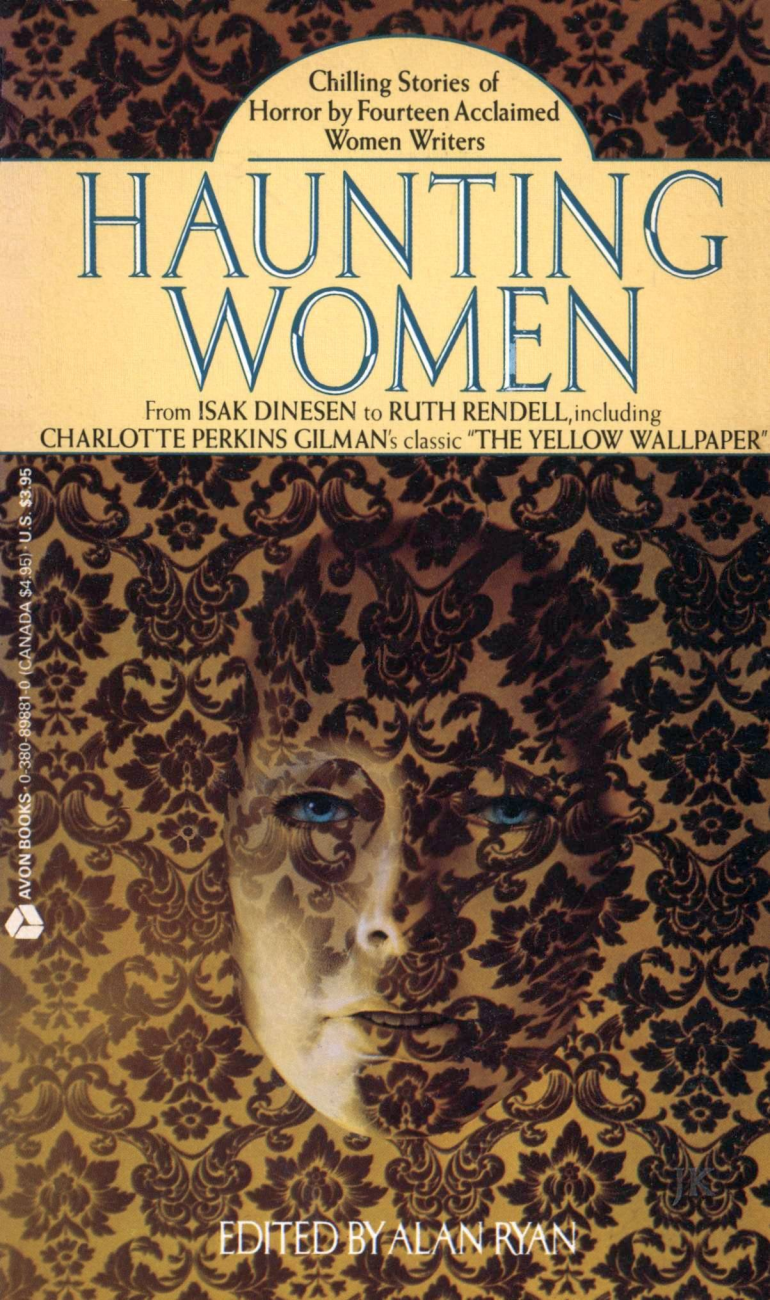
Chilling Stories of Horror by Fourteen Acclaimed Women Writers

HAUNTING WOMEN

From ISAK DINESEN to RUTH RENDELL, including CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN's classic "THE YELLOW WALLPAPER"



AVON BOOKS 0-380-89881-0 (CANADA $4.95) U.S. $3.95

EDITED BY ALAN RYAN

HAUNTING WOMEN

Ever since Mary Shelley showed up her famous husband by writing *Frankenstein* at the age of nineteen, woman writers have been producing some of the finest and most frightening Gothic literature in the English language, stories that take us to the edge of darkness and beyond . . . that chill the heart and leave us shuddering . . . that compel us to recognize and admit our own worst thoughts and deadliest wishes . . . stories that give shape to the fears that all of us, men and women, fall prey to in the darkest hour of the night.

From the Introduction by Alan Ryan

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HAUNTING WOMEN

EDITED BY ALAN RYAN

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AVON BOOKS
A division of
The Hearst Corporation
105 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10016

Published by arrangement with the editor
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 88-91528
ISBN: 0-380-89881-0

First Avon Books Printing: October 1988

Printed in the U.S.A.

K-R 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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This book is dedicated to

MARIE

my partner in everything

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HAUNTING WOMEN

HAUNTING
WOMEN

Introduction

Our literature, and our short fiction in particular, is filled with horror stories. No matter whether they're subtle or blatant, and no matter what we call them—weird tales, uncanny tales, ghost stories, or nasties—they explore the darkest elements of human nature.

Asked to name the best writers of such "scary" stories, most readers would undoubtedly list men: Edgar Allan Poe, M. R. James, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, H. P. Lovecraft, Stephen King. Pressed further, they might add another few names: J. Sheridan LeFanu, Ambrose Bierce, Ramsey Campbell.

On reflection, however, many readers would surely reply that the *single* most frightening story they have ever read is Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery."

Other readers, who might be familiar with the writings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, author of *Herland,* or who might have come across the story in an old anthology, might very likely reply that "The Yellow Wallpaper" is the most frightening story ever written.

And then memory goes to work and a flood of other stories comes to mind: Daphne du Maurier's unnerving short fiction; Edith Wharton's ghost stories, and Elizabeth Bowen's; the Gothic tales of Isak Dinesen; the disturbingly dark psychological tales of Ruth Rendell, Patricia Highsmith, Susan Hill, Joyce Carol Oates; Angela Carter's deadly fairy tales; the contemporary horror stories of Rosemary Timperley . . .

Sugar and spice and everything nice?

Not at all.

Ever since Mary Shelley showed up her famous husband (and his famous friends) by writing *Frankenstein* at the age of nineteen, women writers have been producing some of the finest, and most frightening, Gothic literature in the English language, stories that take us to the edge of darkness and beyond . . . that chill the heart and leave us shuddering . . . that compel us to recognize and admit our own worst thoughts and deadliest wishes . . . stories that give shape to the fears that all of us, men and women, fall prey to in the darkest hour of the night.

This book offers what I hope is an entertaining and thoughtful collection of good horror stories . . . all of which happen to have been written by women.

Horror stories come in all varieties, and are by no means limited to breathless tales, spattered with exclamation points, about drooling ghouls and gibbering, shapeless monsters hiding just the other side of the bedroom door. There are also good old-fashioned ghost stories. There are seemingly ordinary stories about seemingly ordinary people doing what no ordinary person would do . . . or so we like to think. There are stories about supernatural intervention in human affairs, for good or ill. There are psychological stories about the things we all push to the backs of our minds, the fears we don't admit and the wishes we never speak aloud.

The literature of horror is often regarded—and often dismissed—as genre fiction. It is that, but there is some excellent writing done within the conventions of the genre. There is also a great deal of horror fiction written by writers whose literary reputations are beyond dispute. The common concerns of horror fiction are by no means limited to any literary category; they are, in fact, part of the mainstream of our literary heritage.

And many such stories are written by women.

The writers in *Haunting Women* represent a wide range of backgrounds, both personal and literary, a range broad enough to include, say, Jean Rhys and Shirley Jackson, Ruth Rendell and Muriel Spark, Mrs. Henry Wood and Isak Dinesen.

There were several thousand stories to choose from. I had a couple of favorites in mind to begin with, and they are here. I had a couple of authors in mind, and their work is included here. Beyond that, it was a matter of considering dozens of authors and hundreds of stories.

There are only fourteen stories here—not many to represent all there are; this book could have been eight or ten times longer. A list of the writers *not* included reads like a Who's Who: Mrs. Charlotte Riddell, Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell, Amelia B. Edwards, Rhoda Broughton, Louisa May Alcott, Daphne du Maurier, Joan Aiken, Patricia Highsmith, Susan Hill, Cynthia Asquith, Agatha Christie, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty, Katherine Anne Porter, Mary Elizabeth Counselman, C. L. Moore, Norah Lofts, Ursula K. LeGuin, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, and another dozen, and maybe more.

My own view of anthologies, after editing six of them, is that they reflect the editor's thoughts as much as a novel reflects the novelist's thoughts. The stories here represent my own selection from all those available, within the constraints of length and budget. I wanted variety in length, style, period, subject matter. I wanted, as an anthologist, good stories that would be enhanced by a reading of the other stories in the book. I did not set out to prove anything or to illustrate patterns.

And yet, with all the decisions made and the final stories chosen, and keeping in mind that women writers work in the same literary traditions and within the same genre conventions as men, I think there are patterns.

And inevitably, the question arises: are these stories different from the horror stories written by men?

In some ways, I think, they are.

There are some ghosts and apparitions in these stories, but there are no monsters. Monsters seem to find a more congenial habitat in the writing of male authors, who often have a richer background in pulp magazines, comic books, and science fiction.

There is violence in some of these stories, but there is nothing that goes so far as to be called truly gruesome.

One recurring theme—whether it is the cause or conse-

quence of woman's position in society at a given period—is a female character's fear of a domineering man, who may be father, husband, or lover. For years in the past—although it is happily out of favor now—magazines were filled with "wife-killer" stories written by men. The other side of the picture is represented here by three stories from earlier in the century, those by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, May Sinclair, and Ellen Glasgow. Rosemary Timperley's story brings a more contemporary view to the subject.

Also, whatever the reason, many of these stories reflect a very strong concern for the sanctity of the home and the safety of children. Shirley Jackson's story portrays a woman trying to keep her sanity amid swirling domestic horrors, while Mary Danby's story shows a deep concern for the terrifying problems of raising a handicapped child.

It is tempting to adopt the critical position that the writer, while writing, is asexual. After all, women often write from the point of view of a man, and vice versa; we do whatever is required by the stories that occur to us. Besides, a writer's concerns are not theoretical; they are technical and practical. And yet, I am convinced that some, at least, of the stories in this volume could have been written only by women.

I owe a special word of thanks here to Marie Marino. As always, my work would be less without her.

ALAN RYAN
New York City

The Renegade

by Shirley Jackson

Shirley Jackson (1919–1965) shocked and horrified the literary world when The New Yorker *published "The Lottery" in 1948. It is surely one of the best-known stories in the English language, good enough to reread, with the same fascinated horror, with which we first read it. Among her fine novels are* Hangsaman, The Bird's Nest, The Sundial, *about a group of people awaiting the end of the world in an old mansion, and* The Haunting of Hill House, *her masterpiece and one of the best explorations of the nature of fear ever written.*

Among her outstanding short stories, besides "The Lottery" itself, are "Pillar of Salt" and "The Daemon Lover," both of which are often named as examples of modern psychological terror.

"The Renegade" has a woman as its central character and a familiar domestic world as its setting. And the events in it—like those in all the best horror stories—could be taking place in the house next door.

It was eight-twenty in the morning. The twins were loitering over their cereal, and Mrs. Walpole, with one eye on the clock and the other on the kitchen window past which the school bus would come in a matter of minutes, felt the unreasonable irritation that comes with being late on a school morning, the wading-through-molasses feeling of trying to hurry children.

"You'll have to walk," she said ominously, for perhaps the third time. "The bus won't wait."

"I'm hurrying," Judy said. She regarded her full glass of milk smugly. "I'm closer to through than Jack."

Jack pushed his glass across the table and they measured meticulously, precisely. "No," he said. "Look how much more you have than me."

"It doesn't *matter,*" Mrs. Walpole said, "it doesn't *matter.* Jack, *eat* your cereal."

"She didn't have any more than me to start with," Jack said. "Did she have any more than me, Mom?"

The alarm clock had not gone off at seven as it should. Mrs. Walpole heard the sound of the shower upstairs and calculated rapidly; the coffee was slower than usual this morning, the boiled eggs a shade too soft. She had only had time to pour herself a glass of fruit juice and no time to drink it. *Someone*—Judy or Jack or Mr. Walpole—was going to be late.

"*Judy,*" Mrs. Walpole said mechanically, "*Jack.*"

Judy's hair was not accurately braided. Jack would get off without his handkerchief. Mr. Walpole would certainly be irritable.

The yellow-and-red bulk of the school bus filled the road outside the kitchen window, and Judy and Jack streaked for the door, cereal uneaten, books most likely forgotten. Mrs. Walpole followed them to the kitchen door, calling, "Jack, your milk money; come straight home at noon." She watched them climb into the school bus and then went briskly to work clearing their dishes from the table and setting a place for Mr. Walpole. She would have to have breakfast herself later, in the breathing-spell that came after nine o'clock. That meant her wash would be late getting on the line, and if it rained that afternoon, as it certainly might, nothing would be dry. Mrs. Walpole made an effort, and said, "Good morning, dear," as her husband came into the kitchen. He said, "Morning," without glancing up and Mrs. Walpole, her mind full of unfinished sentences that began, "Don't you think other people ever have any feelings or—" started patiently to set his breakfast before him. The soft-boiled eggs in their dish, the toast, the coffee. Mr. Walpole devoted himself to his paper, and Mrs. Walpole, who wanted desperately also to say, "I don't suppose you notice that I haven't had a chance to eat—" set the dishes down as softly as she could.

Everything was going smoothly, although half-an-hour late, when the telephone rang. The Walpoles were on a party line, and Mrs. Walpole usually let the phone ring

her number twice before concluding that it was really their number; this morning, before nine o'clock, with Mr. Walpole not half-through his breakfast, it was an unbearable intrusion, and Mrs. Walpole went reluctantly to answer it. "Hello," she said forbiddingly.

"Mrs. Walpole," the voice said, and Mrs. Walpole said, "Yes?" The voice—it was a woman—said, "I'm sorry to bother you, but this is—" and gave an unrecognizable name. Mrs. Walpole said, "Yes?" again. She could hear Mr. Walpole taking the coffeepot off the stove to pour himself a second cup.

"Do you have a dog? Brown-and-black hound?" the voice continued. With the word *dog* Mrs. Walpole, in the second before she answered, "Yes," comprehended the innumerable aspects of owning a dog in the country (six dollars for spaying, the rude barking late at night, the watchful security of the dark shape sleeping on the rug beside the double-decker beds in the twins' room, the inevitability of a dog in the house, as important as a stove, or a front porch, or a subscription to the local paper; more, and above any of these things, the dog herself, known among the neighbors as Lady Walpole, on an exact par with Jack Walpole or Judy Walpole; quiet, competent, exceedingly tolerant), and found in none of them a reason for such an early morning call from a voice which she realized now was as irritable as her own.

"Yes," Mrs. Walpole said shortly, "I own a dog. Why?"

"Big brown-and-black hound?"

Lady's pretty markings, her odd face. "Yes," Mrs. Walpole said, her voice a little more impatient, "yes, that is certainly my dog. Why?"

"He's been killing my chickens." The voice sounded satisfied now; Mrs. Walpole had been cornered.

For several seconds Mrs. Walpole was quiet, so that the voice said, "Hello?"

"That's perfectly ridiculous," Mrs. Walpole said.

"This morning," the voice said with relish, "your dog was chasing our chickens. We heard the chickens at about eight o'clock, and my husband went out to see what was

the matter and found two chickens dead and he saw a big brown-and-black hound down with the chickens and he took a stick and chased the dog away and then he found two more dead ones. He says," the voice went on flatly, "that it's lucky he didn't think to take his shotgun out with him because you wouldn't have any more dog. Most awful mess you ever saw," the voice said, "blood and feathers everywhere."

"What makes you think it's *my* dog?" Mrs. Walpole said weakly.

"Joe White—he's a neighbor of yours—was passing at the time and saw my husband chasing the dog. Said it was your dog."

Old man White lived in the next house but one to the Walpoles. Mrs. Walpole had always made a point of being courteous to him, inquired amiably about his health when she saw him on the porch as she passed, had regarded respectfully the pictures of his grandchildren in Albany.

"I see," Mrs. Walpole said, suddenly shifting her ground. "Well, if you're absolutely *sure*. I just can't believe it of Lady. She's so gentle."

The other voice softened, in response to Mrs. Walpole's concern. "It *is* a shame," the other woman said. "I can't tell you how sorry I am that it happened. But . . ." Her voice trailed off significantly.

"Of *course* we'll take care of the damage," Mrs. Walpole said quickly.

"No, no," the woman said, almost apologetically. "Don't even *think* about it."

"But of *course*—" Mrs. Walpole began, bewildered.

"The dog," the voice said. "You'll have to do something about the dog."

A sudden unalterable terror took hold of Mrs. Walpole. Her morning had gone badly, she had not yet had her coffee, she was faced with an evil situation she had never known before, and now the voice, its tone, its inflection, had managed to frighten Mrs. Walpole with a word like *something*.

"How?" Mrs. Walpole said finally. "I mean, what do you want me to do?"

There was a brief silence on the other end of the wire, and then the voice said briskly, "I'm sure I don't know, missus. I've always heard that there's no way to stop a chicken-killing dog. As I say, there was no damage to speak of. As a matter of fact, the chickens the dog killed are plucked and in the oven now."

Mrs. Walpole's throat tightened and she closed her eyes for a minute, but the voice went inflexibly on. "We wouldn't ask you to do anything except take care of the dog. Naturally, you understand that we can't have a dog killing our chickens?"

Realizing that she was expected to answer, Mrs. Walpole said, "Certainly."

"So . . ." the voice said.

Mrs. Walpole saw over the top of the phone that Mr. Walpole was passing her on his way to the door. He waved briefly to her and she nodded at him. He was late; she had intended to ask him to stop at the library in the city. Now she would have to call him later. Mrs. Walpole said sharply into the phone, "First of all, of course, I'll have to make sure it's my dog. If it is my dog I can promise you you'll have no more trouble."

"It's your dog all right." The voice had assumed the country flatness; if Mrs. Walpole wanted to fight, the voice implied, she had picked just the right people.

"Good-bye," Mrs. Walpole said, knowing that she was making a mistake in parting from this woman angrily; knowing that she should stay on the phone for an interminable apologetic conversation, try to beg her dog's life back from this stupid inflexible woman who cared so much for *her* stupid chickens.

Mrs. Walpole put the phone down and went out into the kitchen. She poured herself a cup of coffee and made herself some toast.

I am not going to let this bother me until after I have had my coffee, Mrs. Walpole told herself firmly. She put extra butter on her toast and tried to relax, moving her back against the chair, letting her shoulders sag. Feeling like this at nine-thirty in the morning, she thought, it's a feeling that belongs with eleven o'clock at night. The bright sun outside was not as cheerful as it might be; Mrs.

Walpole decided suddenly to put her wash off until tomorrow. They had not lived in the country town long enough for Mrs. Walpole to feel the disgrace of washing on Tuesday as mortal; they were still city folk and would probably always be city folk, people who owned a chicken-killing dog, people who washed on Tuesday, people who were not able to fend for themselves against the limited world of earth and food and weather that the country folk took so much for granted. In this situation as in all such others—the disposal of rubbish, the weather stripping, the baking of angel-food cake—Mrs. Walpole was forced to look for advice. In the country it is extremely difficult to "get a man" to do things for you, and Mr. and Mrs. Walpole had early fallen into the habit of consulting their neighbors for information which in the city would have belonged properly to the superintendent, or the janitor, or the man from the gas company. When Mrs. Walpole's glance fell on Lady's water dish under the sink, and she realized that she was indescribably depressed, she got up and put on her jacket and a scarf over her head and went next door.

Mrs. Nash, her next-door neighbor, was frying doughnuts, and she waved a fork at Mrs. Walpole at the open door and called, "Come in, can't leave the stove." Mrs. Walpole, stepping into Mrs. Nash's kitchen, was painfully aware of her own kitchen with the dirty dishes in the sink. Mrs. Nash was wearing a shockingly clean house dress and her kitchen was freshly washed; Mrs. Nash was able to fry doughnuts without making any sort of a mess.

"The men do like fresh doughnuts with their lunch," Mrs. Nash remarked without any more preamble than her nod and invitation to Mrs. Walpole. "I always try to get enough made ahead, but I never do."

"I wish I could make doughnuts," Mrs. Walpole said. Mrs. Nash waved the fork hospitably at the stack of still-warm doughnuts on the table and Mrs. Walpole helped herself to one, thinking: This will give me indigestion.

"Seems like they all get eaten by the time I finish making them," Mrs. Nash said. She surveyed the cooking

doughnuts and then, satisfied that she could look away for a minute, took one herself and began to eat it standing by the stove. "What's wrong with you?" she asked. "You look sort of peaked this morning."

"To tell you the truth," Mrs. Walpole said, "it's our dog. Someone called me this morning that she's been killing chickens."

Mrs. Nash nodded. "Up to Harrises'," she said. "I know."

Of course she'd know by now, Mrs. Walpole thought.

"You know," Mrs. Nash said, turning again to the doughnuts, "they do say there's nothing to do with a dog kills chickens. My brother had a dog once killed sheep, and I don't know *what* they didn't do to break that dog, but of course nothing would do it. Once they get the taste of blood." Mrs. Nash lifted a golden doughnut delicately out of the frying kettle, and set it down on a piece of brown paper to drain. "They get so's they'd rather kill than eat, hardly."

"But what can I *do?*" Mrs. Walpole asked. "Isn't there *anything?*"

"You can try, of course," Mrs. Nash said. "Best thing to do first is tie her up. Keep her tied, with a good stout chain. Then at least she won't go chasing no more chickens for a while, save you getting her killed *for* you."

Mrs. Walpole got up reluctantly and began to put her scarf on again. "I guess I'd better get a chain down at the store," she said.

"You going downstreet?"

"I want to do my shopping before the kids come home for lunch."

"Don't buy any store doughnuts," Mrs. Nash said. "I'll run up later with a dishful for you. You get a good stout chain for that dog."

"Thank you," Mrs. Walpole said. The bright sunlight across Mrs. Nash's kitchen doorway, the solid table bearing its plates of doughnuts, the pleasant smell of the frying, were all symbols somehow of Mrs. Nash's safety, her confidence in a way of life and a security that had no traffic with chicken-killing, no city fears, an assurance and

cleanliness so great that she was willing to bestow its overflow on the Walpoles, bring them doughnuts and overlook Mrs. Walpole's dirty kitchen. "Thank you," Mrs. Walpole said again, inadequately.

"You tell Tom Kittredge I'll be down for a pork roast later this morning," Mrs. Nash said. "Tell him to save it for me."

"I shall." Mrs. Walpole hesitated in the doorway and Mrs. Nash waved the fork at her.

"See you later," Mrs. Nash said.

Old man White was sitting on his front porch in the sun. When he saw Mrs. Walpole he grinned broadly and shouted to her, "Guess you're not going to have any more dog."

I've got to be nice to him, Mrs. Walpole thought, he's not a traitor or a bad man by country standards; anyone would tell on a chicken-killing dog; but he doesn't have to be so pleased about it, she thought, and tried to make her voice pleasant when she said, "Good morning, Mr. White."

"Gonna have her shot?" Mr. White asked. "Your man got a gun?"

"I'm so worried about it," Mrs. Walpole said. She stood on the walk below the front porch and tried not to let her hatred show in her face as she looked up at Mr. White.

"It's too bad about a dog like that," Mr. White said.

At least he doesn't blame *me*, Mrs. Walpole thought. "Is there anything I can do?" she said.

Mr. White thought. "Believe you might be able to cure a chicken-killer," he said. "You get a dead chicken and tie it around the dog's neck, so he can't shake it loose, see?"

"Around her neck?" Mrs. Walpole asked, and Mr. White nodded, grinning toothlessly.

"See, when he can't shake it loose at first he tries to play with it and then it starts to bother him, see, and then he tries to roll it off and it won't come and then he tries to bite it off and it won't come and then when he sees it won't come he thinks he's never gonna get rid of it, see, and he gets scared. And then you'll have him

coming around with his tail between his legs and this thing hanging around his neck and it gets worse and worse."

Mrs. Walpole put one hand on the porch railing to steady herself. "What do you do then?" she asked.

"Well," Mr. White said, "the way I heard it, see, the chicken gets riper and riper and the more the dog sees it and feels it and smells it, see, the more he gets to hate chicken. And he can't ever get rid of it, see?"

"But the dog," Mrs. Walpole said. "Lady, I mean. How long do we have to leave it around her neck?"

"Well," Mr. White said with enthusiasm, "I guess you leave it on until it gets ripe enough to fall off by itself. See, the head—"

"I see," Mrs. Walpole said. "Would it work?"

"Can't say," Mr. White said. "Never tried it myself." His voice said that *he* had never had a chicken-killing dog.

Mrs. Walpole left him abruptly; she could not shake the feeling that if it were not for Mr. White, Lady would not have been identified as the dog killing the chickens; she wondered briefly if Mr. White had maliciously blamed Lady because they were city folk, and then thought, No, no man around here would bear false witness against a dog.

When she entered the grocery it was almost empty; there was a man at the hardware counter and another man leaning against the meat counter talking to Mr. Kittredge, the grocer. When Mr. Kittredge saw Mrs. Walpole come in he called across the store, "Morning, Mrs. Walpole. Fine day."

"Lovely," Mrs. Walpole said, and the grocer said, "Bad luck about the dog."

"I don't know what to do about it," Mrs. Walpole said, and the man talking to the grocer looked at her reflectively, and then back at the grocer.

"Killed three chickens up to Harrises' this morning," the grocer said to the man and the man nodded solemnly and said, "Heard about that."

Mrs. Walpole came across to the meat counter and

said, "Mrs. Nash said would you save her a roast of pork. She'll be down later to get it."

"Going up that way," the man standing with the grocer said. "Drop it off."

"Right," the grocer said.

The man looked at Mrs. Walpole and said, "Gonna have to shoot him, I guess?"

"I hope not," Mrs. Walpole said earnestly. "We're all so fond of the dog."

The man and the grocer looked at one another for a minute, and then the grocer said reasonably, "Won't do to have a dog going around killing chickens, Mrs. Walpole."

"First thing you know," the man said, "someone'll put a load of buckshot into him, he won't come home no more." He and the grocer both laughed.

"Isn't there any way to cure the dog?" Mrs. Walpole asked.

"Sure," the man said. "Shoot him."

"Tie a dead chicken around his neck," the grocer suggested. "That might do it."

"Heard of a man did that," the other man said.

"Did it help?" Mrs. Walpole asked eagerly.

The man shook his head slowly and with determination.

"You know," the grocer said. He leaned his elbow on the meat counter; he was a great talker. "You know," he said again, "my father had a dog once used to eat eggs. Got into the chicken-house and used to break the eggs open and lick them up. Used to eat maybe half the eggs we got."

"That's a bad business," the other man said. "Dog eating eggs."

"Bad business," the grocer said in confirmation. Mrs. Walpole found herself nodding. "Last, my father couldn't stand it no more. Here half his eggs were getting eaten," the grocer said. "So he took an egg once, set it on the back of the stove for two, three days, till the egg got good and ripe, good and hot through, and that egg smelled pretty bad. Then—I was there, boy twelve, thirteen years old—he called the dog one day, and the dog

come running. So I held the dog, and my daddy opened the dog's mouth and put in the egg, red-hot and smelling to heaven, and then he held the dog's mouth closed so's the dog couldn't get rid of the egg anyway except swallow it." The grocer laughed and shook his head reminiscently.

"Bet that dog never ate another egg," the man said.

"Never touched another egg," the grocer said firmly. "You put an egg down in front of that dog, he'd run's though the devil was after him."

"But how did he feel about you?" Mrs. Walpole asked. "Did he ever come near *you* again?"

The grocer and the other man both looked at her. "How do you mean?" the grocer said.

"Did he ever *like* you again?"

"Well," the grocer said, and thought. "No," he said finally, "I don't believe you could say's he ever did. Not much of a dog, though."

"There's one thing you ought to try," the other man said suddenly to Mrs. Walpole, "you really want to cure that dog, there's one thing you ought to try."

"What's that?" Mrs. Walpole said.

"You want to take that dog," the man said, leaning forward and gesturing with one hand, "take him and put him in a pen with a mother hen's got chicks to protect. Time she's through with him he won't never chase another chicken."

The grocer began to laugh and Mrs. Walpole looked, bewildered, from the grocer to the other man, who was looking at her without a smile, his eyes wide and yellow, like a cat's.

"What would happen?" she asked uncertainly.

"Scratch his eyes out," the grocer said succinctly. "He wouldn't ever be able to *see* another chicken."

Mrs. Walpole realized that she felt faint. Smiling over her shoulder, in order not to seem discourteous, she moved quickly away from the meat counter and down to the other end of the store. The grocer continued talking to the man behind the meat counter and after a minute Mrs. Walpole went outside, into the air. She decided that

she would go home and lie down until nearly lunchtime, and do her shopping later in the day.

At home she found that she could not lie down until the breakfast table was cleared and the dishes washed, and by the time she had done that it was almost time to start lunch. She was standing by the pantry shelves, debating, when a dark shape crossed the sunlight in the doorway and she realized that Lady was home. For a minute she stood still, watching Lady. The dog came in quietly, harmlessly, as though she had spent the morning frolicking on the grass with her friends, but there were spots of blood on her legs and she drank her water eagerly. Mrs. Walpole's first impulse was to scold her, to hold her down and beat her for the deliberate, malicious pain she had inflicted, the murderous brutality a pretty dog like Lady could keep so well hidden in their home; then Mrs. Walpole, watching Lady go quietly and settle down in her usual spot by the stove, turned helplessly and took the first cans she found from the pantry shelves and brought them to the kitchen table.

Lady sat quietly by the stove until the children came in noisily for lunch, and then she leaped up and jumped on them, welcoming them as though they were the aliens and she the native to the house. Judy, pulling Lady's ears, said, "Hello, Mom, do you know what Lady did? You're a bad bad dog," she said to Lady, "you're going to get shot."

Mrs. Walpole felt faint again and set a dish down hastily on the table. "Judy Walpole," she said.

"She *is*, Mom," Judy said. "She's going to get shot."

Children don't realize, Mrs. Walpole told herself, death is never real to them. Try to be sensible, she told herself. "Sit down to lunch, children," she said quietly.

"But, *Mother*," Judy said, and Jack said, "She *is*, Mom."

They sat down noisily, unfolding their napkins and attacking their food without looking at it, eager to talk.

"You *know* what Mr. Shepherd said, Mom?" Jack demanded, his mouth full.

"Listen," Judy said, "we'll tell you what he said."

Mr. Shepherd was a genial man who lived near the

Walpoles and gave the children nickels and took the boys fishing. "He says Lady's going to get shot," Jack said.

"But the spikes," Judy said. "Tell about the spikes."

"The *spikes,*" Jack said. "Listen, Mommy. He says you got to get a collar for Lady."

"A strong collar," Judy said.

"And you get big thick nails, like spikes, and you hammer them into the collar."

"All around," Judy said. "Let *me* tell it, Jack. You hammer these nails all around so's they make spikes inside the collar."

"But it's loose," Jack said. "Let *me* tell this part. It's loose and you put it around Lady's neck."

"And—" Judy put her hand on her throat and made a strangling noise.

"Not *yet,*" Jack said. "Not *yet,* dopey. First you get a long long long long rope."

"A *real* long rope," Judy amplified.

"And you fasten it to the collar and then we put the collar on Lady," Jack said. Lady was sitting next to him and he leaned over and said, "Then we put this real sharp spiky collar around your neck," and kissed the top of her head while Lady regarded him affectionately.

"And then we take her where there are chickens," Judy said, "and we show her the chickens, and we turn her loose."

"And make her chase the chickens," Jack said. "And *then,* and then, when she gets right up close to the chickens, we puuuuuuull on the rope—"

"And—" Judy made her strangling noise again.

"The spikes cut her head off," Jack finished dramatically.

They both began to laugh and Lady, looking from one to the other, panted as though she were laughing too.

Mrs. Walpole looked at them, at her two children with their hard hands and their sunburned faces laughing together, their dog with blood still on her legs laughing with them. She went to the kitchen doorway to look outside at the cool green hills, the motion of the apple tree in the soft afternoon breeze.

"Cut your head right off," Jack was saying.

Everything was quiet and lovely in the sunlight, the peaceful sky, the gentle line of the hills. Mrs. Walpole closed her eyes, suddenly feeling the harsh hands pulling her down, the sharp points closing in on her throat.

The Villa Désirée

by May Sinclair

British novelist May Sinclair (1865–1946) was active in feminist and social service causes and was a firm believer in the reality of spiritualism. She is best known as the author of Divine Fire *(1904).*

Her ghost stories were collected in two volumes, Uncanny Stories *(1923) and* The Intercessor *(1931). Her interest in spiritualism is often reflected in her fiction.*

"The Villa Désirée" was first published in a landmark anthology of new horror tales, The Ghost Book, *edited by Lady Cynthia Asquith and published in 1926. The volume included tales by Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, L. P. Hartley, Hugh Walpole, Walter de la Mare, Enid Bagnold, Oliver Onions, Mary Webb, and D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking Horse Winner." "The Villa Désirée" was the lead story in the book.*

The author's interest in spiritualism offers one explanation of "The Villa Désirée," and its suggestive title makes it possible to see it as a story about sexual fear. Certainly it is one of the great ghost stories.

I

He had arranged it all for her. She was to stay a week in Cannes with her aunt, and then to go on to Roquebrune by herself, and he was to follow her there. She, Mildred Eve, supposed he could follow her anywhere, since they were engaged now.

There had been difficulties, but Louis Carson had got over all of them by lending her the Villa Désirée. She would be all right there, he said. The caretakers, Narcisse and Armandine, would look after her; Armandine was an excellent cook; and she wouldn't be five hundred yards from her friends, the Derings. It was so like him to think of it, to plan it all out for her. And when he came down?

Oh, when he came down he would go to the Cap Martin Hotel, of course.

He understood everything without any tiresome explaining. She couldn't afford the hotels at Cap Martin and Monte Carlo; and though the Derings had asked her to stay with them, she really couldn't dump herself down on them like that, almost in the middle of their honeymoon.

Their honeymoon—she could have bitten her tongue out for saying it, for not remembering. It was awful of her to go talking to Louis Carson about honeymoons, after the appalling tragedy of *his*.

There were things she hadn't been told, that she hadn't liked to ask: Where it had happened. And how. And how long ago. She only knew it was on his wedding night, that he had gone in to the poor little girl of a bride and found her dead there, in the bed.

They said she had died in a sort of a fit.

You had only to look at him to see that something terrible had happened to him some time. You saw it when his face was doing nothing: a dark, agonised look that made it strange to her while it lasted. It was more than suffering; it was almost as if he could be cruel, only he never was, he never could be. *People* were cruel, if you liked; they said it put them off. Mildred could see what they meant. It might have put *her* off, perhaps, if she hadn't known what he had gone through. But the first time she had met him he had been pointed out to her as the man to whom just that appalling thing had happened. So far from putting her off that was what had drawn her to him from the beginning, made her pity him first, then love him. Their engagement had come quick, in the third week of their acquaintance.

When she asked herself, "After all, what do I know about him," she had her answer, "I know that." She felt that already she had entered into a mystical union with him through compassion. She *liked* the strangeness that kept other people away and left him to her altogether. He was more her own that way.

There was (Mildred Eve didn't deny it) his personal magic, the fascination of his almost abnormal beauty. His

black, white and blue. The intensely blue eyes under the straight black bars of the eyebrows, the perfect, pure, white face suddenly masked by the black moustache and small, black, pointed beard. And the rich, vivid smile he had for her, the lighting up of the blue, the flash of white teeth in the black mask.

He had smiled then at her embarrassment as the awful words leaped out at him. He had taken it from her and turned the sharp edge of it.

