of his teeth.

I emptied my glass and handed it to Friar Tuck to fill. Then I saw the wild expression on his face. His hand was squeezing Jellewyn's, and they both seemed to be listening to something.

"What . . . ," I began.

Just then we heard loud imprecations overhead, followed by the sound of bare feet running rapidly toward the deckhouse, and then a terrible cry.

We looked at each other, horrified. A high-pitched call, a kind of yodel, came from far away.

We all rushed up on deck at once, jostling each other in the darkness.

Everything was calm. The sails were purring happily; near the helm, the lantern was burning brightly, illuminating the squat shape of the abandoned thermos bottle.

But there was no one at the helm.

"Walker! Walker!" we shouted frantically.

Faraway, from the horizon blurred by the night mists, the mysterious yodel answered us.

The great silent night had swallowed up our poor Walker forever.

A sinister dawn, purple like the swift twilight of tropical savannahs, followed that funereal night.

The men, dulled by anguished insomnia, watched the choppy waves. The bowsprit frenziedly pecked at the foam of the crests.

A big hole had appeared in our crossjack. Steevens opened the sail-locker to replace it. Friar Tuck took out his metal palm and prepared to do a conscientious repair job.

Everyone's movements were instinctive, mechanical, and morose. Now and then I turned the helm and murmured to myself, "What's the use? What's the use?"

Without having been ordered to, Turnip began climbing up the mainmast. I watched him distractedly until he reached the main yard, then the sails hid him from sight.

Suddenly we heard his frenzied shout:

"Hurry! Come up, there's someone on the mast!"

There was a fantastic sound of aerial struggle, then a howl of agony, and at the same time a whirling shape shot upward, and then fell into the waves a great distance away from the ship.

Jellewyn swore vehemently and began climbing up the mast, followed by Friar Tuck.

Steevens and I leapt toward the only lifeboat on board. The Fleming's formidable arms were sliding it toward the water when we were rooted to the deck by astonishment and terror. Something gray, shiny, and indistinct, like glass, suddenly surrounded the lifeboat, the chains snapped, an unknown force tilted the schooner to port, and a wave broke over the deck and poured into the open sail-locker. An instant later, the lifeboat had vanished without a trace.

Jellewyn and Friar Tuck came down from the mast. They had seen no one.

Jellewyn took a rag and wiped his hands, shuddering. He had found the sail and the rigging splattered with warm blood.

In a faltering voice, I recited the prayer for the dead, interspersing the holy words with curses against the ocean and its mystery.

It was late when Jellewyn and I went topside, having decided to spend the night at the helm together.

At one moment I began to weep and he patted me affectionately on the shoulder. I became a little calmer and lit my pipe.

We had nothing to say to each other. He seemed to have fallen asleep at the helm. I stared into the darkness.

I leaned over the port rail and was suddenly petrified by an unearthly sight. I straightened up, uttering a muffled exclamation.

"Have you seen it, Jellewyn, or are my eyes playing tricks on me?"

"You're not mistaken," he said softly, "but for the love of Christ don't say anything about it to the others. Their minds are already close enough to madness."

I had to make a great effort to go back to the rail. Jellewyn stood beside me.

The bottom of the sea was aflame with a vast bloody glow that spread beneath the schooner; the light slid under the keel and illuminated the sails and rigging from below. It was as though we were on a boat in the Drury Lane Theatre, lighted by an invisible row of flares.

"Phosphorescence?" I ventured.

"Look," whispered Jellewyn.

The water had become as transparent as glass. At an enormous depth, we saw great dark masses with unreal shapes: there were manors with immense towers, gigantic domes, horribly straight streets lined with frenzied houses. We appeared to be flying over a furiously busy city at an incredible height.

"There seems to be movement," I said.

"Yes."

We could see a swarming crowd of amorphous beings engaged in some sort of feverish and infernal activity.

"Get back!" Jellewyn shouted, pulling me violently by the belt.

One of those beings was rising toward us with astounding speed. In less than a second its immense bulk had hidden the undersea city from us; it was as though a flood of ink had instantaneously spread around us.

The keel received a tremendous blow. In the crimson light, we saw three enormous tentacles, three times as high as the mainmast, hideously writhing in the air. A formidable face composed of black shadows and two eyes of liquid amber rose above the port side of the ship and gave us a terrifying look.

This lasted less than two seconds. A heavy swell was headed for us broadside.

"Helm hard to starboard!" shouted Jellewyn.

The lines holding the boom snapped, and it cut through the air like an ax. The mainmast bent almost to the breaking-point. Taut halyards broke with a sound like that of harp strings.

The awesome vision became vague. The water was foaming. To starboard, the glow ran like a burning fringe across the high, galloping crests, then abruptly vanished.

"Poor Walker, poor Turnip," said Jellewyn.

The bell rang in the forecastle: the midnight watch was beginning.

An uneventful morning followed. The sky was covered with thick, motionless clouds of a dirty, yellowish color. The air was chilly.

Toward noon, shining feebly through the mist, I saw a spot of light that might have been the sun. I decided to determine its position, despite Jellewyn's opinion that it would be meaningless.

The sea was rough. I tried to hold the horizon, but a wave would always invade my field of vision, and the horizon would leap up into the sky. Finally I succeeded. But as I was looking for the reflection of the spot of light in the mirror of the sextant, I saw a kind of white streamer quivering in front of it at a great height.

Something indefinable rushed toward me. The sextant flew into the air, I received a jarring blow on the head, and then I heard shouts, sounds of struggle, and more shouts.

I was not exactly unconscious. I was sprawled against the deckhouse. Bells were ringing endlessly in my ears; I even seemed to hear the solemn booming of Big Ben. Mingled with these pleasant sounds were clamors that were more alarming, but also further away.

I was about to make an effort to stand up when I felt myself seized and lifted. I began howling and kicking with all my returning strength.

"Thank God!" said Jellewyn. "He's not dead!"

I managed to open my eyelids, which felt as though they were made of lead. A patch of yellow sky was cut by diagonal ropes. I saw Jellewyn staggering as though he were drunk.

"For the love of God, what's happened to us?" I asked dolefully, for Jellewyn's face was streaming with tears.

Without answering, he led me to my cabin.

I saw that one of the two bunks was occupied by a motionless mass.

At this point, I completely regained my senses. I put my hands over my heart. I had just recognized Steevens' hideously swollen face.

Jellewyn gave me a drink.

"This is the end," I heard him say.

"The end," I repeated stupidly, trying to understand.

He put cold compresses on Steevens' face.

"Where's Friar Tuck?" I asked.

Jellewyn sobbed aloud.

"Like . . . the others. . . . We'll never see him again!"

He told me, in a tear-choked voice, the little he knew.

It had happened with incredible swiftness, like all the successive tragedies that now formed our existence. Jellewyn had been below, checking the oilcups, when he heard shouts of distress from above. He hurried topside and saw Steevens furiously struggling inside a kind of silvery bubble. A moment later, Steevens collapsed and lay still. Friar Tuck was gone; his metal palms and sail-needles were scattered around the mainmast. Fresh blood was dripping from the starboard rail. I was lying unconscious against the deckhouse. He knew nothing more.

"When Steevens comes to, he'll give us more information," I said weakly.

"When he comes to!" Jellewyn exclaimed bitterly. "His body is nothing but a horrible bag filled with broken bones and crushed organs. Because of his Herculean constitution he's still breathing, but for all practical purposes he's dead, dead like the others."

We let the *Mainz Psalter* sail as she pleased. She had little canvas spread, and she drifted sideways almost as much as she moved forward.

"Everything seems to show that the danger is mainly on deck," said Jellewyn, as though talking to himself.

We were still in my cabin when evening came.

Steevens' breathing was labored and painful to hear. We had to keep wiping away the bloody froth that ran from his mouth.

"I won't sleep," I said.

"Neither will I," replied Jellewyn.

We had closed the portholes despite the stuffy atmosphere. The ship was rolling a little.

Toward two in the morning, when an invincible torpor was dulling my thoughts and I was sinking into a half-sleep already packed with nightmares, I suddenly started.

Jellewyn was wide awake. He was looking up in terror at the gleaming wooden ceiling.

"Someone's walking on deck," he said softly.

I seized the rifle.

"That's useless. Let's stay where we are. . . . Ah, they're making themselves at home now!"

We heard rapid footsteps on the deck. It sounded as though a busy crowd were moving around.

"I thought so," said Jellewyn. He laughed. "We're gentlemen of leisure now: we have others working for us."

The sounds had become more precise. The helm creaked; an arduous maneuver was being carried out in the head wind.

"They're unfurling the sails!"

"Of course."

The ship pitched heavily, then listed to starboard.

"A starboard tack, in this wind," Jellewyn said approvingly. "They're monsters, brutes drunk with blood and murder, but they're sailors. The most skillful yachtsman in England, sailing a racer built last year, wouldn't dare to sail so close to the wind. And what does it prove?"

No longer understanding anything, I made a gesture of discouragement.

He answered his own question: "It proves that we have a fixed destination, and that they want us to arrive somewhere."

After reflecting for a moment I said, "It also proves that they're neither demons nor ghosts, but beings like us."

"Oh, that's saying a lot!"

"I'm expressing myself badly. What I mean is that they're material beings, with only natural forces at their command."

"I've never doubted that," Jellewyn said calmly.

Toward five in the morning, another maneuver was carried out, making the schooner roll heavily. Jellewyn opened a porthole. A dirty dawn was filtering through compact clouds.

We cautiously ventured up on deck. It was tidy and deserted.

The ship was hove to.

Two calm days went by.

The nocturnal maneuvers had not been resumed, but Jellewyn pointed out that a very swift current was taking us in what should have been a northwesterly direction.

Steevens was still breathing, but more feebly. Jellewyn had brought a portable medicine chest in his baggage, and from time to time he gave the dying man an injection. We spoke little. I think we had even stopped thinking. For my part, I was stupefied by alcohol, for I was drinking whisky by the pint.

One day, when I was drunkenly cursing the schoolmaster and promising to smash his face into a thousand pieces, I happened to mention the books he had brought on board.

Jellewyn leapt forward and shook me vigorously.

"Careful, I'm the captain," I said gently.

"To hell with captains like you! What did you say? Books?"

"Yes, in his cabin. There's a trunk full of them. I saw them myself. They're written in Latin; I don't know that pharmacist's jargon."