"It would never do," he had said, "to spoil the *honeymoon.* You'd much better have my villa. Some day, quite soon, it'll be yours, too. You know I like anticipating things."

That was always the excuse he made for his generosities. He had said it again when he engaged her seat in the *train de luxe* from Paris and wouldn't let her pay for it. (She had wanted to travel third class.) He was only anticipating, he said.

He was seeing her off now at the big Gare d'Lyons, standing on the platform with a great sheaf of blush roses in his arms. She, on the high step of the railway carriage, stood above him, swaying in the open doorway. His face was on a level with her feet; they gleamed white through the fine black stockings. Suddenly he thrust his face forwards and kissed her feet. As the train moved he ran beside it and tossed the roses into her lap.

And she sat in the hurrying train, holding the great sheaf of blush roses in her lap, and smiling at them as she dreamed. She was in the Riviera Express; the Riviera Express. Next week she would be in Roquebrune, at the Villa Désirée. She read the three letters woven into the edges of the grey cloth cushions: P.L.M.: Paris-Lyons-Mediterranée—Paris-Lyons-Mediterranée, over and over again. They sang themselves to the rhythm of the wheels; they wove their pattern into her dream. Every now and then, when the other passengers weren't looking, she lifted the roses to her face and kissed them.

She hardly knew how she dragged herself through the long dull week with her aunt at Cannes.

And now it was over and she was by herself at Roquebrune.

The steep narrow lane went past the Derings' house and up the face of the hill. It led up into a little olive wood, and above the wood she saw the garden terraces. The sunlight beat in and out of their golden yellow walls. Tier above tier, the blazing terraces rose, holding up their rows of spindle-stemmed lemon and orange trees. On the topmost terrace the Villa Désirée stood white and hushed between two palms, two tall poles each topped by a head of dark green curving, sharp-pointed blades. A grey scrub of olive-trees straggled up the hill behind it and on each side.

Rolf and Martha Dering waited for her with Narcisse and Armandine on the steps of the verandah.

"Why on earth didn't you come to us?" they said.

"I didn't want to spoil your honeymoon."

"Honeymoon, what rot! We've got over that silliness. Anyhow, it's our third week of it." They were detached and cool in their happiness.

She went in with them, led by Narcisse and Armandine. The caretakers, subservient to Mildred Eve and visibly inimical to the Derings, left them together in the *salon.* It was very bright and French and fragile and worn; all faded grey and old, greenish gilt; the gilt chairs and settees carved like picture frames round the gilded cane. The hot light beat in through the long windows open to the terrace, drawing up a faint powdery smell from the old floor.

Rolf Dering stared at the room, sniffing, with fine nostrils in a sort of bleak disgust.

"You'd much better have come to us," he said.

"Oh, but, it's charming."

"Do you *think* so?" Martha said. She was looking at her intently.

Mildred saw that they expected her to feel something, she wasn't sure what, something that they felt. They were subtle and fastidious.

"It does look a little queer and—unlived in," she said, straining for the precise impression.

"I should say," said Martha, "it had been too much lived in, if you ask me."

"Oh, no. That's only dust you smell. I think, perhaps, the windows haven't been open very long."

She resented this criticism of Louis' villa.

Armandine appeared at the doorway. Her little slant, Chinesy eyes were screwed up and smiling. She wanted to know if Madame wouldn't like to go up and look at her room.

"We'll all go up and look at it," said Rolf.

They followed Armandine up the steep, slender, curling staircase. A closed door faced them on the landing. Armandine opened it and the hot golden light streamed out to them again.

The room was all golden white; it was like a great white tank filled with water where things shimmered, submerged in the stream; the white painted chairs and dressing-table, the high white painted bed, the pink and white striped ottoman at its foot; all vivid and still, yet quivering in the stillness, with the hot throb, throb, of the light.

"*Voilà,* Madame," said Armandine.

They didn't answer. They stood, fixed in the room, held by the stillness, staring, all three of them, at the high white bed that rose up, enormous, with its piled mattresses and pillows, the long white counterpane hanging straight and steep, like a curtain, to the floor.

Rolf turned to Armandine.

"Why have you given Madame this room?"

Armandine shrugged her fat shoulders. Her small, Chinesy eyes blinked at him, slanting, inimical.

"Monsieur's orders, Monsieur. It is the best room in the house. It was Madame's room."

"I know. That's *why*—"

"But no, Monsieur. Nobody would dislike to sleep in Madame's room. The poor little thing, she was so pretty, so sweet, so young, Monsieur. Surely Madame will not dislike the room."

"Who *was*—Madame?"

"But, Monsieur's wife, Madame, Madame Carson. Poor Monsieur, it was so sad—"

"Rolf," said Mildred, "did he bring her here—on their honeymoon?"

"Yes."

"Yes, Madame. She died here. It was so sad—. Is there anything I can do for Madame?"

"No, thank you, Armandine."

"Then I will get ready the tea."

She turned again in the doorway, crooning in her thick, Provençal voice. "*Madame* does not dislike her room?"

"No, Armandine. No. It's a beautiful room."

The door closed on Armandine. Martha opened it again to see whether she were listening on the landing. Then she broke out.

"Mildred—you know you loathe it. It's beastly. The whole place is beastly."

"You can't stay in it," said Rolf.

"Why not? Do you mean, because of Madame?"

Martha and Rolf were looking at each other, as if they were both asking what they should say. They said nothing.

"Oh, her poor little ghost won't hurt me, if that's what you mean."

"Nonsense," Martha said. "Of course it isn't."

"What is it, then?"

"It's so beastly lonely, Mildred," said Rolf.

"Not with Narcisse and Armandine."

"Well, I wouldn't sleep a night in the place," Martha said, "if there wasn't any other on the Riviera. I don't like the look of it."

Mildred went to the open lattice, turning her back on the high, rather frightening bed. Down there, below the terraces, she saw the grey flicker of the olive woods and, beyond them, the sea. Martha was wrong. The place was beautiful; it was adorable. She wasn't going to be afraid of poor little Madame. Louis had loved her. He loved the place. That was why he had lent it her.

She turned. Rolf had gone down again. She was alone with Martha. Martha was saying something.

"Mildred—where's Mr. Carson?"

"In Paris. Why?"

"I thought he was coming here."

"So he is, later on."

"To the villa?"

"No. Of course not. To Cap Martin." She laughed. "So *that's* what you've been thinking of, is it?"

She could understand her friend's fear of haunted houses, but not these previsions of impropriety.

Martha looked shy and ashamed.

"Yes," she said. "I suppose so."

"How horrid of you. You might have trusted me."

"I do trust you." Martha held her a moment with her clear, loving eyes. "Are you sure you can trust *him?*"

"Trust him? Do *you* trust Rolf?"

"Ah—if it was like that, Mildred—"

"It *is* like that."

"You're really not afraid?"

"What is there to be afraid of? Poor little Madame?"

"I didn't mean Madame. I meant Monsieur."

"Oh—wait till you've seen him."

"Is he *very* beautiful?"

"Yes. But it isn't *that,* Martha. I can't tell you what it is."

They went downstairs, hand in hand, in the streaming light. Rolf waited for them on the verandah. They were taking Mildred back to dine with them.

"Won't you let me tell Armandine you're stopping the night?" he said.

"No, I won't. I don't want Armandine to think I'm frightened."

She meant she didn't want Louis to think she was frightened. Besides, she was not frightened.

"Well, if you find you don't like it, you must come to us," he said.

And they showed her the little spare room next to theirs, with its camp-bed made up, the bed-clothes turned back, all ready for her, any time of the night, in case she changed her mind. The front door was on the latch.

"You've only to open it and creep in here and be safe," Rolf said.

II

Armandine—subservient and no longer inimical, now that the Derings were not there—Armandine had put the

candle and matches on the night-table and the bell which, she said, would summon her if Madame wanted anything in the night. And she had left her.

As the door closed softly behind Armandine, Mildred drew in her breath with a light gasp. Her face in the looking-glass, between the tall light candles, showed its mouth half open, and she was aware that her heart shook slightly in its beating. She was angry with the face in the glass with its foolish mouth gaping. She said to herself, Is it possible I'm frightened? It was not possible. Rolf and Martha had made her walk too fast up the hill, that was all. Her heart always did that when she walked too fast up hill, and she supposed that her mouth always gaped when it did it.

She clenched her teeth and let her heart choke her till it stopped shaking.

She was quiet now. But the test would come when she had blown out the candles and had to cross the room in the dark to the bed.

The flame bent backwards before the light puff she gave, and righted itself. She blew harder, twice, with a sense of spinning out the time. The flame writhed and went out. She extinguished the other candle at one breath. The red point of the wick pricked the darkness for a second and died. At the far end of the room the high bed glimmered.

She could feel her mouth set in a hard grin of defiance as she went to it, slowly, too proud to be frightened. And then suddenly, half way, she thought about Madame.

The awful thing was climbing into that high funereal bed that Madame had died in. Your back felt so undefended. But once she was safe between the bed-clothes it would be all right. It would be all right so long as she didn't think about Madame. Very well, then, she wouldn't think about her. You could frighten yourself into anything by thinking.

Deliberately, by an intense effort of her will, she turned the sad image of Madame out of her mind and found herself thinking about Louis Carson.

This was Louis' house, the place he used to come to when he wanted to be happy. She made out that he had

sent her there because he wanted to be happy in it again. She was there to drive away the unhappiness, the memory of poor little Madame. Or, perhaps, because the place was sacred to him; because they were both so sacred, she and the young dead bride who hadn't been his wife. Perhaps he didn't think about her as dead at all; he didn't want her to be driven away. He had the faithfulness for which death doesn't exist. She wouldn't have loved him if he hadn't been faithful. You could be faithful and yet marry again.

She was convinced that whatever she was there for, it was for some beautiful reason. Anything that Louis did, anything he thought or felt or wanted, would be beautiful. She thought of Louis standing on the platform in the Paris station, his beautiful face looking up at her; its sudden darting forward to kiss her feet. She drifted again into her happy, hypnotising dream and was fast asleep before midnight.

She woke with a sense of intolerable compulsion, as if she were being dragged violently up out of her sleep. The room was grey in the twilight of the unrisen moon.

And she was not alone.

She knew that there was something there. Something frightful and obscene. The greyness was frightful and obscene. It shut her in; it was the enclosing shell of the horror.

The thing that had waked her was there with her in the room.

For she knew she was awake. Apart from her supernatural certainty, one physical sense, detached from the horror, was alert. It heard the ticking of the clock on the chimney-piece, the hard, sharp shirring of the palm-leaves outside, as the wind rubbed their knife-blades together. These sounds were witnesses to the dreadful fact that she was awake, and that whatever was going to happen now was real. At the first sight of the greyness she had shut her eyes again, afraid to look into the room, because she was certain that what she would see there was real. But she had no more power over her eyelids than she had had over her sleep. They opened under the same intolerable

compulsion. And the supernatural thing forced itself now on her sight.

It stood a little in front of her by the bedside. From the breasts downwards its body was unfinished, rudimentary, not quite born. The grey shell was still pregnant with its loathsome shapelessness. But the face—the face was perfect in absolute horror. And it was Louis Carson's face.

Between the black bars of the eyebrows and the black pointed beard she saw it, drawn back, distorted in an obscene agony, corrupt and malignant. The face and the body, flesh and yet not flesh, they were the essence made manifest of untold, unearthly abominations.

It came on to her, bending over her, peering at her, so close that the piled mattresses now hid the lower half of its body. And the frightful thing about it was that it was blind, parted from all controlling and absolving clarity, flesh and yet not flesh. It looked for her without seeing her; and she knew that unless she could save herself that instant it would find what it looked for. Even now, behind the barrier of the piled-up mattresses, the unfinished form defined and completed itself; it shook with the agitation of its birth.

Her heart staggered and stopped in her breast. Her breast was clamped down on to her backbone. She struggled to keep alive and conscious. If she were to die or faint that appalling presence there would have its way with her. All her will surged up against it. She dragged herself straight up in the bed suddenly and spoke to it.

"Louis! What are you doing there?"

At her cry it went, without moving; sucked, back into the greyness that had borne it.

She thought: "It'll come back. Even if I don't see it I shall know it's in the room."

She knew what she would do. She would get up and go to the Derings. She longed for the open air, for Rolf and Martha, for the strong earth under her feet.

She lit the candle on the night-table and got up. She still felt that It was there and that standing up on the floor she was more vulnerable, more exposed to it. Her terror was too extreme for her to stay and dress herself. She

thrust her bare feet into her shoes, slipped her travelling coat over her nightgown and went downstairs and out through the house door, sliding back the bolts without a sound. She remembered that Rolf had left a lantern for her in the verandah, in case she should want it—as if they had known.

She lit the lantern and made her way down the villa garden, stumbling from terrace to terrace, through the olive wood and the steep lane to the Derings' house. Far down the hill she could see a light in the window of the spare room. The house door was on the latch. She went through and on into the lamp-lit room that waited for her.

She knew again what she would do. She would go away before Louis Carson could come to her. She would go away to-morrow. Rolf and Martha would bring her things down from the villa; he would take her away into Italy in his car. She would get away from Louis Carson for ever. She would get away up through Italy.

III

Rolf had come back from the villa with her things. He had brought her a letter. It had been sent up that morning from Cap Martin.

It was from Louis Carson.

"My darling Mildred:

You see I couldn't wait a fortnight without seeing you. I *had* to come. I'm here at the Cap Martin Hotel.

"I'll be with you some time between half-past ten and eleven—"

Below, at the bottom of the lane, Rolf's car waited. It was half-past ten. If they went now they would meet Carson coming up the lane. They must wait till he had passed the house and gone up through the olive wood.

Martha had brought hot coffee and rolls. They sat down at the other side of the table and looked at her with kind, anxious eyes as she turned sideways, watching the lane.

"Rolf," she said suddenly, "do you know anything about Louis Carson?"

She could see them looking at each other.

"Nothing. Only the things the people here say."

"What sort of things?"

"Don't tell her, Rolf."

"Yes. He *must* tell me. I've got to know."

She had no feeling left but horror, horror that nothing could intensify.

"There's not much. Except that he was always having women with him up there. Not particularly nice women. He seems," Rolf said, "to have been rather an appalling beast."

"Must have been," said Martha, "to have brought his poor little wife there, after—"

"Rolf, what did Mrs. Carson die of?"

"Don't ask *me*," he said.

But Martha answered. "She died of fright. She saw something. I told you the place was beastly."

Rolf shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, you said you felt it yourself. We both felt it."

"Because we knew about the beastly things he did there."

"She didn't know. I tell you, she saw something."

Mildred turned her white face to them.

"I saw it too."

"You?"

"What? What did you see?"

"Him. Louis Carson."

"He must be dead, then, if you saw his ghost."

"The ghosts of poor dead people don't kill you. It was what he *is*. All that beastliness in a face. A face."

She could hear them draw in their breath short and sharp. "Where?"

"There. In that room. Close by the bed. Looking for me. I saw what *she* saw."

She could see them frown now, incredulous, forcing themselves to disbelieve. She could hear them talking, their voices beating off the horror.

"Oh, but she couldn't. He wasn't there."

"He heard her scream first."

"Yes. He was in the other room, you know."

"*It* wasn't. He can't keep it back."

"Keep it back?"

"No. He was waiting to go to her."

Her voice was dull and heavy with realisation. She felt herself struggling, helpless, against their stolidity, their unbelief.

"Look at that," she said. She pushed Carson's letter across to them.

"He was waiting to go to her," she repeated. "And—last night—he was waiting to come to me."

They stared at her, stupefied.

"Oh, can't you *see?*" she cried. "It didn't wait. It got there before him."

The House of the Famous Poet

by Muriel Spark

Muriel Spark was born in Edinburgh and lived for some years in Central Africa. During World War II, she returned to Great Britain and worked in the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office. Since her first novel, The Comforters, *was published in 1957, she has enjoyed international recognition for her spare and brilliant examinations of modern life, including* Memento Mori *(1959),* The Ballad of Peckham Rye *(1960),* The Bachelors *(1960),* The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie *(1961), which was made into a widely popular play and film,* The Abbess of Crewe *(1974),* Territorial Rights *(1979), and* Loitering With Intent *(1981). Her short stories have been collected in* The Go-Away Bird *(1958) and* Bang-Bang You're Dead *(1982).*

"The House of the Famous Poet" is a fine example of Spark's seemingly casual and transparent style, but it is not at all a casual story. Set in the Swiss Cottage section of north London during the Blitz, it deals in part with war, but its real subject is a darkness more universal than war, and longer-lasting.

In the summer of 1944, when it was nothing for trains from the provinces to be five or six hours late, I travelled to London on the night train from Edinburgh, which, at York, was already three hours late. There were ten people in the compartment, only two of whom I remember well, and for good reason.

I have the impression, looking back on it, of a row of people opposite me, dozing untidily with heads askew, and, as it often seems when we look at sleeping strangers, their features had assumed extra emphasis and individu-

ality, sometimes disturbing to watch. It was as if they had rendered up their daytime talent for obliterating the outward traces of themselves in exchange for mental obliteration. In this way they resembled a twelfth-century fresco; there was a look of medieval unselfconsciousness about these people, all except one.

This was a private soldier who was awake to a greater degree than most people are when they are not sleeping. He was smoking cigarettes one after the other with long, calm puffs. I thought he looked excessively evil—an atavistic type. His forehead must have been less than two inches high above dark, thick eyebrows, which met. His jaw was not large, but it was apelike; so was his small nose and so were his deep, close-set eyes. I thought there must have been some consanguinity in the parents. He was quite a throwback.

As it turned out, he was extremely gentle and kind. When I ran out of cigarettes, he fished about in his haversack and produced a packet for me and one for a girl sitting next to me. We both tried, with a flutter of small change, to pay him. Nothing would please him at all but that we should accept his cigarettes, whereupon he returned to his silent, reflective smoking.

I felt a sort of pity for him then, rather as we feel towards animals we know to be harmless, such as monkeys. But I realized that, like the pity we expend on monkeys merely because they are not human beings, this pity was not needed.

Receiving the cigarettes gave the girl and myself common ground, and we conversed quietly for the rest of the journey. She told me she had a job in London as a domestic helper and nursemaid. She looked as if she had come from a country district—her very blonde hair, red face and large bones gave the impression of power, as if she was used to carrying heavy things, perhaps great scuttles of coal, or two children at a time. But what made me curious about her was her voice, which was cultivated, melodious and restrained.

Towards the end of the journey, when the people were beginning to jerk themselves straight and the rushing to and fro in the corridor had started, this girl, Elise, asked

me to come with her to the house where she worked. The master, who was something in a university, was away with his wife and family.

I agreed to this, because at that time I was in the way of thinking that the discovery of an educated servant girl was valuable and something to be gone deeper into. It had the element of experience—perhaps, even of truth—and I believed, in those days, that truth is stranger than fiction. Besides, I wanted to spend that Sunday in London. I was due back next day at my job in a branch of the civil service, which had been evacuated to the country and for a reason that is another story, I didn't want to return too soon. I had some telephoning to do. I wanted to wash and change. I wanted to know more about the girl. So I thanked Elise and accepted her invitation.

I regretted it as soon as we got out of the train at King's Cross, some minutes after ten. Standing up tall on the platform, Elise looked unbearably tired, as if not only the last night's journey but every fragment of her unknown life was suddenly heaping up on top of her. The power I had noticed in the train was no longer there. As she called, in her beautiful voice, for a porter, I saw that on the side of her head that had been away from me in the train, her hair was parted in a dark streak, which, by contrast with the yellow, looked navy blue. I had thought, when I first saw her, that possibly her hair was bleached, but now, seeing it so badly done, seeing this navy blue parting pointing like an arrow to the weighted weariness of her face, I, too, got the sensation of great tiredness. And it was not only the strain of the journey that I felt, but the foreknowledge of boredom that comes upon us unaccountably at the beginning of a quest, and that checks, perhaps mercifully, our curiosity.

And, as it happened, there really wasn't much to learn about Elise. The explanation of her that I had been prompted to seek, I got in the taxi between King's Cross and the house at Swiss Cottage. She came of a good family, who thought her a pity, and she them. Having no training for anything else, she had taken a domestic job on leaving home. She was engaged to an Australian soldier billeted also at Swiss Cottage.

Perhaps it was the anticipation of a day's boredom, maybe it was the effect of no sleep or the fact that the V-1 sirens were sounding, but I felt some sourness when I saw the house. The garden was growing all over the place. Elise opened the front door, and we entered a darkish room almost wholly taken up with a long, plain wooden work-table. On this, were a half-empty marmalade jar, a pile of papers, and a dried-up ink bottle. There was a steel-canopied bed, known as a Morrison shelter, in one corner and some photographs on the mantelpiece, one of a schoolboy wearing glasses. Everything was tainted with Elise's weariness and my own distaste. But Elise didn't seem to be aware of the exhaustion so plainly revealed on her face. She did not even bother to take her coat off, and as it was too tight for her I wondered how she could move about so quickly with this restriction added to the weight of her tiredness. But, with her coat still buttoned tight, Elise phoned her boy-friend and made breakfast, while I washed in a dim, blue, cracked bathroom upstairs.

When I found that she had opened my hold-all without asking me and had taken out my rations, I was a little pleased. It seemed a friendly action, with some measure of reality about it, and I felt better. But I was still irritated by the house. I felt there was no justification for the positive lack of consequence which was lying about here and there. I asked no questions about the owner who was something in a university, for fear of getting the answer I expected—that he was away visiting his grandchildren, at some family gathering in the home counties. The owners of the house had no reality for me, and I looked upon the place as belonging to, and permeated with, Elise.

I went with her to a nearby public house, where she met her boy-friend and one or two other Australian soldiers. They had with them a thin Cockney girl with bad teeth. Elise was very happy, and insisted in her lovely voice that they should all come along to a party at the house that evening. In a fine aristocratic tone, she demanded that each should bring a bottle of beer.

During the afternoon Elise said she was going to have

a bath, and she showed me a room where I could use the telephone and sleep if I wanted. This was a large, light room with several windows, much more orderly than the rest of the house, and lined with books. There was only one unusual thing about it: beside one of the windows was a bed, but this bed was only a fairly thick mattress made up neatly on the floor. It was obviously a bed on the floor with some purpose, and again I was angered to think of the futile crankiness of the elderly professor who had thought of it.

I did my telephoning, and decided to rest. But first I wanted to find something to read. The books puzzled me. None of them seemed to be automatically part of a scholar's library. An inscription in one book was signed by the author, a well-known novelist. I found another inscribed copy, and this had the name of the recipient. On a sudden idea, I went to the desk, where while I had been telephoning I had noticed a pile of unopened letters. For the first time, I looked at the name of the owner of the house.

I ran to the bathroom and shouted through the door to Elise, "Is this house of the famous poet?"

"Yes," she called. "I *told* you."

She had told me nothing of the kind. I felt I had no right at all to be there, for it wasn't, now, the house of Elise acting by proxy for some unknown couple. It was the house of a famous modern poet. The thought that at any moment he and his family might walk in and find me there terrified me. I insisted that Elise should open the bathroom door and tell me to my face that there was no possible chance of their returning for many days to come.

Then I began to think about the house itself, which Elise was no longer accountable for. Its new definition, as the house of a poet whose work I knew well, many of whose poems I knew by heart, gave it altogether a new appearance.

To confirm this, I went outside and stood exactly where I had been when I first saw the garden from the door of the taxi. I wanted to get my first impression for a second time.

And this time I saw an absolute purpose in the overgrown garden, which, since then, I have come to believe existed in the eye of the beholder. But, at the time, the room we had first entered, and which had riled me, now began to give back a meaning, and whatever was, was right. The caked-up bottle of ink, which Elise had put on the mantelpiece, I replaced on the table to make sure. I saw a photograph I hadn't noticed before, and I recognized the famous poet.

It was the same with the upstairs room where Elise had put me, and I handled the books again, not so much with the sense that they belonged to the famous poet but with some curiosity about how they had been made. The sort of question that occurred to me was where the paper had come from and from what sort of vegetation was manufactured the black print, and these things have not troubled me since.

The Australians and the Cockney girl came around about seven. I had planned to catch an eight-thirty train to the country, but when I telephoned to confirm the time I found there were no Sunday trains running. Elise, in her friendly and exhausted way, begged me to stay without attempting to be too serious about it. The sirens were starting up again. I asked Elise once more to repeat that the poet and his family could by no means return that night. But I asked this question more abstractedly than before, as I was thinking of the sirens and of the exact proportions of the noise they made. I wondered, as well, what sinister genius of the Home Office could have invented so ominous a wail, and why. And I was thinking of the word *siren.* The sound then became comical, for I imagined some maniac sea nymph from centuries past belching into the year 1944. Actually, the sirens frightened me.

Most of all, I wondered about Elise's party. Everyone roamed about the place as if it were nobody's house in particular, with Elise the best-behaved of the lot. The Cockney girl sat on the long table and gave of her best to the skies every time a bomb exploded. I had the feeling that the house had been requisitioned for an evening by the military. It was so hugely and everywhere occupied

that it became not the house I had first entered, nor the house of the famous poet, but a third house—the one I had vaguely prefigured when I stood, bored, on the platform at King's Cross station. I saw a great amount of tiredness among these people, and heard, from the loud noise they made, that they were all lacking sleep. When the beer was finished and they were gone, some to their billets, some to pubs, and the Cockney girl to her Underground shelter where she had slept for weeks past, I asked Elise, "Don't you feel tired?"

"No," she said with agonizing weariness, "I never feel tired."

I fell asleep myself, as soon as I had got into the bed on the floor in the upstairs room, and overslept until Elise woke me at eight. I had wanted to get up early to catch a nine o'clock train, so I hadn't much time to speak to her. I did notice, though, that she had lost some of her tired look.

I was pushing my things into my hold-all while Elise went up the street to catch a taxi when I heard someone coming upstairs. I thought it was Elise come back, and I looked out of the open door. I saw a man in uniform carrying an enormous parcel in both hands. He looked down as he climbed, and had a cigarette in his mouth.

"Do you want Elise?" I called, thinking it was one of her friends.

He looked up, and I recognized the soldier, the throwback, who had given us cigarettes in the train.

"Well, anyone will do," he said. "The thing is, I've got to get back to camp and I'm stuck for the fare—eight and six."

I told him I could manage it, and was finding the money when he said, putting his parcel on the floor, "I don't want to borrow it. I wouldn't think of borrowing it. I've got something for sale."

"What's that?" I said.

"A funeral," said the soldier. "I've got it here."

This alarmed me, and I went to the window. No hearse, no coffin stood below. I saw only the avenue of trees.

The soldier smiled. "It's an abstract funeral," he explained, opening the parcel.

He took it out and I examined it carefully, greatly comforted. It was very much the sort of thing I had wanted—rather more purple in parts than I would have liked, for I was not in favour of this colour of mourning. Still, I thought I could tone it down a bit.

Delighted with the bargain, I handed over the eight shillings and sixpence. There was a great deal of this abstract funeral. Hastily, I packed some of it into the hold-all. Some I stuffed in my pockets, and there was still some left over. Elise had returned with a cab and I hadn't much time. So I ran for it, out of the door and out of the gate of the house of the famous poet, with the rest of my funeral trailing behind me.

You will complain that I am withholding evidence. Indeed, you may wonder if there is any evidence at all. "An abstract funeral," you will say, "is neither here nor there. It is only a notion. You cannot pack a notion into your bag. You cannot see the colour of a notion."

You will insinuate that what I have just told you is pure fiction.

Hear me to the end.

I caught the train. Imagine my surprise when I found, sitting opposite me, my friend the soldier, of whose existence you are so skeptical.

"As a matter of interest," I said, "how would you describe all this funeral you sold me?"

"Describe it?" he said. "Nobody describes an abstract funeral. You just conceive it."

"There is much in what you say," I replied. "Still, describe it I must, because it is not every day one comes by an abstract funeral."

"I am glad you appreciate that," said the soldier.

"And after the war," I continued, "when I am no longer a civil servant, I hope, in a few deftly turned phrases, to write of my experiences at the house of the famous poet, which culminated like this. But of course," I added, "I will need to say what it looks like."

The soldier did not reply.

"If it were an okapi or a sea-cow," I said, "I would have to say what it looked like. No one would believe me otherwise."

"Do you want your money back?" asked the soldier. "Because if so, you can't have it. I spent it on my ticket."

"Don't misunderstand me," I hastened to say. "The funeral is a delightful abstraction. Only, I wish to put it down in writing."

I felt great pity for the soldier on seeing his worried look. The apelike head seemed the saddest thing in the world.

"I make them by hand," he said, "these abstract funerals."

The siren sounded somewhere, far away.

"Elise bought one of them last month. She hadn't any complaints. I change at the next stop," he said, getting down his kit from the rack. "And what's more," he said, "your famous poet bought one."

"Oh, did he?" I said.

"Yes," he said. "No complaints. It was just what he wanted—the idea of a funeral."

The train pulled up. The soldier leaped down and waved. As the train started again, I unpacked my abstract funeral and looked at it for a few moments.

"To hell with the idea," I said. "It's a real funeral I want."

"All in good time," said a voice from the corridor.

"*You* again," I said. It was the soldier.

"No," he said, "I got off at the last station. I'm only a notion of myself."

"Look here," I said, "would you be offended if I throw all this away?"

"Of course not," said the soldier. "You can't offend a notion."

"I want a real funeral," I explained. "One of my own."

"That's right," said the soldier.

"And then I'll be able to write about it and go into all the details," I said.

"Your own funeral?" he said. "You want to write it up?"

"Yes," I said.

"But," said he, "you're only human. Nobody reports on their own funeral. It's got to be abstract."

"You see my predicament?" I said.

"I see it," he replied. "I get off at this stop."

This notion of a soldier alighted. Once more the train put on speed. Out of the window I chucked all my eight and sixpence worth of abstract funeral. I watched it fluttering over the fields and around the tops of camouflaged factories with the sun glittering richly upon it, until it was out of sight.

In the summer of 1944 a great many people were harshly and suddenly killed. The papers reported, in due course, those whose names were known to the public. One of these, the famous poet, had returned unexpectedly to his home at Swiss Cottage a few moments before it was hit by a flying bomb. Fortunately, he had left his wife and children in the country.

When I got to the place where my job was, I had some time to spare before going on duty. I decided to ring Elise and thank her properly, as I had left in such a hurry. But the lines were out of order, and the operator could not find words enough to express her annoyance with me. Behind this overworked, quarrelsome voice from the exchange I heard the high, long hoot which means that the telephone at the other end is not functioning, and the sound made me infinitely depressed and weary; it was more intolerable to me than the sirens, and I replaced the receiver; and, in fact, Elise had already perished under the house of the famous poet.

The blue cracked bathroom, the bed on the floor, the caked ink bottle, the neglected garden, and the neat rows of books—I try to gather them together in my mind whenever I am enraged by the thought that Elise and the poet were killed outright. The angels of the Resurrection will invoke the dead man and the dead woman, but who will care to restore the fallen house of the famous poet if not myself? Who else will tell its story?

When I reflect how Elise and the poet were taken in—

how they calmly allowed a well-meaning soldier to sell them the notion of a funeral, I remind myself that one day I will accept, and so will you, an abstract funeral, and make no complaints.

Loopy

by Ruth Rendell

Ruth Rendell is known to mystery lovers far and wide for her creation of Chief Inspector Wexford, whose investigations she has chronicled in a dozen immensely popular novels, including To Fear a Painted Devil, A Demon in My View, *and* The Lake of Darkness. *Her recent novels include* Master of the Moor, The Killing Doll, *and* An Unkindness of Ravens, *and the Gothic element in her fiction seems to be growing constantly. Her short stories are collected in* The Fallen Curtain, Means of Evil, The Fever Tree, *and* The New Girl Friend.

Rendell's work is particularly chilling because she understands so well the darkest motivations of human nature. Often, her characters toy with a dreadful idea, flirting with it, testing it, until, little by little, the sinister amusement becomes overwhelming temptation.

In "Loopy" she is at her best, going behind the closed doors of her characters' lives, showing them as they really are . . . in private. It is not a pretty picture.

At the end of the last performance, after the curtain calls, Red Riding Hood put me on a lead and with the rest of the company we went across to the pub. No one had taken makeup off or changed, there was no time for that before the George closed. I remember prancing across the road and growling at someone on a bicycle.

They loved me in the pub—well, some of them loved me. Quite a lot were embarrassed. The funny thing was that I should have been embarrassed myself if I had been one of them. I should have ignored *me* and drunk up my drink and left. Except that it is unlikely I would have been in a pub at all. Normally, I never went near such places. But inside the wolf skin it was very different, everything was different in there.

I prowled about for a while, sometimes on all fours—though this isn't easy for us who are accustomed to the upright stance—sometimes loping, with my forepaws held close up to my chest. I went over to tables where people were sitting and snuffled my snout at their packets of crisps. If they were smoking I growled and waved my paws in air-clearing gestures. Lots of them were forthcoming, stroking me and making jokes or pretending terror at my red jaws and wicked little eyes. There was even one lady who took hold of my head and laid it in her lap.

Bounding up to the bar to collect my small dry sherry, I heard Bill Harkness (the First Woodcutter) say to Susan Hayes (Red Riding Hood's Mother): "Old Colin's really come out of his shell tonight."

And Susan, bless her, said, "He's a real actor, isn't he?"

I was one of the few members of our company who was. I expect this is always true in amateur dramatics. There are one or two real actors, people who could have made their livings on the stage if it wasn't so overcrowded a profession, and the rest who just come for the fun of it and the social side.

Did I ever consider the stage seriously? My father had been a civil servant, both my grandfathers in the ICS. As far back as I can remember it was taken for granted I should get my degree and go into the Civil Service. I never questioned it. If you have a mother like mine, one in a million, more a friend than a parent, you never feel the need to rebel. Besides, Mother gave me all the support I could have wished for in my acting. Acting as a hobby, that is. For instance, though the company made provision for hiring all the more complicated costumes for that year's Christmas pantomime, Mother made the wolf suit for me herself. It was ten times better than anything we could have hired. The head we had to buy, but the body and the limbs she made from a long-haired grey-fur fabric such as is manufactured for ladies' coats.

Moira used to say I enjoyed acting so much because it enabled me to lose myself and become, for a while, someone else. She said I disliked what I was and looked

for ways of escape. A strange way to talk to the man you intend to marry! But before I approach the subject of Moira or, indeed, continue with this account, I should explain what its purpose is.

The psychiatrist attached to this place or who visits it (I'm not entirely clear which), one Dr. Vernon-Peak, has asked me to write down some of my feelings and impressions. That, I said, would only be possible in the context of a narrative. Very well, he said, he had no objection. What will become of it when finished I hardly know. Will it constitute a statement to be used in court? Or will it enter Dr. Vernon-Peak's files as another case history? It's all the same to me. I can only tell the truth.

After the George closed, then, we took off our makeup and changed and went our several ways home. Mother was waiting up for me. This was not invariably her habit. If I told her I should be late and to go to bed at her usual time she always did so. But I, quite naturally, was not averse to a welcome when I got home, particularly after a triumph like that one. Besides, I had been looking forward to telling her what an amusing time I'd had in the pub.

Our house is late-Victorian, double-fronted, of grey limestone, by no means beautiful, but a comfortable, well built place. My grandfather bought it when he retired and came home from India in 1920. Mother was ten at the time, so she has spent most of her life in that house.

Grandfather was quite a famous shot and used to go big-game hunting before that kind of thing became, and rightly so, very much frowned upon. The result was that the place was full of "trophies of the chase." While Grandfather was alive, and he lived to a great age, we had no choice but to put up with the antlers and tusks that sprouted everywhere out of the walls, the elephant's-foot umbrella stand, and the snarling maws of *tigris* and *ursa*. We had to grin and bear it, as Mother, who has a fine turn of wit, used to put it.

But when Grandfather was at last gathered to his ancestors, reverently and without the least disrespect to him, we took down all those heads and horns and packed them away in trunks. The fur rugs, however, we didn't

disturb. These days they are worth a fortune and I always felt that the tiger skins scattered across the hall parquet, the snow leopard draped across the back of the sofa, and the bear into whose fur one could bury one's toes before the fire gave to the place a luxurious look. I took off my shoes and snuggled my toes in it that night.

Mother, of course, had been to see the show. She had come on the first night and seen me make my onslaught on Red Riding Hood, an attack so sudden and unexpected that the whole audience had jumped to its feet and gasped. (In our version we didn't have the wolf actually devour Red Riding Hood. Unanimously, we agreed this would hardly have been the thing at Christmas.) Mother, however, wanted to see me wearing her creation once more, so I put it on and did some prancing and growling for her benefit. Again I noticed how curiously uninhibited I became once inside the wolf skin. For instance, I bounded up to the snow leopard and began snarling at it. I boxed at its great grey-white face and made playful bites at its ears. Down on all-fours I went and pounced on the bear, fighting it, actually forcing its neck within the space of my jaws.

How Mother laughed! She said it was as good as anything in the pantomime and a good deal better than anything they put on television.

"Animal crackers in my soup," she said, wiping her eyes. "There used to be a song that went like that in my youth. How did it go on? Something about lions and tigers loop the loop."

"Well, *lupus* means a wolf in Latin," I said.

"And you're certainly loopy! When you put that suit on again I shall have to say you're going all loopy again!"

When I put that suit on again? Did I intend to put it on again? I had not really thought about it. Yes, perhaps if I ever went to a fancy-dress party—a remote enough contingency. Yet what a shame it seemed to waste it, to pack it away like Grandfather's tusks and antlers after all the labor Mother had put into it. That night I hung it up in my wardrobe and I remember how strange I felt when I took it off that second time, more naked than I usually

felt without my clothes, almost as if I had taken off my skin.

Life kept to the "even tenor" of its way. I felt a little flat with no rehearsals to attend and no lines to learn. Christmas came. Traditionally, Mother and I were alone on the Day itself, we would not have had it any other way, but on Boxing Day Moira arrived and Mother invited a couple of neighbors of ours in as well. At some stage, I seem to recall, Susan Hayes dropped in with her husband to wish us the compliments of the season.

Moira and I had been engaged for three years. We would have got married some time before, there was no question of our not being able to afford to marry, but a difficulty had arisen over where we should live. I think I may say in all fairness that the difficulty was entirely of Moira's making. No mother could have been more welcoming to a future daughter-in-law than mine. She actually wanted us to live with her at Simla House—she said we must think of it as our home and of her simply as our housekeeper. But Moira wanted us to buy a place of our own, so we had reached a deadlock, an impasse.

It was unfortunate that on that Boxing Day, after the others had gone, Moira brought the subject up again. Her brother (an estate agent) had told her of a bungalow for sale halfway between Simla House and her parents' home that was what he called "a real snip." Fortunately, *I* thought, Mother managed to turn the conversation by telling us about the bungalow she and her parents had lived in in India, with its great colonnaded veranda, its English flower garden, and its peepul tree. But Moira interrupted her.

"This is *our* future we're talking about, not your past. I thought Colin and I were getting married."

Mother was quite alarmed. "Aren't you? Surely Colin hasn't broken things off?"

"I suppose you don't consider the possibility *I* might break things off?"

Poor Mother couldn't help smiling at that. She smiled to cover her hurt. Moira could upset her very easily. For some reason this made Moira angry.

"I'm too old and unattractive to have any choice in the matter, is that what you mean?"

"Moira," I said.

She took no notice. "You may not realize it," she said, "but marrying me will be the making of Colin. It's what he needs to make a man of him."

It must have slipped out before Mother quite knew what she was saying. She patted Moira's knee. "I can quite see it may be a tough assignment, dear."

There was no quarrel. Mother would never have allowed herself to be drawn into that. But Moira became very huffy and said she wanted to go home, so I had to get the car out and take her.

All the way to her parents' house I had to listen to a catalogue of her wrongs at my hands and my mother's. By the time we parted I felt dispirited and nervous. I even wondered if I was doing the right thing, contemplating matrimony in the "sere and yellow leaf" of forty-two.

Mother had cleared the things away and gone to bed. I went into my bedroom and began undressing. Opening the wardrobe to hang up my tweed trousers, I caught sight of the wolf suit and on some impulse I put it on.

Once inside the wolf I felt calmer and, yes, happier. I sat down in an armchair but after a while I found it more comfortable to crouch, then lie stretched out on the floor. Lying there, basking in the warmth from the gas fire on my belly and paws, I found myself remembering tales of man's affinity with wolves, Romulus and Remus suckled by a she-wolf, the ancient myth of the werewolf, abandoned children reared by wolves even in these modern times. All this seemed to deflect my mind from the discord between Moira and my mother and I was able to go to bed reasonably happily and to sleep well.

Perhaps, then, it will not seem so very strange and wonderful that the next time I felt depressed I put the suit on again. Mother was out, so I was able to have the freedom of the whole house, not just of my room. It was dusk at four, but instead of putting the lights on I prowled about the house in the twilight, sometimes catching sight of my lean grey form in the many large mirrors Mother is so fond of. Because there was so little light and our

house is crammed with bulky furniture and knickknacks, the reflection I saw looked not like a man disguised but like a real wolf that has somehow escaped and strayed into a cluttered Victorian room. Or a werewolf, that animal part of man's personality that detaches itself and wanders free while leaving behind the depleted human shape.

I crept up upon the teakwood carving of the antelope and devoured the little creature before it knew what had attacked it. I resumed my battle with the bear and we struggled in front of the fireplace, locked in a desperate hairy embrace. It was then that I heard Mother let herself in at the back door. Time had passed more quickly than I had thought. I escaped and whisked my hind paws and tail round the bend in the stairs just before she came into the hall.

Dr. Vernon-Peak seems to want to know why I began this at the age of forty-two, or rather why I had not done it before. I wish I knew. Of course, there is the simple solution that I didn't have a wolf skin before, but that is not the whole answer. Was it perhaps that until then I didn't know what my needs were, though partially I had satisfied them by playing the parts I was given in dramatic productions?

There is one other thing. I have told him that I recall, as a very young child, having a close relationship with some large animal, a dog perhaps or a pony, though a search conducted into family history by this same assiduous Vernon-Peak has yielded no evidence that we ever kept a pet. But more of this anon.

Be that as it may, once I had lived inside the wolf I felt the need to do so more and more. Erect on my hind legs, drawn up to my full height, I do not think I flatter myself unduly when I say I made a fine handsome animal. And having written that, I realize that I have not yet described the wolf suit, taking for granted, I suppose, that those who see this document will see it. Yet this may not be the case. They have refused to let *me* see it, which makes me wonder if it has been cleaned and made presentable again or if it is still—but, no, there is no point in going into unsavory details.

I have said that the body and limbs of the suit were made of long-haired grey-fur fabric. The stuff of it was coarse, hardly an attractive material for a coat, I should have thought, but very closely similar to a wolf's pelt. Mother made the paws after the fashion of fur gloves but with the padded and stiffened fingers of a pair of leather gloves for the claws. The head we bought from a jokes-and-games shop. It had tall prick ears, small yellow eyes, and a wonderful, half open mouth—red, voracious-looking, and with a double row of white fangs. The opening for me to breathe through was just beneath the lower jaw where the head joined the powerful hairy throat.

As spring came I would sometimes drive out into the countryside, park the car, and slip into the skin. It was far from my ambition to be seen by anyone. I sought solitude. Whether I should have cared for a "beastly" companion, that is something else again. At that time I wanted merely to wander in the woods and copses or along a hedgerow in my wolf's persona. And this I did, choosing unfrequented places, avoiding anywhere that I might come in contact with the human race.

I am trying, in writing this, to explain how I felt. Principally, I felt *not human.* And to be not human is to be without human responsibilities and human cares. Inside the wolf, I laid aside my apprehensiveness about getting married, my apprehensiveness about *not* getting married, my fear of leaving Mother on her own, my justifiable resentment at not getting the leading part in our new production. All this got left behind with the depleted sleeping man I left behind to become a happy mindless wild creature.

Our wedding had once again been postponed. The purchase of the house Moira and I had finally agreed upon fell through at the last moment. I cannot say I was altogether sorry. It was near enough to my home, in the same street in fact as Simla House, but I had begun to wonder how I would feel passing our dear old house every day knowing it was not under that familiar roof I should lay my head.

Moira was very upset.

Yet, "I won't live in the same house as your mother even for three months," she said in answer to my suggestion. "That's a certain recipe for disaster."

"Mother and Daddy lived with Mother's parents for twenty years," I said.

"Yes, and look at the result!" It was then that she made that remark about my enjoying playing parts because I disliked my real self.

There was nothing more to be said except that we must keep on house-hunting.

"We can still go to Malta, I suppose," Moira said. "We don't have to cancel that."

Perhaps, but it would be no honeymoon. Anticipating the delights of matrimony was something I had not done up till then and had no intention of doing. And I was on my guard when Moira—Mother was out at her bridge evening—insisted on going up to my bedroom with me, ostensibly to check on the shade of the suit I had bought to get married in. She said she wanted to buy me a tie. Once there, she reclined on my bed, cajoling me to come and sit beside her.

I suppose it was because I was feeling depressed that I put on the wolf skin. I took off my jacket—but nothing more, of course, in front of Moira—stepped into the wolf skin, fastened it up, and adjusted the head. She watched me. She had seen me in it when she came to the pantomime.

"Why have you put that on?"

I said nothing. What could I have said? The usual contentment filled me, though, and I found myself obeying her command, loping across to the bed where she was. It seemed to come naturally to fawn on her, to rub my great prick-eared head against her breast, to enclose her hands with my paws. All kinds of fantasies filled my wolfish mind and they were of an intense piercing sweetness. If we had been on our holiday then, I do not think moral resolutions would have held me back.

But unlike the lady in the George, Moira did not take hold of my head and lay it in her lap. She jumped up and shouted at me to stop this nonsense, stop it at once, she hated it. So I did as I was told, of course I did, and got

sadly out of the skin and hung it back in the cupboard. I took Moira home. On our way we called in at her brother's and looked at fresh lists of houses.

It was on one of these that we eventually settled after another month or so of picking and choosing and stalling, and we fixed our wedding for the middle of December. During the summer the company had done *Blithe Spirit* (in which I had the meager part of Dr. Bradman, Bill Harkness being Charles Condomine) and the pantomime this year was *Cinderella* with Susan Hayes in the name part and me as the Elder of the Ugly Sisters. I had calculated I should be back from my honeymoon just in time.

No doubt I would have been. No doubt I would have married and gone away on my honeymoon and come back to play my comic part had I not agreed to go shopping with Moira on her birthday. What happened that day changed everything.

It was a Thursday evening. The stores in the West End stay open late on Thursdays. We left our offices at five, met by arrangement and together walked up Bond Street. The last thing I had in view was that we should begin bickering again, though we had seemed to do little else lately. It started with my mentioning our honeymoon. We were outside Asprey's, walking along arm-in-arm. Since our house wouldn't be ready for us to move into till the middle of January, I suggested we should go back for just two weeks to Simla House. We should be going there for Christmas in any case.

"I thought we'd decided to go to a hotel," Moira said.

"Don't you think that's rather a waste of money?"

"I think," she said in a grim sort of tone, "I think it's money we daren't not spend," and she drew her arm away from mine.

I asked her what on earth she meant.

"Once get you back there with Mummy and you'll never move."

I treated that with the contempt it deserved and said nothing. We walked along in silence. Then Moira began talking in a low monotone, using expressions from paperback psychology which I'm glad to say I have never heard from Dr. Vernon-Peak. We crossed the street and entered

Selfridge's. Moira was still going on about Oedipus complexes and that nonsense about making a man of me.

"Keep your voice down," I said. "Everyone can hear you."

She shouted at me to shut up, she would say what she pleased. Well, she had repeatedly told me to be a man and to assert myself, so I did just that. I went up to one of the counters, wrote her a check for, I must admit, a good deal more than I had originally meant to give her, put it into her hands, and walked off, leaving her there.

For a while I felt not displeased with myself, but on the way home in the train depression set in. I should have liked to tell Mother about it but Mother would be out, playing bridge. So I took recourse in my other source of comfort, my wolf skin. The phone rang several times while I was gamboling about the rooms but I didn't answer it. I knew it was Moira. I was on the floor with Grandfather's stuffed eagle in my paws and my teeth in its neck when Mother walked in.

Bridge had ended early. One of the ladies had been taken ill and rushed to the hospital. I had been too intent on my task to see the light come on or hear the door. She stood there in her old fur coat, looking at me. I let the eagle fall and bowed my head—I wanted to die I was so ashamed and embarrassed. How little I really knew my mother! My dear faithful companion, my only friend! Might I not say, my other self?

She smiled. I could hardly believe it but she was smiling. It was that wonderful, conspiratorial, rather naughty smile of hers. "Hallo," she said. "Are you going all loopy?"

In a moment she was down on her knees beside me, the fur coat enveloping her, and together we worried at the eagle, engaged in battle with the bear, attacked the antelope. Together we bounded into the hall to pounce upon the sleeping tigers. Mother kept laughing (and growling too), saying, "What a relief, what a relief!" I think we embraced.

Next day when I got home she was waiting for me, transformed and ready. She had made herself an animal suit. She must have worked on it all day, out of the snow-

leopard skin and a length of white-fur fabric. I could see her eyes dancing through the gap in its throat.

"You don't know how I've longed to be an animal again," she said. "I used to be animals when you were a baby. I was a dog for a long time and then I was a bear, but your father found out and he didn't like it. I had to stop."

So that was what I dimly remembered. I said she looked like the Queen of the Beasts.

"Do I, Loopy?" she said.

We had a wonderful weekend, Mother and I. Wolf and leopard, we breakfasted together that morning. Then we played. We played all over the house, sometimes fighting, sometimes dancing, hunting of course, carrying off our prey to the lairs we made for ourselves among the furniture. We went out in the car, drove into the country, and there in a wood got into our skins and for many happy hours roamed wild among the trees.

There seemed no reason, during those two days, to become human again at all, but on the Tuesday I had a rehearsal and on the Monday morning I had to go off to work. It was coming down to earth, back to what we call reality, with a nasty bang. Still, it had its amusing side too. A lady in the train trod on my toe and I had growled at her before I remembered and turned it into a cough.

All through that weekend neither of us had bothered to answer the phone. In the office I had no choice and it was there that Moira caught me. Marriage had come to seem remote, something grotesque, something that others did, not me. Animals do not marry. But that was not the sort of thing I could say to Moira. I promised to ring her. I said we must meet before the week was out.

I suppose she did tell me she'd come over on the Thursday evening and show me what she'd bought with the money I had given her. She knew Mother was always out on Thursdays. I suppose Moira did tell me and I failed to take it in. Nothing was important to me but being animals with Mother—Loopy and the Queen of the Beasts.

Each night as soon as I got home we made ourselves ready for our evening's games. How harmless it all was!

How innocent! Like the gentle creatures in the dawn of the world before man came. Like the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had been sent away.

The lady who had been taken ill at the bridge evening had since died, so this week it was cancelled. But would Mother have gone anyway? Probably not. Our animal capers meant as much to her as they did to me, almost more perhaps, for she had denied herself so long.

We were sitting at the dining table, eating our evening meal. Mother had cooked, I recall, a rack of lamb so that we might later gnaw the bones. We never ate it, of course, and I have since wondered what became of it. But we did begin on our soup. The bread was at my end of the table, with the bread board and the long sharp knife.

Moira, when she called and I was alone, was in the habit of letting herself in by the back door. We did not hear her, neither of us heard her, though I do remember Mother's noble head lifted a fraction before Moira came in, her fangs bared and her ears pricked. Moira opened the dining-room door and walked in. I can see her now, the complacent smile on her lips fading and the scream starting to come. She was wearing what must have been my present, a full-length white sheepskin coat.

And then? This is what Dr. Vernon-Peak will particularly wish to know but what I cannot clearly remember. I remember that as the door opened I was holding the bread knife in my paws. I think I remember letting out a low growling and poising myself to spring. But what came after?

The last things I can recall before they brought me here are the blood on my fur and the two wild predatory creatures crouched on the floor over the body of the lamb.

The Yellow Wallpaper

by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935) took an active part in the foremost American social movements of her time, including Fabian socialism, Bellamism, social welfare, and the peace movement, but she is best remembered today as a prominent figure in the early feminist movement. Her interest in feminism is readily apparent in her fiction, which includes a number of short stories and, most notably, the novel Herland. *When* Herland *was republished in the United States a few years ago, readers welcomed it as an important work of feminist literature.*

"The Yellow Wallpaper" was first published in the New England Magazine *in 1892. Partly autobiographical, it is based on the author's breakdown after a year of her first marriage, and the character of the husband, alas, had a real-life model. Quite apart from its origins, however, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is one of the finest, and strongest, tales of horror ever written. It may be a ghost story. Worse yet, it may not.*

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs

openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and *perhaps*—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—*perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see, he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is—and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise and am absolutely forbidden to "work" until I am well again.

Personally I disagree with their ideas.

Personally I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition.

I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus— But John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges, and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a *delicious* garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, too, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid; but I don't care—there is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

I even said as much to John one moonlit evening but he said what I felt was a *draught*, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty, old-fashioned chintz hangings! But John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and I feel so basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery, at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playground and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around

the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the roof low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life—one of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate, and provoke study, and when you follow the lame, uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions.

The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smoldering, unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.

It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away—he hates to have me write a word.

We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!

But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.

John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him.

Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!

I meant so to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!

Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able—to dress and entertain, and order things.

It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!

And yet I *cannot* be with him, it makes me so nervous.

I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wallpaper!

At first he meant to repair the room, but afterward he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

He said that after the wallpaper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then the gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.

"You know the place is doing you good," he said, "and really, dear, I don't care to renovate the house just for a three months' rental."

"Then let us go downstairs," I said, "there are such pretty rooms there."

Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down cellar if I wished, and would have it whitewashed into the bargain.

But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things.

It is as airy and comfortable a room as anyone need wish, and of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

I'm really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper.

Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deep-shaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees.

Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.

I think sometimes, that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillowcase as to let me have those stimulating people about now.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside-down.

I got positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two breadths didn't match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have!

I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toystore.

I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big old bureau used to have, and there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

I used to feel that if any of the other things looked too fierce I could always hop into that chair and be safe.

The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a playroom they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great

heavy bed, which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars.

But I don't mind it a bit—only the paper.

There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing.

She is a perfect, an enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!

But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from the windows.

There is one that commands the road, a lovely, shaded winding road, and one that just looks off over the country. A lovely country, too, full of great elms and velvet meadows.

This wallpaper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then.

But in the places where it isn't faded, and where the sun is just so, I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure that seems to sulk about that silly and conspicuous front design.

There's Sister on the stairs!

Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are all gone and I am tired out. John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so we just had mother and Nellie and the children down for a week.

Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now.

But it tired me all the same.

John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall.

But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!

Besides, it is such an undertaking to go so far.

I don't feel as if it was worthwhile to turn my hand over for anything, and I'm getting dreadfully fretful and querulous.

I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time.

Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone.

And I am alone a good deal just now. John is kept in town very often by serious cases, and Jennie is good and lets me alone when I want her to.

So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal.

I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wallpaper. Perhaps *because* of the wallpaper.

It dwells in my mind so!

I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you. I start, we'll say at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I *will* follow that pointless pattern to some sort of a conclusion.

I know a little of the principles of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of.

It is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise.

Looked at in one way, each breadth stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of "debased Romanesque" with *delirium tremens*—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.

But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

There is one end of the roof where it is almost intact and there, when the crosslights fade and the low sun shines directly upon it, I can almost fancy radiation, after all—the interminable grotesques seem to form around a

common center and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction.

It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap, I guess.

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I *must* say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much.

John says I musn't lose my strength, and has me take cod-liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real, earnest, reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wished he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished.

It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness, I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till he tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let my silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort: the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wallpaper.

If we had not used it that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child

of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here, after all. I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them any more—I am too wise—but I keep watch of it all the same.

There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will.

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

It is always the same shape, only very numerous.

And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here!

It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so.

But I tried it last night.

It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around, just as the sun does.

I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another.

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wallpaper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper *did* move, and when I came back John was awake.

"What is it, little girl?" he said. "Don't go walking about like that—you'll get cold."

I thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

"Why, darling!" said he. "Our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can't see how to leave before.

"The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course, if you were in any danger I could and would, but you really are better,

dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better. I feel really much easier about you."

"I don't weigh a bit more," said I, "nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening, when you are here, but it is worse in the morning, when you are away."

"Bless her little heart!" said he with a big hug. "She shall be as sick as she pleases. But now let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning."

"And you won't go away?" I asked gloomily.

"Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we will take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready. Really, dear, you are better!"

"Better in body, perhaps—" I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.

"My darling," said he, "I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?"

So of course I said no more on that score, and we went to sleep before long. He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn't—I lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately.

On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing.

You may think you have mastered it, but just as you get well under way in following, it turns a back somersault, and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.

The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions—why, that is something like it.

That is, sometimes!

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes.

When the sun shoots in through the east windows—I always watch for that first long, straight ray—it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it.

That is why I watch it always.

By moonlight—the moon shines in all night when there is a moon—I wouldn't know it was the same paper.

At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern, I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind—that dim sub-pattern—but now I am quite sure it is a woman.

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour.

I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all I can.

Indeed, he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal.

It is a very bad habit, I am convinced, for, you see, I don't sleep.

And that cultivates deceit, for I don't tell them I'm awake—oh, no!

The fact is, I am getting a little afraid of John.

He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look.

It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis, that perhaps it is the paper!

I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times

looking at the paper! And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.

She didn't know I was in the room, and when I asked her in a quiet, a very quiet voice, with the most restrained manner possible, what she was doing with the paper she turned around as if she had been caught stealing, and looked quite angry—asked me why I should frighten her so!

Then she said that the paper stained everything it touched, and that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's, and she wished we would be more careful!

Did not that sound innocent? But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was.

John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wallpaper.

I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him that it was *because* of the wallpaper—he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away.

I don't want to leave now until I have found it out. There is a week more, and I think that will be enough.

I'm feeling ever so much better! I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch developments; but I sleep a good deal in the daytime.

In the daytime it is tiresome and perplexing.

There are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them, though I have tried conscientiously.

It is the strangest yellow, that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old, foul, bad yellow things.

But there is something else about that paper—the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad! Now we have had

a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not the smell is here.

It creeps all over the house.

I find it hovering in the dining room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs.

It gets into my hair.

Even when I go to ride, if I turn my head suddenly and surprise it—there is that smell!

Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like.

It is not bad, at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met.

In this damp weather it is awful. I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell.

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is the *color* of the paper—a yellow smell!

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mopboard. A streak that runs around the room. It goes behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even *smooch* as if it had been rubbed over and over.

I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!

I really have discovered something at last.

Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out.

The front pattern *does* move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.

Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. But

nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.

They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside-down, and makes their eyes white!

If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad.

I think that woman gets out in the daytime!

And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her!

I can see her out of every one of my windows!

It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.

I see her in that long shaded lane, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbors, creeping all around the garden.

I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!

I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once.

And John is so queer, now, that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself.

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once.

But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at one time.

And though I always see her she *may* be able to creep faster than I can turn!

I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind.

If only that top pattern could be gotten off from the under one! I mean to try it, little by little.

I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and

I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give.

She said I slept a good deal in the daytime.

John knows I don't sleep very well at night, for all I'm so quiet!

He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.

As if I couldn't see through him!

Still, I don't wonder he acts so, sleeping under this paper for three months.

It only interests me, but I feel sure John and Jennie are secretly affected by it.

Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John is to stay in town overnight, and won't be out until this evening.

Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing! but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.

That was clever, for really I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight, and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of paper.

A strip about as high as my head and half around the room.

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me I declared I would finish it to-day!

We go away tomorrow, and they are moving all my furniture down again to leave things as they were before.

Jennie looked at the wall in amazement, but I told her merrily that I did it out of pure spite at the vicious thing.

She laughed and said she wouldn't mind doing it herself, but I must not get tired.

How she betrayed herself that time!

But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me—not *alive!*

She tried to get me out of the room—it was too patent! But I said it was so quiet and empty and clean now that I believed I would lie down again and sleep all I could; and not to wake me even for dinner—I would call when I woke.

So now she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left but that great bedstead nailed down, with the canvas mattress we found on it.

We shall sleep downstairs tonight, and take the boat home tomorrow.

I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed!

But I must get to work.

I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path.

I don't want to get out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes.

I want to astonish him.

I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!

But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on!

This bed will *not* move!

I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at the corner—but it hurt my teeth.

Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!

I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides, I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well

enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to *look* out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper, as I did?

But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope—you don't get *me* out in the road there!

I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.

For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.

But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.

Why, there's John at the door!

It is no use, young man, you can't open it!

How he does call and pound!

Now he's crying for an ax.

It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!

"John, dear!" said I in the gentlest voice. "The key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!"

That silenced him for a few moments.

Then he said—very quietly indeed, "Open the door, my darling!"

"I can't," said I. "The key is down by the front door, under a plantain leaf!"

And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it, of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing?"

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

"I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and

Jennie! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!''

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

The Foghorn

by Gertrude Atherton

Gertrude Atherton, a great-grandniece of Benjamin Franklin, was born in San Francisco in 1857. She married at the age of eighteen, but her husband died tragically a few years later. She devoted the rest of her life to writing, producing a total of fifty-six books, including novels, stories, biographies, histories, and an edition of the letters of Alexander Hamilton. Her work often attracted attention for its sexual content and for her feminist positions. In 1947 she published a reminiscence called My San Francisco *and she was still writing into her ninetieth year. She died in 1948.*

Her ghost stories, which are often compared to those of Henry James and Edith Wharton, were collected in The Bell in the Fog *(1905) and* The Foghorn *(1934).*

"The Foghorn" is a powerful story on several counts, not least of which is its eerie descriptions of San Francisco Bay. But it has a greater eeriness than that, and the worst chill only comes when the story is finished.

What an absurd vanity to sleep on a hard pillow and forgo that last luxurious burrowing into the very depths of a mass of baby pillows! . . . her back was already as straight as—a chimney? . . . who was the Frenchman that said one must reject the worn counters? . . . but this morning she would have liked that sensuous burrowing, and the pillow had never seemed so hard, so flat . . . yet how difficult it was to wake up! She had had the same experience once before when the doctor had given her veronal for insomnia . . . could Ellen, good creature, have put a tablet in the cup of broth she took last thing at night: "as a wise precaution," the doctor had said genially. What a curse insomnia was! But she had a

congenital fear of drugs and had told no one of this renewal of sleeplessness, knowing it would pass.

And, after all, she didn't mind lying awake in the dark; she could think, oh, pleasant lovely thoughts, despite this inner perturbation—so cleverly concealed. How thankful she was to be tall enough to carry off this new fashion in sleeves! If trains would only come in again, she would dress her hair high some night (just for fun) and look—not like her beloved Mary Stewart, for Mary was almost ugly if one analyzed her too critically. Charm? How much more charm counted than mere beauty, and she herself had it "full measure and running over," as that rather fresh admirer had announced when drinking her health at her coming-out party . . . what was his name? . . . six years ago. He was only a college boy . . . how could one remember? There had been so many since.

Ninon de l'Enclos? She was passable in her portraits, but famous mainly for keeping young . . . Diane de Poitiers? She must have needed charm double-distilled if she looked anything like an original portrait of her hung at a loan exhibition in Paris: flaxen hair, thin and straight, drawn severely from a bulging brow above insufferably sensual eyes—far too obvious and "easy" for the fastidious male of today—a flaxen complexion, no high lights: not very intelligent. Interesting contrast in taste centuries apart—perhaps.

Madame Récamier? Better-looking than most of the historic beauties: hair piled high—but then she wore a slip of an Empire gown . . . well, never mind.

She ranked as a beauty herself, although perhaps charm had something to do with it. Her mouth was rather wide, but her teeth were exquisite. Something rather obscure was the matter in that region of brilliant enamel this morning. A toothache? She had never had a toothache. Well, there was no pain . . . what matter? . . . something wrong, though; she'd go to the dentist during the day. Her nose was a trifle tip-tilted, but very straight and thin, and anyhow the tilt suited the way she carried her head, "flung in the air." Her complexion and hair and eyes were beyond all cavil . . . she was nothing so commonplace as a downright blonde or brunette . . . how she

should hate being catalogued! The warm, bright waving masses of her hair had never been cut since her second birthday. They, too, were made for burrowing.

Her mother's wedding dress had a long train. But the delicate ivory of the satin had waxed with time to a sickly yellow. Her mother hadn't pressed the matter when she was engaged to John St. Rogers, but she had always expressed a wish that each of her daughters should wear the dress to the altar. Well, she had refused outright, but had consented to have her own gown trimmed with the lace: yards and yards of *point d'Alençon*—and a veil that reached halfway down the train. What a way to spend money! Who cared for lace now? Not the young, anyhow. But Mother was rather a dear, and she could afford to be quite unselfish for once, as it certainly would be becoming. When the engagement was broken, they told the poor old darling that she cried because she would have another long wait before watching all that lace move up the aisle on a long slender figure that made her think pridefully of the graceful skeleton hidden within one hundred and seventy resented pounds.

Well, she would never wear that lace—nor any wedding gown. If she were lucky enough to marry at all, the less publicity the better . . . a mere announcement (San Francisco papers please copy) . . . a quiet return from Europe . . . a year or two in one of those impersonal New York apartment-houses where no one knew the name of his next-door neighbor . . . no effacement in a smaller city for her!

How strange that she of all girls should have fallen in love with a married man—or, at all events, accepted the dire consequences. With a father that had taken to drugs and then run off with another woman—luckily before Mother had come in for Granddad's fortune—and . . . what was it Uncle Ben had once said, Queer twists in this family since "way back." It had made her more conventional than her natural instincts would have prompted; but, no, let her do herself justice: she had cultivated a high standard of character and planted her mind with flowers both sturdy and fair—that must have been the reason she had fallen in love at last, after so many futile attempts.

No need for her to conceal from him the awful truth that she read the Greek and Latin classics in the original text, attended morning classes over at the University . . . odd, how men didn't mind if you "adored" music and pictures, but if they suspected you of being intellectual, they either despised or feared you, and faded away.

Fog on the Bay. Since childhood she had loved to hear that long-drawn-out, almost-human moan of the foghorn as she lay warm and sheltered in bed. It was on a night of fog they had spoken for the first time, although they had nodded at three or four formal dinners given to the newcomers who had brought letters to the elect. Bostonians were always popular in San Francisco; they had good manners and their formality was only skin-deep. The men were very smart; some of the women, too; but as a rule they lacked the meticulous grooming and well-set-up appearance of their men. She had been impressed the first time she had met him: six feet (she herself was five feet six), somewhere in the thirties, very spare, said to be a first-rate tennis player, and had ranked as an all-round athlete at Harvard; had inherited a piece of property in San Francisco which was involving him in litigation, but he was in no haste to leave, even before they met.

That had been at the Jeppers', and as the house commanded a fine view of the Bay, and she was tired of being torn from some man every time they had circled the ballroom, she had managed to slip away and had hidden behind the curtains of the deep bow window at the end of the hall. In a moment she was aware that someone had followed her, and oddly enough she knew who it was, although she didn't turn her head; and they stood in silence and gazed together at the sharp dark outlines of the mountains on the far side of the Bay; the gliding spheroids of golden light that were ferryboats, the islands with their firm, bold outlines, now almost visibly drooping in slumber . . . although there always seemed to her to be an atmosphere of unrest about Alcatraz, psychic emanation of imprisoned men under rigid military rule, and officials no doubt as resentful in that dull monotonous existence on a barren rock . . . A light flickered along a

line of barred upper windows; doubtless a guard on his rounds.

The band of pulsing light on the eastern side of the Bay: music made visible . . . stars as yellow and bright above, defying the thin silver of the hebetic moon . . . lights twinkling on Sausalito opposite, standing out boldly from the black mass of Tamalpais high-flung above. Her roving eyes moved to the Golden Gate, narrow entrance between two crouching forts, separating that harbor of arrogant beauty from the gray waste of the Pacific—ponderous, rather stupid old ocean. . . .

For the first time he spoke: "The fog! Chief of San Francisco's many beauties."

She had nodded, making no other reply, watching that dense yet imponderable white mass push its way through the Golden Gate like a laboring ship . . . then riding the waters more lightly, rolling a little, writhing, whiffs breaking from the bulk of that ghostly ship to explore the hollows of the hills, resting there like puffs of white smoke. Then, over the cliffs and heights on the northern side of the Bay, a swifter, more formless, but still lovely white visitant that swirled down and over the inland waters, enshrouding the islands, Sausalito, where so many Englishmen lived, the fulgent zone in the east; but a low fog—the moon and stars still visible . . . the foghorns, one after another, sending forth their long-drawn-out moans of utter desolation. . . .

With nothing more to look at, they had seated themselves on a small sofa, placed there for reticent couples, and talked for an hour—a desultory exploring conversation. She recalled none of it. A few mornings later they had met on the Berkeley ferryboat, accidentally no doubt, and he had gone on with her in the train and as far as the campus. . . . Once again. After that, when the lecture was over, in the Greek Theatre . . . wonderful hours . . . how easy to imagine themselves in Greece of the fifth century B.C., alone in that vast gray amphitheatre, the slim, straight tenebrous trees above quivering with the melody of birds!

Never a word of love—not for months. This novel and exciting companionship was enough . . . depths of

personality to explore—in glimpses! Sometimes they roamed over the hills, gay and carefree. They never met anyone they knew.

Winter. Weeks of pouring rain. They met in picture galleries, remote corners of the Public Library, obscure restaurants of Little Italy under the shadow of Telegraph Hill. Again they were unseen, undiscovered.

He never came to the house. Since her mother's death and the early marriages of the girls, Uncle Ben had come to live with her in the old house on Russian Hill; the boys were East at school; she was free of all family restrictions, but her old servants were intimate with all the other servants on the Hill. She barely knew his wife. He never spoke of her.

Spring. A house-party in the country, warm and dry after the last of the rains. After dinner they had sat about on the terraces, smoking, drinking, listening to a group singing within, admiring the "ruins" of a Roman temple at the foot of the lawn lit by a blazing moon.

He and she had wandered off the terrace, and up an almost perpendicular flight of steps on the side of the mountain that rose behind the house . . . dim aisles of redwoods, born when the earth was young, whose long trunks never swayed, whose high branches rarely sang in the wind—unfriendly trees, but protective, sentinel-like, shutting out the modern world; reminiscent those closely planted aisles were of ancient races . . . forgotten races . . . god-like races, perhaps.

Well, they had felt like gods that night. How senseless to try to stave off a declaration of love . . . to fear . . . to wonder . . . to worry . . . How inevitable . . . natural . . . when it came! Hour of hours. . . .