"Well, *I* know it. Why didn't you tell me about those books?"

"What difference would it have made?" I muttered thickly. "Anyway, I'm the captain. . . . You . . . you ought to . . . respect me."

"You damned drunk!" he said angrily, going off toward the schoolmaster's cabin. I heard him step inside and close the door behind him.

The inert and pitiful Steevens was my companion during the hours of drinking that followed.

"I'm the captain of this ship," I mumbled, "and I'll. . . . I'll complain to the authorities. . . . He called me a . . . a damned drunk. . . . I'm the master after God on my ship. . . . Isn't that right, Steevens? You're a witness. . . . He insulted me basely. . . . I'll put him in irons. . . ."

Then I slept a little.

When Jellewyn came in to swallow a hasty meal of hardtack and corned beef, his cheeks were flushed and his eyes were glittering.

"Mr. Ballister," he said, "did the schoolmaster ever tell you about a crystal object, a box, perhaps?"

"He didn't confide in me," I grunted, still remembering his rudeness.

"Ah, if only I'd had those books before all these things began happening!"

"Have you found anything?" I asked.

"I'm getting a few glimmers. . . . A path is opening up. It's probably senseless, but in any case it's amazing, more amazing than you can possibly imagine!"

He was terribly excited. I was unable to get anything more out of him. He hurried back to the schoolmaster's cabin, and I left him alone.

I did not see him again until the beginning of evening, and then only for a few minutes. He came in to fill a kerosene lamp and did not say a word.

I slept until late the next morning. As soon as I woke up, I went to the schoolmaster's cabin.

Jellewyn was not there.

Seized with painful anxiety, I called him. There was no answer. I ran all over the ship shouting his name, even forgetting prudence to the point of going up on deck. Finally I threw myself on the floor, weeping and invoking the name of God.

I was alone on board the accursed schooner, alone with the dying Steevens.

Alone, horribly alone.

It was not until noon that I went back to the schoolmaster's cabin. My attention was immediately caught by a sheet of paper pinned to the wall. I read these words in Jellewyn's handwriting:

> *Mr. Ballister, I am going to the top of the mainmast. I must see something. Perhaps I shall never return. If so, forgive me for my death, which will leave you all alone, because Steevens is doomed, as you know. But quickly do what I tell you: Burn all these books; do it on the stern, far from the mainmast, and do not go near the edge of the ship. I think an effort will be made to prevent you from burning the*

books. Everything inclines me to believe it. But burn them, burn them quickly, even at the risk of setting fire to the ship. Will it save you? I dare not hope so. Perhaps Providence will give you a chance. May God have mercy on you, Mr. Ballister, and on all of us!

Duke ———, known as Jellewyn.*

When I returned to my cabin, shaken by that extraordinary farewell and cursing the shameful drunkenness that had probably prevented my valiant companion from awakening me, I no longer heard Steevens' irregular breathing. I leaned over his poor, contorted face. He, too, was gone.

I took two cans of gasoline from the little engine room, and, moved by some sort of providential instinct, I started the engine and turned it up to full speed.

I went back to the helm, piled the books on the deck, and poured gasoline on them.

A high, pale flame arose.

At that moment, there was a cry from the sea, and I heard someone call my name. Then I, too, cried out, in surprise and fear: in the wake of the *Mainz Psalter*, a hundred feet back, swam the schoolmaster.

The flames crackled; the books were rapidly being transformed into ashes.

The infernal swimmer shouted curses and supplications.

"Ballister! I'll make you rich, richer than all men on earth put together! I'll make you die, you imbecile, in horrible tortures that are unknown on your accursed planet! I'll make you a king, Ballister, king of a formidable kingdom! Ah, you swine, hell would be sweeter to you than what I have in store for you!"

He swam desperately, but made little progress in overtaking the ship.

Suddenly the schooner made a few strange movements and was shaken by dull blows. I saw the water rising to-

* Here appears a name that we shall not reveal, in order not to rekindle the sorrow of a great and noble reigning family. Jellewyn bore a heavy weight of guilt, but his death brilliantly redeemed him.

ward me: the ship was being pulled toward the bottom of the sea.

"Ballister, listen to me!" howled the schoolmaster.

He was quickly drawing closer. His face was horribly impassive, but his eyes were burning with unbearable brightness.

Then, in the middle of a mass of hot ashes, I saw a piece of parchment curl up and reveal a sparkling object. I remembered Jellewyn's words. The specially constructed book had been hiding the crystal box he had mentioned to me.

"The crystal box!" I exclaimed.

The schoolmaster heard me. He shrieked like a madman, and I saw an incredible sight: he stood on the water with his hands outstretched like threatening claws.

"It's knowledge, the greatest knowledge of all, that you're about to destroy, you damned fool!" he roared.

Shrill yodels were now coming toward me from all points of the horizon.

The first waves broke over the deck.

I leapt into the flames and smashed the crystal box with my heel.

I had a feeling of collapse, and terrible nausea. Sky and water blended in a flashing chaos, an immense clamor shook the air. I began a frightful fall into darkness. . . .

And here I am. I've told you everything now. I woke up on your ship. I'm going to die. Have I been dreaming? I wish I could believe it.

But I'm going to die among men, on my own earth. Ah, how happy I am!

It was Briggs, the cabin boy of the *North Caper,* who had first sighted Ballister. The boy had just stolen an apple from the galley and was about to eat it, huddled among some coils of cable, when he saw Ballister swimming sluggishly a few yards from the ship.

Briggs began shouting at the top of his lungs, for he saw that the swimmer was about to be drawn into the wash of the propeller.

Ballister was pulled out of the water. He was uncon-

scious: his swimming movements had been automatic, as sometimes happens with very strong swimmers.

There was no ship in sight and no trace of wreckage on the water. But the cabin boy said that he had seen a ship as transparent as glass—those are his own words—rise up off the port beam, then sink below the surface. This earned him a slap from Captain Cormon, to teach him not to tell such wild stories.

We managed to pour a little whisky down Ballister's throat. Rose, the engineer, gave him his bunk, and we covered him warmly.

He soon passed from unconsciousness into deep, feverish sleep. We were waiting, with curiosity, for him to awaken when a terrible incident took place.

This is now being told by John Copeland, first mate of the *North Caper*. It was I, who, with Seaman Jolks, saw the mystery and terror that came out of the night.

The last bearing taken during the day had located the *North Caper* at longitude 22° west and latitude 60° north.

I took the helm myself, having decided to spend the night on deck, because the night before we had seen long ice floes glittering in the moonlight on the northwest horizon.

Jolks hung up the running lights, and since he had a violent toothache that was made worse by the warmth of the forecastle, he came to smoke his pipe beside me. I was glad, because a lonely watch can be terribly monotonous when it lasts all night.

I must tell you that, while the *North Caper* is a good, sturdy ship, she is not a trawler of the latest model, even though she has been equipped with radio. The spirit of fifty years ago still weighs down on her, leaving her with sails that supplement the limited power of her steam engine. She does not have the tall, enclosed, ungainly cabin that is perched in the middle of the deck on most modern trawlers like a ludicrous little cottage. Her helm is still on the stern, facing the sea, the wind, and the spray.

I am giving you this description so that you will know that we witness the incomprehensible scene not from a glassed-in observation post, but from the deck itself.

Without this explanation, my story would not seem believable to those familiar with the design of steam trawlers.

There was no moonlight because the sky was too overcast; only the diffused glow of the clouds and the phosphorescence of the wave crests made it possible to see anything.

It was somewhere around ten o'clock. The men were sunk deep in their first sleep. Jolks, absorbed in his toothache, was softly moaning and swearing. The binnacle light made his tense face stand out from the surrounding darkness.

Suddenly I saw his grimace of pain change to an expression of astonishment, then of genuine terror. His pipe fell from his open mouth. This struck me as so comical that I made a mocking remark to him. His only reply was to point to the starboard light.

My pipe joined his when I saw what he was pointing to: clutching the shrouds a few inches below the light, two wet hands were emerging from the darkness.

Suddenly the hands let go and a dark form leapt onto the deck. Jolks quickly stepped aside, and the binnacle light shone on the intruder's face. To our indescribable amazement, we saw a kind of clergyman, wearing a black tail-coat and streaming with sea water. He had a small head with eyes like glowing coals that were staring straight at us.

Jolks made a move to take out his fishing knife, but he did not have time: the apparition leapt on him and knocked him down. At the same time, the binnacle light was shattered. A few moments later there was a shrill cry from the forecastle, where the cabin boy had been sitting up with Ballister:

"He's killing him! Help!"

Ever since I had had to stop some serious brawls among members of the crew, I had made it a habit to carry my revolver at night. It was a powerful weapon, and I shot well with it. I cocked it.

The ship was filled with a confused clamor.

A short time after this series of events, a gust of wind ripped a gash in the clouds and a beam of moonlight followed the ship like a spotlight.

I could already hear the captain's swearing above Briggs's cries of alarm when to my right I heard soft footsteps and saw the clergyman leap over the side and into the water.

I saw his small head rise on the crest of a wave. I calmly aimed at it and fired. He uttered a strange howl, and the wave carried him toward the side of the ship.

Jolks appeared beside me. Although he was still a little dazed, he was wielding a grappling iron. The body was now floating alongside the ship, bumping against it. The grappling iron bit into the clothes and pulled up its prey with surprising ease.

Jolks dropped a shapeless wet bundle on the deck, saying that it felt as light as a feather. Captain Cormon came out of the forecastle, holding a lighted lantern.

"Someone tried to kill our shipwreck victim!" he said.

"We've got the bandit," I said. "He came out of the sea. . . ."

"You're crazy, Copeland!"

"Look at him, captain. I shot him and. . . ."

We leaned over the pitiful remains, but we immediately straightened up again, shouting like madmen.

The clothes were empty; two artificial hands and a wax head were attached to them. My bullet had gone through the wig and broken the nose.

You already know Ballister's story. He told it to us when he woke up toward the end of that infernal night. He spoke serenely, with a kind of happiness.

We took devoted care of him. There were two holes in his left shoulder, as though he had been stabbed twice, but we would have saved him if we had been able to stop his bleeding, because no essential organs had been damaged.

After having talked so much, he lapsed into a coma. When he came out of it later, he asked how he had been injured. Briggs was the only one with him at the time. Glad to have a chance to make himself interesting, he replied that in the middle of the night he had seen a dark shape rush into the forecastle and strike Ballister. He then told him about the shot and showed him the grotesque remains.