They had met the next day in a corner of their favorite little restaurant, over a dish of spaghetti, which she refused to eat as it had liver in it, and talked the matter out. No, she would not enter upon a secret intrigue; meeting him in some shady quarter of the town, where no questions were asked, in some horrible room which had sheltered thousands of furtive "lovers" before them . . . she would far rather never see him again. . . . He had smiled at the flight taken by an untrained imagina-

tion, but nodded. . . . No, but she knew the alternative. He had no intention of giving her up. No hope of a divorce. He had sounded his wife; tentatively at first, then told her outright he loved another woman. She had replied that he could expect no legal release from her. It was her chance for revenge and she would take it. . . . A week or two and his business in San Francisco would be settled . . . he had an independent fortune . . . would she run away with him? Elope in good old style? Could she stand the gaff? All Europe for a perpetual honeymoon—unless his wife were persuaded by her family later on to divorce him. Then he would return and work at something. He was not a born idler.

She had consented, of course, having made up her mind before they met. She had had six years of "the world." She knew what she wanted. One might "love" many times, but not more than once find completion, that solidarity which makes two as one against the malignant forces of life. She had no one to consider but herself. Her mother was dead. Her sisters, protected by husbands, wealth, position, would merely be "thrilled." The boys and Uncle Ben, of course, would be furious. Men were so hopelessly conservative.

For the rest of the world she cared exactly nothing.

That foghorn. What was it trying to tell her? A boat . . . fog . . . why was it so hard to remember? So hard to awaken? Ellen must have given her an overdose. Fragmentary pictures . . . slipping down the dark hill to the wharf . . . her low delighted laugh echoed back to her as he helped her into the boat . . . one more secret lark before they flung down the gage. . . . How magnificently he rowed . . . long, sweeping, easy strokes as he smiled possessively into her eyes and talked of the future. . . . No moon, but millions of stars that shed a misty golden light . . . rows of light on the steep hillsides of the city. The houses dark and silent . . . a burst of music from Fort Mason. . . .

Out through the Golden Gate, still daring . . . riding that oily swell . . . his chuckle as she had dared him to row straight across to China. Her sharp anxious cry as she

half-rose from her seat and pointed to a racing mountain of snow-white mist.

He had swept about at once and made for the beach below Sutro Heights. Too late. Almost as he turned, they were engulfed. Even an old fisherman would have lost his sense of direction.

And then the foghorns began their warnings. The low, menacing roar from Point Benito. The wailing siren on Alcatraz. Sausalito's throaty bass. The deep-toned bell on Angel Island. She knew them all, but they seemed to come from new directions.

A second . . . a moment . . . an hour . . . later . . . a foreign but unmistakable note. Ships—two of them . . . blast and counter-blast. . . . She could barely see his white rigid face through the mist as he thrust his head this way and that trying to locate those sounds. . . . Another abrupt swerve . . . crash . . . shouts . . . her own voice shrieking as she saw his head almost severed—the very fog turn red . . .

She could hear herself screaming yet. It seemed to her that she had been screaming since the beginning of time.

She sat up in bed, clasping her head between her hands, and rocked to and fro. This bare small room, just visible in the gray dawn. . . . She was in a hospital, of course. Was it last night or the night before they had brought her here? She wondered vaguely that she felt no inclination to scream any more, now that she had struggled to full consciousness. . . . Too tired, perhaps . . . the indifference of exhaustion. . . . Even her eyes felt singularly dry, as if they had been baked in a hot oven. She recalled a line, the only memorable line, in Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia,* "Eyepits red with rust of ancient tears." Did her eyes look like that? But she did not remember crying . . . only screaming.

Odd that she should be left alone like this. Uncle Ben and the girls must have been summoned. If they had gone home, tired out, they should have left a nurse in constant attendance . . . and surely they might have found her a better room. . . . Or had she been carried into some emergency hospital? . . . Well, she could go home today.

Her hands were still clasping her head when another

leaf of awareness turned over, rattling like parchment. Hair. Her lovely abundant hair. . . . She held her breath as her hands moved exploringly over her head. Harsh short bristles almost scratched them.

She had had brain fever, then. Ill a long time . . . weeks . . . months, perhaps. No wonder she felt weak and spent and indifferent! But she must be out of danger, or they would not leave her like this. . . . Would she suffer later, with renewed mocking strength? Or could love be burnt out, devoured by fever germs? A short time before, while not yet fully conscious, she had relived all the old hopes, fears, dreams, ecstasies; reached out triumphantly to a wondrous future, arrogantly sure of herself and the man, contemptuous of the world and its makeshift conventions. . . . And now she felt nothing. . . .

But when she was well again? Twenty-four! Forty, fifty years more; they were a long-lived family. Her mother had been killed at a railroad crossing. . . . Well, she had always prided herself on her strength. She would worry through the years somehow.

Had the town rung with the scandal when the newspapers flared forth next morning? No girl goes rowing at night with a married man unless there is something between them. Had his wife babbled? Were the self-righteous getting off the orthodoxies of their kind? Punished for their sin. Retributive justice meted out to a girl who would break up a home and take a married man for her lover.

Retributive justice! As if there were any such thing in life as justice. All helpless victims of the law of cause and effect. Futile, aspiring, stupidly confident links in the inexorable chain of circumstance. . . . Commonplace minds croaking, "Like father like daughter" . . .

How she hated, hated, *hated,* self-righteousness, smug hypocrisy . . . illogical minds—one sheep bleating like another sheep—not one of them with the imagination to guess that she never would have stooped to a low secret intrigue.

She had been pounding her knee with her fist in a sudden access of energy. As it sputtered out and she felt

on the verge of collapse, her hand unfolded and lay palm down on the quilt. . . . She felt her eyes bulging. She uttered her first sound: a low almost inarticulate cry.

Her hand? That large-veined, skinny thing? She had beautiful long white hands, with skin as smooth as the breast of a dove. Of no one of her beauty's many parts had she been prouder, not even when she stood now and then before the cheval glass and looked critically, and admiringly, at the smooth, white, rounded perfection of her body. She had given them a golden manicure set on one of their birthdays, a just tribute; and they were exquisitely kept, although she hated conspicuous nails.

A delusion? A nightmare? She spread the other hand beside it . . . side by side the two on the dingy counterpane . . . old hands. . . . Shorn hair will grow again . . . but hands . . .

Mumbling. Why mumbling? She raised one of those withered yellow hands to her mouth. It was empty. Her shaking fingers unbuttoned the high night-gown, and she glanced within. Pendent dugs, brown and shrivelled.

Brain fever! The sun had risen. She looked up at the high barred window. She understood.

Voices at the door. She dropped back on the pillow and closed her eyes and lay still.

The door was unlocked, and a man and woman entered: doctor and nurse, as was immediately evident. The doctor's voice was brisk and business-like and deeply mature; the woman's, young and deferential.

"Do you think she'll wake again, doctor?"

"Probably not. I thought she would be gone by now, but she is still breathing." He clasped the emaciated wrist with his strong fingers. "Very feeble. It won't be long now."

"Is it true, doctor, that sometimes, just before death, reason is restored and they remember and talk quite rationally?"

"Sometimes. But not for this case. Too many years. Look in every hour, and when it is over, ring me up. There are relatives to be notified. Quite important people, I believe."

"What are they like?"

"Never seen them. The law firm in charge of her estate pays the bills. Why should they come here? Couldn't do her any good, and nothing is so depressing as these melancholia cases. It's a long time now since she was stark raving. That was before my time. Come along. Six wards after this one. Don't forget to look in. Good little girl. I know you never forget."

They went out and locked the door.

The Ghost

by Mrs. Henry Wood

Mrs. Henry Wood was born in 1814. When she was widowed early in life, she moved to London and supported herself by writing. Her first novel, East Lynne *(still highly regarded and read today), was published in 1861. She instantly became a bestselling author and continued to produce an average of one novel a year until her death in 1887.*

Like many Victorian writers, Mrs. Wood had more than a passing interest in the supernatural and several of her novels revolve around supernatural themes. Certainly she had enough interest herself to satisfy the public taste for frights and shivers.

Her short story "The Ghost" clearly demonstrates the skill that won her such a wide readership. It begins almost lightly, with schoolboys planning a practical joke, and then proceeds to a wonderful portrait—worthy of Dickens—of the crotchety Mr. Ketch, with his taste for tripe and onions. In the context of such realism, what follows is all the more chilling. The ghost of the title may be the product of imagination, but the outcome of the prank is all too real.

The moon was high in the heavens, lighting up the tower of the cathedral, illuminating its pinnacles, glittering through the elm trees, bringing forth into view even the dark old ivy on the preberdal houses. A fair night—all too fair for the game that was going to be played in it.

When the Helstoneleigh college boys resolved upon what they were pleased to term a "lark"—and, to do them justice, they regarded this, their prospective night's work, in no graver light—they carried it out artistically, with a completeness, a skill, worthy of a better cause. Several days had they been hatching this—laying their

plans, arranging the details; it would be their own bungling fault if it miscarried. But the college boys were no bunglers.

Stripped of its details, the bare plot was to exhibit a "ghost" in the cloisters, and to get Charley Channing, a harmless but timid fellow scholar, to pass through them. The boys had been too wise to let it come to the knowledge of their seniors; and the most difficult part of the business had been old Ketch, the caretaker—but that was managed.

The moonlight shone peacefully on the college, and the conspirators were stealing up, by ones and twos, to their place of meeting round the dark trunks of the elm trees. Fine as it was overhead, it was less so underfoot. The previous day had been a wet one, the night had been wet, and also the forepart of the present day. Schoolboys are not particularly given to reticence, and a few more than the original conspirators had been taken into the plot. They were winding up now, in the weird moonlight, for the hour was approaching.

At this point we must pay a visit to Mr. Ketch in his lodge at his supper hour. Mr. Ketch had changed his hour for that important meal. Growing old with age or with lumbago, he found early rest congenial to his bones, as he informed his friends; so he supped at seven, and retired afterwards. Since the summer he had taken to having his pint of ale brought to him, deeming it more prudent not to leave his lodge and the keys to fetch it. This was known to the boys, and it rendered their plans a little more difficult.

Mr. Ketch, I say, sat in his lodge, having locked up the cloisters about an hour before, sneezing and wheezing, for he was suffering from a cold, caught the day previously in the wet. He was spelling over a weekly twopenny newspaper, borrowed from the public-house, by the help of a flaring tallow candle and a pair of spectacles, of which one glass was out. Cynically severe was he over everything he read, for it was in the nature of Mr. Ketch to be. As the three-quarters past six chimed out from the cathedral clock, his door was suddenly opened, and a

voice called out "Beer!" Mr. Ketch's supper ale had arrived.

But the arrival did not give the gentleman pleasure, and he started up in what we might call a fury. Dashing his one-eyed glasses on the table, he attacked the man—

"What d'ye mean with your 'beer' at this time o' the evening? It wants a quarter to seven! Haven't you got no clock at your place? D'ye think I shall take it in now?"

"Well, it just comes to this," said the man, who was the brewer at the public-house, and made himself useful at odd jobs in his spare time, "if you don't like to take it in now, you can't have it at all, of my bringing. I be a-going up to t'other end of the town, and shan't be back this side of ten."

Mr. Ketch, with much groaning and grumbling, took the ale and poured it into a jug of his own—a handsome jug, that had been in the wars and lost its spout and handle—giving back the public-house jug to the man. "You serve me such an impertinent trick again as to bring my ale a quarter of an hour aforehand, that's all!" snarled he.

The man received the jug and went off whistling; he had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Ketch and his temper well. That gentleman shut his door with a bang, and proceeded to get out his customary bread and cheese. Not that he had any great love for a bread-and-cheese supper; as a matter of taste he would very much have preferred something more dainty; only dainties and Mr. Ketch's pocket didn't agree.

"They wants to be took down a notch, that public—sending out a man's supper beer a quarter afore seven, when it ain't ordered to come till seven strikes. Much they care if it stops a-waiting and a-flattening, and gets undrinkable! Be I a slave that I should be forced to swaller my supper afore my tea have well gone down, just to please them? They have got a sight too much custom, that's what it is."

He took a slight draught of the offending ale, and was critically surveying the loaf before applying to it that green-handled knife of his, when a second summons was heard at the door—a very timid one this time.

Mr. Ketch flung down the bread and the knife. "What's the reason I can't get a meal in quiet? Who is it?"

There was no response to this, save a second faint tapping.

"Come in!" roared out he. "Pull the string o' the latch."

But nobody came in, in spite of this lucid direction; and the timid tapping, which seemed to proceed from very small knuckles, was repeated again. Mr. Ketch was fain to go, grunting, and open it.

A young damsel of eight or so, in a tattered tippet and a large bonnet—probably her mother's—stood there curtsying. "Please, sir, Mr. Ketch is wanted."

Mr. Ketch was rather taken aback at this strange address, and surveyed its messenger in astonishment. "Who be you? And who wants him?" growled he.

"Please, sir, it's a gentleman as is a-waiting at the big green gates," was the reply. "Mr. Ketch is to go to him this minute—he told me to come and say so; and if you didn't make haste, he should be gone."

"Can't you speak consistent?" snarled Ketch. "Who is the gentleman?"

"Please, sir, I think it is the bishop."

This put Ketch in a fluster. The "big green gates" could only have reference to the private entrance to the bishop's garden, which entrance his lordship used when attending the cathedral. That the bishop was in Helstoneleigh Ketch knew. He had arrived that day, after a short absence. What on earth could he want with *him?* Never doubting, in his hurry, the genuineness of the message, Ketch pulled his door to, and stepped off, the young messenger having already decamped. The green gates were not one minute's walk from the lodge—though a projecting buttress of the cathedral prevented the one being in sight of the other—and old Ketch gained them and looked around.

Where was the bishop? The iron gates, the garden, the white stones at his feet, the towering cathedral aloft, all lay cold and calm in the moonlight, but of human sound or sight there was none. The gates were locked when he

came to try them and he could not see the bishop anywhere.

He was not likely to see him. Steven Bywater, the lad who took upon himself much of the plot's acting part—of which, to give him his due, he was boldly capable—had been on the watch in the street near the cathedral for a messenger that would suit his purpose. Seeing this young damsel hurrying along with a jug in her hand, possibly to buy beer for *her* home supper, he waylaid her.

"Little ninepins, would you like to get threepence?" asked he. "You shall have it if you'll carry a message for me close by."

"Little ninepins" had probably never had a whole threepenny piece to herself in her young life; she caught at the tempting suggestion, and Bywater drilled into her his instructions, finding her excessively stupid over the process. Perhaps that was all the better. "Now mind, you are *not* to say who wants Mr. Ketch unless he asks," repeated he for about the fifth time, as she was departing to do the errand. "If he asks, say you think it's the bishop."

So she went and delivered it. But had old Ketch's temper allowed him to go into minute questioning, he might have discovered the trick. Bywater stealthily followed the child near the lodge, screening himself from observation; and as soon as old Ketch hobbled out of it, he popped in, snatched the cloister keys from their nail, and deposited a piece of paper, folded as a note, on Ketch's table. Then he made off.

Back came Ketch after a while. He did not quite know what to make of it, but rather inclined to the opinion that the bishop had not waited for him. "He might have wanted me to take an errand round to the deanery," soliloquised he. And this thought had caused him to tarry about the gate, so that he was absent from his lodge quite ten minutes. The first thing he saw on entering was the bit of paper on the table. He seized and opened it, grumbling aloud that folks used his home just as they pleased, going in and out without reference to his presence or his absence. The note, written in pencil,

purported to be from an acquaintance, one Joseph Jenkins. It ran as follows:

> "My old father is coming up to our place tonight to eat a bit of supper, and he says he should like you to join him, which I and Mrs. J. shall be happy if you will, at seven o'clock. It's tripe and onions.
>
> Yours
> J. Jenkins

Now, if there was one delicacy known to this world more delicious to old Ketch's palate than another it was tripe, seasoned with plenty of onions. His mouth watered as he read. He was aware that it was—to use the phraseology of Helstoneleigh—"tripe night." On two nights in the week tripe was sold in the town ready dressed, onions and all. This was one; and Ketch anticipated a glorious treat. In too great a hurry to cast so much as a glance round his lodge (crafty Bywater had been deep), not stopping even to put up the loaf and the cheese and the green-handled knife, only drinking the beer, away hobbled Ketch as fast as his lumbago would allow him, locking safely his door, and not having observed the absence of the keys.

"He ain't a bad sort, Joe Jenkins," allowed he, conciliated beyond everything at the prospect the invitation held out, and talking to himself as he limped away towards the street. "He don't write a bad hand neither! It's a plain un—not one o' them new-fangled scrawls that you can't read. Him and his wife held up their heads a cut above me—oh, yes they have, though, for all Joe's humbleness. Old Jenkins has always said we'd have a supper together some night, him and me; I suppose this is it."

The first chimes of the cathedral clock gave notice of the hour seven! Old Ketch broke out all in a heat, and tried to hobble along. Seven o'clock! What if, through being late, his share of the tripe and onions should be eaten!

Peeping out every now and then from the deep shade

cast by one of the angles of the cathedral, and as swiftly and cautiously drawn back again, was a trencher, apparently watching Ketch. As soon as that functionary was fairly launched on his way, the trencher came out entirely, and went flying at a swift pace round the college to the Boundaries.

Bywater, by the help of the filched keys, was now safe in the cloisters, absorbed with his companions in the preparation for the grand event of the night. In point of fact, they were getting up Pierce senior. Their precise mode of doing that need not be given. They had requisites in abundance, having disputed among themselves which should be at the honour of the contribution, and the result was an over prodigality.

"That's seven!" exclaimed Bywater in an agony, as the clock struck. "Make haste, Pierce! The young one was to come out at a quarter-past. If you're not ready, it will ruin all."

"I shall be ready and waiting, if you don't bother" was the response of Pierce. "I wonder if old Ketch is safely off."

"What a stunning fright Ketch would be in if he came in here and met the ghost!" exclaimed Hurst. "He'd never think it was anything less than the Old Gentleman come for him."

A chorus of laughter, which Hurst himself hushed. It would not do for noise to be heard in the cloisters at that hour.

There was nothing to which poor Charley Channing was more sensitive than to ridicule on the subject of his unhappy failing—the propensity to fear; and there is no failing to which schoolboys are more intolerant. Of moral courage—that is, of courage in the cause of right—Charles had plenty; of physical courage, little. Apart from the misfortune of having had supernatural terror implanted in him in childhood, he would never have been physically brave. Schoolboys cannot understand that this shrinking from danger (I speak of palpable danger), which they call cowardice, nearly always emanates from a superior intellect. Where the mental powers are of a high order, the

imagination unusually awakened, danger is sure to be keenly perceived, and sensitively shrunk from. In proportion will be the shrinking dread of ridicule. Charles Channing possessed this dread in a remarkable degree. You may therefore judge how he felt when he found it mockingly alluded to by Bywater.

On this very day that we are writing of, Bywater caught Charles, and imparted to him in profound confidence an important secret—that a choice few of the boys were about to play old Ketch a trick, obtain the keys, and have a game in the cloisters by moonlight. A place in the play, he said, had been assigned to Charles. Charles hesitated—not because it might be wrong so to cheat Ketch (Ketch was the common enemy of the boys, of Charley as of the rest), but because he had plenty of lessons to do. This was Bywater's opportunity; he chose to interpret the hesitation differently.

"So you are afraid, Miss Charley! Ho, ho! Do you think the cloisters will be dark? That the moon won't keep the ghosts away? I say, it *can't* be true, what I heard the other day, that you dare not be in the dark, lest ghosts should come and run away with you!"

"Nonsense, Bywater!" returned Charley, changing colour like a conscious girl.

"Well, if you are *not* afraid, you'll come and join us," sarcastically returned Bywater. "We shall have stunning good sport. There'll be about a dozen of us. Rubbish to your lessons! You need not be away from them more than an hour. It won't be *dark*, Miss Channing."

After this nothing would have kept Charley away, fearing their ridicule. He promised faithfully to be in the cloisters at a quarter-past seven.

Accordingly, the instant tea was over, he got to his lessons. Thus was he engaged when another student, Hamish, entered.

"What sort of night is it, Hamish?" asked Charles thinking of the projected night play.

"Fine," replied Hamish.

The silence was resumed. Hamish turned himself round to the fire and said no more. Charles's ears were listening for the quarter-past seven; and the moment it chimed out,

he quitted his work, took his trencher coat from the hall, and departed saying nothing to anybody.

He went along whistling past the deanery; it, and the cathedral tower rising above it, looked gray in the moonlight. He picked up a stone and sent it right into one of the elm trees; some of the birds, disturbed from their roost, flew out, croaking, over his head. In the old days of superstition it might have been looked upon as an ill omen, coupled with what was to follow. Ah, Charley, if you could but foresee what is before you! If Mrs. Channing, from her far-off sojourn, could but know what grievous ill is about to overtake her boy!

Poor Charley suspected nothing. He was whistling a merry tune, laughing, boy-like, at the discomfiture of the cawing rooks, and anticipating the stolen game he and his friends were about to take part in on forbidden ground.

At that minute he saw a boy come forth from the cloisters, and softly whistle to him, as if in token that he was being waited for. Charley answered the whistle, and set off at a run.

Which of the boys it was he could not tell; the outline of the form and the college cap were visible enough in the moonlight, but not the face. When he gained the cloister entrance he could no longer see him, but supposed the boy had preceded him into the cloisters. On went Charley, groping his way down the narrow passage. "Where are you?" called out he.

There was no answer. Once in the cloisters, a faint light came in from the open windows overlooking the burial-yard—a very faint light, indeed, for the buildings all round it were so high as almost to shut out a view of the sky; you must go close to the window-frame before you could see it.

"I—s-a-a-y!" roared Charley again, at the top of his voice, "where are you all? Is nobody here?"

There came neither response nor sign of it. One faint sound certainly did seem to strike upon his ear from behind; it was like the click of a lock being turned. Charley looked sharply round, but all seemed still again. The low, dark, narrow passage was behind him; the dim cloisters were before him; he was standing at the corner

formed by the east and south quadrangles, and the pale burial-ground in their midst, with its damp grass and its gravestones, looked cold and lonesome in the moonlight.

The strange silence—it was not the silence of daylight—struck upon Charles with dismay. "You fellows there!" he called out again in desperation. "What's the good of playing up this nonsense?"

The tones of his voice died away in the echoes of the cloisters, but of other answer there was none. At that instant a rook, no doubt disturbed by the sound, came diving down and flopped its wings across the burial-ground. The sight of something moving there nearly startled Charles out of his senses, and the matter was not much mended when he discovered it was only a bird. He turned and flew down the passage to the entrance quicker than he had come up it; but, instead of passing out, he found the iron gate closed. What could have shut it? There was no wind. And if there had been a wind ever so boisterous, it could scarcely have moved that little low gate, for it opened inwards.

Charles seized it to pull it open. It resisted his efforts. He tried to shake it, but little came of that, for the gate was fastened firmly. Bit by bit stole the conviction over his mind that he was locked in.

Then a panic seized him. He was locked in the ghostly cloisters, close to the graves of the dead—on the very spot where, as idle tales went, the monks of bygone ages came out of those recording stones under his feet and showed themselves at midnight. Not a step could he take round the cloisters but his foot must press those stones. To be locked in the cloisters might be nothing for brave, grown, sensible men, but for many a boy it would have been a great deal, and for Charles Channing it was awful.

That he was alone he never doubted. He believed—as fully as belief, or any other feeling could flash into his horrified mind and find a place in it—that Bywater had decoyed him into the cloisters and left him there. All the dread terrors of childhood rose up before him. To say that he was mad in that moment might not be quite correct, but it is certain his mind was not perfectly sane. His whole body, his face, his hair, grew damp in an instant,

as does one in mortal agony; and with a smothered cry, which was not like that of a human being, he turned and fled through the cloisters, in the vague hope to find the other gate open.

It may be difficult for some of you to understand this excessive terror, albeit the situation was not a particularly desirable one. A college boy, in these enlightened days, laughs at supernatural tales as the delusions of ignorance in ages past; but for those who have had the misfortune to be imbued in infancy with superstitions, as was Charles Channing, the terror exists still, college boys though they may be. He could not have told (had he been collected enough to tell anything) what his precise dread was as he flew through the cloisters. None can at these moments. A sort of bugbear rises up in the mind, and they shrink from it, though they see not what its exact nature may be; but it is a bugbear that can neither be faced nor borne.

Feeling like one about to die; feeling as if death, in that awful moment, might be a boon rather than the contrary, Charles sped down the east quadrangle and turned into the north. At the extremity of the north side, forming the angle between it and the west, commenced the narrow passage similar to the one he had just traversed, which led to the west gate of egress. A faint glimmering of the white-flagged stones beyond this gate gave a promise it was open. A half-uttered sound of thankfulness escaped him, and he sped on.

Ah, but what was that? What was it that he came upon in the middle of the north quadrangle, standing within the niches? A towering form, with a ghostly face, telling of the dead, a mysterious, supernatural-looking blue flame lighting it up round about. It came out of the niche and advanced slowly upon him.

An awful cry escaped from his heart, and went ringing up to the roof of the cloisters. Oh, that the dean, sitting in his deanery adjacent to the cloisters, could have heard that helpless cry of anguish! No, no; there could be no succour for a place that was supposed to be empty and closed.

Back to the locked gate with perhaps the apparition following him? Or forward *past* IT to the open door of

egress? Which was it to be? In these moments there can be no reason to guide the course; but there is instinct; and instinct took that ill-fated child to the open door.

How he got past the sight it is impossible to tell. Had it been right in front of his path he never would have got past it. But it had made a halt when just beyond the niche, not coming out very far. With his poor hands stretched out and his breath leaving him, Charles did get by, and made for the door, the ghost bringing up the rear with a yell; while those old cloister niches when he was fairly gone, grew alive with moving figures, which came out of their dark corners and shrieked aloud with laughter.

Away, he knew not whither—away, like one who is being pursued by an unearthly phantom, deep catchings of his breath, as will follow undue bodily exertion, telling of something not right within; wild, low, abrupt sounds breaking from him at intervals—thus he flew, turning to the left, which took him towards . . . the river. Anywhere from the dreaded cloisters; anywhere from the old gray ghostly edifice; anywhere in his dread and agony! He dashed past the boat-house, down the steps, turning on to the river pathway, and—

Whether the light hanging at the boat-house deceived his sight—whether the slippery mud caused him to lose his footing—whether he was running too quickly and could not stop himself in time—or whether, in his irrepressible fear, he threw himself unconsciously in, to escape what might be behind him, will never be known. Certain it is, the unhappy boy went plunging into the river, another and a last wild cry escaping him as the waters closed over his head . . .

Simon's Wife

by Tanith Lee

British author Tanith Lee was born in 1947. She began her career with radio scripts and stories for young people. Her first major fantasy novel, The Birthgrave, *was published in the United States in 1975. Since then she has won a wide following for her highly colored and richly imagined tales of science fiction, fantasy, and a subgenre of fantasy called "sword and sorcery."*

Lee is a prolific author of short stories, most of them in the same genres as her novels. The unnerving "Simon's Wife," with its realistic and contemporary world, is a departure from her usual style and subjects. It was published for the first time in my own anthology Night Visions, *and Lee tells me it is based on an actual experience of her own. It certainly feels that way.*

Her name was Kristy, and she was his wife. In fact, she was no business of mine, except inasmuch as she was his business, since I was his lover.

Lover. Odd word, really, to describe us, the mutual objects of sexual desire, a word which bore, in our case, no positive relation to love. Oh, he wanted me, needed me, all of that. One can't expect more, for the world is an abject primitive place under its veneer of aspirations. You settle for what you can get, or else you settle for very little. I had tried both states, and I thought I understood what I must settle for. And it's nice to be needed, wanted. When I saw that in his eyes, that's when I started, in turn, desperately to want him. I didn't know about Kristy then, not quite then.

I met Simon in the way of business, which happens. Somehow, one resentfully feels it shouldn't happen, since one can shut one's self off from the social side of things and be safe from the complexities of life; but to eat one

must work, you have no choice in the matter. Then, when you are vulnerable with having to be in a certain place, life seizes its unfair advantage by throwing you together with someone, and the contact is made, the fuse lit, and no escape. There had been for me nobody, for a year, rather longer. You struggle out of one situation, bruised, wretched, consoling yourself that you will never let it occur again. Of course, it does. For over a year I'd managed to avoid the trap. The theatre is a paradox; it permits superficially intense intimacies and involvements which somehow miss, by their very nature, any actual entanglement. You can swim through these syrupy currents a very great while, and emerge unscathed, happy even, when you come up for air. Then one morning, standing about backstage with my sheaf of designs, I saw Simon standing at the angle of the corridor.

They were casting for the new production, and people were coming in and out with that bizarre, always attendant aura of impermanence and barely controlled hysteria. This band of actors scattered in the corridor had taken on the unnerving look of the dole queue they always somehow acquire at such moments, as if by sympathetic magic. He had it too, the feigned listlessness of stance betrayed by wide eyes, which would be funny if it weren't so disheartening to see talented people consistently in this predicament. I didn't register much else, except his hair, which was very blond, the wrong sort of blond to be a bleach-job. Then he glanced up and his eyes didn't quite meet mine. I offered him the respectfully distant but rueful smile I keep by me for these occasions. And almost at once, still without looking directly at me, the reaction came from his face—the face of a stranger—I hadn't anticipated, a sort of blatant and emotional interest, a kind of naked quickening that threw me, made me feel physically threatened, queasy, like suddenly touching a slab of alien bare skin in a crowded train. Then my door opened to admit me and my designs and I slid away inside the room, like a crab going under a stone.

Simon was in the production. It was a play full of small dehumanised parts that send the actors off in agonising

spasms trying to learn what the hell they're meant to be doing. The sort of play that's not a play for actors to act in, which can work, strangely enough, given the right impetus. I liked my designs, but again, it was that sort of play—it required accessories rather than people. I saw Simon very often. I saw him looking at me. It was a constant thing, almost a frightening thing. Though not because it was aggressive or insolent. He was attracted to me, that was all. Yet there was an element of the inexorable in it. It was worse, because we rarely spoke, only enough to exchange names, mention peculiarities of weather, acoustics. When we were face to face, he looked away from me; it was when I looked away he looked at me. Which gave me the feeling that when our eyes finally met some absolute demand would be put to me, not even so much a demand as an appeal, and I couldn't be sure what answer was going to well up inside me.

The play didn't work; it folded. Everyone folded with it in a mute, grey, resigned and cynical depression for which no consolation is ever to be found. Three days after the closure, Simon phoned me. I had known he would. When I heard his voice I experienced that glint of satisfaction at a prediction vindicated and the horrible terror that always assails me at such instants. The cause of the terror was simple: I could see the door of the trap swinging open, and I knew I was going to step inside.

We had dinner somewhere. God knows what we ate, each other, probably, in the abstract. Our eyes met, on the third glass of wine; he was that afraid, or that mistrustful of himself or me. And the eyes laid out before me all I had dreaded to observe in them, and with a shudder of revulsion, I felt myself respond. We do not belong to ourselves, but to our physical codes and appetites. We do not necessarily want what we need. By the time we left the restaurant and walked along the Embankment in the early night, our hands and our bodies could barely keep themselves apart; we were overwhelmed by the dismal, fruitless concupiscence that tortures those with no easy access to a private bed. We were both poor—the aborted play had seen to that—both presently out of work. In the great and glittering city of

vice, you still need money to copulate in comfort or security. For myself, deprived of funds, I had vacated my flat and moved in with a woman friend—onto her couch, to be precise, a not auspicious location for sex. As for Simon—clinging to my hand as if in fear of falling and drowning in the blue-black water, with its gilded frescoes of lights such an inconsequent distance beneath us—he now made his confession.

"Yes, I'm married. You guessed, of course."

Of course, I had guessed.

"Yes."

"Does it matter?"

"No," I said. It didn't, for I was still naive enough then to imagine it did not. I am still naive enough to imagine it does not—except for me.

"There isn't much left of a marriage," he said. "The trouble is, I care, I care a lot. It's a mess—"

"You don't have to tell me," I said.

"It's a relief to have someone to talk to."

"Good."

He glanced at me warily. He was, after all, an actor. It's too easy to suppose an actor always acts, is acting out lies, ploys, cunning scenes to snare and entice. He can presumably do that, it's his trade. But then, you would be suspicious all the time, would never credit anything. I believed him, as far as it went. It was hard not to believe him, when every inch of my skin and flesh and every bone and every nerve ending was primed to his eyes, his voice, his touch.

"It's pretty bad," he said, "but then I meet someone like you, and everything inside me turns over. I don't know how to say this," he said. Naturally, as always, this was the prelude to his discovering precisely how he might say it. His wife was going away. She was going to spend two or three days with her mother. The mother lived in Scotland, as if on purpose to facilitate visits that would take her daughter from the country and leave hearth and home free for the extra-marital sojourning of other women. It was perfectly ridiculous, for this is what he asked me to do: stay with him in her absence.

It seemed to me then, she must know, his wife, whose

name I was not yet familiar with, know he was about to make this liaison with me. Probably he had asked her before asking me. Such arrangements are not uncommon, or so one is led to think.

I said: "I suppose you do this quite often."

He looked miserable, and said he had never done it before.

Oddly enough, the same sick disorientation that was sweeping me seemed also to be sweeping over him. It was the sort of mood where one might do anything. There is, for me, this added dilemma, that I am afraid of everything, and consequently sensible fears have no value. A day in some provincial English city I am unused to produces in me the same kind of vivacious head-long panic anyone else might suffer on crossing through the Iron Curtain. I could not assess it, and did not try, but I said I didn't know what to say, and like him, at that point, I was lying.

So we adhered our bodies to each other, that marvellous kissing of new lovers, very like death without death's essential and obligatory deadness. We parted nervously, and next day he nervously rang me, and I nervously told him I would do what he had asked. It seems quite peculiar to me now that I agreed to it. Even then, I thought it absurd. But I was desperately lonely and had not realised it. Life and lust were exacting their revenge for being ignored.

The house was of the tall, narrow, semi-detached variety, and abutting on a wild stretch of London heath. It had a fashionable, delapidated air, autumnal and Victorian. The kind of place that fills me with nostalgia for a past where I never existed, the kind of place, too, that I pine for and admire, but should really hate to inhabit. The other half of the house, the other "attached" portion, was sombre, overhung with trees like massive cobwebs. It looked as if the neighbours had died and no one had found out yet. Other dwellings kept their distance, and the road, all bits of stone, came winding up from the raucous High Street as if onto another plane.

Simon met me at the station, standing on the platform

like a happy child to greet me, as I came from the train, stiff and chilled with fright. He was rather older than me, but made me feel terribly old, he was so apparently liberated and glad at my arrival. On me, the whole situation had come down like a ton of bricks. It seemed almost nightmarish, and as the train had gathered momentum, I had scrabbled frantically around in my brain, trying to remember what Simon actually looked like, for alarm had dispelled his image. All I could recapture were the hungry eyes, the white-blond hair, and my own sensual longing that had included itself as a weird facet of my terror. Then, meeting him, his innocence, or his insensibility, which made him oblivious of the ghastliness of what we did, its sheer bad taste, seemed to add an extra burden to my back.

"I hope your neighbours are blind, deaf, and dumb," I said.

He said neither he nor his wife had anything to do with neighbours. Defiantly I decided it was not my problem, that I had come to gratify myself and damn him and damn all the rest of it. We got into his car and drove through a welter of streets, eventually onto the gravel road, the rainy green wing of the heath opening on the right, and the gaunt houses with their witch-hat gables and glaring black windows on the left. We reached the relevant drive, got out of one interior, the car, climbed stairs, emerged into another, the house. I had now achieved the stage of no longer really seeing things, except through a sort of fog, a type of fear-drunkenness which can only be eradicated by the real thing, alcohol, or possibly yoga, which I have never mastered. I surveyed the immaculate living room and sat bolt upright in a terse pink chair, letting him pour drink into me like anti-freeze into a reluctant engine. At last a rose haze replaced the fog, a rose haze through which I could, strangely, see very well.