At this sight, Ballister cried out in terror.

"The schoolmaster! The schoolmaster!"

He fell into a painful fever and did not regain consciousness until six days later, in the maritime hospital in Galway, where he kissed the image of Christ and died.

The tragic mannequin was taken to Reverend Leemans, a worthy ecclesiastic who has been all over the world and knows many of the secrets of savage lands and the sea.

He examined it for a long time.

"What can have been inside it?" asked Archie Reines. "There surely was *something* in it. It was alive."

"Yes, it was alive all right, I can tell you that," grumbled Jolks, rubbing his red, swollen neck.

Reverend Leemans sniffed the thing like a dog, then cast it aside with disgust.

"I thought so," he said.

We also sniffed it.

"It smells of formic acid," I said.

"And phosphorus," added Reines.

Captain Cormon reflected for a moment, then his lips quivered a little when he said, "It smells like an octopus."

Leemans stared at him.

"On the last day of Creation," he said, "it is from the sea that God will cause the Blasphemous Beast to appear. Let us not try to anticipate destiny with impious inquiries."

"But . . . ," began Reines.

" 'Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?' "

Before the Holy Word, we bowed our heads and gave up trying to understand.

THE LAST TRAVELER

In his checkered cap and his old overcoat, John was no longer the imposing waiter of the Ocean Queen Hotel; for the next seven months, until the end of the off-season at the seaside, he was going to become once again an ironmonger on Humber Street in Hull.

Mr. Buttercup, the owner of the hotel, gave him a friendly handshake.

"I'll see you next year, John. I intend to open on the fifteenth of May."

"If it's God's will, yes," said John, solemnly drinking the farewell whisky that his employer had poured for him.

The dissatisfied rumble of a strong tide filled the mist-dulled air.

"The season is really over," said John.

"We're the last ones, the very last ones," added Mr. Buttercup.

Distant figures, bent beneath shapeless burdens, were walking along the coast, toward the little railroad station.

"The Stalkers are leaving," observed John. "The watchman on the pier told them there would be snow today."

"Snow!" Mr. Buttercup said indignantly. "Why, we're scarcely into October!"

John looked up at the sky rusted by sea mists. Cranes were passing in melancholy parades.

"They're going past the marshes," he said. "It's a bad sign when they do that."

A pure white bird flew by, crying, "Snow. . . . Snow. . . . Snow. . . ."

"You hear?" said John, trying to laugh.

"Snow? That's outrageous!" said Mr. Buttercup. Then he added philosophically, "Anyway, what difference does

it make to me? Tomorrow the men will come to get the furniture that isn't going to hibernate here, and day after tomorrow I'll be in London."

"Yes, what difference does it make?" John said approvingly.

In the distance, a hammer was tapping feverishly on wood.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Buttercup. "Windgery is going too! Listen: he's nailing the shutters of his house."

"But then you'll be alone, completely alone," remarked John. "When the last train has gone, the stationmaster goes to the village."

Mr. Buttercup started: alone!

"That's what I get for buying a hotel in this Godforsaken hole," he grumbled, "instead of in Margate or Folkestone."

"But business wasn't too bad," John protested gently, patting the pocket in which his wallet was sleeping.

"No, I suppose not," conceded Mr. Buttercup.

A locomotive whistled from behind the horizon in a long, threadlike wail.

"Here comes the train," said John. "Well, good-by, Mr. Buttercup."

"Oh, you still have a little time. Have another drink."

"Just one more drop, Mr. Buttercup; at my age, I can't run after trains any more!"

Mr. Buttercup remained alone in the dark, empty lobby. The hammer was no longer pounding beyond the road.

"Finiiished. . . . Finiiished . . . ," creaked a snipe, flying up from a nearby pond.

"The season's finished but I'm not," said Mr. Buttercup, trying to show the twelve rattan armchairs in the lobby that he was still lighthearted. But neither the snipe nor the chairs cared about his undaunted spirit.

Then he saw a man running desperately beside the railroad track. A whistle from the locomotive goaded the latecomer; he ran still faster, gesticulating like an unhappy puppet.

Mr. Buttercup grunted with pleasure.

"Mr. Windgery has missed the train," he said to himself. "Ah, that's amusing!"

The ringing of the telephone interrupted his joy. It

was the electricity works calling to tell him that the current was going to be cut off, since the season was over.

"But *I'm* still here!" protested Mr. Buttercup.

"We can't keep a dynamo going just for you."

Mr. Buttercup lit one of the two green candles that adorned the piano, used a bottle as a candlestick, and gloomily poured himself another drink.

Twilight was dying in the west. The flame of the candle flickered, pointing its tip at the formidable shadows that had stealthily crept into the lobby.

Someone opened the door and sank into one of the rattan armchairs with a sigh.

Mr. Buttercup looked at him incredulously. At first he had taken him for one of the shadows that were now moving boldly in the lobby, but another sigh, more painful this time, convinced him that it was a man who had sat down in the chair.

The candle did not enable him to recognize him until he was only a few feet away.

"Mr. Windgery!" he exclaimed, relieved. "Well, this *is* a surprise! I saw you going to the station."

"Missed the train," panted Mr. Windgery.

"You ran as fast as you could, though, I saw that. Good heavens, but you're out of breath!"

"Lungs . . . very bad. . . . Wanted to leave . . . snow. . . ."

"Again! But it's not going to snow!"

Mr. Windgery's only answer was to extend a translucent hand toward the darkened windows, and the hotelkeeper saw delicate white flakes fluttering through the evening shadows.

"Well, well . . . ," he murmured. "After all, what of it?"

"Not good for me," complained Mr. Windgery.

"I'll accompany you to your house."

Mr. Windgery shook his head.

"Never mind: everything in my house is either empty or locked up. I'll stay here, if you have a room and a little hot tea."

"Why, of course!" Mr. Buttercup said eagerly, quickly resuming his role as a paid host. "Would you like some

supper? I can give you cold beef, pâté, tinned fish, and cheese."

"No, thank you. I only want some hot tea and a little rum, if you don't mind."

"Of course not. You'll keep me company," Mr. Buttercup said good-humoredly. "I was all alone here; everyone else had left—you were the last to go. I can't think of a worse punishment for a decent man than not having anyone to talk to on an October night, a hundred yards from the bellowing sea, with no living voices around him except those of wild geese."

But his companion was as gloomy as the night itself. Mr. Buttercup was alarmed to see him redden his handkerchief with large gobs of sputum. They looked black in the dim light of the candle, and that made them all the uglier.

After a plaintive "Good night," Mr. Windgery went up to his room, taking the last green candle.

Sitting before the pointed flame and drinking from the bottle, Mr. Buttercup felt more alone than ever. He found the whisky bitter and drank it in big swallows, without savoring it.

When he awoke, shivers of horror were running over his skin, but he did not know why, especially since the snow-padded night was perfectly quiet. As he was falling asleep, he had cursed Mr. Windgery's rough cough; he no longer heard it now.

"He's asleep," he thought, but he could not explain the instinct that urged him to huddle down into the warm cave of his covers.

Although twilight, with its gliding shadows, should have seemed more hostile than this silent and splendidly clear night, he had not feared it; but he now said aloud in a quavering voice, "Come, come, what's going on here?"

Nothing was going on. The moonlight was accentuating the silence, that was all.

"What can it be?" he said in the same thin voice.

And suddenly, from the depths of the motionless night, the answer came.

It came in the form of dull, heavy footsteps.

"Mr. Windgery! Mr. Windgery!" called Mr. Buttercup.

Only the imperturbable footsteps answered his cry; they seemed to leave Mr. Windgery's room and calmly go down the stairs.

Mr. Buttercup threw on some unmatched clothes. He wanted to react against a nameless terror that was flowing toward him like shadowy water. He joked foolishly: "I can't complain of not having any company. First I was alone, then Windgery came, and now here's another traveler."

He leaned over the railing but saw nothing, even though the staircase was reflecting a silvery light. The footsteps were at the bottom now.

"Hello there!" said Mr. Buttercup. "Mr. Traveler. . . . Mr. Last Traveler. . . . Let's have a look at you!"

But his voice was more tenuous than a child's hair, and it scarcely reached his trembling lips.

He fell silent without even thinking of calling Mr. Windgery again, but he started down the stairs.

The footsteps were coming from the lobby. A short time later, without any sound of locks or doors, they faded away in the basement.

It later seemed strange to Mr. Buttercup that he did not think of getting a gun.

When the footsteps had ceased, the silence gave him the courage to go prudently down the stairs. He took such minute precautions that he seemed to have become a burglar in his own hotel. Despite the triply-posted notice —Bolt Your Door at Night—the door of Mr. Windgery's room was not locked, and the hotelkeeper was able to open it noiselessly.

The moonlight showed him instantly that there was something tragic and baleful in that room.

Mr. Windgery was lying on the bed with his head sunk deeply into the pillow and his mouth black, opened for a cry that seemed to be still audible; his open eyes reflected the blue light from the window.

"Dead!" gasped Mr. Buttercup. "Good Lord, what a predicament!"

Two seconds later, he was fleeing wildly toward the upper stories: the footsteps had just abruptly crossed the lobby and begun going up the stairs.

If a man of science had later told Mr. Buttercup that

at that moment a sixth sense, related to the animal instinct of self-preservation, had taken possession of his whole being, he would no doubt have been answered by a skeptical shrug. One thing is certain, however: Mr. Buttercup was in the grip of absolute terror.

The shrill little voice of human reason had almost immediately stopped advising him to prepare an armed ambush in some dark corner. An imperious instinct resounded in his soul: "I must get away! Against *that* I'm powerless!"

He had just reached the top floor, reserved for the hotel staff and the guests' servants. He stumbled against an artful disorder left by his dissatisfied employees. The footsteps were now going from room to room, as though making a methodical inspection.

"It's in number twelve," murmured the hotelkeeper. "Now it's in number eighteen . . . twenty-two . . . twenty-nine. . . . Dear God, it's in *my* room!"

It chilled his heart to know that the Unknown that walked in the night was moving among the familiar and personal objects he had just left, as though a little of his being still clung to the things in that room.

In the last of the servants' rooms he saw a holy-water basin. He had a strange idea. Without making any noise, he blocked the hall with furniture and placed the holy-water basin on top of this frail barricade.