We went into the upstairs bedroom. Temporarily freed of doubts, I gave myself over to the self-conscious yet quite unique joy of lying down in a bed with a man whose naked body filled me with desire and pleasure, even delight. The best is always the first, perhaps, that is the sugar coating; the bitter kernel comes later. The walls

turned white, then dull red with the stormy sunset. We made love like two people dying of thirst and coming on a well. It surprised me to find him apparently as thirsty as I. Presently, in a series of twining aftermaths, we began softly to say those things to each other that men and women do say at such a time, when they have got over the limiting fences of good manners, reticence and clear judgment. And gradually the walls turned redder, and more red, then slate, then almost green, then the colour of Lucozade from the modern street lamps, which marched up the road in despite of all Victoriana and all the arcane stealth of love.

By now, I was sober again, or rather drunk merely on the loins and liking of a man. At some point we got up and ate in the stern, un-Victorian kitchen below, eating huge random chunks of bread, cheese, oranges. In the pitch black of the night, just the neon shafts on the wall like blades, we went back to bed and coupled—coupled *is* the word. In the black I could not see his face, nor any part of him, or scarcely. No matter; by then I knew him through and through.

"You're beautiful," he said, "a beautiful lover, a beautiful woman. So beautiful."

But when he turned to sleep, he turned also his back to me, the surest sign this idyll was only of the flesh, and only for one night, or two.

When light came in at the windows, I woke up, as in fact I had been waking on and off throughout the darkness. I looked first at him, lover's look, woman's look. He slept soundly, appetite appeased. For the first time, rather stupidly, I accepted the fact we were lying in the bed which normally he shared with her, the unknown, unnamed woman in Scotland. I didn't feel guilty, hadn't really at any point felt that, only vaguely and disturbingly surprised to find myself in such a situation.

I got up quietly, and went into the strange, bright, yellow bathroom. When I returned he was still asleep, but he stirred as I slid back into the bed. "What is it?" he said, and it abruptly occurred to me he had forgotten who I was, and thought I was his wife. His eyes opened and a sharpening of some suddenness in them convinced me

this was so. "Nothing," I said. He sighed and shut his eyes again, and I said, before I could stop myself: "Does she know I'm here?" He laughed drowsily. "Christ, no, she doesn't." The cold primal light of the windows was washing all about the room, irradiating objects, items I hadn't properly seen before. "She'd mind, then," I said idiotically. "She'd probably stick a knife in you," he said. He was nearly asleep again, and people say these things, out of a sort of ugly pride masking insecurity, or a sort of unconscious striving to create drama in their lives. Even so, the frightful tactlessness of the remark made me aware of my own tactlessness, lying beside him in their bed. I watched the light bleach the ceiling and fell asleep not thinking to.

The phone rang about eight-thirty and woke both of us. Simon went cursing to answer it, and came back cursing.

"Fred, my agent. Something's come up. I've got to get back to town by ten. Christ, he picks the most bloody times."

He had that bewildered appearance people take on who have forced themselves physically wide awake in a matter of seconds, abandoning the brain to catch up later. Two things went through my own mind. Anyone connected with the theatre is liable to these calls, with about a day to an hour's notice to make it to some important interview or function. Agents pounce and sink their teeth in whatever gets close enough, and expect the same predatory instinct from their clients. Simon obviously couldn't pass this up. At the same moment, though, it might so easily be a ruse, planned in advance, an excuse to be rid of the adulterous partner.

"I'd better go," I said.

"Go where?" said Simon.

"If you have to be in town."

"I'll only be two or three hours. It's nothing special. Three hours at the most. No, stay here, I'll be back in time to take you to lunch."

His eyes were still full of their emotional hunger, not appeased after all. Perhaps he didn't want me to leave. Yet his manner was indefinably not the same, more brisk, less lingering and less happy.

By half past nine he was gone. The car drove off into the rain. And I, as I realised suddenly, with no means to regain access should I once leave the premises, was trapped inside the thin Victorian semi-detached.

The strangeness did not come immediately. To begin with (though this, I see now, was a sort of defence against the impending premonition of strangeness), I gave myself tasks. I washed the stack of dishes, rinsed them and set them to drain; I stripped the bed, and made it. These activities, of the kind which one carries out quite spontaneously in one's own home, gave the place a spurious friendliness, gave my being in that place a spurious correctness. Yet, even those actions somehow have, in retrospect, a brittle quality . . .

Tasks completed, I ran a bath in the yellow bathroom. In the yellow bath, the water was reminiscent of egg yoke. The soap, also like an egg, I did not particularly care for. It slid out of my hand onto the mat. On the wall, above the bath, was a white chip in the paint. I wondered what could have made it. Perhaps it had always been there. Perhaps Simon's wife had come into this bathroom and flung something at the wall and so chipped the paint—this irrational idea half amused me, and half appalled me with its visualization of violence. Just then, precisely then, I heard the front door open, very softly, next softly close, and my body, naked in that yellow bath, turned to ice.

I don't know how long I sat there, frozen in the warm water. I was listening, waiting. I knew that Scotland had disgorged Simon's wife, that she was here. I knew that in a moment she would mount the stairs, walk into this bathroom whose door I had not bothered to lock. And then? She didn't come into the bathroom, and the suspense was so devastating that finally I could no longer accept it. And naturally, rejecting the suspense, I saw the truth at once. She didn't come into the bathroom because she wasn't here in the house. Old houses are notorious for their inner murmurings, creaks and timpanies, and this one was no exception. Why, if she had been here, I should have heard other sounds, and indeed, the front

door would have shut more noisily, for she did not suspect and would have returned in innocence. Or did she suspect? Was she planning to arrive early, and was this an omen? No, ridiculous. People didn't carry on that way. You could rely on their lack of imagination, their adherence to convention, their fear, which kept them safe within the limits of reason. And Simon was so sure of her, of the day of her return, he had told me so, stressed it. My thoughts made the same whirlpool and disintegration in my head as the water going through the bath through its constricted exit point. I understood perfectly I was being stupid. Even so, to dress my bareness and to camouflage my face with make-up had become imperative.

Clothed, camouflaged and in possession of my external self, I believed I was calmed and altered. I went down into the modern kitchen and made myself coffee, and looked at the rain through the window, and the rain-glaucous heath.

The mug I had picked up, not thinking, had a flowery girl patterned on it. It was probably hers. Well, so what? She would never know. Never know I had walked about her house, made coffee in her mug, eaten from her dishes and washed them (two dinner plates draining, two breakfast plates, two cups, two saucers, two of everything); if she came home early, never even seeing me, just seeing that double act of crockery, she would know, wouldn't she? I'd bathed in her yellow bath, slept in her bed, my head on her pillow, my body coupled to the body of her man. Yes. Well, it was done.

I finished the coffee, washed the cup, and dried it. Methodically, I dried and put away in its proper compartment one of everything that had stood draining. And then a kind of electric urge galvanized me. It wasn't merely crockery that condemned. A tissue thrown negligently in a waste bin smeared with the wrong shade of eye-shadow, a jar of cold cream left behind, forgotten in a last minute rush to leave. Worse, a hair, not the right colour, on the pillow or the side of the wash basin. Yes, a *hair*. I was blonde, but not as fair as Simon, and somehow I guessed she would be dark, his wife, darker than either of us.

Bizarre: I could start, if I wished, to build up a picture of her, a very clear picture, simply from the things around me.

The rain dripped and splashed outside, and the house made small noises to itself. Almost like a footstep, just then, in the living room next door. Fool. I went back upstairs, treading quietly, though who would hear? All right, if I wanted to be careful, I would go over the house and destroy every trace of myself.

I began in the bathroom. There were no hairs, but I made certain. Then, on impulse, I packed away my toothbrush, and the other washing impedimenta, into my sponge bag, and carried it into the bedroom where I had left my other things. I even checked the bathroom cabinet, which I had not actually used. There was a glass bottle of bath salts in the cabinet, they smelled of roses, hers . . . In the bedroom, I stripped the bed again, inspected it, remade it. I took my box of tissues, my perfume and a scatter of other small items, and packed them up. Even an alien scent, of course, could give a warning—I opened the bedroom windows. The rain sheeted in, I banged them closed again. Suppose someone had seen me at the window?

I was being an idiot. I told myself this, but I could not rest. When Simon came back, I could question him more thoroughly about dates and times, reassure myself. He would be angry, probably, at this pedantic terror of mine.

Maybe I should investigate the living room below? Had I been avoiding it? For some reason I didn't want to go down into that immaculate chamber with its pink chairs, where I had gradually and determinedly lost my inhibitions, drinking this woman's drink in order to drink her husband more thirstily.

Eventually, my bag was completely packed, the impression of myself expunged, I thought, from the upper floor. I felt the effectiveness of this expunging in the sense of impermanence which now engulfed me. I wandered this house like a ghost, no familiar possession of mine in sight, a lost traveller without a landmark.

So I noticed, more and more, those possessions, those landmarks of Simon's wife, whose name I did not yet

know, whose picture I was forming by irresistible slow degrees.

Why did I suppose her to be dark, almost black-haired? For this was how I most definitely envisaged her. It came to me at last that the flowery-patterned girl on the mug had had black hair; probably the idea sprang from that, yet I could not shake my conviction off. A dark, slim wife, and taller than me. But then, I am not very tall. Her dressing table in the bedroom was littered with personal effects. They now took on the frightful aspect of objects subtracted from the pockets or luggage of someone found dead, because she had left them helplessly behind to my scrutiny. I did not mean to pry, but could not avoid gazing, nervously fingering. The porcelain bowl with its population of hairpins, and little beads presumably rescued from a broken necklace, the blue pomander which no longer had any odour. A large, clean, black and green cotton handkerchief hung three quarters of its length out of a drawer. A postcard was tucked into the angle of the mirror. It showed a view of trees and a castle. I touched it, and it fell instantly from its niche and landed picture down on the table top. As if purposely constructed by a stranger months ago in order that I might find it and learn from it, the neat handwriting on the postcard said: "Dear Kristy and Simon, the weather's lousy but the pubs are fine."

Very, very carefully, as carefully, perhaps, as if handling the wires of a bomb, I replaced the postcard in its corner of the mirror.

Her name was Kristy, then. I knew it now. Kristy, Simon's wife.

The power of giving names. Ancient superstition. By thy name, I conjure thee to come to me . . .

What did I understand about Simon, anyway? Sex is a false reassurance, it shows so much, but still there is so much more that is hidden. No, I didn't really have an inkling of his basic motives, his unconscious mind. Suppose—no, insane notion—yes, but suppose. Suppose he had lied to me about the day of her—of *Kristy's*—return? Suppose she were coming home today after all, and he had meant her to walk in and find me, I merely

the pawn in some game of love and hate he wished to play with her.

I was shivering by now, but I switched on no fire to cheer me, and though the overcast sky was darkening all the rooms in a preternatural fashion, I could not turn on a light. What time was it? A quarter to twelve. Well, he'd be here soon, one o'clock, not long.

Anyway, even if . . . even if his Kristy were to stalk through the front door right now, I was packed, I was ready to leave. I could run, snatch up my bag and coat and—my coat. A simple matter, a coat. But where had Simon put this coat of mine? Suddenly it became a problem of panic-ridden intensity to find the coat, penultimate (I was the ultimate) piece of the randomly scattered jigsaw of Me I was putting frantically together.

Be calm, and think. Yes, he had hung the coat on a hanger—or had he? Was the coat merely lying over the back of a chair in the living room? Wait, there was a cupboard in the bedroom, one of those fitted cupboards flush to the wall—I did not, I believe, really imagine my coat was in the cupboard. What was I doing, then, opening the door to bring myself face to face with the garments of Kristy?

I think I stopped breathing as I looked, afraid to breathe her in, some fragrance of miasma of her life. Clothes are very intimate, one does not realise how intimate they are. Slender and shadowy, they swayed there, like the several hanged bodies of the woman herself. They appeared pathetic, desolate. And yet, how curiously terrible.

I slammed the door shut, took up my bag and went down the stairs. The kitchen gleamed in the brackish rain-light. The door was just barely ajar which led into the living room. The house was silent now, cataleptic but not dead.

Don't be afraid, no one's in there.

The room was empty, congealed and uninviting, with an awful dank, pale smell as if it had been recently distempered. I could hardly recognise it, this room, which before had been made dramatic by nerves, and warmed by Simon's presence. My coat lay over a chair back.

Because I was so very cold, I raised the coat and drew it on. I set my bag down beside a pink chair.

What time was it? Twelve o'clock.

Only another hour. Perhaps he might come sooner.

How trustworthy was Simon, though? What had he said to me, with that tactless ugly self-aggrandizement: She'd stick a knife in you. Poor Kristy. How much would it hurt her, if she did know? As much as it would hurt me, knowing it was with her he would lie in the future, wrapped in that black-twining pleasure-madness he had shared with me?

There was a book lying on the window sill directly across from me. The rain glitter through the window was flickering on its jacket, like a signal: Come see.

I went to the book reluctantly, dragging my feet.

A quite ordinary volume. I don't even recollect what it was, although I may have noticed, for a moment. I turned the pages, flyleaf, title page. I saw, written there, mundane, unoriginal and entirely horrifying: "Darling Kristy, always my love. Simon."

The house made a sound. It was like a great soft indrawn breath. The stairs creaked, settling from my descent, the way old stairs will.

I could see her now, vividly. She seemed to glow up at me from the greyness inside my brain. Slim, dark, and tall. Her eyes were fixed on me with a sort of blindness that could yet behold me, like the duplicated eye of some fearsome camera.

Kristy. Simon's wife.

Something moved in the window. Not the rain. My reflection.

No, not my reflection. The reflection of something else, a few paces behind me.

I didn't turn all that fast. I didn't have to whirl about to discover, because I already understood.

She was standing just inside the doorway. She was tall, slender, and very, very dark, and her face was exactly as I had pictured it a second before; in fact, so absolute a reproduction that at any other instant I would have questioned it. But not then, oh, not then. She held me in her camera sight, blind, seeing. Her right arm was raised.

I had witnessed the stance a hundred times in the cinema, a safe distance from me on a screen: the angle of the elbow, the clenched hand with its knuckle-bones protruding, the searing shine, borrowed from a window, high-lighted and flashing. It was the bread knife she held so securely. Its serrated edge, which last night had cut the loaf, the orange segments, trembled in the air as it waited to cut my flesh.

My heart is strong. It lurched, contracted, seemed to burst, but it kept beating. I didn't speak or cry out; neither did she. She looked pitilessly at me, but with no enjoyment, no tears and no fury. Just with the knife clenched in her thin strong hand.

And then somehow it occurred to me that I could get by her, which was surely unlikely, or impossible. Yet it seemed I could do it, and somehow I did do it. I even grabbed up my bag as I ran under the silver blade of the knife. I ran, and I got through the door, across the hall, flung wide the outer door, found myself darting headlong down the steps. I could not feel my feet, my body, but the rain I felt. The rain pulled me forward into itself, sheltering me.

In fright, I heard her pursuing feet behind me, over the gravel driveway, along the wet pavement beyond. But I looked back, and she had not pursued me. Kristy had not pursued me with her knife.

I never thought to fling myself upon some neighbouring door, hammering the bell and shrieking. But then, in any case, all the houses which fronted on the heath had that same blank uncommunicative appearance. I hazard no one would have answered.

I did not continue running. I walked, quickly and steadily, down the hill. Once or twice I looked over my shoulder; only the rain was behind me.

I reached the High Street, found a bus which took me to the station, found a train which would take me home.

I don't know exactly what went through my mind as I did all this, if anything did. I was responding to an impulse to vacate the scene, not merely the house, but the district itself, yet I was not afraid, or did not feel

afraid. Even when I had looked over my shoulder, I had already guessed she was not there. I was very dull, matter-of-factly thinking of my brush with a murderess. I slumped on the train seat, an average uninteresting passenger, with no claim to notoriety and no evidence of it in my person.

It was not till I got back to the flat of my friend, whose couch I currently utilised, that my hands started to shake, next my whole body. No one was in, so I was able to throw up in the bathroom and presently weep, all undisturbed, unwitnessed and with no need of explanation. By the time my friend returned that evening, she found me apparently normal and with some casual excuse for my abbreviated absence.

I was washing my hair when the phone rang. It was Simon. I didn't want to speak to him and could not grasp why he should be phoning me. Actually, I had hardly thought of him, hardly thought of anything at all.

At the sound of my voice, he began instantly to shout at me. I couldn't work out what he was saying. He was demanding to know why I had abandoned the house, where I had gone. He said he had driven about for hours in the car, searching for me. He was angry and desperate, and it made no sense. I was quite calm, and when he stopped, I said, quite calmly enough: "Surely Kristy told you why I wasn't there?"

"What the hell has this got to do with Kristy?"

My wet hair dripped on my shoulders as the rain had done. My friend stood in her small kitchenette, making an omelette; I knew she could hear every word I said. So she heard me say:

"Kristy came home early."

"What are you talking about? I told you, she's in *Scotland,* for Christ's sake—"

"Kristy came home early," I said. I smiled as if he could see me. "She found her own explicit way, to tell me to get out."

"What are you playing at?" he shouted. "Have you gone bloody mad?"

"Ask her," I said.

"How can I bloody ask her? She's bloody not here, you stupid bitch."

I put the phone down. It didn't make sense and I didn't want to think about it anymore.

My friend peered at me sideways.

"Sorry," I said. "If he rings again, could you be fantastically kind and tell him I'm not here?"

He did ring, once more, next morning.

"He said where could he reach you," my friend informed me. "I said I didn't know. Bloody rude bastard," she added.

I waited till she went out, to cry again.

He didn't ring any more, and I cried, on and off, for eighteen days. And then, like getting over flu, I suddenly recovered, the whole thing dropped away from me, ceased to matter.

Only one time did I wonder, make an attempt to figure it out. Had Kristy got rid of me, and then left the house before Simon's return? And when she saw him again, did she pretend nothing had happened? Or did she use her shining knife on him? Somehow, I never reckoned that she had.

A month later, I heard, through the theatre grapevine, Simon had a part in some playhouse production in the north. I was working myself by then, submerged in that thick buoyant sea which I find so sustaining and generally so danger-free. Professionally, I did quite well that year, actually. Quite well.

It was the year after that I met Kristy socially.

I was at someone's party, in a rambling basement flat in Kensington, drinking sour white wine under the dim moody lighting. I'd just been working very hard on some rush designs, and was in that state of worn-out lassitude that will laugh at any joke and commiserate with any misfortune. I'd talked to about twenty people, most of whom I didn't know, most of whom had seemed to pour on me the stories of their lives, which I'd gratefully lapped up with suitable giggles and groans, only too happy to let my own brain slumber. Then there was a plump fair girl, a couple of years younger than me, who

didn't really say anything and looked at me with the same sort of tired preparedness to listen that I was giving everyone else. We drifted apart incompatibly, after a brief audible silence, and I seated myself with a male acquaintance on the fake Italian cassone in the hall.

"Saw you talking to Kristy," he said. "Must have been dismal for you."

I got the sort of feeling you get when a car, hurtling from a side turning, narrowly misses you on the wet road.

"Kristy?" I said.

"Yes, you know Kristy. Simon's wife. He was in that thing you did those nice red trees for. Folded. What was it? Couple of years ago."

"Yes, I remember."

My eyes were feverishly searching, searching, but I couldn't find her. "Where is she?"

"Oh, my God, girl. *There.* You were rabbitting with her about half a minute ago. Sack dress with the big tits. That's it."

"No," I said, "that's not Kristy." He was pointing flamboyantly, and discourteously, at the plump blonde girl with the listening look.

"Not Kristy? Of course, it's Kristy. Poor cow. Simon's pissed off and left her, living with someone in Leeds now, and she doesn't seem to want to pull herself together. She always was a well-rounded wench, but she's starting to sag. My dear, I said to her, you've got to make the effort, can't you see what you're doing to yourself?"

"She bleaches her hair," I said. "That's new."

"No, that's natural, that hair, always was. Used to look weird, her and Simon together. She's nearly as fair as Simon. Quite incestuous. Mind you, I don't say a good hairdresser couldn't improve on nature."

He went on, telling me what a mess she was in, what he'd told her, how her bra needed to hoist a couple of notches. The blonde girl went on standing in the corner, by the lacquer fire screen, letting people come to her, fill her glass with gin and her ears with chatter. Once I caught her name, clear across the room from another mouth: Kristy. Kristy, Simon's wife.

"It's funny," I said at last, my voice perfectly level,

because I suppose anyone who has to do with the theatre, in whatever capacity, eventually masters some rudiments of acting.

"Funny? It's terribly, heartbreakingly sad, you callous cow."

"No," I said, "I mean it's funny because I met Kristy once, or I thought I did. And she was quite different."

Across the room, Kristy, short, blonde, overweight, tired and deserted, had started to cry into her little glass of gin, simultaneously fumbling from her bag a large black and green cotton handkerchief. And with her plump hand, which patently had never held a knife, she lifted the handkerchief that once I had seen hanging from her dressing table drawer, and crushed the cotton over her eyes.

Hell on Both Sides of the Gate

by Rosemary Timperley

Rosemary Timperley (born in 1920) is regarded by many as the foremost writer of ghost stories in England today. Since 1952, when Lady Cynthia Asquith selected one of her stories for The Second Ghost Book, *she has produced an impressive list of novels, short fiction, and radio scripts, besides editing a number of excellent anthologies. Her radio plays have frequently been produced on Great Britain's* Morning Story *and* Just Before Midnight *series and, most notably, on Capital Radio's* Moment of Terror. *But she is principally known for her short stories, including both quiet ghostly tales and powerful examples of contemporary psychological horror. Although her work has never been available in the United States, her stories have appeared in all of the major British anthologies and in many volumes of the annual series,* The Pan Book of Horror Stories.

"Hell on Both Sides of the Gate" is carefully, almost sedately, composed in style, pacing, and effect. But it is a very strong and disturbing story that portrays, without flinching, quite a number of frightening situations and threatening psychological states. Its central character is a woman, and one of its most unnerving scenes reflects a woman's special fears. And after that scene, there are still worse things waiting.

Astrid Soliman set out early to climb to Hell's Gate, the island's highest village. Usually she made this journey with eager anticipation, as she'd be meeting her husband off the plane; but today was different. It would be two whole months before Cyril's next leave, and this time the plane would be bringing not him but her father.

Her father: What would he be like? What *had* he been like? She couldn't remember him at all. She'd been a baby when he was taken away and shut up for "life" in an asylum for the criminally insane. Now his sentence was over, since "life," of course, is not life—only a very long time: in the case of Gordon Sleigh, twenty-five years. Astrid was now twenty-six. Her father would be seventy. He'd been an "old" father anyway and surely the prison years would have aged him even more. Would he now be a frail skeleton of a man, a half-ghost? If so, how should she treat him? Like an invalid? Oh, why did he have to come here at all?

The answer to that was simple: he had nowhere else to go and his daughter was his only living relative. Gordon Sleigh was coming home.

As she continued up the mountainous road, she brooded over that old crime of his. She hadn't been told of it until she was in her teens. When she'd asked her uncle and aunt about her parents, they'd said they'd tell her one day and meantime not to worry. But the shadow of the secret did worry her and eventually she got the truth.

It was a cruel truth, worse than the secrecy. Gordon Sleigh had married a woman twenty years younger than himself. He had tried to give her everything she wanted. She had borne him a daughter. The father had adored the child. The mother, vain, spoilt and frivolous as she was pretty, had found the little girl a damned nuisance, interfering with her freedom, messing up her nice clothes. Her neglect of the baby verged on cruelty. Her husband argued and protested . . . And then one day, after a fearful quarrel, when the mother had said coldly of the child, "I can't stand the sight of it," Gordon had gone berserk and strangled his wife.

He had then picked up his daughter in his arms, taken her to the police station of the London district where they lived, confessed his crime and said: "Now you can do what you like with me, but please see that my daughter is conveyed to my brother and sister-in-law. They live in the West Indies, on the island of Saba. They're good people. They'll give her a good start in life."

And so it came to pass that Astrid was taken to Saba,

where she lived with her uncle and aunt, themselves childless. At the "capital" village, called The Bottom, Astrid found her home. She had never known anything different. The little beaches were her playground, the surrounding mountains her familiars.

Because of her past and the possibility of gossip, her relatives had tended to keep her away from people, and she was a natural loner anyway. She loved wandering about by herself, secure on her island. As the years passed she stayed childishly dreamy, untouched by what is loosely called "the world."

Then, when she was twenty, she met Cyril Soliman on one of her mountain walks. He was an Englishman who worked as principal keeper of the British Board of Trade lighthouse at Sombrero. That rock was barren except for the lighthouse, which functioned at the northern corner of the Anegarda Passage. Hundreds of ships had been wrecked on the reefs of Anegarda, the drowned island, and, had it not been for the lighthouse and the reliability of its staff, there might have been hundreds more.

Cyril Soliman told the girl about the hazards of his work and she found it intensely romantic. He fulfilled her vague dreams; she fell in love with him rather as a teenager falls in love with a film actor. He, a restricted and lonely man, responded to her hero-worship. They had a whirlwind romance during that month of his leave and he married her, a civil ceremony, before he returned to Sombrero. To Astrid it was all rather like a fairytale—and it had come true.

They bought a cottage at The Bottom and there Astrid had lived a peaceful and unsophisticated life for six years. Her only anxiety was the danger of Cyril's work; but he was expert at it, so she tried to put that fear out of her mind.

During the years of her marriage, her uncle and aunt both died. He was drowned in a storm at sea—he'd been captain of a schooner—and his wife died soon after, of an infection. The truth was that once her man was gone, she simply had not wanted to live. Astrid was saddened, but had not missed them too much. She had her own life.

* * *

Naturally she had thought of those two as her only real relatives, had regarded her father as little more than an evil myth—until the news had arrived from England that Gordon Sleigh was about to be released and wished to come and live with his daughter. Astrid, appalled, had been prepared to refuse to have him, but Cyril said, "No, that would be cruel." He was her father, after all, and whatever he'd done, he'd been punished. "Let the old man come to us, Astrid. Apart from anything else, he'll be company for you when I'm offshore."

"But I don't want any company when you're not here," she had protested. For she still enjoyed being alone. She liked to walk and read and dream and listen to records during the two months when Cyril was away, and then she was all the more affectionate when he had his month at home. She was well suited by a husband who was away a lot, as he was suited by a wife who wasn't "round his neck" all the time.

However, she had agreed to accept her father.

The airstrip, just below Hell's Gate, was, of course, a blessing. It meant that even during the hurricane season when Saba was isolated by sea for weeks at a time, a plane could still get through. So Cyril rarely had to waste precious days of leave. But now the airstrip showed a darker aspect to her: it made it easy for her father to arrive. Maybe he wouldn't have been so keen if he'd had to make the tortuous journey by water.

She reached Hell's Gate. No sign of the plane. She was told there'd be an hour's delay, for technical reasons, and walked on higher in an attempt to ease her mind by tiring her body. She rambled up through the forest of tree ferns, where begonias blossomed and bananas beckoned, and when she was right at the top of the aptly named Mount Scenery, she stood and gazed at the other distant islands all around. This was one of her favourite spots. Usually it made her happy just to be here, but today she was full of nebulous fears. Even her beloved trees had an almost evil aspect, as if one day they would turn against her—allow something terrible to happen to her—but what?

An hour later she was back at the airstrip and the plane, insect-small at first, then large as a bird, and then gradu-

ally becoming large as life, zoomed towards Flat Point landing field.

Three passengers alighted. Two were a young black couple. The third was an old, white man: so very white. A face like white paper; shoulder-length hair like blowing snow. He was wearing a white suit, wearing it awkwardly as if it were unfamiliar and too new. His luggage consisted of one small suitcase. He began to plod laboriously across the tarmac in the blazing sun—like someone exercising in a prison yard, thought Astrid and she wanted to run away screaming—she had a fleeting vision of herself, running and running—and she was in white, too—not the cheap little yellow thing she was wearing today.

She controlled herself, put a smile on her face and went to meet the newcomer. "Mr. Sleigh—Father?"

"Yes. And you are Astrid. You're like your mother."

A shiver passed through the girl despite the heat. "I—I've come to take you home," she said. "A taxi will drive us to The Bottom. Let me carry your case."

"If you wish, but it's very light." It was indeed. His worldly goods were virtually non-existent. He was a man who had nothing but the burden of his past.

In the taxi, he stared out of the window and did not speak. Astrid guessed he was still drinking in the world about him after his long incarceration. "Beautiful, isn't it?" she commented at last.

"It is," he agreed, adding intensely: "So are you, my child." He had, she thought, the eyes of a child himself. Blue. Innocent. How could a man with such eyes have committed such a crime?

"Good and beautiful," he continued. "I knew you would be as long as you were given a good start in life. That's all any child needs—a good start. I have no regrets, despite all I have suffered. It was worth it."

He was looking down at his hands. They were exceptionally large, too large for the rest of him. The fingers were thick and long and strong. The wrists were powerful. She too was staring at those hands and thinking: But for them, my life would have been quite different, I suppose I do owe him something—but am I supposed to be grateful?

"Every man," he said, "must be prepared to sacrifice himself for his child."

"Don't think about the past any more."

"But it's all I have. What I did then was the last thing I *did*. I've done nothing since except wait. Twenty-five years of waiting for 'Her Majesty's pleasure.' Sometimes I thought she'd never give herself the pleasure of letting me out." He laughed, without amusement. "They thought I was mad to do it, you see, but it was the sanest thing I ever did. It was practical and effective. It gave you a good start in life."

He's like a record stuck in a grove, she thought. "We'll soon be at The Bottom now," she informed him.

"I have come through Hell's Gate, out of Hell," Gordon Sleigh murmured. "So this should be Heaven. I'll make it so. Strange that the way from Hell's Gate goes downhill though, to The Bottom. Heaven should be at the top." He paused and then went on in a more common-sense voice: "I gathered from your letter, Astrid, that your husband is a prisoner."

"Cyril? No! I never said that! He's keeper of the light-house at Sombrero—that's what I wrote to you."

"Yes, you did, and that kind of lighthouse *is* a prison. It's a Tower Light. I read the subject up. A man who works on a Tower Light, that is, one with no dry land around it—as distinct from a Land Light, on the mainland, or a Rock Light, on an island—is imprisoned there for a series of two-month sentences interspersed with one-month paroles. He spends two-thirds of the year in prison. Any man worth his salt would have got himself a Land Light posting, then there'd be accommodation provided for you, as his wife. He must be afraid of marriage, feels safer in his prison tower. Afraid of life itself. Some of the prisoners in the bin were like that. They preferred prison to freedom. They felt safe. They weren't real men at all."

"My husband is a real man and a brave one," Astrid said coldly. "He saves lives every day by looking after the light."

"No point in saving just any old lives," said her father. "Some aren't worth saving, and some are so worthless that they'd be better off dead."

"What a dreadful thing to say!"

"Only the truth, child."

The taxi drew up outside the cottage. Tight-lipped, Astrid got out, paid the driver, then took her father indoors. The furnishing of the cottage was monastically simple.

"*This* is your home?" said Gordon Sleigh.

"Cyril's and mine."

"Why is it as bare as a cell?"

"We like it this way. We're not materialistic. There's everything one needs, and the view of the sea through the window is decoration enough."

"Rubbish," said the old man. "The sea is a kind of prison wall, hemming you in. Your husband is a mean man. He should have provided you with a beautiful home, to suit your own beauty."

"I am not beautiful. I'm quite ordinary. I was lucky that Cyril looked twice at me. Also, he is not in the least mean. It's just that we both like simplicity."

"After six years of marriage, Astrid, why have you no children?"

"I don't know. It doesn't matter."

"No doubt he's got something wrong with him."

Indignantly the girl turned on the old man. "Perhaps you don't want to stay here after all. You could fly back in a day or so."

He gave her a stricken look. "Back to where?" His child-eyes pleaded with her. "I'm not being critical of *you*, child. You've been in my mind all these years and now that I'm with you, and find you so lovely, I want nothing more. But I do resent the way that your husband treats you. When I married your mother, I gave her everything a pretty woman could wish for. Men should be generous to their wives."

"How can you talk like that, considering—" She stopped. She couldn't say it. She was wretchedly aware that she didn't even begin to understand this stranger-father. His mind was a foreign country, the like of which she had never explored. And her nebulous fears turned into substantial ones. There was something ominously powerful about the old man. He made her feel weak as

water. She wished Cyril were here. She had never felt so unprotected.

Now Gordon Sleigh said, "I did various handyman jobs at the bin, for small payments, but they added up. I can afford to have this place turned into an ideal home. You must let me look after you, seeing that your husband is such an inadequate personality."

"Inadequate personality? What on earth is that?" Astrid asked impatiently.

"Psychological jargon for a drip. I learned quite a bit of the terminology used by the shrinks. At first they labelled me a 'paranoid schizophrenic with homicidal tendencies.' "

"And what exactly does that mean?"

"Exactly nothing, and anything at all. Everything means nothing and anything at all. The only truth is that, in real life, there are no rules."

"Well, I have a rule." She made a fragile effort to defy him. "It's that you're not to criticize Cyril."

"Cyril! What a name!"

Astrid flushed. That name was the only thing about her husband that she didn't admire. It *was* soppy.

"You'd have thought he'd have changed it," said her father.

"I expect you're hungry. I'll get us a meal. Meantime you can unpack." She took him to the small room which was to be his.

"It will take me hours to unpack, will it not?" he said, opening his case, which contained only underclothes, pyjamas and toilet items. He placed the garments in a drawer of the chest-of-drawers and the other things on top. "Reminds me of my small corner at the bin," he said.

"We'll go shopping tomorrow and buy you things."

"We will go shopping and I will buy *you* things. That frock is cheap and shabby. You should be clad like a princess, not a gipsy. I shall order clothes for you from the islands which have a tourist trade."

Seething inwardly, Astrid left him and began to prepare a meal. She felt as if her whole delightful life had collapsed about her ears, like a house of cards. How was

she going to endure living with Gordon Sleigh? It would be hell.

That night she lay sleepless and listened to him pottering about in his room. What was he doing? In the morning he showed her what he had done. He had made a drawing of how he thought her living-room should look, with opulent soft furnishings, pictures, ornaments. "This is how my daughter should live," he declared. Then he showed her sketches of dresses and coats. "And here are the sort of clothes she should wear. I've spent most of the night working on these. Your lean times are over, my child. I'm going to give you everything you want."

"But I'm happy as I am! That is, I *was* happy—"

"Until you married Mr. Inadequate Personality. Quite."

"No, I meant—" She funked telling him what she had meant.

Gordon Sleigh went ahead with arrangements to refurnish the cottage and supply Astrid with a "suitable" wardrobe. This at least kept him occupied and she found herself letting him have his way—not that she could have stopped him, any more than she could have halted a steam-engine.

In a way, Astrid and her father did settle down together. She let him do as he wished with the cottage and went for her usual solitary walks. She reminded herself that material things didn't matter and if it gave the old man pleasure to change the rooms, what harm did it do? The harm, of course, was that he was changing the place from the home that had been hers and Cyril's to one that was his. She began to feel like a guest there, a guest who now had to "dress for dinner," have her hair "done," make up her face. Her father insisted on these things and, loathing quarrels, she gave in. She had never before had to deal with anyone with such a domineering personality. It was a new experience and she didn't have the least idea how to combat it.

By the end of those first two months with her father, she only felt at home when she was outside. The fern forest was her living-room now. He never came there.