"It has to come this way," he thought, "and then. . . ."

He would have been at a loss if he had been asked to explain what he meant by "it," but he had no time to reflect or reason: the footsteps were falling heavily on the bare steps that led to his refuge. They sounded more ominous and ferocious than ever; they seemed to make the whole building cry out in terror.

"I must go higher!" he groaned.

He reached the empty, dusty attic with its creaking floor. He looked around, wild-eyed. Was this going to be the wretched setting of his death? Suddenly his hand touched a thin metal ladder. The observation platform! He ran up the ladder. The trap door in the ceiling, welded shut by rust and dirt, would not open. The footsteps reached the floor below, then passed the childish barricade.

"Even that doesn't stop it!" thought Mr. Buttercup,

weeping. He desperately thrust his head and shoulders against the trap door. It opened onto the vast blue night, blurred by snow but still sparkling with bright stars.

The observation platform overlooked the whole surrounding countryside. He had never ventured onto it before. He felt waves of dizziness rising inside him.

"I'd rather jump off than have *that* get me!" he cried.

Walking on a thick mattress of snow, he went to the edge of the platform. A feeling of immense desolation seized his heart. Far away, on the black surface of the sea, one light was following another. The yellow eye of the pier was insolently staring up at him from the depths of the darkness.

"Yes, yes, I'd rather jump . . . ," he sobbed.

A grating sound made him start; it came from the rusty rungs of the metal ladder. . . . It came closer and closer until it reached the trap door.

Then Mr. Buttercup saw the long stem of the lightning rod gleaming softly in the moonlight. He took hold of it with a gasp of horror, stepped over the railing of the platform, and, with the wail of a soul in hell, let himself slide down into emptiness.

Something jumped onto the platform.

A pale tongue of light licked the horizon. At the bottom of the ashy trench of the railroad, a green lamp went on; the window panes of the little station were whitened by the icy glow of a gaslight, and the first train whistled lazily in the invisible distance. Mr. Buttercup left the pile of creosoted crossties that had served as his shelter all night and, with stiff bones, bleeding hands, and a crazed brain, he ran to the lighted and inhabited little station, which seemed to him the most desirable oasis in the world.

It was not until eleven o'clock, when he had heard the opinion of the doctor who had come from a nearby village on his bicycle and declared that Mr. Windgery had died a natural death from consumption, that Mr. Buttercup resolved to look over the hotel.

He had found nothing suspicious in it, and was already accusing solitude, fear, and whisky, when he reached the

observation platform. There, beside his own footprints faithfully retained by the snow, he saw other footprints, hideous, terrifying, and incredibly large. They, too, went to the edge of the platform, but they did not return; it was as though the thing that walked in the night had made a monstrous leap. . . .

When he went back down to the lobby, he uttered an exclamation of joy on seeing the black vehicle that had come for the remains of poor Mr. Windgery. He held its driver with whisky and amusing stories until the arrival of the moving van, and he promised such a large tip to the moving men if everything was gone an hour before the departure of the last train that they hurried so much they nearly broke everything, including their own limbs.

An hour before the last train whistled its farewell, Mr. Buttercup was on the station platform.

He had brought two bottles of whisky for the station-master, who helped him up the steps with brotherly affection and waved to him until the train was a tiny black lizard on the horizon.

At a long table of the Silver Dragon, a friendly tavern on Richmond Road where Mr. Buttercup went to tell his story, his companions asked for cards, dice, and a checkerboard.

"It's what's known as suggestion, autosuggestion," said Mr. Chickenbread, who sold musical instruments in the spacious shop next door.

"A hallucination," said Mr. Bitterstone, who was in the oil business.

Mr. Buttercup scratched his cheek.

"No one in the Buttercup family has hallucinations," he retorted, somewhat offended.

Dice rattled, decreeing wins and losses. The white disks melted before the dark advance of the blacks on the neutral checkerboard. Only old Dr. Hellermond remained thoughtful.

"I know," he murmured, speaking more to himself than to the placid Mr. Buttercup, "I know those footsteps. When I was an intern, I often heard them during quiet nights in the hospital, when nothing was awake except formaldehyde fumes and tearful grief. They moved with-

out echoes down the long halls studded with dim night-lights; they preceded nocturnal stretchers being carried to the cold mortuary by silent-footed attendants.

"All of us—doctors, nurses, and attendants—used to hear them, but we had a tacit agreement never to mention them. Sometimes, though, a novice would pray aloud. Each time we heard them we knew that a void had just been made in the painful life of the white-walled wards.

"When the somber sergeants of Newgate Prison prepare the black flag bearing a capital *N* for the approaching dawn, they hear those footsteps moving along a stone corridor toward a cell more sinister than all the others."

Dr. Hellermond fell silent and began watching a game of checkers with interest.

THE BLACK MIRROR

Mr. Thorndike, who ran a rental library in Staple Inn, looked for the thousandth time at the strange wooden-fronted houses that faced his establishment. There was no one around the black tables laden with books to whom he could repeat once again that he admired the Tudor style of those buildings, and that they were the only ones that had survived all the fires and upheavals of the City since the fifteenth century.

No one. . . . It was not strictly true, but the lone customer who was casually looking through the greasy volumes hardly counted for Mr. Thorndike.

Dr. Baxter-Brown was an ordinary general practitioner who lived on Church Street, where he occupied two rooms in one of the tall, pale houses bordering Clissold Park. He had neither a library nor a laboratory, and he received his few patients in a shabby living room with black horsehair chairs. Twice a week he made a long, sad journey across the city, which took him to Holborn and Thorndike's dusty den, where he spent an hour or two before leaving with a rented book.

It was drizzling that day, and his reading table was in the darkest corner of the rental library, but Mr. Thorndike had no intention of lighting one of his green-shaded lamps for such a poor customer.

Dr. Baxter-Brown was leafing through the thick pages of a history of England, which he was not reading. He deftly slid another book under it; it was a thin volume, speckled with rust spots and chewed by bookworms.

Just then Miss Bowes came in and Mr. Thorndike bowed low. Not only did she rent rare and expensive books, but she also liked to have a little chat with him, which enabled him to show off his historical knowledge.

"We were speaking of Wren the last time I had the honor and pleasure of seeing you, Miss Bowes, and, concerning Guild Hall, which he rebuilt after the fire of 1666. . . ."

Baxter-Brown stood up. He had slipped the slender booklet into his overcoat pocket and was holding a recent novel in his hand.

"Thank you, sir, good-by," Mr. Thorndike said curtly, taking the coin held out to him by the doctor.

Baxter-Brown's stocky figure melted into the mist of Holborn.

As he waited for his bus in the middle of a glum, patient, watersoaked crowd, he patted his overcoat pocket as though it contained a bulging wallet. Yet there was nothing in it except an old copy of Warren's Almanac for the year 1857 that had miraculously escaped from Mr. Thorndike's kitchen stove, or from the man who came twice a year to buy, by the pound, those books that he had judged to be unfit for further circulation.

It was late when Baxter-Brown reached home. In the entrance hall, he came upon his landlady, Mrs. Skinner. She sniffed haughtily and did not return his greeting.

"I must give her a payment on account," he thought sadly as he climbed the stairs, with their threadbare carpet, that led to the fourth floor.

His fire was not burning, and his worn-out gas mantle gave off a meager light.

He placed the almanac on his round, unwaxed table between a half-empty bottle of whisky and a sticky pipe, then he carefully checked the lock on the door, stuffed the keyhole full of paper, and carefully lowered the green cotton window shade.

"Now, let's see," he said with a sigh. "But first, let's call Polly to our aid."

He picked up his pipe, filled it with thick flakes of tobacco taken from a gray paper cone, and lit it with pleasure.

"Polly, my good old Polly," he said with gruff affection.

Polly helped to alleviate the loneliness of his life of poverty and relentless misfortune. It was after reading a detective novel that he had taken it into his head to

give his pipe a feminine name, and he had also carved three little crosses in its bowl, as a mark of ownership or preference. "It's a fine pipe," he sometimes told himself, recalling the day of fleeting affluence when he had paid a relatively high price for that Chesterfield made of heavy English brier.

"Let's see, now. . . ."

He began reading with his hands pressed to his temples and his lips pursed attentively:

In 1842 the collection of curios formed at Strawberry Hill by Horace Walpole was sold at auction. Among the singular objects contained in it was the famous black mirror of Dr. John Dee, physician, surgeon, and astrologer of Queen Elizabeth I. It was a piece of beautifully black coal, perfectly polished and carved into an oval shape, with a handle of brown ivory. It had formerly been in the collection of the Earls of Peterborough, bearing this description: "Black stone by means of which Dr. Dee called forth spirits."

A stranger bought it at the Walpole sale for twelve pounds, and since then all efforts to find it again have been unsuccessful.

Neither the Peterboroughs nor the Walpoles ever tried to make use of that magical object, and they carefully kept it hidden, for fear of the disastrous consequences that might have been produced by ill-advised curiosity.

Elias Ashmole, author of the strange and frightening THEATRUM CHEMICUM, had this to say about the black mirror: "By means of that magic stone one can see all the persons one wishes to see, in any part of the world, even if they are hidden in the most remote rooms, or in caves in the bowels of the earth."

The last owners, frightened by such power, shrank from the idea of putting it to the test. . . .

Baxter-Brown ignored the rest of the article, which was devoted to the deplorable fate of the enigmatic John

Dee, but he used a magnifying glass to decipher the small handwriting in the margin:

> *Yes, but Edward Kelley, the sinister pirate who clung to poor Dee like a shadow, used the mirror for discovering hidden treasures and for committing his mysterious crimes.*
>
> *There can be no doubt that, in the hands of a criminal, that remarkable object. . . . [At this point some words were missing because of bookworm holes.] . . . what LIVES in the mirror.*

The word "lives" was printed in big capital letters. A few lines, hastily jotted down in another handwriting, finished these marginal notes:

> *The Quatrefates stole the mirror. They used it to find the treasures of. . . . [More work by the bookworms] . . . be cursed unto the last generation.*

Baxter-Brown heaved one of his customary long sighs, opened the secret drawer of an ugly little Dedlaw writing-desk, and placed the almanac in it, beside a leather case. The case contained a set of valuable tools made of burnished steel. They were very well made and had once belonged to Stanton Miller, alias The Goat, who had been hanged at Newgate one morning in March while a violent hailstorm was breaking windows on Paternoster Row.