The day arrived when Cyril was due back. She set off alone to Hell's Gate to meet his plane. When she saw him alight and walk towards her, she ran full speed into his arms, clung to him like a scared child, and burst into tears.

"Darling, what on earth's the matter?" He embraced her, but inside himself he shrank a little. He didn't like displays of hysteria. Astrid had never behaved like this before.

She told him, sobbingly, as a taxi drove them away from the airstrip, but she had to admit that when she put it into words, it didn't sound dreadful at all. Cyril said: "The old boy's only trying to please you, by the sound of it. And let's face it, love, you and I have been rather neglectful when it comes to 'gracious living.' "

"So you're on his side!"

"Of course not, but you mustn't be so afraid of change. Life is all changes, like the weather. Nothing stays still."

"It stayed still before, and I was happy—"

"Be happy now." He kissed her and they remained in close embrace for the rest of the drive. Astrid was comforted, but only temporarily. When they reached what had once been their home, her father was waiting. He ushered them into the elaborately furnished living-room as if he were the host and they mere visitors. Cyril looked ill at ease in the new setting. They made polite conversation over a meal, and when night had fallen and Cyril and Astrid were in bed together, they found they couldn't make love.

"What's the matter with us?" Astrid whispered.

"Something in the atmosphere."

"Yes. It's him . . . Listening."

They lay passionless and sleepless, listening to the silent listener. The old man was so strong. His personality infiltrated the very air about them. And Astrid, although she hated to admit it, felt disappointed in her husband. Surely he had succumbed too easily to the influence of her father.

* * *

That month of Cyril's leave was something of a nightmare. The old man rarely left them alone. What had once been an idyllic holiday for them both turned into an ordeal. Astrid kept hoping that her husband would declare that Gordon Sleigh must not remain, but he said nothing. He grew quieter and quieter and was obviously longing to go back on duty. When his last day came and Astrid saw him off at the airstrip, they kissed each other with a sad restraint; her father's first words when she returned to the cottage were: "Thank goodness he's gone. What a wet blanket of a fellow. He'll only be happy in his prison. Now—a celebration—the special secret dress I ordered for you has arrived. Come and try it on."

Wearily, Astrid tried on the dress. It was ankle length, tight-waisted and made of white lace. Despite herself, she appreciated its beauty. It was a fairytale dress. She said a sincere little, "Thank you, Father."

Then the fairytale turned evil, the way such tales do. He said, "You look like a bride. You're the image of your mother on her wedding day." He paused, then added softly, "Since your husband is obviously impotent, *I* could give you a child."

Astrid could hardly believe that she had heard correctly, but she had, for he went on: "I didn't live like a monk at that place. Some of the domestic staff, foreign girls, were willing enough. I never got out of practice. I could give you—" He was approaching her with a goatish leer on his face, and she was so shocked and frightened that she ran out of the cottage, still wearing the white lace dress. Holding up the skirt with both hands, she ran and ran until she reached her refuge, the forest of tree ferns. There she collapsed in exhaustion on a bed of greenery and lay panting, half-drowned in sweat, her heart banging like drums of war.

She stayed there all night, too distraught to know what to do next. And it was there, next day, that her father found her.

He had taken a taxi to Hell's Gate and asked people there if they had seen his daughter. He'd described her and the dress and eventually someone said that they had

indeed seen a girl in a long white dress running up the hill towards the forest.

So now Gordon Sleigh came walking calmly towards her, in the place which was her home. His child-eyes looked very bright and blue, his white hair ghostly in the shade of the trees. There was something hypnotic about him. She had no will-power left.

"Hello, my Queen of Sheba," he said. "Here I am. I love you. I want you. There are no rules. Hold out your arms and let me in."

And she did, and they made love on the bed of greenery, and it was Heaven—and Hell also. For she had let him into her real home. There would be no escape from him now. She was no longer Queen of Sheba, after whom Saba was said to be named, but a kind of zombie in a powerful man's thrall.

Nothing was quite real to Astrid after that time in the forest. Her behaviour changed completely. She went on wearing her "bridal" dress and sat about in easy chairs instead of going for walks. She stayed close to the old man all the time. Six weeks later, she found that she was pregnant.

"Wonderful!" said Gordon Sleigh. "A dream come true."

He looked after her tenderly, this stranger-father-lover.

When Cyril's next leave began, she did not meet him off the plane. He came alone to the cottage. She did not tell him about the child. Her father had told her not to. Cyril lingered about like a lost wayfarer. He lay by Astrid's side at night but did not touch her. He felt as if he barely knew her any more and wished only to get back to his lighthouse and the easy company of his two assistant keepers. His marriage was a real marriage no longer; had it ever been? On his last day, a taxi was ordered and Astrid and her father both came to the airstrip with him. Then the old man said he had business in Hell's Gate, and he left the couple to their final farewells.

Cyril said, "Goodbye, Astrid. I feel it *is* goodbye. Something is going to happen: some great change." And he shuddered. Cold-lipped, he kissed her on the forehead.

She thought he had guessed about the child and stood there dumb with guilt.

But the "change" he had mentioned turned out to be quite different. A week later news arrived that Cyril Soliman had been taken ill on duty with some mysterious viral infection. Frantic radio messages were sent for a doctor to come, and when one did, with great difficulty, climbing up the rope ladder which was the only means of access to this Tower Light, he was too late. The Principal Keeper was dead. The two assistants said that his last words, spoken in delirium and high fever, were: "Witchcraft! Slay! Slay!"

"God knows what he meant by that," said one of the keepers. "Soliman was the last person in the world to slay anyone—or ask anyone else to. He was the sort to preserve life, not destroy it."

Gordon Sleigh was jubilant. "So it worked!" he cried. "Astrid, remember my business at Hell's Gate the day you saw him off? Well, I went to see an old *obeah* man in the lower part of the village, the coloured quarter. He was a rare old boy, black as a coal-bucket and surrounded by the bits and pieces of his trade—bundles of coloured rags, jars of dirty water, hanks of human hair, dead frogs, cats' skulls, dogs' teeth, miniature coffins, all sorts and conditions of bones, human and animal, and some greyish muck which he proudly told me was 'grave dust.' I'd brought along some bits and pieces myself: Soliman's nail-clippings, hair from his pillow and his shaving-brush, scraps of skin, some mucus from a handkerchief and so on. I asked the old chap to do what he could and he promised that Soliman would be a dead man within a week as long as I was prepared to pay. Well, I'm not a mean man. I paid him handsomely and trusted him to get on with it. And he did! Damned clever, you know. These simple souls who live close to nature have supernatural powers which we Westerners lost centuries ago. So the monkish lighthouse keeper is dead and *I* am your husband now. You grow more like your mother every day, in appearance, but the difference is that when our child is born, you will be a good mother—a perfect mother!"

Astrid let the words wash over her like an evil flood.

The horror of it went deep, beyond emotion, into the sphere where there are no rules. Her heart and soul were dead. But her body went on functioning like that of any other healthy young animal, and in due course her child was born; To Astrid Soliman, a daughter. She hated it on sight, this child of incestuous sin whose conception had given her glimpses of that Heaven which is the other face of Hell. The baby had blue eyes, a paper-white skin and white hair, like its father. And its hands, although tiny, were large in proportion to the tiny body.

Yes, it was an *it*, not a person, to Astrid. She refused to have anything to do with it. Her milk dried up, and so did any milk of human kindness which had once been hers. The father had to do everything for the child, wash it, dress it, fix its nappies, give it carefully warmed milk from a bottle. Astrid sat around the living-room in her pretty clothes and ignored them both.

One night the child kept crying, on and on. Gordon tore himself to pieces trying to comfort it, this little one which appeared like a miniature edition of himself. And at last he shouted at Astrid: "My God, this can't go on! The child needs the affection of a mother—can't you see that? You're her mother! You should do your duty by her!"

Astrid said: "I can't stand the sight of it!" The very words her mother had said of Astrid herself all those years ago. History was repeating itself. Gordon Sleigh was filled with the same red rage as before. He put out his strong, thick-fingered hands and placed them round Astrid's neck, as if they were a separate lethal instrument rather than part of his own body; he gripped her round the throat until her face turned black and her fearful jerking and struggling ceased; and he watched her die.

After that, he picked up the baby in his arms and went to the small police station at The Bottom. He confessed his crime, then said, "Now you can do what you like with me, but please see that my daughter is conveyed to some good couple on the island who will act as foster-parents. A woman who loves little children and would sooner die than neglect them. That will give my child a

good start in life. It's all a child needs—a good start in life."

"He's a madman," the Dutch officials whispered to each other. "For a start, the child is his grand-daughter, not his daughter. The mother was the widow of that lighthouse keeper, Soliman. She got pregnant after his last leave, and then he died. Lord, what a mess!"

Officialdom sorted out the mess. The child was taken by seafaring folk who lived at The Bottom and eventually, after being held in custody in Saba for a while, Gordon Sleigh was escorted, heavily guarded, to the airstrip at Hell's Gate. From there he would be returned to the asylum from which he had been so mistakenly released.

His comment, as he boarded the aeroplane, was, "So Hell is on both sides of the Gate."

Now, a little white-haired, blue-eyed girl is growing up on the island of Saba. She has been told that her father was a lighthouse keeper who died of an illness during the course of his duty, and that her mother died in a domestic accident. One odd characteristic is that the child has very large, strong, thick-fingered hands and exceptionally powerful wrists. They seem to fascinate her and she stares at them sometimes as if they belonged to someone else.

The other day, her pet cat was found strangled to death. Her foster-parents were appalled. Who could have done such a wicked thing to a child's playmate? But the child herself was not upset. She merely said: "Puss neglected her kittens. *I* shall look after them now and give them a good start in life."

The Shadowy Third

by Ellen Glasgow

Ellen Glasgow (1874–1945) was a regionalist writer, most of her novels set in her native Virginia. Always highly regarded, she won a Pulitzer Prize in 1942, but she is best known for her earlier novels, Barren Ground *(1925), a tale of madness and murder, and* Vein of Iron *(1935).*

Her collection of ghost stories, The Shadowy Third, *was published in 1923. Each of the stories in it presents a variation on a theme: a ghost reaching out from the past to affect events in the present. This is a familiar story device, but Glasgow's writing is so polished and her pacing so sure, that the stories are extremely effective.*

The events of "The Shadowy Third" take place in the handsome Fifth Avenue mansion of a wealthy doctor, in a world we might more readily associate with Edith Wharton. While the story reflects, in part, the attitudes of its period, the voice of the narrator is so convincing that we have no choice but to believe the strange things we are told.

When the call came I remember that I turned from the telephone in a romantic flutter. Though I had spoken only once to the great surgeon, Roland Maradick, I felt on that December afternoon that to speak to him only once—to watch him in the operating-room for a single hour—was an adventure which drained the colour and the excitement from the rest of life. After all these years of work on typhoid and pneumonia cases, I can still feel the delicious tremor of my young pulses; I can still see the winter sunshine slanting through the hospital windows over the white uniforms of the nurses.

"He didn't mention me by name. Can there be a

mistake?" I stood, incredulous yet ecstatic, before the superintendent of the hospital.

"No, there isn't a mistake. I was talking to him before you came down." Miss Hemphill's strong face softened while she looked at me. She was a big, resolute woman, a distant Canadian relative of my mother's, and the kind of nurse, I had discovered in the month since I had come up from Richmond, that Northern hospital boards, if not Northern patients, appear instinctively to select. From the first, in spite of her hardness, she had taken a liking—I hesitate to use the word "fancy" for a preference so impersonal—to her Virginia cousin. After all, it isn't every Southern nurse, just out of training, who can boast a kinswoman in the superintendent of a New York hospital.

"And he made you understand positively that he meant me?" The thing was so wonderful that I simply couldn't believe it.

"He asked particularly for the nurse who was with Miss Hudson last week when he operated. I think he didn't even remember that you had a name. When I asked if he meant Miss Randolph, he repeated that he wanted the nurse who had been with Miss Hudson. She was small, he said, and cheerful-looking. This, of course, might apply to one or two of the others, but none of these was with Miss Hudson."

"Then I suppose it is really true?" My pulses were tingling. "And I am to be there at six o'clock?"

"Not a minute later. The day nurse goes off duty at that hour, and Mrs. Maradick is never left by herself for an instant."

"It is her mind, isn't it? And that makes it all the stranger that he should select me, for I have had so few mental cases."

"So few cases of any kind." Miss Hemphill was smiling, and when she smiled I wondered if the other nurses would know her. "By the time you have gone through the treadmill in New York, Margaret, you will have lost a good many things besides your inexperience. I wonder how long you will keep your sympathy and your

imagination? After all, wouldn't you have made a better novelist than a nurse?"

"I can't help putting myself into my cases. I suppose one ought not to?"

"It isn't a question of what one ought to do, but of what one must. When you are drained of every bit of sympathy and enthusiasm, and have got nothing in return for it, not even thanks, you will understand why I try to keep you from wasting yourself."

"But surely in a case like this—for Doctor Maradick?"

"Oh, well, of course—for Doctor Maradick." She must have seen that I implored her confidence, for, after a minute, she let fall carelessly a gleam of light on the situation: "It is a very sad case when you think what a charming man and a great surgeon Doctor Maradick is."

Above the starched collar of my uniform I felt the blood leap in bounds to my cheeks. "I have spoken to him only once," I murmured, "but he is charming, and so kind and handsome, isn't he?"

"His patients adore him."

"Oh, yes, I've seen that. Everyone hangs on his visits." Like the patients and the other nurses, I also had come by delightful, if imperceptible, degrees to hang on the daily visits of Doctor Maradick. He was, I suppose, born to be a hero to women. From my first day in his hospital, from the moment when I watched, through closed shutters, while he stepped out of his car, I have never doubted that he was assigned to the great part in the play. If I had been ignorant of his spell—of the charm he exercised over his hospital—I should have felt it in the waiting hush, like a drawn breath, which followed his ring at the door and preceded his imperious footstep on the stairs. My first impression of him, even after the terrible events of the next year, records a memory that is both careless and splendid. At that moment, when, gazing through the chinks in the shutters, I watched him, in his coat of dark fur, cross the pavement over the pale streaks of sunshine, I knew beyond any doubt—I knew with a sort of infallible prescience—that my fate was irretrievably bound up with his in the future. I knew this, I repeat, though Miss Hemphill would still insist that my

foreknowledge was merely a sentimental gleaning from indiscriminate novels. But it wasn't only first love, impressionable as my kinswoman believed me to be. It wasn't only the way he looked. Even more than his appearance—more than the shining dark of his eyes, the silvery brown of his hair, the dusky glow in his face—even more than his charm and his magnificence, I think, the beauty and sympathy in his voice won my heart. It was a voice, I heard someone say afterwards, that ought always to speak poetry.

So you will see why—if you do not understand at the beginning, I can never hope to make you believe impossible things!—so you will see why I accepted the call when it came as an imperative summons. I couldn't have stayed away after he sent for me. However much I may have tried not to go, I know that in the end I must have gone. In those days, while I was still hoping to write novels, I used to talk a great deal about "destiny" (I have learned since then how silly all such talk is), and I suppose it was my "destiny" to be caught in the web of Roland Maradick's personality. But I am not the first nurse to grow love-sick about a doctor who never gave her a thought.

"I am glad you got the call, Margaret. It may mean a great deal to you. Only try not to be too emotional." I remember that Miss Hemphill was holding a bit of rose-geranium in her hand while she spoke—one of the patients had given it to her from a pot she kept in her room, and the scent of the flower is still in my nostrils—or my memory. Since then—oh, long since then—I have wondered if she also had been caught in the web.

"I wish I knew more about the case." I was pressing for light. "Have you ever seen Mrs. Maradick?"

"Oh, dear, yes. They have been married only a little over a year, and in the beginning she used to come sometimes to the hospital and wait outside while the doctor made his visits. She was a very sweet-looking woman then—not exactly pretty, but fair and slight, with the loveliest smile, I think, I have ever seen. In those first months she was so much in love that we used to laugh about it among ourselves. To see her face light up when

the doctor came out of the hospital and crossed the pavement to his car, was as good as a play. We never tired of watching her—I wasn't superintendent then, so I had more time to look out of the window while I was on day duty. Once or twice she brought her little girl in to see one of the patients. The child was so much like her that you would have known them anywhere for mother and daughter."

I had heard that Mrs. Maradick was a widow, with one child, when she first met the doctor, and I asked now, still seeking an illumination I had not found, "There was a great deal of money, wasn't there?"

"A great fortune. If she hadn't been so attractive, people would have said, I suppose, that Doctor Maradick married her for her money. Only," she appeared to make an effort of memory, "I believe I've heard somehow that it was all left in trust away from Mrs. Maradick if she married again. I can't, to save my life, remember just how it was; but it was a queer will, I know, and Mrs. Maradick wasn't to come into the money unless the child didn't live to grow up. The pity of it—"

A young nurse came into the office to ask for something—the keys, I think, of the operating-room, and Miss Hemphill broke off inconclusively as she hurried out of the door. I was sorry that she left off just when she did. Poor Mrs. Maradick! Perhaps I was too emotional, but even before I saw her I had begun to feel her pathos and her strangeness.

My preparations took only a few minutes. In those days I always kept a suitcase packed and ready for sudden calls; and it was not yet six o'clock when I turned from Tenth Street into Fifth Avenue, and stopped for a minute, before ascending the steps, to look at the house in which Doctor Maradick lived. A fine rain was falling, and I remember thinking, as I turned the corner, how depressing the weather must be for Mrs. Maradick. It was an old house, with damp-looking walls (though that may have been because of the rain) and a spindle-shaped iron railing which ran up the stone steps to the black door, where I noticed a dim flicker through the old-fashioned fanlight. Afterwards I discovered that Mrs. Maradick had been

born in the house—her maiden name was Calloran—and that she had never wanted to live anywhere else. She was a woman—this I found out when I knew her better—of strong attachments to both persons and places; and though Doctor Maradick had tried to persuade her to move uptown after her marriage, she had clung, against his wishes, to the old house on lower Fifth Avenue. I dare say she was obstinate about it in spite of her gentleness and her passion for the doctor. Those sweet, soft women, especially when they have always been rich, are sometimes amazingly obstinate. I have nursed so many of them since—women with strong affections and weak intellects—that I have come to recognize the type as soon as I set eyes upon it.

My ring at the bell was answered after a little delay, and when I entered the house I saw that the hall was quite dark except for the waning glow from an open fire which burned in the library. When I gave my name, and added that I was the night nurse, the servant appeared to think my humble presence unworthy of illumination. He was an old negro butler, inherited perhaps from Mrs. Maradick's mother, who, I learned afterwards, was from South Carolina; and while he passed me on his way up the staircase, I heard him vaguely muttering that he "wa'n't gwinter tu'n on dem lights twel de chile had done playin'."

To the right of the hall, the soft glow drew me into the library, and crossing the threshold timidly, I stooped to dry my wet coat by the fire. As I bent there, meaning to start up at the first sound of a footstep, I thought how cosy the room was after the damp walls outside to which some bared creepers were clinging; and I was watching the strange shapes and patterns the firelight made on the old Persian rug, when the lamps of a slowly turning motor flashed on me through the white shades at the window. Still dazzled by the glare, I looked round in the dimness and saw a child's ball of red and blue rubber roll towards me out of the gloom of the adjoining room. A moment later, while I made a vain attempt to capture the toy as it spun past me, a little girl darted airily, with peculiar lightness and grace, through the doorway, and stopped

quickly, as if in surprise at the sight of a stranger. She was a small child—so small and slight that her footsteps made no sound on the polished floor of the threshold; and I remember thinking while I looked at her that she had the gravest and sweetest face I had ever seen. She couldn't—I decided this afterwards—have been more than six or seven years old, yet she stood there with a curious prim dignity, like the dignity of an elderly person, and gazed up at me with enigmatical eyes. She was dressed in Scotch plaid, with a bit of red ribbon in her hair, which was cut in a fringe over her forehead and hung very straight to her shoulders. Charming as she was, from her uncurled brown hair to the white socks and black slippers on her little feet, I recall most vividly the singular look in her eyes, which appeared in the shifting light to be of an indeterminate colour. For the odd thing about this look was that it was not the look of childhood at all. It was the look of profound experience, of bitter knowledge.

"Have you come for your ball?" I asked; but while the friendly question was still on my lips, I heard the servant returning. In my confusion I made a second ineffectual grasp at the plaything, which had rolled away from me into the dusk of the drawing-room. Then, as I raised my head, I saw that the child also had slipped from the room; and without looking after her I followed the old negro into the pleasant study above, where the great surgeon awaited me.

Ten years ago, before hard nursing had taken so much out of me, I blushed very easily, and I was aware at the moment when I crossed Doctor Maradick's study that my cheeks were the colour of peonies. Of course, I was a fool—no one knows this better than I do—but I had never been alone, even for an instant, with him before, and the man was more than a hero to me, he was—there isn't any reason now why I should blush over the confession—almost a god. At that age I was mad about the wonders of surgery, and Roland Maradick in the operating-room was magician enough to have turned an older and more sensible head than mine. Added to his great reputation and his marvelous skill, he was, I am sure of this, the most splendid-looking man, even at forty-five, that one

could imagine. Had he been ungracious—had he been positively rude to me, I should still have adored him; but when he held out his hand, and greeted me in the charming way he had with women, I felt that I would have died for him. It is no wonder that a saying went about the hospital that every woman he operated on fell in love with him. As for the nurses—well, there wasn't a single one of them who had escaped his spell—not even Miss Hemphill, who could have been scarcely a day under fifty.

"I am glad you could come, Miss Randolph. You were with Miss Hudson last week when I operated?"

I bowed. To save my life I couldn't have spoken without blushing the redder.

"I noticed your bright face at the time. Brightness, I think, is what Mrs. Maradick needs. She finds her day nurse depressing." His eyes rested so kindly upon me that I have suspected since that he was not entirely unaware of my worship. It was a small thing, heaven knows, to flatter his vanity—a nurse just out of a training-school—but to some men no tribute is too insignificant to give pleasure.

"You will do your best, I am sure." He hesitated an instant—just long enough for me to perceive the anxiety beneath the genial smile on his face—and then added gravely, "We wish to avoid, if possible, having to send her away."

I could only murmur in response, and after a few carefully chosen words about his wife's illness, he rang the bell and directed the maid to take me upstairs to my room. Not until I was ascending the stairs to the third story did it occur to me that he had really told me nothing. I was as perplexed about the nature of Mrs. Maradick's malady as I had been when I entered the house.

I found my room pleasant enough. It had been arranged—at Doctor Maradick's request, I think—that I was to sleep in the house, and after my austere little bed at the hospital, I was agreeably surprised by the cheerful look of the apartment into which the maid led me. The walls were papered in roses, and there were curtains of

flowered chintz at the window, which looked down on a small formal garden at the rear of the house. This the maid told me, for it was too dark for me to distinguish more than a marble fountain and a fir-tree, which looked old, though I afterwards learned that it was replanted almost every season.

In ten minutes I had slipped into my uniform and was ready to go to my patient; but for some reason—to this day I have never found out what it was that turned her against me at the start—Mrs. Maradick refused to receive me. While I stood outside her door I heard the day nurse trying to persuade her to let me come in. It wasn't any use, however, and in the end I was obliged to go back to my room and wait until the poor lady got over her whim and consented to see me. That was long after dinner—it must have been nearer eleven than ten o'clock—and Miss Peterson was quite worn out by the time she came for me.

"I'm afraid you'll have a bad night," she said as we went downstairs together. That was her way, I soon saw, to expect the worst of everything and everybody.

"Does she often keep you up like this?"

"Oh, no, she is usually very considerate. I never knew a sweeter character. But she still has this hallucination—"

Here again, as in the scene with Doctor Maradick, I felt that the explanation had only deepened the mystery. Mrs. Maradick's hallucination, whatever form it assumed, was evidently a subject for evasion and subterfuge in the household. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask, "What is her hallucination?"—but before I could get the words past my lips we had reached Mrs. Maradick's door, and Miss Peterson motioned me to be silent. As the door opened a little way to admit me, I saw that Mrs. Maradick was already in bed, and that the lights were out except for a night-lamp burning on a candle-stand beside a book and a carafe of water.

"I won't go in with you," said Miss Peterson in a whisper; and I was on the point of stepping over the threshold when I saw the little girl, in the dress of Scotch plaid, slip by me from the dusk of the room into the electric light of the hall. She held a doll in her arms, and

as she went by she dropped a doll's work-basket in the doorway. Miss Peterson must have picked up the toy, for when I turned in a minute to look for it I found that it was gone. I remember thinking that it was late for a child to be up—she looked delicate, too—but, after all, it was no business of mine, and four years in a hospital had taught me never to meddle in things that do not concern me. There is nothing a nurse learns quicker than not to try to put the world to rights in a day.

When I crossed the floor to the chair by Mrs. Maradick's bed, she turned over on her side and looked at me with the sweetest and saddest smile.

"You are the night nurse," she said in a gentle voice; and from the moment she spoke I knew that there was nothing hysterical or violent about her mania—or hallucination, as they called it. "They told me your name, but I have forgotten it."

"Randolph—Margaret Randolph." I liked her from the start, and I think she must have seen it.

"You look very young, Miss Randolph."

"I am twenty-two, but I suppose I don't look quite my age. People usually think I am younger."

For a minute she was silent, and while I settled myself in the chair by the bed, I thought how strikingly she resembled the little girl I had seen first in the afternoon, and then leaving her room a few moments before. They had the same small, heart-shaped faces, coloured ever so faintly; the same straight, soft hair, between brown and flaxen; and the same large, grave eyes, set very far apart under arched eyebrows. What surprised me most, however, was that they both looked at me with that enigmatical and vaguely wondering expression—only in Mrs. Maradick's face the vagueness seemed to change now and then to a definite fear—a flash, I had almost said, of startled horror.

I sat quite still in my chair, and until the time came for Mrs. Maradick to take her medicine not a word passed between us. Then, when I bent over her with the glass in my hand, she raised her head from the pillow and said in a whisper of suppressed intensity:

"You look kind. I wonder if you could have seen my little girl?"

As I slipped my arm under the pillow I tried to smile cheerfully down on her. "Yes, I've seen her twice. I'd know her anywhere by her likeness to you."

A glow shone in her eyes, and I thought how pretty she must have been before illness took the life and animation out of her features. "Then I know you're good." Her voice was so strained and low that I could barely hear it. "If you weren't good you couldn't have seen her."

I thought this queer enough, but all I answered was, "She looked delicate to be sitting up so late."

A quiver passed over her thin features, and for a minute I thought she was going to burst into tears. As she had taken the medicine, I put the glass back on the candle-stand, and bending over the bed, smoothed the straight brown hair, which was as fine and soft as spun silk, back from her forehead. There was something about her—I don't know what it was—that made you love her as soon as she looked at you.

"She always had that light and airy way, though she was never sick a day in her life," she answered calmly after a pause. Then, groping for my hand, she whispered passionately, "You must not tell him—you must not tell anyone that you have seen her!"

"I must not tell anyone?" Again I had the impression that had come to me first in Doctor Maradick's study, and afterwards with Miss Peterson on the staircase, that I was seeking a gleam of light in the midst of obscurity.

"Are you sure there isn't anyone listening—that there isn't anyone at the door?" she asked, pushing aside my arm and raising herself on the pillows.

"Quite, quite sure. They have put out the lights in the hall."

"And you will not tell him? Promise me that you will not tell him." The startled horror flashed from the vague wonder of her expression. "He doesn't like her to come back, because he killed her."

"Because he killed her!" Then it was that light burst on me in a blaze. So this was Mrs. Maradick's halluci-

nation! She believed that her child was dead—the little girl I had seen with my own eyes leaving her room; and she believed that her husband—the great surgeon we worshipped in the hospital—had murdered her. No wonder they veiled the dreadful obsession in mystery! No wonder that even Miss Peterson had not dared to drag the horrid thing out into the light! It was the kind of hallucination one simply couldn't stand having to face.

"There is no use telling people things that nobody believes," she resumed slowly, still holding my hand in a grasp that would have hurt me if her fingers had not been so fragile. "Nobody believes that he killed her. Nobody believes that she comes back every day to the house. Nobody believes—and yet you saw her—"

"Yes, I saw her—but why should your husband have killed her?" I spoke soothingly, as one would speak to a person who was quite mad. Yet she was not mad, I could have sworn this while I looked at her.

For a moment she moaned inarticulately, as if the horror of her thoughts were too great to pass into speech. Then she flung out her thin, bare arm with a wild gesture.

"Because he never loved me!" she said. "He never loved me!"

"But he married you," I urged gently while I stroked her hair. "If he hadn't loved you, why should he have married you?"

"He wanted the money—my little girl's money. It all goes to him when I die."

"But he is rich himself. He must make a fortune from his profession."

"It isn't enough. He wanted millions." She had grown stern and tragic. "No, he never loved me. He loved someone else from the beginning—before I knew him."

It was quite useless, I saw, to reason with her. If she wasn't mad, she was in a state of terror and despondency so black that it had almost crossed the border-line into madness. I thought once that I would go upstairs and bring the child down from her nursery; but, after a moment's hesitation, I realized that Miss Peterson and Doctor Maradick must have long ago tried all these measures. Clearly, there was nothing to do except soothe

and quiet her as much as I could; and this I did until she dropped into a light sleep which lasted well into the morning.

By seven o'clock I was worn out—not from work but from the strain on my sympathy—and I was glad, indeed, when one of the maids came in to bring me an early cup of coffee. Mrs. Maradick was still sleeping—it was a mixture of bromide and chloral I had given her—and she did not wake until Miss Peterson came on duty an hour or two later. Then, when I went downstairs, I found the dining-room deserted except for the old housekeeper, who was looking over the silver. Doctor Maradick, she explained to me presently, had his breakfast served in the morning-room on the other side of the house.

"And the little girl? Does she take her meals in the nursery?"

She threw me a startled glance. Was it, I questioned afterwards, one of distrust or apprehension?

"There isn't any little girl. Haven't you heard?"

"Heard? No. Why, I saw her only yesterday."

The look she gave me—I was sure of it now—was full of alarm.

"The little girl—she was the sweetest child I ever saw—died just two months ago of pneumonia."

"But she couldn't have died." I was a fool to let this out, but the shock had completely unnerved me. "I tell you I saw her yesterday."

The alarm in her face deepened. "That is Mrs. Maradick's trouble. She believes that she still sees her."

"But don't you see her?" I drove the question home bluntly.

"No." She set her lips tightly. "I never see anything."

So I had been wrong, after all, and the explanation, when it came, only accentuated the terror. The child was dead—she had died of pneumonia two months ago—and yet I had seen her, with my own eyes, playing ball in the library; I had seen her slipping out of her mother's room, with her doll in her arms.

"Is there another child in the house? Could there be a child belonging to one of the servants?" A gleam had shot through the fog in which I was groping.

"No, there isn't any other. The doctors tried bringing one once, but it threw the poor lady into such a state she almost died of it. Besides, there wouldn't be any other child as quiet and sweet-looking as Dorothea. To see her skipping along in her dress of Scotch plaid used to make me think of a fairy, though they say that fairies wear nothing but white or green."

"Has any one else seen her—the child, I mean—any of the servants?"

"Only old Gabriel, the coloured butler, who came with Mrs. Maradick's mother from South Carolina. I've heard that negroes often have a kind of second sight—though I don't know that that is just what you would call it. But they seem to believe in the supernatural by instinct, and Gabriel is so old and doty—he does no work except answer the door-bell and clean the silver—that nobody pays much attention to anything that he sees—"

"Is the child's nursery kept as it used to be?"

"Oh, no. The doctor had all the toys sent to the children's hospital. That was a great grief to Mrs. Maradick; but Doctor Brandon thought, and all the nurses agreed with him, that it was best for her not to be allowed to keep the room as it was when Dorothea was living."

"Dorothea? Was that the child's name?"

"Yes, it means the gift of God, doesn't it? She was named after the mother of Mrs. Maradick's first husband, Mr. Ballard. He was the grave, quiet kind—not the least like the doctor."

I wondered if the other dreadful obsession of Mrs. Maradick's had drifted down through the nurses or the servants to the housekeeper; but she said nothing about it, and since she was, I suspected, a garrulous person, I thought it wiser to assume that the gossip had not reached her.

A little later, when breakfast was over and I had not yet gone upstairs to my room, I had my first interview with Doctor Brandon, the famous alienist who was in charge of the case. I had never seen him before, but from the first moment that I looked at him I took his measure almost by intuition. He was, I suppose, honest enough—I have always granted him that, bitterly as I have felt

towards him. It wasn't his fault that he lacked red blood in his brain, or that he had formed the habit, from long association with abnormal phenomena, of regarding all life as a disease. He was the sort of physician—every nurse will understand what I mean—who deals instinctively with groups instead of with individuals. He was long and solemn and very round in the face; and I hadn't talked to him ten minutes before I knew he had been educated in Germany, and that he had learned over there to treat every emotion as a pathological manifestation. I used to wonder what he got out of life—what anyone got out of life who had analyzed away everything except the bare structure.

When I reached my room at last, I was so tired that I could barely remember either the questions Doctor Brandon had asked or the directions he had given me. I fell asleep, I know, almost as soon as my head touched the pillow; and the maid who came to inquire if I wanted luncheon decided to let me finish my nap. In the afternoon, when she returned with a cup of tea, she found me still heavy and drowsy. Though I was used to night nursing, I felt as if I had danced from sunset to daybreak. It was fortunate, I reflected, while I drank my tea, that every case didn't wear on one's sympathies as acutely as Mrs. Maradick's hallucination had worn on mine.

Through the day I did not see Doctor Maradick; but at seven o'clock when I came up from my early dinner on my way to take the place of Miss Peterson, who had kept on duty an hour later than usual, he met me in the hall and asked me to come into his study. I thought him handsomer than ever in his evening clothes, with a white flower in his buttonhole. He was going to some public dinner, the housekeeper told me, but, then, he was always going somewhere. I believe he didn't dine at home a single evening that winter.

"Did Mrs. Maradick have a good night?" He had closed the door after us, and turning now with the question, he smiled kindly, as if he wished to put me at ease in the beginning.

"She slept very well after she took the medicine. I gave her that at eleven o'clock."

For a minute he regarded me silently, and I was aware

that his personality—his charm—was focused upon me. It was almost as if I stood in the centre of converging rays of light, so vivid was my impression of him.

"Did she allude in any way to her—to her hallucination?" he asked.

How the warning reached me—what invisible waves of sense-perception transmitted the message—I have never known; but while I stood there, facing the splendour of the doctor's presence, every intuition cautioned me that the time had come when I must take sides in the household. While I stayed there I must stand either with Mrs. Maradick or against her.

"She talked quite rationally," I replied after a moment.

"What did she say?"

"She told me how she was feeling, that she missed her child, and that she walked a little every day about her room."

His face changed—how, I could not at first determine.

"Have you seen Doctor Brandon?"

"He came this morning to give me his directions."

"He thought her less well to-day. He has advised me to send her to Rosedale."

I have never, even in secret, tried to account for Doctor Maradick. He may have been sincere. I tell only what I know—not what I believe or imagine—and the human is sometimes as inscrutable, as inexplicable, as the supernatural.

While he watched me I was conscious of an inner struggle, as if opposing angels warred somewhere in the depths of my being. When at last I made my decision, I was acting less from reason, I knew, than in obedience to the pressure of some secret current of thought. Heaven knows, even then, the man held me captive while I defied him.

"Doctor Maradick," I lifted my eyes for the first time frankly to his, "I believe that your wife is as sane as I am—or as you are."

He started. "Then she did not talk freely to you?"