Baxter-Brown nodded his head. He had treated Stanton Miller when he had been taken to the Rotherhite police station after being three-quarters lynched by a furious mob. "Take these for your fee, doc," the wretched man had whispered to him while his guard's back was turned. "They may be useful to you, and besides, I'd just as soon they weren't found on me."

They had not done Stanton Miller any good, but they had been of some assistance to Baxter-Brown, who sometimes earned less than a pound a week.

"Let's see, now, Polly. . . ." he murmured, blowing a stream of smoke toward the ceiling.

Three days later, he knew that the last of the Marquesses of Quatrefage lived in Asteys Row, in a dilapidated old house whose windows were veiled by dust but adorned with heavy and costly brocade hangings.

"Damn that old miser Quatrefage!" cried a street peddler as Baxter-Brown was strolling down Asteys Row. And he saw a little man with a tiny head, dressed in the style of Beau Brummel, walk lightly up the stone steps of the house.

Asteys Row is an insignificant street in Canonbury that is quiet in the daytime and absolutely deserted at night.

The Quatrefage house was defended by a powerful door, studded with bolts and equipped with a double safety chain. But the back door, facing the little Alwyn Canal, yielded without remorse to the first pressure applied by a steel lever a foot and a half long. Baxter-Brown walked across a little courtyard ankle-deep in rainwater, opened the window of the laundry room, and easily found his way to the second-floor bedrooms.

Stanton Miller had not lied: his tools were truly useful. Baxter-Brown was aware of this as he cut into a quaint coffer embellished with gilded bands and graceful wrought-iron decorations.

He had nearly finished his work when the Marquess of Quatrefage appeared, brandishing a poker.

The doctor took this ridiculous weapon away from him and hit him on his small, pear-shaped head with it.

The old man twittered like a bird and fell to the floor. Baxter-Brown's professional knowledge told him that there was no need for a second blow.

He explored the coffer without haste or agitation. He found twelve pounds in banknotes, a pile of gleaming new shillings, and, in a red silk sheath, Dr. Dee's mirror.

When he returned home, he drank most of the whisky left in the bottle and took the mirror from its sheath.

With a sigh of regret, he put Polly down on the table, for there was no more tobacco in the paper cone. Then

he devoted all his attention to an examination of that strange magical object.

The thin, dark oval had the luster of a patch of night sky without moon or stars. He observed that it glowed without reflecting light. However, he discovered nothing unusual in its shadowy depths.

He tried to concentrate his mind and his will, invoking the name of the mysterious maker and occasionally coupling it with that of Edward Kelley.

After an hour of this, sweat was running down his back and his hands were quivering, shaken by a sudden fever.

Shortly before dawn the gaslight began to die down, because he had forgotten to put a coin into the slot meter. As soon as the room was plunged into darkness, he saw a beautiful blue light shining from the mirror.

His first act was prompted by fear: he ran into the next room and closed the door. He soon accused himself of cowardice, however, and, despite the unpleasant shudders that were running up and down his spine, he went back to the table.

The light was still shining, though less brightly.

"I must observe this phenomenon scientifically," he told himself. "This blue light is polarized to some extent, and so, by placing myself to the left of the mirror, I see. . . ."

Yes, he saw, but he would have preferred the strange black surface to remain free of all apparitions, in spite of his desire to make use of the mirror's occult power.

The apparition was very vague, however, and he had to make a serious mental effort to see any definite shape in it.

"It looks like . . . hm, it's rather blurred, but it looks like a dressing gown. . . . Ah, there's a head. . . . And feet. . . ."

The form was becoming more distinct.

The head was accentuated by a broad helmet. As for the feet, they were inordinately long and narrow, and encased in those hideous sollerets that are shown on the last knights of the War of the Roses by pictures of the period.

"It's not pretty, and it doesn't mean anything," he decided in a brief surge of valor.

This was his last attempt to put up a bold front in the face of the unknown, for he soon became aware that the incomprehensible and grotesque image was creating an atmosphere of abominable terror around itself. The blue light was bright enough to illuminate objects near the mirror, and he saw Polly and the whisky bottle bathed in an opalescent glow. These were familiar, even friendly things to him, yet he looked at them with fear, as though they somehow played a part in the threatening mystery that had just been born before his eyes.

After being clear for no more than a few seconds, the apparition rapidly became amorphous again. First the helmet began to fade, then the dressing gown became blurred and vaporous, and the serpentine extremities melted into a writhing mist. Suddenly, as though it had been turned off by a switch, the blue light vanished and the room was dark.

"The slot meter!" growled Baxter-Brown, furiously reaching into his pocket for a coin. He was slipping it into the slot when he heard a sound of breaking glass behind him, followed by a rapid gurgle. A moment later, the gaslight was shining again.

The bottle was in pieces and the whisky was flowing across the table in two streams; the mirror had again become nothing but a black oval.

"I wonder if it was all a morbid flight of my imagination," he thought. But soon he painfully shook his head: "How did my bottle get broken, and. . . ."

He stared at the table in amazement: Polly had disappeared.

A week went by before Baxter-Brown again had the courage to confront the mystery of the magic mirror in the silence and shadows of the night.

Nothing happened.

He became bolder and repeated his efforts during the nights that followed. He augmented them by fantastic evocations of the shades of Dee and Kelley, and even of infernal beings whose names he had found in an old treatise on magic by Podgers.

He was gradually overcome by disappointment. He no longer dared to think about wondrous hidden treasures,

and he told himself that he never really believed in them at all.

"And for that I . . . I . . . ," he murmured every now and then, but he never finished his thought, and he himself would have been unable to say whether his regrets were related to the corpse in Asteys Row. The murder had brought him twelve pounds and several shillings, but that money soon melted away like snow in sunshine.

On the day when the last of the shiny shillings had gone toward the purchase of some tea and sugar, Mrs. Skinner sent word that she was going to call on him. The message was delivered by Dinah Pubsey, the servant who did all the heavy and dirty work in the house, and it consisted of a notification that he was not to leave before he had spoken with Mrs. Skinner, if he did not want to find his door sealed when he returned.

Mrs. Skinner was a rather tolerant landlady who did not declare war on a tenant who owed a quarter's rent; but Baxter-Brown owed eight, not to speak of the small loans she had given him in moments of good humor.

She came at eleven o'clock sharp, two hours after Dinah Pubsey's visit, wearing horn-rimmed glasses and brandishing a statement of account.

"Doctor, this can't go on. I've been very patient, and I might continue to be patient if I didn't have serious financial problems now. If you'll look over these records, you'll see that you owe me. . . ."

She stopped talking, sniffed the air with disgust, and exclaimed:

"Good heavens, what a stench! What kind of poison do you smoke in your pipe, doctor? I can't stay here with that smell. . . . Go away, leave my house. . . . Oh, what a terrible stink!"

She hurried away, letting her statement of account flutter to the floor, an act of forgetfulness that was unprecedented in the annals of the house.

Baxter-Brown was glad to be rid of her loud and formidable presence, but he stood still beside the round table, frowning in bewilderment: for reasons of economy, he had not bought another pipe, so that ever since Polly's disappearance he had not smoked. Furthermore, when he too had sniffed the air, he had detected no

smell of tobacco, only the stale smell of the sink and the scent of a few pharmaceutical bottles.

He shrugged his shoulders and went over to inspect the contents of the secret drawer in the little desk standing stiffly in its corner.

The black mirror was there, dark and shiny, but without mystery or revelation; beside it, the steel tools were sleeping in their leather case. With a sigh, he picked them up.

Just then a cry of distress came from downstairs:

"Doctor! Doctor! She's going to die!"

He recognized Dinah Pubsey's shrill voice.

He found her bawling at the top of her lungs and shedding torrents of tears in front of the open kitchen door.

"She came in and said to me, 'It's that tobacco, oh how it stinks!' and then she fell on the floor! She hasn't moved! Oh! Oh!"

Baxter-Brown saw Mrs. Skinner lying on the white and red tile floor. Her glasses were a short distance away, broken. Her face was hideously convulsed.

"She's not moving, look how still she is!" sobbed the maid.

"And she'll never move again," the doctor said softly, for he had just ascertained the unfortunate woman's death.

After writing a brief report for the police, he went up to his room and put the leather case back in its place. Since it was he who had first determined Mrs. Skinner's death, he would take part in the inquest; he was therefore going to receive a fee of three pounds sixpence, enough to give him several days of rest and subsistence.

Why was it that from then on he was haunted by the loss of Polly? He had gradually come to regard that pipe to some extent as the wife who had been denied to him because of his great poverty. He missed it so much that he no longer wanted to buy another one; he had even lost all desire to smoke.

But more serious concerns soon dispelled that minor preoccupation: not only was he completely lacking in

cash, but he was also crushed by debts that left him no hope of being able to make both ends meet.

He had never had very many patients; he now had none at all. Night prowlers had torn off the zinc plaque, fastened to the front door, that bore his name and his office hours. He did not even consider putting it back in place, for he was convinced that it would be useless.

"Ah, Stanton Miller," he murmured, "I must again think of you, my poor brother in crime!"

He took the burnished steel tools from the drawer. Beside them, in its scarlet silk sheath, was Dr. John Dee's mirror. He gave it a glance of angry contempt. "Some day," he muttered, "you may have to work your mischief from the bottom of the river!"

Until then he had trusted almost entirely in his luck when he carried out his petty nocturnal thefts, except, perhaps, for the somber adventure in Asteys Row that had brought him the black mirror. This time, however, he had made careful perparations for the expedition that was to save him from total destitution.

The house he had picked out in Bloomsfield was unoccupied. Lady Aberlow, its owner, had gone for a stay in a clinic on Coswell Road and had brought her servants with her. He had learned this from eavesdropping on the conversation of some colleagues who were unaware of his attentive presence.

One of the shutters on the ground floor had been badly closed, and Baxter-Brown already had enough experience to know that this shutter would constitute no serious obstacle to his entrance.

It was cold and dark when he got off the bus in Cornhill; and by the time he had walked to London Wall, gloomy and rough like the spirit of ill-humor, fog was slowly blurring the streets. The streetlamps intermittently wept reddish tears into the ghost-infested mist. All sounds were muffled; the sirens of the Embankment were whimpering in the distance, almost inaudible, gagged by the fog.