"She may be mistaken, unstrung, piteously distressed in mind"—I brought this out with emphasis—"but she is not—I am willing to stake my future on it—a fit subject

for an asylum. It would be foolish—it would be cruel to send her to Rosedale."

"Cruel, you say?" A troubled look crossed his face, and his voice grew very gentle. "You do not imagine that I could be cruel to her?"

"No, I do not think that." My voice also had softened.

"We will let things go on as they are. Perhaps Doctor Brandon may have some other suggestion to make." He drew out his watch and compared it with the clock—nervously, I observed, as if his action were a screen for his discomfiture or perplexity. "I must be going now. We will speak of this again in the morning."

But in the morning we did not speak of it, and during the month that I nursed Mrs. Maradick I was not called again into her husband's study. When I met him in the hall or on the staircase, which was seldom, he was as charming as ever; yet, in spite of his courtesy, I had a persistent feeling that he had taken my measure on that evening, and that he had no further use for me.

As the days went by, Mrs. Maradick seemed to grow stronger. Never, after our first night together, had she mentioned the child to me; never had she alluded by so much as a word to her dreadful charge against her husband. She was like any woman recovering from a great sorrow, except that she was sweeter and gentler. It is no wonder that everyone who came near her loved her; for there was a mysterious loveliness about her like the mystery of light, not of darkness. She was, I have always thought, as much of an angel as it is possible for a woman to be on this earth. And yet, angelic as she was, there were times when it seemed to me that she both hated and feared her husband. Though he never entered her room while I was there, and I never heard his name on her lips until an hour before the end, still I could tell by the look of terror in her face whenever his step passed down the hall that her very soul shivered at his approach.

During the whole month I did not see the child again, though one night, when I came suddenly into Mrs. Maradick's room, I found a little garden, such as children make out of pebbles and bits of box, on the window-sill. I did not mention it to Mrs. Maradick, and a little later,

as the maid lowered the shades, I noticed that the garden had vanished. Since then I have often wondered if the child were invisible only to the rest of us, and if her mother still saw her. But there was no way of finding out except by questioning, and Mrs. Maradick was so well and patient that I hadn't the heart to question. Things couldn't have been better with her than they were, and I was beginning to tell myself that she might soon go out for an airing, when the end came so suddenly.

It was a mild January day—the kind of day that brings the foretaste of spring in the middle of winter, and when I came downstairs in the afternoon, I stopped a minute by the window at the end of the hall to look down on the box maze in the garden. There was an old fountain, bearing two laughing boys in marble, in the centre of the gravelled walk, and the water, which had been turned on that morning for Mrs. Maradick's pleasure, sparkled now like silver as the sunlight splashed over it. I had never before felt the air quite so soft and springlike in January; and I thought, as I gazed down on the garden, that it would be a good idea for Mrs. Maradick to go out and bask for an hour or so in the sunshine. It seemed strange to me that she was never allowed to get any fresh air except the air that came through her windows.

When I went into her room, however, I found that she had no wish to go out. She was sitting, wrapped in shawls, by the open window, which looked down on the fountain; and as I entered she glanced up from a little book she was reading. A pot of daffodils stood on the window-sill—she was very fond of flowers and we tried always to keep some growing in her room.

"Do you know what I am reading, Miss Randolph?" she asked in her soft voice; and she read aloud a verse while I went over to the candle-stand to measure out a dose of medicine.

" 'If thou hast two loaves of bread, sell one and buy daffodils, for bread nourisheth the body, but daffodils delight the soul.' That is very beautiful, don't you think so?"

I said "Yes," that it was beautiful; and then I asked

her if she wouldn't go downstairs and walk about in the garden.

"He wouldn't like it," she answered; and it was the first time she had mentioned her husband to me since the night I came to her. "He doesn't want me to go out."

I tried to laugh her out of the idea; but it was no use, and after a few minutes I gave up and began talking of other things. Even then it did not occur to me that her fear of Doctor Maradick was anything but a fancy. I could see, of course, that she wasn't out of her head; but sane persons, I knew, sometimes have unaccountable prejudices, and I accepted her dislike as a mere whim or aversion. I did not understand then and—I may as well confess this before the end comes—I do not understand any better to-day. I am writing down the things I actually saw, and I repeat that I have never had the slightest twist in the direction of the miraculous.

The afternoon slipped away while we talked—she talked brightly when any subject came up that interested her—and it was the last hour of day—that grave, still hour when the movement of life seems to droop and falter for a few precious minutes—that brought us the thing I had dreaded silently since my first night in the house. I remember that I had risen to close the window, and was leaning out for a breath of the mild air, when there was the sound of steps, consciously softened, in the hall outside, and Doctor Brandon's usual knock fell on my ears. Then, before I could cross the room, the door opened, and the doctor entered with Miss Peterson. The day nurse, I knew, was a stupid woman; but she had never appeared to me so stupid, so armoured and encased in her professional manner, as she did at that moment.

"I am glad to see that you are taking the air." As Doctor Brandon came over to the window, I wondered maliciously what devil of contradictions had made him a distinguished specialist in nervous diseases.

"Who was the other doctor you brought this morning?" asked Mrs. Maradick gravely; and that was all I ever heard about the visit of the second alienist.

"Someone who is anxious to cure you." He dropped into a chair beside her and patted her hand with his long,

pale fingers. "We are so anxious to cure you that we want to send you away to the country for a fortnight or so. Miss Peterson has come to help you to get ready, and I've kept my car waiting for you. There couldn't be a nicer day for a trip, could there?"

The moment had come at last. I knew at once what he meant, and so did Mrs. Maradick. A wave of colour flowed and ebbed in her thin cheeks, and I felt her body quiver when I moved from the window and put my arms on her shoulders. I was aware again, as I had been aware that evening in Doctor Maradick's study, of a current of thought that beat from the air around into my brain. Though it cost me my career as a nurse and my reputation for sanity, I knew that I must obey that invisible warning.

"You are going to take me to an asylum," said Mrs. Maradick.

He made some foolish denial or evasion; but before he had finished I turned from Mrs. Maradick and faced him impulsively. In a nurse this was flagrant rebellion, and I realized that the act wrecked my professional future. Yet I did not care—I did not hesitate. Something stronger than I was driving me on.

"Doctor Brandon," I said, "I beg you—I implore you to wait until to-morrow. There are things I must tell you."

A queer look came into his face, and I understood, even in my excitement, that he was mentally deciding in which group he should place me—to which class of morbid manifestations I must belong.

"Very well, very well, we will hear everything," he replied soothingly; but I saw him glance at Miss Peterson, and she went over to the wardrobe for Mrs. Maradick's fur coat and hat.

Suddenly, without warning, Mrs. Maradick threw the shawls away from her, and stood up. "If you send me away," she said, "I shall never come back. I shall never live to come back."

The grey of twilight was just beginning, and while she stood there, in the dusk of the room, her face shone out as pale and flower-like as the daffodils on the window-

sill. "I cannot go away!" she cried in a sharper voice. "I cannot go away from my child!"

I saw her face clearly; I heard her voice; and then—the horror of the scene sweeps back over me!—I saw the door open slowly and the little girl run across the room to her mother. I saw the child lift her little arms, and I saw the mother stoop and gather her to her bosom. So closely locked were they in that passionate embrace that their forms seemed to mingle in the gloom that enveloped them.

"After this can you doubt?" I threw out the words almost savagely—and then, when I turned from the mother and child to Doctor Brandon and Miss Peterson, I knew breathlessly—oh, there was a shock in the discovery!—that they were blind to the child. Their blank faces revealed the consternation of ignorance, not of conviction. They had seen nothing except the vacant arms of the mother and the swift, erratic gesture with which she stooped to embrace some invisible presence. Only my vision—and I have asked myself since if the power of sympathy enabled me to penetrate the web of material fact and see the spiritual form of the child—only my vision was not blinded by the clay through which I looked.

"After this can you doubt?" Doctor Brandon had flung my words back to me. Was it his fault, poor man, if life had granted him only the eyes of flesh? Was it his fault if he could see only half of the thing there before him?

But they couldn't see, and since they couldn't see I realized that it was useless to tell them. Within an hour they took Mrs. Maradick to the asylum; and she went quietly, though when the time came for parting from me she showed some faint trace of feeling. I remember that at the last, while we stood on the pavement, she lifted her black veil, which she wore for the child, and said: "Stay with her, Miss Randolph, as long as you can. I shall never come back."

Then she got into the car and was driven off, while I stood looking after her with a sob in my throat. Dreadful as I felt it to be, I didn't, of course, realize the full horror of it, or I couldn't have stood there quietly on the pavement. I didn't realize it, indeed, until several months

afterwards when word came that she had died in the asylum. I never knew what her illness was, though I vaguely recall that something was said about "heart failure"—a loose enough term. My own belief is that she died simply of the terror of life.

To my surprise Doctor Maradick asked me to stay on as his office nurse after his wife went to Rosedale; and when the news of her death came there was no suggestion of my leaving. I don't know to this day why he wanted me in the house. Perhaps he thought I should have less opportunity to gossip if I stayed under his roof; perhaps he still wished to test the power of his charm over me. His vanity was incredible in so great a man. I have seen him flush with pleasure when people turned to look at him in the street, and I know that he was not above playing on the sentimental weakness of his patients. But he was magnificent, heaven knows! Few men, I imagine, have been the object of so many foolish infatuations.

The next summer Doctor Maradick went abroad for two months, and while he was away I took my vacation in Virginia. When we came back the work was heavier than ever—his reputation by this time was tremendous—and my days were so crowded with appointments, and hurried flittings to emergency cases, that I had scarcely a minute left in which to remember poor Mrs. Maradick. Since the afternoon when she went to the asylum the child had not been in the house; and at last I was beginning to persuade myself that the little figure had been an optical illusion—the effect of shifting lights in the gloom of the old rooms—not the apparition I had once believed it to be. It does not take long for a phantom to fade from the memory—especially when one leads the active and methodical life I was forced into that winter. Perhaps—who knows? (I remember telling myself)—the doctors may have been right, after all, and the poor lady may have actually been out of her mind. With this view of the past, my judgment of Doctor Maradick insensibly altered. It ended, I think, in my acquitting him altogether. And then, just as he stood clear and splendid in my verdict of him, the reversal came so precipitately that I grow breathless now whenever I try to live it over again. The violence of

the next turn in affairs left me, I often fancy, with a perpetual dizziness of the imagination.

It was in May that we heard of Mrs. Maradick's death, and exactly a year later, on a mild and fragrant afternoon, when the daffodils were blooming in patches around the old fountain in the garden, the housekeeper came into the office, where I lingered over some accounts, to bring me news of the doctor's approaching marriage.

"It is no more than we might have expected," she concluded rationally. "The house must be lonely for him—he is such a sociable man. But I can't help feeling," she brought out slowly after a pause in which I felt a shiver pass over me. "I can't help feeling that it is hard for that other woman to have all the money poor Mrs. Maradick's first husband left her."

"There is a great deal of money, then?" I asked curiously.

"A great deal." She waved her hand, as if words were futile to express the sum. "Millions and millions!"

"They will give up this house, of course?"

"That's done already, my dear. There won't be a brick left of it by this time next year. It's to be pulled down and an apartment-house built on the grounds."

Again the shiver passed over me. I couldn't bear to think of Mrs. Maradick's old home falling to pieces.

"You didn't tell me the name of the bride," I said. "Is she someone he met while he was in Europe?"

"Dear me, no! She is the very lady he was engaged to before he married Mrs. Maradick, only she threw him over, so people said, because he wasn't rich enough. Then she married some lord or prince from over the water; but there was a divorce, and now she has turned again to her old lover. He is rich enough now, I guess, even for her!"

It was all perfectly true, I suppose; it sounded as plausible as a story out of a newspaper; and yet while she told me I felt, or dreamed that I felt, a sinister, an impalpable hush in the air. I was nervous, no doubt; I was shaken by the suddenness with which the housekeeper had sprung her news on me; but as I sat there I had quite vividly an impression that the old house was

listening—that there was a real, if invisible, presence somewhere in the room or the garden. Yet, when an instant afterwards I glanced through the long window which opened down to the brick terrace, I saw only the faint sunshine over the deserted garden, with its maze of boxes, its marble fountain, and its patches of daffodils.

The housekeeper had gone—one of the servants, I think, came for her—and I was sitting at my desk when the words of Mrs. Maradick on that last evening floated into my mind. The daffodils brought her back to me; for I thought, as I watched them growing, so still and golden in the sunshine, how she would have enjoyed them. Almost unconsciously I repeated the verse she had read to me:

"If thou hast two loaves of bread, sell one and buy daffodils"—and it was at this very instant, while the words were still on my lips, that I turned my eyes to the box maze, and saw the child skipping rope along the gravelled path to the fountain. Quite distinctly, as clear as day, I saw her come, with what children call the dancing step, between the low box borders to the place where the daffodils bloomed by the fountain. From her straight brown hair to her frock of Scotch plaid and her little feet, which twinkled in white socks and black slippers over the turning rope, she was as real to me as the ground on which she trod or the laughing marble boys under the splashing water. Starting up from my chair, I made a single step to the terrace. If I could only reach her—only speak to her—I felt that I might at last solve the mystery. But with the first flutter of my dress on the terrace, the airy little form melted into the quiet dusk of the maze. Not a breath stirred the daffodils, not a shadow passed over the sparkling flow of the water; yet, weak and shaken in every nerve, I sat down on the brick step of the terrace and burst into tears. I must have known that something terrible would happen before they pulled down Mrs. Maradick's home.

The doctor dined out that night. He was with the lady he was going to marry, the housekeeper told me; and it must have been almost midnight when I heard him come in and go upstairs to his room. I was downstairs because

I had been unable to sleep, and the book I wanted to finish I had left that afternoon in the office. The book—I can't remember what it was—had seemed to me very exciting when I began it in the morning; but after the visit of the child I found the romantic novel as dull as a treatise on nursing. It was impossible for me to follow the lines, and I was on the point of giving up and going to bed, when Doctor Maradick opened the front door with his latch-key and went up the staircase. "There can't be a bit of truth in it," I thought over and over again as I listened to his even step ascending the stairs. "There can't be a bit of truth in it." And yet, though I assured myself that "there couldn't be a bit of truth in it," I shrank, with a creepy sensation, from going through the house to my room in the third story. I was tired out after a hard day, and my nerves must have reacted morbidly to the silence and the darkness. For the first time in my life I knew what it was to be afraid of the unknown, of the unseen; and while I bent over my book, in the glare of the electric light, I became conscious presently that I was straining my senses for some sound in the spacious emptiness of the rooms overhead. The noise of a passing motor-car in the street jerked me back from the intense hush of expectancy; and I can recall the wave of relief that swept over me as I turned to my book again and tried to fix my distracted mind on its pages.

I was still sitting there when the telephone on my desk rang, with what seemed to my overwrought nerves a startling abruptness, and the voice of the superintendent told me hurriedly that Doctor Maradick was needed at the hospital. I had become so accustomed to these emergency calls in the night that I felt reassured when I had rung up the doctor in his room and had heard the hearty sound of his response. He had not yet undressed, he said, and would come down immediately while I ordered back his car, which must just have reached the garage.

"I'll be with you in five minutes!" he called as cheerfully as if I had summoned him to his wedding.

I heard him cross the floor of his room; and before he could reach the head of the staircase, I opened the door and went out into the hall in order that I might turn on

the light and have his hat and coat waiting. The electric button was at the end of the hall, and as I moved towards it, guided by the glimmer that fell from the landing above, I lifted my eyes to the staircase, which climbed dimly, with its slender mahogany balustrade, as far as the third story. Then it was, at the very moment when the doctor, humming gaily, began his quick descent of the steps, that I distinctly saw—I will swear to this on my deathbed—a child's skipping-rope lying loosely coiled, as if it had dropped from a careless little hand, in the bend of the staircase. With a spring I had reached the electric button, flooding the hall with light; but as I did so, while my arm was still outstretched behind me, I heard the humming voice change to a cry of surprise or terror, and the figure on the staircase tripped heavily and stumbled with groping hands into emptiness. The scream of warning died in my throat while I watched him pitch forward down the long flight of stairs to the floor at my feet. Even before I bent over him, before I wiped the blood from his brow and felt for his silent heart, I knew that he was dead.

Something—it may have been, as the world believes, a misstep in the dimness, or it may have been, as I am ready to bear witness, an invisible judgment—something had killed him at the very moment when he most wanted to live.

The Sound of the River

by Jean Rhys

Jean Rhys was born in Dominica in 1894, moved to England at the age of sixteen, and for some years lived in Paris, where her early novels are set. Ford Maddox Ford wrote an introduction to her first collection of stories in 1927, The Left Bank. *Her early novels, which dealt (daringly, for the time) with women's sexuality, were not successful, and after 1939 her work went out of print.*

And then in 1966, she reappeared with Wide Sargasso Sea, *a strange and thrilling Gothic novel about the first Mrs. Rochester, the mad wife in Charlotte Bronte's* Jane Eyre, *set in the exotic landscape of Jamaica. It deservedly won the Royal Society of Literature Award and the W. H. Smith Award. Of the latter, Rhys, then age seventy-two, had the daring and the honesty to say, "It has come too late."*

Two more collections of her stories appeared, Tigers Are Better-Looking *in 1968 and* Sleep It Off, Lady *in 1976. She was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in the year* Wide Sargasso Sea *was published and a CBE in 1978. She died in 1979.*

"The Sound of the River" was first published in 1966, at a time when her skills were perhaps at their finest. In only a few pages, she delineates all too vividly a secret fear that everyone has felt but seldom admitted.

The electric bulb hung on a short flex from the middle of the ceiling, and there was not enough light to read so they lay in bed and talked. The night air pushed out the curtains and came through the open window soft and moist.

"But what are you afraid of? How do you mean afraid?"

She said, "I mean afraid like when you want to swallow and you can't."

"All the time?"

"Nearly all the time."

"My dear, really. You are an idiot."

"Yes, I know."

Not about this, she thought, not about this.

"It's only a mood," she said. "It'll go."

"You're so inconsistent. You chose this place and wanted to come here, I thought you approved of it."

"I do. I approve of the moor and the loneliness and the whole set-up, especially the loneliness. I just wish it would stop raining occasionally."

"Loneliness is all very well," he said, "but it needs fine weather."

"Perhaps it will be fine tomorrow."

If I could put it into words it might go, she was thinking. Sometimes you can put it into words—almost—and so get rid of it—almost. Sometimes you can tell yourself I'll admit I was afraid today. I was afraid of the sleek smooth faces, the rat faces, the way they laughed in the cinema. I'm afraid of escalators and doll's eyes. But there aren't any words for this fear. The words haven't been invented.

She said, "I'll like it again when the rain stops."

"You weren't liking it just now, were you? Down by the river?"

"Well," she said, "no. Not much."

"It was a bit ghostly down there tonight. What can you expect? Never pick a place in fine weather." (Or anything else either, he thought.) "There are too many pines about," he said. "They shut you in."

"Yes."

But it wasn't the black pines, she thought, or the sky without stars, or the thin hunted moon, or the lowering, flat-topped hills, or the tor and the big stones. It was the river.

"The river is very silent," she'd said. "Is that because it's so full?"

"One gets used to the noise, I suppose. Let's go in and

light the bedroom fire. I wish we had a drink. I'd give a lot for a drink, wouldn't you?"

"We can have some coffee."

As they walked back he'd kept his head turned towards the water.

"Curiously metallic it looks by this light. Not like water at all."

"It looks smooth as if it were frozen. And much wider."

"Frozen—no. Very much alive in an uncanny way. Streaming hair," he'd said as if he were talking to himself. So he'd felt it too. She lay remembering how the brown broken-surfaced, fast-running river had changed by moonlight. Things are more powerful than people. I've always believed that. (You're not my daughter if you're afraid of a horse. You're not my daughter if you're afraid of being seasick. You're not my daughter if you're afraid of the shape of a hill, or the moon when it is growing old. In fact you're not my daughter.)

"It isn't silent now, is it?" she said. "The river, I mean."

"No, it makes a row from up here." He yawned. "I'll put another log on the fire. It was very kind of Ransom to let us have that coal and wood. He didn't promise any luxuries of that sort when we took the cottage. He's not a bad chap, is he?"

"He's got a heart. And he must be wise to the climate after all."

"Well, I like it," he said as he got back into bed, "in spite of the rain. Let's be happy here."

"Yes, let's."

That's the second time. He said that before. He'd said it the first day they came. Then too she hadn't answered "yes, let's" at once because fear which had been waiting for her had come up to her and touched her, and it had been several seconds before she could speak.

"That must have been an otter we saw this evening," he said, "much too big for a water rat. I'll tell Ransom. He'll be very excited."

"Why?"

"Oh, they're rather rare in these parts."

"Poor devils, I bet they have an awful time if they're rare. What'll he do? Organize a hunt? Perhaps he won't, we've agreed that he's soft-hearted. This is a bird sanctuary, did you know? It's all sorts of things. I'll tell him about that yellow-breasted one. Maybe he'll know what it was."

That morning she had watched it fluttering up and down the window pane—a flash of yellow in the rain. "Oh what a pretty bird." Fear is yellow. You're yellow. She's got a broad streak of yellow. They're quite right, fear is yellow. "Isn't it pretty? And isn't it persistent? It's determined to get in . . ."

"I'm going to put this light out," he said. "It's no use. The fire's better."

He struck a match to light another cigarette and when it flared she saw the deep hollows under his eyes, the skin stretched taut over his cheekbones, and the thin bridge of his nose. He was smiling as if he knew what she'd been thinking.

"Is there anything you're not afraid of in these moods of yours?"

"You," she said. The match went out. Whatever happened, she thought. Whatever you did. Whatever I did. Never you. D'you hear me?

"Good." He laughed. "That's a relief."

"Tomorrow will be fine, you'll see. We'll be lucky."

"Don't depend on our luck. You ought to know better by this time," he muttered. "But you're the sort who never knows better. Unfortunately we're both the sort who never knows better."

"Are you tired? You sound tired."

"Yes." He sighed and turned away. "I am rather." When she said, "I must put the light on, I want some aspirin," he didn't answer, and she stretched her arm over him and touched the switch of the dim electric bulb. He was sleeping. The lighted cigarette had fallen on to the sheet.

"Good thing I saw that," she said aloud. She put the cigarette out and threw it through the window, found the aspirin, emptied the ashtray, postponing the moment when

she must lie down stretched out straight, listening, when she'd shut her eyes only to feel them click open again.

Don't go to sleep, she thought, lying there. Stay awake and comfort me. I'm frightened. There's something here to be frightened of, I tell you. Why can't you feel it? When you said, let's be happy, that first day, there was a tap dripping somewhere into a full basin, playing a gay and horrible tune. Didn't you hear it? I heard it. Don't turn away and sigh and sleep. Stay awake and comfort me.

Nobody's going to comfort you, she told herself, you ought to know better. Pull yourself together. There was a time when you weren't afraid. Was there? When? When was that time? Of course there was. Go on. Pull yourself together, pull yourself to pieces. There was a time. There was a time. Besides I'll sleep soon. There's always sleeping, and it'll be fine tomorrow.

I knew it would be fine today, she thought when she saw the sunlight through the flimsy curtains. The first fine day we've had.

"Are you awake," she said. "It's a fine day. I had such a funny dream," she said, still staring at the sunlight. "I dreamt I was walking in a wood and the trees were groaning and then I dreamt of the wind in telegraph wires, well, a bit like that, only very loud. I can still hear it—really I swear I'm not making this up. It's still in my head and it isn't anything else except a bit like the wind in telegraph wires.

"It's a lovely day," she said and touched his hand.

"My dear, you are cold. I'll get a hot water bottle and some tea. I'll get it because I'm feeling very energetic this morning, you stay still for once!"

"Why don't you answer?" she said, sitting up and peering at him. "You're frightening me," she said, her voice rising. "You're frightening me. Wake up," she said and shook him. As soon as she touched him her heart swelled till it reached her throat. It swelled and grew jagged claws and the claws clutched her, driving in deep. "Oh God," she said and got up and drew the curtains and saw his face in the sun. "Oh God," she said, staring

at his face in the sun and knelt by the bed with his hand in her two hands, not speaking, not thinking any longer.

The doctor said, "You didn't hear anything during the night?"

"I thought it was a dream."

"Oh! You thought it was a dream. I see. What time did you wake up?"

"I don't know. We kept the clock in the other room because it had a loud tick. About half past eight or nine, I suppose."

"You knew what had happened, of course."

"I wasn't sure. At first I wasn't sure."

"But what did you do? It was past ten when you telephoned. What did you do?"

Not a word of comfort. Suspicion. He has small eyes and bushy eyebrows and he looks suspicious.

She said, "I put on a coat and went to Mr. Ransom's, where there's a telephone. I ran all the way but it seemed a long way."

"But that oughtn't to have taken you more than ten minutes at the most."

"No, but it seemed very long. I ran but I didn't seem to be moving. When I got there everybody was out and the room where the telephone is was locked. The front door is always open but he locks that room when he goes out. I went back into the road but there was no one there. Nobody in the house and nobody in the road and nobody on the slope of the hill. There were a lot of sheets and men's shirts hanging on a line waving. And the sun of course. It was our first day. The first fine day we've had."

She looked at the doctor's face, stopped, and went on in a different voice.

"I walked up and down for a bit. I didn't know what to do. Then I thought I might be able to break the door in. So I tried and I did. A board broke and I got in. But it seemed a long time before anybody answered."

She thought, Yes, of course I knew. I was late because

I had to stay there listening. I heard it then. It got louder and closer and it was in the room with me. I heard the sound of the river.

I heard the sound of the river.

Robbie

by Mary Danby

English writer Mary Danby (born in 1941) can claim Charles Dickens as a great-great-grandfather. Well known as an anthologist, she has edited the successful annual series The Fontana Book of Great Horror Stories *since its fifth volume in 1970. She also edits the annual* Armada Ghost Book *for younger readers. Recently, she assembled three massive volumes (*65 Great Tales of the Supernatural, 65 Great Horror Stories, *and* 65 Great Spine Chillers*) that are basic to any library of horror literature. She lives near London in Berkshire, England.*

Her own short stories, frequently published in Great Britain but not available in the United States, often focus on the psychology of children. And they are, more often than not, unflinching in their portrayal of human violence.

"Robbie" begins with a quiet domestic scene and then, layer by layer, reveals all the troubled relationships within a family burdened with a handicapped child. There is terrible violence in this story, as the reader will suspect from the first few pages, but the violence is more than matched by Danby's enormously moving compassion for her characters.

"Of course, her boy's found himself a job down the bakery," said Mrs. Coppard.

"Has he?" Evelyn was removing the pins from the pink plastic rollers in Mrs. Coppard's pale brown hair. If you half-closed your eyes it looked as though her head was covered with sausage rolls.

"He wanted to get into the police, but he failed the medical. Eczema."

Evelyn tutted. "Shame." She ran her fingers through the hair, lifting the fat brown rolls away from the scalp,

then she carefully began to brush out the curls, using the side of her hand to arrange them in layers.

Mrs. Coppard looked at herself in the mirror, which was propped on the top of Evelyn's twin-tub washing-machine. "D'you think I should try a rinse?" she asked.

"Something on the red side, d'you mean?"

"Mm. Or highlights, perhaps. Blonde streaks."

Evelyn held up a hand mirror so that Mrs. Coppard could see the back of her head, then she untied the nylon cape and helped her up from the kitchen chair. A glance at the clock made her start. Nearly half past three.

"I shall have to get a move on," she told her client. "Robbie's bus is due in."

Mrs. Coppard searched in her purse for the right change. "Getting on all right, is he, at that school?" she asked. "Here we are." She handed some money over to Evelyn, who put it into a canister marked "Sugar."

"Thanks. Yes, he seems fine."

Mrs. Coppard went out into the passage and opened the front door. "He's a dear little chap." She bit her lip. "Oops, I shouldn't say that, I suppose. But you always *think* of him as little, don't you. Human nature being what it is."

When she had gone, Evelyn quickly tidied away the rollers and pins, then set off down the farm track that led from her cottage to the road beyond. She had hardly been waiting a minute when the blue mini-bus came round the corner and drew up alongside her. Half a dozen faces pressed against the windows as the door slid back and Robbie climbed out. One of the faces left a dribble of saliva behind on the pane.

"Ho, Mumma!" said Robbie, butting her with his head and hugging her thin waist with a lack of self-consciousness unusual in a boy of eleven.

She took his hand and looked up at the lady driving the mini-bus. "Wave goodbye to Mrs. Gladwell, Robbie."

"Bye, Mrs. Gladweb!" called Robbie as the bus drew away. He hopped and skipped at the end of Evelyn's arm as they made their way back to the cottage.

"Mark Williams wet himself today," he told her.

"There was a puddle on the floor. Mr. Warner made him clean it up himself."

"Oh no, Robbie, surely not," said Evelyn. After all, these children couldn't help it. They didn't choose to be antisocial.

"He did," confirmed Robbie, jumping forward with both feet and nearly pulling Evelyn's arm out.

She didn't think she believed him, but you never knew.

Before they went into the house, they visited Bella and her puppies in the shed that stood on the other side of the muddy yard that was their garden. Ted, Evelyn's husband, would have liked to have had the puppies into the house, but she knew they would have been into everything, making messes. In any case, they were quite happy in the shed. They had a big, cosy box to sleep in, and there would be plenty of room for them to move around in when they were older. At the moment they were still at the half-blind, bumbling stage.

"Billy . . . Goldie . . . Jason," said Robbie, doing the roll-call. "Meg . . . Scruffy." He chuckled delightedly. "Scruffy bit me," he said, "without his teeth."

Bella was some kind of retriever cross, and her pups might have had a bit of red setter in them. They were a fair mixture of colours, and at this stage it was difficult to see what shape they would turn out to be. Their mother, lying on an old grey blanket, turned to look at Evelyn and Robbie, and thumped her tail against the side of the box.

"Booby loo, Bella," said Robbie meaninglessly.

In a little while they left the shed and went towards the house. Robbie went ahead of Evelyn, taking four steps in all directions for every one of hers. He was a big child, plumpish, with short, stocky arms and legs and a round face. His features were squashy-looking, so that they were hard to remember when he wasn't present. But he possessed a marvellous gaiety and an optimism rarely found in those with a sharper awareness of their situation. He was clumsy, with uncoordinated movements, so that he appeared sometimes to limp or hobble. He moved ahead, with little skips and lollops, heavy and ungainly, yet with a certain grace. Like the puppies, thought

Evelyn. As they went into the house, he said conversationally: "Had yer snap?"

This was his latest expression. If it was anything like the last one, it could go on for months. Robbie was hard to fathom. If he had just been backward, it would have been easier: he could simply have been treated as a child of four or five—which was how he appeared most of the time. But every now and then his brain seemed to slip out of gear, and he would do or say something quite nonsensical. He would find a phrase that appealed to him, then repeat it over and over again, for weeks, sometimes. Last time it had been "Catch a kitty," which he had said to everyone he came across, exploring all the different tones of voice he could use, until Ted and Evelyn had been driven nearly mad. Evelyn thought "Had yer snap?" might prove to be even more exasperating than "Catch a kitty."

"Are you going to watch 'Playschool'?" she asked, turning on the television as Robbie settled himself into a chair in the living-room. "I've got a lady coming for a trim in a minute, then I'll do your tea." Robbie put his fingers in his mouth and hugged his elbows eagerly to his body as he heard the familiar music and saw the title appear on the screen.

That was twenty minutes' peace, anyway. He loved to watch children's programmes and became totally absorbed in them, joining in all the counting songs and finger games, clapping in time (or nearly in time) to the music. He knew all the nursery rhymes. In a little while Evelyn heard him singing: "Oh, the wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round . . ."—not very tunefully.

The lady in need of a trim was nearly half an hour late, and fussed for ages about whether or not her fringe was straight. When she finally left, it was five o'clock, and Evelyn hadn't even begun to prepare their tea. She put her head around the living-room door to check on Robbie and found him huddled in a corner, puffing and grunting.

"What on earth . . .?"

He had become bored with television after a while, had taken a length of tape from her sewing basket and had

somehow managed to tie himself up. He had done this before, though not for some months.

"Oh, you silly boy," she said, cutting him free. "I can't leave you for a minute, can I."

Robbie returned to his chair and applied himself intently to a soap opera on the television. He seemed happy to concentrate once more.

Evelyn was peeling the potatoes when Ted arrived home and hung up his dairyman's white coat in the passage.

"Got my tea ready?" he asked, coming into the kitchen.

"Hello, Ted," she said, thinking how nice it would be if he were to behave like a husband in a magazine story, and kiss her before thinking of his stomach.

He was a solid, rough-skinned man, not tall, but giving an impression of largeness. He made her own pallor and wispiness seem even more pronounced, by contrast.

"Not done the potatoes yet?" he asked, peering into the sink. "Heavens, woman, I've been *working*."

"I know, Ted, I know," Evelyn said in a tired voice. "I have too." She went on with the peeling.

Ted hunched his shoulders. "Hairdressing, I suppose. You know I don't like it. We rent this place to live in, not as a business premises. You'll get us chucked out."

Evelyn filled a saucepan with cold water. "I only do it to oblige, Ted. I always say that to them. I say, 'I'm only doing it to oblige.' "

"But they pay you. You can't say it's to oblige if they pay."

"Oh, come on," said Evelyn. "You know it takes care of our summer holidays. Where would we be without it come September?" They were going to Devon for a week, to a self-catering bungalow, taking Robbie with them.

Ted opened the breadbin. "Looks like we'll be having tea at midnight," he said, "so I may as well make myself a sandwich."

Robbie appeared in the doorway and swung on the handle. "Ho, Dad. Had yer snap? Had yer snap?" he said brightly.

"That's just the bloody trouble," said Ted. "I bloody haven't."

"No need to take it out on the boy," Evelyn told him, cutting a potato into four.

Robbie took a few seconds to size up the situation, then he ran to the biscuit tin and took out two custard creams. He held them up eagerly, right in front of his father's face.

"What're you *doing*, boy?" Ted asked irritably. "I don't want those." He pushed Robbie's arm aside and took a loaf from the breadbin. "A man wants more than a couple of biscuits when he's had a hard day's work." He placed a square of cheese between two slices of bread and took a large bite, then, still chewing on the sandwich, he asked: "What you do today, then, Robbie? Had a nice day at school, did you?"

"Mark Williams wet himself," said Robbie. "I had to clear it up."

Later that evening, Ted, wearing striped pyjamas and about to get into bed, said to Evelyn: "Is that true, what Robbie said about mopping up after that boy?"

She tidied her clothes away in the wardrobe. "No, I shouldn't think so. Earlier on he said the boy'd had to do it himself."

"Oh." Ted frowned. "Tells a lot of lies, doesn't he."

"Not *lies*, Ted. He doesn't really know the difference. He doesn't see things right or wrong like we do."

Ted was often puzzled by his son. In his younger days he had dreamt of a sturdy young fellow, "My boy," who could be taught how to wire a plug, put up a shelf, change the wheel of a car. And what had he got? An only son who was possessed of a sweet smile and a good deal of charm, but precious little else on the plus side. Where was the boy who would win the form prize up at the Comprehensive, or be chosen to play football for his school, or make his own tree house? Ted was a bitter man, and all the more so because Evelyn always refused to consider trying again. One day he'd throw away those blessed pills of hers, and they'd take their chance like anyone else.