Baxter-Brown sighed with satisfaction. Even if he had been blindfolded, he would still have been able to find Bloomsfield, Lady Aberlow's house, and the loose shutter.

He made his way into the house with hardly any effort at all. The beam of his flashlight slipped over the livid furniture covers and rolled-up rugs of a Victorian drawing room.

He climbed a broad spiral staircase that rose into opaque darkness and, on the first floor, chose what he believed to be the door of Lady Aberlow's bedroom. When he opened it he was petrified by surprise and terror, as though a monstrosity had risen before him. And yet the only thing frightening about that room was that it was brightly lighted.

The twelve lamps of a big chandelier with drop crystals were shining, and behind a yellow sofa stood a floor lamp with a pink shade. It did not even occur to him that the inhabitants of the house had simply forgotten to turn off those lights before leaving it, because the room was empty and cold, and gave an impression of abandon in defiance of that orgy of illumination.

His shoulders rose painfully, as though a heavy weight were crushing the breath from his chest.

"Come, come," he said to himself, "I've got to go through with it, otherwise I'm lost."

His attention was caught by a Venetian mirror on the wall facing him. He went over to it and lifted it: the four knobs of a wall safe stared at him like two pairs of eyes.

The steel tools joyfully bit into the obstacle and overcame it without great difficulty.

"At last . . . at last. . . ," he gasped, and tears of strange joy flowed down his cheeks when he saw the thick bundles of banknotes and the piles of gold sovereigns.

His pockets were soon bulging. He elatedly picked up the eighteen-inch steel lever he had used to open the safe. Suddenly his whole body went taut: a door had closed, and hurried footsteps were now coming up the stairs; he even heard the click of a pistol being cocked.

He stood as still as a stone statue. He did not move even when he saw a heavy, powerful man framed in the doorway, or when the round, vicious-looking muzzle of an automatic pistol was pointed at his forehead.

But the shot did not go off, and no sound came from the man's throat.

The steel lever slipped from Baxter-Brown's hands, whizzed through the air, and struck its mark. He was still in the same position when the body collapsed and blood came bubbling from a head whose face he could not see.

He had to make an extraordinary effort to lift his feet, which seemed to be sunk in invisible quicksand. But then his strength returned, and he made an enormous leap over the corpse.

When he was outside on the landing he looked back. The chandelier was casting a raw glare on the disemboweled safe and the shattered head of the murdered watchman, while in the soft glow of the floor lamp. . . . Baxter-Brown, almost unmoved by the hideous sight of violent death, nearly cried out in terror: between the shade of the floor lamp and the sofa, hanging in the air as though between the teeth of an invisible smoker, was Polly. He recognized her clearly by the burned rim of her bowl and her three little crosses.

He had a mad impulse to go back, step over the bleeding corpse and seize his favorite pipe, which had so mysteriously disappeared. But suddenly a puff of smoke rose from it, and another, and another, and then Polly began smoking furiously, filling the air with a thick blue fog, smoking all alone, horribly alone. . . .

Baxter-Brown fled into the night. Lost in the dense fog, he took three hours to return to Clissold Park. His bedroom was icy cold, for the wind had blown open the window during his absence, and gray wisps of fog were swirling around the lamp in a wild, spectral dance.

Ten years later, anyone meeting Dr. Baxter-Brown for the first time would never have believed that in a drawer filled with useless things he kept the most formidable and terrible instrument of magic that had ever been left to men by the entities of the invisible: Dr. John Dee's black mirror.

He had taken over the practice of an old doctor in Camden Town who was haunted by the ultimate dream of a country house beside a trout stream in his native Dev-

onshire. He was now a perfectly happy and peaceful man.

He had developed a paunch, wore a walrus mustache, and had a shiny face, for he had become a lover of good food. He had his suits made by Curzon Brothers and took his meals in the Bacchi Restaurant, where he was particularly fond of the wild rabbit stew with stout and the broiled eels. He belonged to a whist club that met in the Kingfisher Tavern, and he played a fairly good game.

Through the years, he had taken the dark magic mirror from its red sheath no more than three or four times. He had looked at its silent mystery without curiosity or fear, and he had never again had any desire to summon up the power enclosed within the darkness of the black stone. His indifference had not reached the point of forgetfulness, however, and at long intervals the complex image in helmet and sollerets had passed like a swift shadow before the dark eyes of his memory.

As for Polly, several extremely disturbing events had made it impossible for him to forget her.

First there was the deplorable Slumber affair.

Baxter-Brown had rented one of those picturesque houses in Camden Town that were the pride of people with small private incomes in the early nineteenth century, and that have kept so much cunning in their old stones that they have always escaped the greed of those intent on destroying houses and making buildings.

On the ground floor, he had a waiting room, a consultation room, and a small laboratory where he made a dozen different kinds of salves and syrups that he sold in gratifyingly large quantities.

On the second floor, the living room, gleaming with new furniture and false brassware, enclosed his leisure hours within horizons that he judged to be perfect. He received few guests in it, for, despite a faithful fortune and steady luck, he had maintained his solitary habits.

Among the few friends to whom he gladly opened this earthly paradise was the good Mr. Slumber, whom he had met at the Kingfisher Tavern.

Mr. Slumber, a former schoolteacher, was very poor and earned a meager living by doing proofreading for

third-rate publishing houses. In the tavern, his daily expenditure was limited to the price of two pints of ale; whenever he drank a third, it was Baxter-Brown who paid for it.

It was said that his evening meal seldom consisted of anything more than a hard-boiled egg or a kippered herring. For this reason, Baxter-Brown often shared with him the abundant portions of cold meat that he ordered from a nearby restaurant.

Mr. Slumber's conversation could scarcely have been called lively, except when it was directed toward one particular subject: ancient lighting devices. Poor, kindly Mr. Slumber became a matchless lyric poet as soon as he began speaking of tallow candles or Carcel lamps. And so Baxter-Brown became almost a god in the lackluster eyes of the former schoolteacher when he bought, from a Cheapside huckster, a tall lamp with a thick blue glass globe and a copper crosspiece.

"It's a Canterpook! I tell you it's a Canterpook!" Mr. Slumber cried with rapturous enthusiasm.

"A Canterpook?"

"Yes. That's the name of a famous ironmonger who lived in Borough around 1790," Mr. Slumber declared proudly. "He acquired his well-earned fame by making lamps like this one."

Baxter-Brown found nothing wrong with this, and from then on the tender glow of the Canterpook moon cheered Mr. Slumber's sweet, simple soul each time he came to visit his friend.

One night Baxter-Brown was roused from his sleep by a keen sense of immediate danger.

For years he had been reluctant to sleep in total darkness, so at his bedside there was always a little night lamp whose dim yellow flame struggled against the silent horde of shadows without much success.

When he abruptly opened his eyes, the thin tongue of flame revealed a hostile form crouching in the darkness, ready to leap upon him, and its glow was reflected on the pale blade of a long knife.

He saw the weapon raised with a sinister flash, while a face covered by a black cloth mask moved forward to witness his death.

He felt doomed; but then the incomprehensible intervened.

The knife fell and stuck quivering in the floor; a brief groan, followed by a gasp of pain and despair, came from the mask, and the threatening form collapsed.

Baxter-Brown rushed over to the nocturnal attacker, and when he pulled off the black mask a dying voice beseeched him:

"Forgive me. . . . I was going to take the Canterpook. . . ."

The robber who died after this wretched confession was poor Mr. Slumber.

Baxter-Brown was wondering by what miracle his life had been saved by the heart attack that had felled his former friend, when he saw Polly.

She was floating a foot above the night lamp, puffing little smoke rings from her bowl marked with three crosses. They were plump, pretty smoke rings that almost seemed proud of their perfect roundness.

Baxter-Brown uttered a muffled cry and put out his hand toward her; his movement was awkward, for it extinguished the feeble flame of the night lamp. When he lighted it again the pipe was gone, but the room smelled of bad tobacco.

It was easy for him to save Mr. Slumber's reputation: he hid his mask and knife and placed his body on a bench in the square a hundred paces from the house.

Edith Bronx would have been pretty, very pretty, in fact, if hyperthyroidism had not given her light blue eyes a rather frightening expression.

Baxter-Brown had met her through Littlewood, the Cornhill pharmacist who was going to take over the preparation of his salves. Edith liked to chat with them, for she proudly regarded herself as a colleague of theirs: she was a nurse in the New Charity Hospital.

Baxter-Brown had never paid much attention to women, but he soon became obsessed by the thought of Edith Bronx.

"I'll ask her to marry me the next time I see her," he often said to himself.

The next time came and was followed by many others,

but the proposal never reached his lips; his conversations with Edith were limited to the virtues of Littlewood's drugs, the treatment of hyperthyroidism, and interesting ailments that he had discovered among his patients.

One autumn evening, he found Littlewood leaning on his counter with his lips quivering and his hands cold.

"Edith just left in a state of absolute desperation," he said. "She had an argument with the head nurse today and was fired. She talked about committing suicide. . . . No, no, I know how these things are. Don't forget that her hyperthyroidism makes her predisposed to hysteria. She went off in the direction of the water works."

Being lame in one leg, Littlewood had been unable to go after Edith.

Baxter-Brown ran like a madman along the dark avenue and did not stop, out of breath, heart pounding, until he saw the surface of the reservoir gleaming in the moonlight.

"Edith! Edith!" he cried in despair.

He saw her leaning on a slender railing with her head bowed toward the call of the dark water.

"Darling. . . . I wanted. . . ."

And so it was in that strange place, and in still stranger circumstances, that he made his declaration of love and asked Edith to marry him.

She went to his house with him, sobbing and broken. He made a roaring fire in the living room, lit all the lamps, even the moonlike Canterpook, and prepared hot toddies with trembling hands.

"Tomorrow I'll get the marriage license, darling."

She was not listening to him; she had lifted her face toward the ceiling, and her hyperthyroidism suddenly accentuated an expression of horrible anxiety in her eyes.

"What's in your house, doctor?" she asked in an undertone.

"What do you mean? What. . . ."

She sank into one of the deep armchairs that flanked the fireplace.

"Excuse me. . . . My head is spinning. . . . My heart. . . . Please don't smoke, doctor!"

Baxter-Brown dropped the hot toddy he had just prepared.

"But I'm not smoking, darling!"

Edith leapt to her feet.

"There! . . . There's a man in the corner, with a helmet on his head. . . . He's hiding. . . . I see his feet under the table. . . . Oh! They look like snakes!"

Suddenly she screamed:

"He's coming closer! . . . He's lighting his pipe from the lamp! Oh, God! Dear God!"

Baxter-Brown tried to stop her as she rushed toward the door, but she pushed him aside with terrible strength. He staggered, lost his balance, and bumped his head against the armchair he had just left.

When he stood up, he heard the front door slam and could do nothing except hurry over to the window. In the moonlight he saw Edith run down the deserted street. When he leaned out, calling her and begging her to come back, he saw a shadow, terrifying beyond all description, silently following her along the sidewalk.

The next day, the body of Edith Bronx was recovered from the reservoir.

Baxter-Brown died the following year.

He had been suffering from asthma for some time, and had not been taking proper care of himself.

Littlewood often came to see him, and it is to him that we owe the story of Baxter-Brown's last moments.

"He made a fatal mistake," related the pharmacist. "His colleague Dr. Ressendyl had told him to stay in bed, but he went out. It was raining heavily, and when he came back he was soaked to the skin. I reproached him bitterly and made him go to bed immediately.

" 'What a foolish thing to do!' I said bitterly. 'Why did you go out in such weather?' "

" 'I've freed myself from a very heavy burden,' " he replied.

"I took his temperature: it was nearly a hundred and four. He soon became delirious. He began talking incoherently. He mentioned a mirror. 'I should have known after all those years . . . ,' he said. *'She* lived in it. . . . *She*. . . .' "

"He said the word 'she' with increasing violence, and I had to order him several times to stop talking and lie still.

"Toward morning he became a little calmer, and I thought he was going to sleep. His temperature had gone down. I thought it would be safe for me to get some sleep too, so I stretched out in an armchair and soon dozed off.

"Suddenly I was awakened by loud shouts. He was sitting up in bed, panting heavily. I had never known him to smoke, so I was amazed to see that he was surrounded by a thick cloud of pipe smoke.

" 'Aha, that's it!' he cried. 'Yes, that's it! . . . Now it's clear to me! . . . And I know her! . . . Ah, the bitch, she stole my pipe!' "

"He fell back onto the pillow; he had ceased to live."

"But as he fell I saw him make a strange gesture, as though he were taking something out of the air. And when his hand came down beside him, it was holding a thick brier pipe marked with three little crosses. It was impossible to get it out of his clenched hand, and I think it was buried with him."

MR. GLASS CHANGES DIRECTION

When he celebrated his fiftieth birthday, David Glass looked back over his past. "Celebrated" is perhaps too strong a word, because no one gave him a present, not even a flower, and he allowed himself only one more pint of ale than usual. Furthermore, his recollections were brief, and he summed them up in a few words: "It's been a hell of a life!"

At this point, Miss Trossett burst into his shop and accused him of having sold her some beans that would not cook.

Mr. Glass had no particular grudge against Miss Trossett, even though she was a peevish customer who was never satisfied with anything, but on that day—why that day, among so many others?—she exasperated him.

"I suppose," she went on, "that the half-pound of rice I'm going to buy from you will be enriched by mouse-droppings as usual, and that you'll cheat me on the weight of the ounce of pepper I need."

Mr. Glass's shop was between Lavender Hill and Clapham Common, on the corner of a winding street near a vacant lot that was slowly turning into a cesspool. For some reason, when a London fog arose it often started at that spot.

A dense billow of smog now floated past the window. The walls of the former shipping office across the street became blurred and finally disappeared altogether.

"Annabella Trossett," he said softly, "go to the devil."

"What! What did you say?" she gasped, putting her hands over her stomach as though she had just been struck there.

"You heard what I said. And if you want to hear more, here it is: you're a disgusting creature, you're the mistress

of the old cutler on Sisters Street, who's rotten with vice and eczema, and you steal from department stores."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Miss Trossett, who lent a hand to the Salvation Army in her spare time. "May heaven protect me! You're mad! Mad!"

"My beans are very good," he went on, "I never give anyone short weight, and there's one more thing I'll tell you, you dear old pile of garbage. . . ."

He was speaking almost in an undertone, listening to a sound that was drawing nearer, muffled by the black fog.

"I won't listen to any more!" cried Miss Trossett, putting her hands over her ears.

"Good, good!" said the grocer. "That's the best thing you can do!"

The sound became clearer: grr . . . grr . . . grr. . . .

Miss Trossett opened the door wide and hesitated before the wall of smog that seemed to block her path.

Grr . . . grr. . . .

Mr. Glass knew the sound well.

"I told you to go to the devil, Annabella Trossett, and I'm going to make sure you do."

He pushed her violently from behind.

She stumbled forward, then fell flat on the street just as one of the enormous trucks of the nearby Brazilian Company went by—grr . . . grr . . . grr . . . —laden with bales of cotton.

There may be places in the world where only good is spoken of the dead. In Mr. Glass's shop this was not the case, especially when the housewives of the neighborhood gathered there.

In the street, the smog had given way to cheerful sunshine, and a morning shower had already washed away the white chalk marks that had indicated the spot where Miss Trossett's body had lain.

As he served flour, marinated salmon, and molasses, Mr. Glass listened to his good neighbors' conversation with a certain astonishment.

"May God have mercy on her poor soul! . . . But just think of it: that creature wore the bonnet of the Salva-

tion Army, and all the time she was going to bed with that filthy old Slike, the tinker!"

"I see it was a tinker, not a cutler," thought Mr. Glass. "Well, it comes to the same thing."

"In her apartment, they found all sorts of things that had disappeared from Mrs. Hook's shop, where she did the cleaning."

"Ah!" he thought. "Mrs. Hook's shop isn't exactly a department store, but she stole from it just the same. . . . She stole!"

"Well," concluded one of the housewives, "the earth will have her body and the devil will have her soul!"

"The devil!" he said to himself. "And the first thing I told her was to go to the devil! There's food for thought in all this. . . ."

These reflections led to nothing, but his night was agitated enough to give rise to others. His sleep was troubled by a nightmare that, though Miss Trossett played no part in it, was filled with such fearful things that he was glad when he finally awoke in the darkness.

Then he saw that his night lamp was not on and that a vaguely luminous form was standing near the window.

The furniture began to crack, even though it was old and its wood had long since stopped shrinking. He was sure he had locked the closet door as usual, but it now opened with an almost human groan. Several times there were three sharp taps on one wall and on the ceiling.

The luminous form became more indistinct and vanished.

Mr. Glass immediately went back to sleep with a strange thought:

"Annabella Trossett. . . . I sent her to the devil—maybe he's thanking me for her. . . ."

When he opened the shutters the next morning, he was struck in the face by a wad of chewing gum and a young voice called out tauntingly:

"It's for you, you old sausage: finish it!"

Hank Hopper, the errand boy for the Brazilian Company, never forgot to give him a friendly greeting of this kind when he passed by. He still harbored resentment against the grocer for having caught him stealing nuts

from the bag near the entrance of his shop, and he often compared him to a sausage with legs, an insulting but rather accurate image.

"I'll see you again, my boy," murmured Mr. Glass. "I'll settle my score with you, you can count on it."

As he ate his breakfast toast, he looked through his morning newspaper. Only a few lines were devoted to the accident that had cost Miss Trossett her life, but three-quarters of a page were taken up with the latest crime of "the new Jack the Ripper."

For several months a nocturnal killer had been operating in the outlying sections of the city, but from time to time he made an incursion into a less deserted neighborhood.

For the first time in his life, Mr. Glass read all the sensational crime stories in the newspaper (until now he had read only the political news and the theatrical reviews). He did it without any clear purpose; he only felt that something around him was changing. But it was still vague, without any definite form, like the figure he thought he had glimpsed in the night.

"It's been a hell of a life!"

On that memorable birthday, he had probed into his past and the reason for which he had denounced his life had to some extent crystallized in one person: Anton Bruck.

Mr. Glass had not always been a grocer in Lavender Hill. At the age of twenty, he had been a copying clerk in the Battersea water works. He had been given the position because of his beautiful handwriting, a veritable calligraphy with thick and thin strokes, and his aspirations had gone no higher than becoming a tax-collector for the water works. But he had reckoned without his department head, Mr. Anton Bruck, who also wrote a beautiful hand.

That malicious man had accused the young clerk of some misdeed or other. It must not have been anything serious, because he could not now even recall what it was, but it was magnified with so much guile and venom that he was told to go and exercise his calligraphic talents elsewhere.

He had been on the verge of swelling the ranks of the London unemployed when his Uncle Bernard, who had a grocer's shop in Lavender Hill, was found dead, asphyxiated by the fumes from his stove. He died intestate, and his nephew inherited the little shop and a rather fat savings account, of which the government generously allowed him to keep a quarter.

If he had become a tax-collector and sold the shop he had inherited from his uncle, he would have been able to marry Jane Graves, a young lady who worked in his office; they would have had an attractive apartment far from the cesspool of Clapham Common, and he would not have had to live in an atmosphere of pickles, spices, and laundry soap.

He made a quick mental calculation: "I was twenty-two when I was dismissed from the water works, and Anton Bruck was somewhere in his forties, so he must be over seventy now. But is he still alive?"

He asked himself this question one Sunday morning as he was leaving church. April was not far off; the sky was clear and there was a softness in the air that invited him to take a stroll. Too bad for the customers who, in defiance of their duty to observe Sunday as a day of rest, would pound on the closed shutters of his shop!

He walked toward the offices of the water works on Mossbury Road. Across the street was an alley that went toward Clapham Junction, where the reddish walls of the railroad repair shops framed a small oasis of greenery to which no one had ever thought to give a name. In the old days, he had gone there at noon every day to eat a big sandwich and quickly leave, because Anton Bruck always came to sit on the only bench in the little square and digest his copious lunch.

The oasis was still there; a little white fuzz had already appeared on the trees and swallows were tracing countless diagrams in the blue air.

He was not surprised to see a little old man with a goatlike profile sitting on the bench, and to recognize him as his former department head.

He sat down beside him. The old man showed his dissatisfaction by grunting.

"So here you are, Bruck!"

The old man gave him a black look and said, "I don't know you."

"But I know *you* very well. . . . Ah, I see you still have tender feet!" sneered the grocer, recalling that Mr. Bruck suffered from corns and bunions.

"I . . . I forbid you . . . ," stammered Mr. Bruck.

"You can't forbid me to do anything—not any more! I'm David Glass. Remember?"

"No. . . . Leave me alone."

But Mr. Glass saw that the old man had recognized him perfectly well.

"I'm going to settle an old score," he said, putting his hand on the old man's scrawny neck.

Mr. Bruck weakly tried to call for help. But Mr. Glass did not finish his movement: his eyes had again fallen on his victims shoes, in which many holes had been cut to make room for enormous corns.

"There!" he said, stamping violently on Mr. Bruck's right foot.

The old man gasped and collapsed on the bench, as though compressed by a machine.

"And there!" said Mr. Glass, giving his other foot the same treatment.

This time Mr. Bruck cried out, but it was only a little squeak, no louder than the cries of the swallows passing overhead; then saliva trickled down onto his vest.

"I've heard of people who died suddenly because someone had stepped on their corns," Mr. Glass said to himself as he left the bench.

For Anton Bruck, who had destroyed a dream of the future thirty years earlier, was dead, thoroughly dead.

One evening Mr. Glass was sharpening the knife he used for cutting imported bologna. The skin of this particular bologna was so thick and tough that he had to stab it with the point of the knife before he could cut off a slice. For this reason, the knife had an especially sharp point.

Just as he finished sharpening it, something thudded against one of the shutters and he heard a mocking voice outside the window:

"You old sausage! Sausage with legs!"

"Dear Hank, he's come at just the right time," smiled the grocer.

Hank Hopper spent his evenings in a tavern whose back room had various coin-operated games. On his way home, he walked past some vacant lots crossed by a canal.

Mr. Glass heard him coming, whistling a stupid blues melody that was popular at the moment.

"That's a beautiful song, Hank!" he said, suddenly stepping in front of him.

"Oh!" cried the young hoodlum. "Mr. . . ."

With this word of respect he finished his existence, for the bologna knife had gone all the way through his heart.

The police and the newspapers attributed Hank Hopper's death to the mysterious killer, because it was no different from the other murders being committed by the monster: a stab in the heart with a long, sharp knife, and a nondescript victim, encountered by chance at night, from whom the murderer took nothing. What surprised the police was that on that same night, only a hundred yards away, the killer had murdered a drunken old woman who was carrying in her bag, among old clothes and scraps of food, a small fortune in banknotes that, as usual, had not been touched. The reason this was surprising was that so far the killer had claimed only one victim a night and had never broken this murderous rule.

When Mr. Glass read in the newspaper that Hank Hopper's body had been taken from the canal, he, too, was astonished, because he had left it on the edge of the road that went past the vacant lots.

Springtime had stopped smiling. A northwest wind was blowing, icy rain was falling, and, in the back room of his shop, Mr. Glass lighted the stove again. It was a small, homey room, especially when the pink-shaded lamp was on and the flames of the fire were playing with the shadows. Leaning back in his deep easy chair, he liked to listen to the sounds of the street dying down in the evening.

The cuckoo from the Black Forest had just gone back

into his clock after announcing midnight when there was a timid knock on one of the shutters.

At first he thought it was a gust of wind, but the knocking was repeated, more insistently. He tiptoed across the shop and put his ear to the door. He thought he heard the sound of rather hurried breathing, and at the same time the doorknob moved.

"Who's there?" he asked.

A muffled voice replied:

"Please open the door, and don't turn on the light."

At any other period of his life, he would have answered this appeal by telling the nocturnal visitor to go away, but he now opened the door without hesitation.

A dark, puny-looking form slipped inside and murmured, "Thank you. You're very kind."

When Mr. Glass led the stranger into the back room, he saw a thin middle-aged man wearing glasses and shabby but clean clothes, including a black overcoat that was dripping with rainwater.

"Take off your coat and sit down by the fire," he said. "You need something to warm you up. How about a hot toddy?"

"No thank you. . . . I'm quite embarrassed. . . . I never drink liquor, but I'd love a cup of tea."

The visitor drank his tea with obvious pleasure and a greedy movement of his lips; then he set down his cup and said:

"My name is Sheep. I'm in the insurance business."

He was obviously only a humble employee in the insurance business, because his jacket and tie were threadbare.

"It's a wretched night," said Mr. Glass, "and the barometer doesn't promise anything good for tomorrow."

"Three days ago," said Mr. Sheep, "no, excuse me, four days ago, the weather was clear. The night was warm and delightful. I admired the crescent-shaped moon; it gleamed like . . . like. . . ."

"Like a freshly-sharpened blade," said Mr. Glass. "Like this one, for example. . . ."

He went over to the sideboard and picked up the knife that settled the fate of the bologna.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Sheep. His cheeks flushed slightly. "That's a very good knife."

"Why did you throw Hank's body into the canal?" asked Mr. Glass.

Mr. Sheep groaned and took on a very unhappy expression.

"I hoped it wouldn't be found until two or three days later, but one of his feet got caught in a tangle of plants and was sticking out. I never . . . uh . . . kill two people in one night. It's a principle with me. You can't imagine how much I respect principles: the mere idea of violating one makes me ill."

"So you saw me!"

"Yes, and if I hadn't already . . . uh . . . killed the old woman, I'd have gone home without doing anything, because I knew the police would credit me with your young man."

A piece of furniture creaked; the flames roared in the stove and a strange shadow with a disquieting shape was cast on the opposite wall.

"Tell me," said Mr. Sheep, "doesn't it seem to you that. . . ."

"Perhaps," replied Mr. Glass. He had understood Mr. Sheep's question as soon as he had begun to ask it, because he, too, was thinking of a singular presence.

"Another cup of tea?" he asked, shaking his shoulders as though ridding himself of a burden.

The shadow had disappeared and the flames had died down.

"Yes, please," said Mr. Sheep. "It's delicious. . . . May I take the liberty of asking you a question? Yes? Do you intend to . . . uh. . . . It's indiscreet of me to ask, but I'd like to know if. . . ."

"If I intend to continue," completed Mr. Glass, smiling.

"Thank you for sparing me such an embarrassing question," said Mr. Sheep with a look of great satisfaction.

"So far I've taken vengeance for old affronts, and there weren't many of them, so I can't answer you with certainty. It's still so new! . . . Would you like some rum?"

Mr. Sheep's glasses became clouded.

"Yes," he said, as though with regret. "Not all temptations come from the devil, do they? But give me only a few drops, because I'm afraid it may make me hiccup."

The rum went down without reprisals, and Mr. Sheep sighed contentedly.

"I've never . . . uh . . . killed in a spirit of revenge," he said. "Not that I haven't had plenty of reasons! In school, the other boys used to beat me because I didn't defend myself. In the office, my colleagues call me 'the cuckold' even though I'm not married and have never even had a love affair, and the office boy puts tacks in my chair. But I've never thought of taking vengeance for all that."

He took another swallow of rum and spoke more volubly:

"I don't know exactly why I began. Mainly, I suppose, I wanted to deceive myself, to convince myself that, far from being a cuckold and the butt of an office boy's practical jokes, I was strong and tough, a powerful man who ought to be feared by everyone. At last I was able to admire myself, and I no longer had to accept the reproach of a mirror that showed me the image of a powerless weakling. And. . . ." He leaned forward as though to make an avowal that feared the indiscretion of the walls and the furniture. "And it's so easy. . . . It's incredible how easy it is to . . . uh . . . kill."

There was a silence that was finally broken by the call of the cuckoo.

"We're nearly neighbors," continued Mr. Sheep, standing up. "I live on Mallinson Road, in Battersea, near the cemetery. I hope you'll come to see me. I have some beautiful books."

"Tonight, have you . . . uh . . . ," Mr. Glass asked softly.

Mr. Sheep energetically shook his head.

"No, no, not at all!"

The grocer opened the door for him. The rain had stopped, the wind had subsided and the sky was starry.

"It's amazing how things can change completely from one moment to the next, like the weather, for example," he said. "Shall I walk with you awhile?"

"I'd be delighted to have you," Mr. Sheep replied warmly.

In the silent, lonely, moonlit streets they walked slowly, like old men. As they conversed, they discovered that they shared a liking for certain foods, the game of checkers, and beautiful illustrated books.

When they reached the wall of the cemetery, Mr. Sheep coughed, put his hand in his pocket and asked, "Would you like a peppermint?"

"Yes, thank you."

"There's nothing better for a cough," said Mr. Sheep.

At the same moment, the bologna knife slipped between two of his ribs and plunged into his heart.

"Let's have a look at those peppermints," Mr. Glass said to himself as he searched the dead man's pocket.

There was not a single peppermint; he found only a long, sharp dagger.

Arthur Billing, found dead, murdered, on Railway Wharf, Battersea Beach.

Martha Gallent, prostitute, found dead, murdered, on Fentiman Road, South Lambeth.

Margaret Coxe, chorus girl, found near Bricklayers' Station.

Lars Essig, sailor, found near London New Dock, Shadwell.

Irma Moore, shopkeeper, found on Hill Street.

The tragic list continued to grow longer, the newspapers thundered, the police were in despair, and people were afraid to go out after dark. A weekly magazine published a cartoon showing policemen, judges in wigs and robes, a scaffold with an empty noose, and, standing beside it, a hangman with his hands in his pockets. The caption was: "The Idlers."

But early in autumn the gory series stopped abruptly.

On September 25, Mr. David Glass won the first prize of two thousand pounds in the charity lottery organized by the Duchess of Stanbroke. The following night his house was robbed, his safe was broken open and emptied, and he was found strangled in his bed.

THE LIVING DEAD

In GHOULS IN MY GRAVE you enter the dread world of the living dead where madness lurks and terror reigns. A few samples:

In THE GOLD TEETH, Abel, a "mining" man, who excavates gold from the dental ware of the dead, encounters a reluctant corpse one night in Abney Park Cemetery:

". . . The dead man had just closed his mouth and sunk his teeth deep into my fingers through my rubber gloves . . ."

In THE CEMETERY WATCHMAN, a passing stranger, hired to guard the mysterious mausoleum of Dutchess Opolchenska in Saint Guitton Cemetery has an unexpected visitor one night:

". . . I was crushed by a formidable weight. Sharp teeth bit into my neck, and cold loathsome lips began greedily sucking my blood . . ."