* * *

The summer holidays arrived, and Robbie, denied the company of his schoolmates, spent his days mooching listlessly around. He was allowed to wander about the farm, and he took to towing behind him a cardboard box on a piece of string. He called it his go-kart. Evelyn had told him to keep out of the way of the men who worked on the farm, but he would hang around up by the barn, hoping to be given a ride on a tractor. Usually, though, he had to make do with a wave as they went busily past. He wasn't allowed in the milking parlour, where his father worked, but he would stand on the rails outside the shed, listening to the steady, rhythmic clank-swish of the machines and watching the big Friesians as they plodded back to their field. Once, he had tried to help herd them, but had found himself hemmed in between a cow and the side of the hayshed. He had felt her steamy breath on his face and smelt her milky smell. Sometimes he woke in the night, sweating at the memory of it.

There were some free-range chickens, and he was allowed to collect their eggs and place them carefully in trays. When he did this, the wife of one of the farmworkers sometimes gave him an egg to take home for his tea. He knew about baby chicks growing inside eggs. He had seen a dead thing that came out of a broken egg. He had touched it and it was slimy. It had a tiny beak. He didn't think it would be nice to eat.

Big chickens were. When Robbie's mother wanted a chicken to cook, Bill Johnson up at the farm would take one of the birds and wring its neck, and hand it to her by its feet, with its head hanging down, glassy-eyed, mouth open in mid-cackle.

Robbie liked to watch his mother preparing food. She would clear the kitchen table and roll up her sleeves, and open the drawer in the end of the table where she kept her knives and other implements. One day, early in the holidays, he saw a plucked chicken lying on the draining-board and he felt its funny soft skin. It was still quite warm. His mother came in and slapped it on to the table.

"Roast chicken for your dinner today, Robbie," she said, sharpening a small cleaver, pulling it back and forth

across a carving steel, criss-cross, criss-cross, like some weird native dance.

"Don't stand too close," she warned, "or I might cut off your nose."

Robbie put a hand up to his face as if to reassure himself that it was still intact, and Evelyn laughed. "That's right. You hang on to it," she said, testing the sharpness of the cleaver against her thumb. She laid out the chicken in front of her and took hold of its head in her left hand. Suddenly there was a bang which made Robbie jump, and the head was severed. There was blood on the table. Robbie crouched down until his eyes were on a level with the chicken's. "Had . . . yer . . . snap?" he asked it, very solemnly. "It's got a tongue," he told his mother.

She was tugging at the neck-skin now, rolling it back and exposing a lumpy, gristly-looking stump of neck. Another bang, and the cleaver sliced through the base of it. The neck rolled away across the table. Robbie picked it up and examined it.

"Haven't you got anything to do?" asked his mother, pushing a strand of hair back from her face. "Wouldn't you like to play outside?"

Robbie placed the chicken's neck carefully against the base of the chicken's head, as if fitting together a jigsaw. "I've done all *my* things," he said dejectedly. "I need someone else."

It was so difficult to find anyone for him to play with. Occasionally one or two of the more good-hearted children in the village would come and spend some time with him, but they soon tired of their altruism and drifted away, leaving Robbie so frustrated and hurt that Evelyn sometimes felt it would be better if they left him alone.

"Why don't you take Bella for a walk?" Evelyn suggested. "The puppies will be all right for a little while. You could go and visit Mrs. Biggins." This was an old lady who lived in another of the farm cottages.

"Mrs. Biggins is a stealer," Robbie said with a sly look. "Mrs. Biggins stole my cowboy hat."

Evelyn sighed. "What nonsense. You know perfectly

well I gave it to her for her little grandson. It was far too small for you."

Robbie turned and looked away, out of the window. "Had yer snap?" he said lightly, as if to change the subject.

When he turned back, his mother had her fingers in the hole where the chicken's neck had been. Slowly she drew out the crop and windpipe, then wiped her hand on a cloth.

"I wish I had a proper go-kart," said Robbie. "Or wheels on my box. Its bottom is going all soft and muddy."

Evelyn, preparing to cut off the chicken's feet, said: "I expect Daddy could make you one. Why don't you ask him?"

Robbie studied the rough-looking yellow legs with their curled-up claws. He wouldn't want feet like that. His own were pink and soft to touch.

"Daddy's always too busy," he complained. "Couldn't you make me one?"

Wham! The feet jumped away across the table, as if still capable of propelling themselves. Robbie caught them and added them to the discard pile. "Five things," he said, counting.

"Six," corrected his mother. "I don't think I'm very good at making things, Robbie. They always seem to go wrong, somehow." She made a careful slit, then plunged her hand into the bird, looking towards the ceiling, as if better to concentrate her sense of touch. In a few moments she withdrew her hand, and it was red with blood. Cupped in her fingers was a clutch of intestines, and the heart, liver and gizzard, which slipped on to the table, glistening, primitive.

Robbie put out a finger and pushed at them. "Don't do that," said Evelyn. In two weeks he would be going to the seaside for the weekend with a group of kind volunteers from the Blue Skies organization. He would be happy with other children around. It wasn't natural for a boy to spend his summer holidays like this. Even a boy like Robbie.

* * *

When Ted came home at noon, Evelyn took the chicken from the oven and made gravy with the stock from the giblets while Ted and Robbie went to look at the puppies.

They were quite big now, and pushed their way out of the shed as soon as the door was opened. They tumbled around for a while, like a troupe of circus acrobats, occasionally breaking off to come and sniff Ted's ankles, or lick Robbie's outstretched hand.

"They 'stand me," he told his father. "They know what I say."

They were developing their own characteristics now. Goldie had a longer tail than the others, Scruffy had a rougher coat. Meg had one ear that was permanently cocked. Billy was the gentle one. Jason was the most inquisitive, forever waddling off on his own and having to be fetched back by Bella.

"Aren't they great, eh?" said Ted, in the tender, quiet voice he used with the cows. "Little smashers." He made a grab for the nearest, Meg, and lifted her up. She scrambled out of his arms and rolled over on the ground, her soft, pale belly uppermost, waiting to be scratched. Bella came over then, her teats swinging heavily beneath her, and nuzzled the puppy upright.

"Did you bring her food?" Ted asked Robbie.

"I'll get it. I'll get it, Dad," Robbie said eagerly. He skipped back to the house and fetched the bowl, which he placed inside the door of the shed. Bella headed firmly towards it, with the five puppies bounding behind, their tails straight up behind them like Dodgem posts.

"They won't need her milk for much longer," said Ted. "Then we'll have to decide what to do with them."

"I'll keep them," Robbie said with earnest enthusiasm. "I'll look after them."

"'Fraid not, boy," said Ted. "We'll have to try and find homes for them. Can't have six dogs around the place. Be impossible, that. Besides, we're going on holiday soon. Can't take 'em with us."

"Don't want them, anyway," Robbie said airily, turning suddenly to aim an imaginary revolver at a passing butterfly.

"But just a moment ago you said . . ." Ted began, then he compressed his lips and sighed. There was no understanding the boy. He could be as normal as tea and biscuits one minute, silly as all-get-out the next. "Get on in and wash your hands for lunch," he said, unable to keep the exasperation out of his voice.

They had their meal in the kitchen, and Ted carved the chicken at the table. Robbie studied the crisp, gold skin and watched the juices run from the carving knife into the dish.

"Where's its head?" he asked.

Evelyn dished up roast potatoes and carrots. "In the dustbin," she said. "You saw me cut it off."

Robbie rocked on his chair. "We could have kept it," he said in a disappointed voice.

"Don't be soft," his father said scornfully, and Evelyn asked: "What for?"

"Just to keep," Robbie said.

"Get on with your food," muttered Ted. "You shouldn't let him watch you doing chickens," he said to Evelyn. "It makes him silly."

They ate in silence for a while, then Robbie, his mouth full of bread sauce, said: "Puppies are going."

"Not with your mouth full," said his father. "And hold your fork properly."

Evelyn shot him a glance. Leave him, Ted, it warned.

"If the puppies go, they can't play with me," Robbie went on, helping himself to more gravy and spilling some on the table. "Everything goes."

"Not everything, Robbie," said his mother. "Daddy and I are always here."

"Everything to play with goes," corrected Robbie.

Evelyn looked at Ted. "Perhaps Daddy will find time this afternoon to make you that go-kart you wanted."

"Oh . . . yes, yes, sure," Ted mumbled. "If I've got time."

Robbie gave him a knowing look. "Had yer snap?" he said, and deliberately poured the remains of his orange squash into the carrots.

Evelyn stood up. "That was *very* naughty, Robbie. Why did you do that?"

Robbie looked penitent. "Sorry. Sorry, Mumma," he said, meaning it.

"Oh well." She began to clear the table, and Robbie jumped up to help her, piling the plates with a clatter that made Ted wince.

Robbie behaved perfectly for the rest of the meal and afterwards helped his mother to make a pot of tea and carry the cups through to the living-room, where Ted half-sat, half-lay in an armchair, watching the Saturday afternoon racing on the television.

In a little while, Evelyn said: "You won't forget that go-kart, Ted . . ."

Robbie looked up from where he lay full-length on the floor, reading a comic. "I'd rather have a brother than a go-kart," he said. "A little brother to do games with."

His father gave a short laugh and said: "Think we should make you one of those, do you?"

Evelyn blushed. "Really, Ted," she remonstrated.

"Sorry, son," went on Ted. He glanced at Evelyn. "Your mum's not much good at making things," he said with a hint of a sneer.

"I would really like a baby brother," Robbie persisted. "I could give him walks and show him my caterpillars. I've got a hundred and ninety-one."

Evelyn, who had inspected his collection, numbering three, smiled. "He wouldn't be able to walk at first," she explained. "He'd just be a little baby. There again, you might not get a brother at all—it could be a sister instead."

Robbie looked cross. "No," he said. "Don't make a sister."

That night, Ted climbed into bed beside Evelyn and moved very close to her, so that she could feel the warmth of him through her nightdress. He put his arm around her shoulders, and she rested her head against the brick-hardness of his chest.

"Hello, Evie," he said, using the pet name he liked to call her by when he was feeling romantic.

"Ted," she acknowledged comfortably.

He stroked her shoulder. "'Bout what Robbie was saying. Another child. Eh?"

She squirmed in the bed, irritated. "You know what I think, Ted. Not another. I couldn't cope with that."

"But it needn't be," he insisted, shifting his position so that he could see her thin, watchful face. "The doctors said so. There's no reason to think we'd have another one like—well, like Robbie."

Robbie. The happy months of waiting. The joy at his birth. Then the "Could I just have a word with you?" and the tests, and the tears, and the great gaping hole of awfulness. Ted could never quite believe that Robbie was his own child, that he could have sired this being whose mind and body in no way seemed to connect with his own. Another scene: "Yes, you have a fine, healthy boy." Immediate recognition in the eyes. Daddy. Hello, son. "He's ever so like you, isn't he. Going to grow up to be like his daddy, this one."

"Please, Evie."

"No, Ted." She shifted away from him. "We're not going through all that again. I couldn't stand it, not knowing. Let's just be content with what we've got, and leave it at that."

"They can tell beforehand, now," said Ted. "They know when there's something wrong. They put a tube in."

Evelyn turned away and put her head down on the pillow. "Let them put tubes in you, then," she said. "You have the baby."

The next day was Sunday, and they all went over to Ted's parents' house, where Robbie disgraced himself by having a tantrum, lying on his back and drumming his heels on the floor and refusing to get up. There appeared to be no particular reason for this sudden performance, and it was over in minutes, but they left early all the same, before tea, because Ted felt embarrassed.

"It doesn't matter," Evelyn reassured him. "Everyone understands. You should just ignore him, like you would

a naughty toddler. It doesn't help, getting annoyed at him."

"He's getting worse," Ted said.

The following morning, Robbie decided to be specially helpful, as if to make up. His father had to be at work very early, and usually made his own breakfast, but this time Robbie was waiting for him in the kitchen with a plate of toast and a lukewarm pot of tea. The toast was a little burnt, and Ted got up to scrape it into the sink, but Robbie was not disheartened. When Ted was ready to go, Robbie held out his newly-laundered dairy coat for him. "Here, Daddy."

But his father snatched it from him, saying: "For God's sake, Robbie!" When the boy's face fell, he repented. "Oh, come on," he said. "Let's go and see the puppies before I go."

Jason was out of the shed almost before they had opened the door, and Robbie chased him around the yard, stumbling uselessly behind the agile leaping and bounding of the puppy. When Jason allowed himself to be caught, Robbie held him for a moment, laughing, then casually threw him away, as if he were a football. The puppy yelped as it hit the ground, then ran away, its tail tucked defensively between its legs.

"Robbie!" His father, furious, shook the boy by the shoulders. "You treat those puppies roughly and you can expect a bit of rough treatment from me, right?" Robbie was gazing about the yard. "And look at me when I'm talking to you." Robbie obeyed, and his expression was disconcertingly mild.

"We'll shut the puppies up, now, and you're not to go near them again until I say so. Is that clear?"

"Had yer snap, Goldie? Had yer snap, Scruffy?" said Robbie.

"Bedlam, bloody bedlam," Ted swore to himself as he mounted his bicycle and set off up the track. "The boy ought to be shut away somewhere."

Later that morning, Evelyn was busy at the washing line when Robbie came up to her, pulling his cardboard

box behind him. It was empty, and bumped over the ground. "I'm going to collect things," he told her.

"Why not see if you can find some wood and some old pram wheels," advised Evelyn. "Then you and Daddy could make that go-kart."

Mrs. Foster came at ten-thirty for a shampoo and blow-dry.

"I see you've got your boy home," she said. "Holidays, is it? You must have your hands full."

Evelyn smiled. "Oh, he's not too bad. I'm used to him."

"Well," said Mrs. Foster, wriggling her neck, "if any of mine got into that sort of state I wouldn't be so calm about it."

"What do you mean?" Evelyn stood poised, holding a bottle of shampoo in one hand.

"You know that old pond down by the pig-runs?" said Mrs. Foster with relish. "The one they call the duck pond, only there aren't any ducks now? I saw him grubbing about down there as I came past."

"Oh no," Evelyn sighed. "He's not supposed to go there. Covered in mud, is he?"

"Hah!" Mrs. Foster gave a high, unpleasant laugh. "Walking mud pie, more like."

Evelyn wearily put down the shampoo and opened the back door. "Robbie!" she called. "Robbie!"

In the distance she saw a dark, dishevelled figure towing a cardboard box. "Just you come in here!" she shouted, then she went back in to Mrs. Foster. "D'you want the herbal or the medicated?" she asked in a controlled, refined way, as if trying to keep her end up.

Robbie's eyes were blue glass baubles in a filthy face.

"And where have you been?" asked Evelyn.

He smiled, and his teeth were a slice of whiteness. "In the pond, collecting," he told her.

"Collecting what, dear?" asked Mrs. Foster, and Evelyn noticed that she couldn't quite hide her disdain.

"Secret," said Robbie.

"Don't you bring those shoes in here," Evelyn said sharply, as he began to step on to her clean kitchen floor. "Take them off outside, then go on into the bathroom and

get out of those wet clothes. I'll be along in a minute to give you a good scrub. No—your box can stay outside, thank you. I don't want to see your secrets today. I'm cross with you."

As Robbie went through to the bathroom he threw a casual "Had yer snap?" at Mrs. Foster and shambled off, singing to himself: "This ole man, he play one, he play nick-nack on my dum . . ."

"I don't know how you manage," said Mrs. Foster. "I'd be a bag of nerves."

After lunch, Evelyn felt one of her migraines coming on. "Don't bother me, Robbie," she said. "I've got a headache. I'm going to lie down."

"Mumma . . ." Robbie was all concern. He stroked her forehead with a damp, paw-like hand and said, "Better soon" in a soothing voice. After a while, he tired of being a nurse and went outside.

"You can play with the pups, but don't go out of the yard, Robbie," Evelyn called after him, making her head throb with the effort. Then she took a couple of pills and went upstairs to lie down. He couldn't come to much harm, pottering about the yard, and she'd only be half an hour or so.

When she awoke it was to the sound of Ted's voice shouting for her. He was outside the back door. Quickly, she tidied herself at her dressing-table and went down to the kitchen. Her head was still like a furnace. Please let him not mind corned beef for tea again.

"Evelyn? Where are you? What's going on? What's Bella tied up for?"

She went out into the yard and saw the dog sitting at the end of a long piece of string, gently whining. She looked around. "Robbie?" she called.

"Has he been with the puppies?" asked Ted. "I specifically told him not to."

Evelyn searched for Robbie with her eyes. "Oh dear," she said, confused. "I said he could."

"Oh, for God's sake," said Ted, untying the dog.

Bella went straight to the door of the shed and sat before it, making a strange, throaty noise and scratching at the door.

"What is it, girl?" said Ted in his soft, animal-loving voice. "What's the matter, eh?" He stood with his hand on the latch, suddenly fearful, then opened the door of the shed. He looked in, and quickly stepped back a pace. "God," he said. "Oh God, no."

Evelyn came running over but he put out an arm and held her back. "Don't go in," he said. "There's been . . . an accident."

He stepped forward into the shed, avoiding the cleaver on the floor. Bella pushed past him and nosed among her dead and dying puppies, among the blood and pain, crying over them, trying to push them back to life.

Ted bent down. "Billy," he whispered, touching the head of the nearest, seeing the eyes at that moment glaze over and die. There was so much blood he couldn't tell what had happened. Jason and Scruffy lay together, red and twitching. Meg . . . Goldie . . . He couldn't go on looking. Choking back his sobs he stood up, and it was then that he heard Evelyn cry out.

"Robbie!" she gasped.

The boy was clumping around the side of the shed, holding in his arms his precious cardboard box. His hands and broadly-grinning face were heavily streaked with blood.

"Ho, Mumma," he said cheerfully. "We can make it now. I've got all the things."

Ted emerged from the shed, shaking and incoherent. "What . . . what the . . ."

"But the blood, Robbie . . ." Evelyn was saying weakly. "Are you hurt? Have you cut yourself?"

"The things for making the little brother," Robbie went on. "You know. I'm helping Daddy. I've got the things."

Ted stared at the boy. He turned to where the tormented Bella was whimpering in the shed, then looked back at the squat, bedraggled, soiled figure whose fatuous smile was just beginning to fade. This figure that called itself his son. "You bloody silly little moron," he said coldly. "You pathetic little god-forsaken cretin!" His voice rose to a shout, and he stormed over to Robbie and swept the box from his hands so that it fell on its side

and the contents were scattered. "Bloody maniac!" moaned Ted, collapsing miserably against the side of the shed. "Bloody, bloody maniac."

Evelyn was kneeling on the ground, gazing in disbelief at Robbie's split treasures. She spoke in a high, hysterical way, as if reality were yet to take hold. "Frogs," she said, putting out a hand towards a squashed, greenish-brown object, "and snails . . ." One was still alive, and poked its soft horns out from under its shell. "Frogs and snails and . . . and p-p-puppy dogs' . . ." she recited, touching something slim and furry and wet with warm blood, "tails," she finished, in a voice so faint it could hardly be heard.

Robbie stood a few paces away, twisting his clumsy hands together, a couple of fat tears sliding down his broad, dirty cheeks. When he spoke, his voice was hoarse with dismay.

"I wanted us to call him Terry . . ."

Heartburn

by Hortense Calisher

Hortense Calisher has been nominated for the National Book Award for her first novel, False Entry, *for her autobiographical work,* Herself, *and for* The Collected Stories of Hortense Calisher. *Her 1983 novel,* Mysteries of Motion, *follows the fates of half a dozen characters, passengers on the first American space shuttle for civilians, as they enter the Space Age, carrying with them all their human frailties and frustrations.*

"Heartburn," like many horror stories and films, has an amusing element, but there is nothing funny at all in what it says about human nature.

The light, gritty wind of a spring morning blew in on the doctor's shining, cleared desk, and on the tall buttonhook of a man who leaned agitatedly toward him.

"I have some kind of small animal lodged in my chest," said the man. He coughed, a slight, hollow apologia to his ailment, and sank back in his chair.

"Animal?" said the doctor, after a pause which had the unfortunate quality of comment. His voice, however, was practised, deft, coloured only with the careful suspension of judgment.

"Probably a form of newt or toad," answered the man, speaking with clipped distaste, as if he would disassociate himself from the idea as far as possible. His face quirked with sad foreknowledge. "Of course, you don't believe me."

The doctor looked at him noncommittally. Paraphrased, an old refrain of the poker table leapt erratically in his mind. "Nits"—no—"newts and gnats and one-eyed jacks," he thought. But already the anecdote was shaping itself, trim and perfect, for display at the clinic luncheon table. "Go on," he said.

"Why won't any of you come right out and say what you think!" the man said angrily. Then he flushed, not hectically, the doctor noted, but with the well-bred embarrassment of the normally reserved. "Sorry. I didn't mean to be rude."

"You've already had an examination?" The doctor was a neurologist, and most of his patients were referrals.

"My family doctor. I live up in Boston."

"Did you tell him—er . . .?" The doctor sought gingerly for a phrase.

One corner of the man's mouth lifted, as if he had watched others in the same dilemma. "I went through the routine first. Fluoroscope, metabolism, cardiograph. Even gastroscopy." He spoke, the doctor noted, with the regrettable glibness of the patient who has shopped around.

"And—the findings?" said the doctor, already sure of the answer.

The man leaned forward, holding the doctor's glance with his own. A faint smile riffled his mouth. "Positive."

"Positive!"

"Well," said the man, "machines have to be interpreted after all, don't they?" He attempted a shrug, but the quick eye of the doctor saw that the movement masked a slight contortion within his tweed suit, as if the man writhed away from himself but concealed it quickly, as one masks a hiccup with a cough. "A curious flutter in the cardiograph, a strange variation in the metabolism, an alien shadow under the fluoroscope." He coughed again and put a genteel hand over his mouth, but this time the doctor saw it clearly—the slight, cringing motion.

"You see," added the man, his eyes helpless and apologetic above the polite covering hand, "it's alive. It *travels.*"

"Yes. Yes, of course," said the doctor, soothingly now. In his mind hung the word, ovoid and perfect as a drop of water about to fall: *obsession.* A beautiful case. He thought again of the luncheon table.

"What did your doctor recommend?" he said.

"A place with more resources, like the Mayo Clinic. It was then that I told him I knew what it was, as I've

told you. And how I acquired it." The visitor paused. "Then, of course, he was forced to pretend he believed me."

"Forced?" said the doctor.

"Well," said the visitor, "actually, I think he did believe me. People tend to believe anything these days. All this mass media information gives them the habit. It takes a strong individual to disbelieve evidence."

The doctor was confused and annoyed. "Well, what then?" he said peremptorily, ready to rise from his desk in dismissal.

Again came the fleeting bodily grimace and the quick cough. "He—er . . . he gave me a prescription."

The doctor raised his eyebrows, in a gesture he was swift to retract as unprofessional.

"For heartburn, I think it was," added his visitor demurely.

Tipping back in his chair, the doctor tapped a pencil on the edge of the desk. "Did he suggest you seek help—on another level?"

"Many have suggested it," said the man.

"But I'm not a psychiatrist!" said the doctor irritably.

"Oh, I know that. You see, I came to you because I had the luck to hear one of your lectures at the Academy. The one on 'Overemphasis on the Non-somatic Causes of Nervous Disorders.' It takes a strong man to go against the tide like that. A disbeliever. And that's what I sorely need." The visitor shuddered, this time letting the *frisson* pass uncontrolled. "You see," he added, thrusting his clasped hands forward on the desk, and looking ruefully at the doctor, as if he would cushion him against his next remark, "you see—I am a psychiatrist."

The doctor sat still in his chair.

"Ah, I can't help knowing what you are thinking," said the man. "I would think the same. A streamlined version of the Napoleonic delusion." He reached into his breast pocket, drew out a wallet, and fanned papers from it on the desk.

"Never mind. I believe you!" said the doctor hastily.

"Already?" said the man sadly.

Reddening, the doctor hastily looked over the collec-

tion of letters, cards of membership in professional societies, licences, and so on—very much the same sort of thing he himself would have had to amass, had he been under the same necessity of proving his identity. Sanity, of course, was another matter. The documents were all issued to Dr. Curtis Retz at a Boston address. Stolen, possibly, but something in the man's manner, in fact everything in it except his unfortunate hallucination, made the doctor think otherwise. Poor guy, he thought. Occupational fatigue, perhaps. But what a form! The Boston variant, possibly. "Suppose you start from the beginning," he said benevolently.

"If you can spare the time . . ."

"I have no more appointments until lunch." And what a lunch that'll be, the doctor thought, already cherishing the pop-eyed scene—Travis the clinic's director (that plethoric Nestor), and young Gruenberg (all of whose cases were unique), his hairy nostrils dilated for once in a *mise-en-scène* which he did not dominate.

Holding his hands pressed formally against his chest, almost in the attitude of one of the minor placatory figures in a *Pietà*, the visitor went on. "I have the usual private practice," he said, "and clinic affiliations. As a favour to an old friend of mine, headmaster of a boys' school nearby, I've acted as guidance consultant there for some years. The school caters for boys of above average intelligence and is run along progressive lines. Nothing's ever cropped up except run-of-the-mill adolescent problems, coloured a little, perhaps, by the type of parents who tend to send their children to a school like that—people who are—well, one might say—almost tediously aware of their commitments as parents."

The doctor grunted. He was that kind of parent himself.

"Shortly after the second term began, the head asked me to come down. He was worried over a sharp drop of morale which seemed to extend over the whole school—general inattention in classes, excited note-passing, nightly disturbances in the dorms—all pointing, he had thought at first, to the existence of some fancier than usual form of hazing, or to one of those secret societies, sometimes laughable, sometimes with overtones of the corrupt, with

which all schools are familiar. Except for one thing. One after the other, a long list of boys had been sent to the infirmary by the various teachers who presided in the dining-room. Each of the boys had shown a marked debility, and what the resident doctor called 'All the stigmata of pure fright. Complete unwillingness to confide.' Each of the boys pleaded stubbornly for his own release, and a few broke out of their own accord. The interesting thing was that each child did recover shortly after his own release, and it was only after this that another boy was seen to fall ill. No two were afflicted at the same time."

"Check the food?" said the doctor.

"All done before I got there. According to my friend, all the trouble seemed to have started with the advent of one boy, John Hallowell, a kid of about fifteen, who had come to the school late in the term with a history of having run away from four other schools. Records at these classed him as very bright, but made oblique references to 'personality difficulties' which were not defined. My friend's school, ordinarily pretty independent, had taken the boy at the insistence of old Simon Hallowell, the boy's uncle, who is a trustee. His brother, the boy's father, is well known for his martial exploits which have nourished the tabloids for years. The mother lives mostly in France and South America. One of these perennial dryads, apparently, with a youthfulness maintained by money and a yearly immersion in the fountains of American plastic surgery. Only time she sees the boy . . . Well, you can imagine. What the feature articles call a Broken Home."

The doctor shifted in his chair and lit a cigarette.

"I won't keep you much longer," said the visitor. "I saw the boy." A violent fit of coughing interrupted him. This time his curious writhing motion went frankly unconcealed. He got up from his chair and stood at the window, gripping the sill and breathing heavily until he had regained control, and went on, one hand pulling unconsciously at his collar. "Or, at least, I think I saw him. On my way to visit him in his room I bumped into a tall redheaded boy in a football sweater, hurrying down

the hall with a windbreaker and a poncho slung over his shoulder. I asked for Hallowell's room; he jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the door just behind him, and continued past me. It never occurred to me . . . I was expecting some adenoidal gangler with acne . . . or one of these sinister little angel faces, full of neurotic sensibility.

"The room was empty. Except for its finicky neatness, and a rather large amount of livestock, there was nothing unusual about it. The school, according to the current trend, is run like a farm, with the boys doing the chores, and pets are encouraged. There was a tank with a couple of turtles near the window, beside it another, full of newts, and in one corner a large cage of well-tended, brisk white mice. Glass cases, with carefully mounted series of lepidoptera and hymenoptera, showing the metamorphic stages, hung on the walls, and on a drawing board there was a daintily executed study of Branchippus, the 'fairy shrimp.'

"While I paced the room, trying to look as if I wasn't prying, a greenish little wretch, holding himself together as if he had an imaginary shawl draped around him, slunk into the half-dark room and squeaked, 'Hallowell?' When he saw me he started to duck, but I detained him and found that he had had an appointment with Hallowell too. When it was clear, from his description, that Hallowell must have been the redhead I'd seen leaving, the poor urchin burst into tears.

" 'I'll never get rid of it now!' he wailed. From then on it wasn't hard to get the whole maudlin story. It seems that shortly after Hallowell's arrival at school he acquired a reputation for unusual proficiency with animals and for out-of-the-way lore which would impress the ingenuous. He circulated the rumour that he could swallow small animals and regurgitate them at will. No one actually saw him swallow anything, but it seems that in some mumbo-jumbo with another boy who had shown cynicism about the whole thing, it was claimed that Hallowell had, well, divested himself of something, and passed it on to the other boy, with the statement that the latter would only

be able to get rid of his cargo when he in turn found a boy who would disbelieve *him.*"

The visitor paused, calmer now, and leaving the window sat down again in the chair opposite the doctor, regarding him with such fixity that the doctor shifted uneasily, with the apprehension of one who is about to be asked for a loan.

"My mind turned to the elementary sort of thing we've all done at times. You know, circle of kids in the dark, piece of cooked cauliflower passed from hand to hand with the statement that the stuff is the fresh brains of some neophyte who hadn't taken his initiation seriously. My young informer, Moulton his name was, swore however that this hysteria (and of course, that's what I thought it) was passed on singly, from boy to boy, without any such séances. He'd been home to visit his family, who are missionaries on leave, and had been infected by his roommate on his return to school, unaware that by this time the whole school had protectively turned believers, en masse. His own terror came, not only from his conviction that he was possessed, but from his inability to find anybody who would take his dare. And so he'd finally come to Hallowell.

"By this time the room was getting really dark and I snapped on the light to get a better look at Moulton. Except for an occasional shudder, like a bodily tic, which I took to be the after-effects of hard crying, he looked like a healthy enough boy who'd been scared out of his wits. I remember that a neat little monograph was already forming itself in my mind, a group study on mass psychosis, perhaps, with effective anthropological references to certain savage tribes whose dances include a rite known as 'eating evil.'

"The kid was looking at me. 'Do you believe me?' he said suddenly. 'Sir?' he added, with a naïve cunning which tickled me.

" 'Of course,' I said, patting his shoulder absently. 'In a way.'

"His shoulder slumped under my hand. I felt its tremor, direct misery palpitating between my fingers.

" 'I thought . . . maybe for a man . . . it wouldn't be . . .' His voice trailed off.

" 'Be the same? . . . I don't know,' I said slowly, for of course, I was answering, not his actual question, but the overtone of some cockcrow of meaning that evaded me.

"He raised his head and petitioned me silently with his eyes. Was it guile, or simplicity, in his look, and was it for conviction, or the lack of it, that he arraigned me? I don't know. I've gone back over what I did then, again and again, using all my own knowledge of the mechanics of decision, and I know that it wasn't just sympathy, or a pragmatic reversal of therapy, but something intimately important for me, that made me shout with all my strength—'Of course I don't believe you!'

"Moulton, his face contorted, fell forward on me so suddenly that I stumbled backwards, sending the tank of newts crashing to the floor. Supporting him with my arms, I hung on to him while he heaved, face downwards. At the same time I felt a tickling, sliding sensation in my own ear, and an inordinate desire to follow it with my finger, but both my hands were busy. It wasn't a minute till I'd gotten him onto the couch, where he drooped, a little white about the mouth, but with that chastened, purified look of the physically relieved, although he hadn't actually upchucked.

"Still watching him, I stooped to clear up the debris, but he bounded from the couch with amazing resilience.

" 'I'll do it,' he said.

" 'Feel better?'

"He nodded, clearly abashed, and we gathered up the remains of the tank in a sort of mutual embarrassment. I can't remember that either of us said a word, and neither of us made more than a halfhearted attempt to search for the scattered pests which had apparently sought crannies in the room. At the door we parted, muttering as formal a good night as was possible between a grown man and a small boy. It wasn't until I reached my own room and sat down that I realized, not only my own extraordinary behaviour, but that Moulton, standing, as I suddenly

recalled, for the first time quite straight, had sent after me a look of pity and speculation.

"Out of habit, I reached into my breast pocket for my pencil, in order to take notes as fresh as possible. And then I felt it . . . a skittering, sidling motion, almost beneath my hand. I opened my jacket and shook myself, thinking that I'd picked up something in the other room . . . but nothing. I sat quite still, gripping the pencil, and after an interval it came again—an inchoate creeping, a twitter of movement almost *lackadaisical,* as of something inching itself lazily along—but this time on my other side. In a frenzy, I peeled off my clothes, inspected myself wildly, and enumerating to myself a reassuring abracadabra of explanation—skipped heartbeat, intercostal pressure of gas—I sat there naked, waiting. And after a moment, it came again, that wandering, aquatic motion, as if something had flipped itself over just enough to make me aware, and then settled itself, this time under the sternum, with a nudge like that of some inconceivable foetus. I jumped up and shook myself again, and as I did so I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror in the closet door. My face, my own face, was ajar with fright, and I was standing there, hooked over, as if I were wearing an imaginary shawl."

In the silence after his visitor's voice stopped, the doctor sat there in the painful embarrassment of the listener who has played confessor, and whose expected comment is a responsibility he wishes he had evaded. The breeze from the open window fluttered the papers on the desk. Glancing out at the clean, regular façade of the hospital wing opposite, at whose evenly shaded windows the white shapes of orderlies and nurses flickered in consoling routine, the doctor wished petulantly that he had fended off the man and all his papers in the beginning. What right had the man to arraign *him?* Surprised at his own inner vehemence, he pulled himself together. "How long ago?" he said at last.

"Four months."

"And since?"

"It's never stopped." The visitor now seemed brimming with a tentative excitement, like a colleague

discussing a mutually puzzling case. "Everything's been tried. Sedatives do obtain some sleep, but that's all. Purgatives. Even emetics." He laughed slightly, almost with pride. "Nothing like that works," he continued, shaking his head with the doting fondness of a patient for some symptom which has confounded the best of them. "It's too cagey for that."

With his use of the word *it*, the doctor was propelled back into that shapely sense of reality which had gone admittedly askew during the man's recital. To admit the category of *it*, to dip even a slightly co-operative finger in another's fantasy, was to risk one's own equilibrium. Better not to become involved in argument with the possessed, lest one's own apertures of belief be found to have been left ajar.

"I am afraid," the doctor said blandly, "that your case is outside my field."

"As a doctor?" said his visitor. "Or as a man?"

"Let's not discuss me, if you please."

The visitor leaned intently across the desk. "Then you admit that to a certain extent, we *have* been—?"

"I admit nothing!" said the doctor, stiffening.

"Well," said the man disparagingly, "of course, that, too, is a kind of stand. The commonest, I've found." He sighed, pressing one hand against his collarbone. "I suppose you have a prescription too, or a recommendation. Most of them do."

The doctor did not enjoy being judged. "Why don't you hunt up young Hallowell?" he said, with malice.

"Disappeared. Don't you think I tried?" said his vis-à-vis ruefully. Something furtive, hope, perhaps, spread its guileful corruption over his face. "That means you do give a certain credence—"

"Nothing of the sort!"

"Well then," said his interrogator, turning his palms upward.

The doctor leaned forward, measuring his words with exasperation. "Do you mean you *want* me to tell you you're crazy!"

"In my spot," answered his visitor meekly, "which would you prefer?"

Badgered to the point of commitment, the doctor stared back at his inconvenient Diogenes. Swollen with irritation, he was only half conscious of an uneasy, vestigial twitching of his ear muscles, which contracted now as they sometimes did when he listened to atonal music.

"O.K., O.K.!" he shouted suddenly, slapping his hand down on the desk and thrusting his chin forward. "Have it your own way then! I don't believe you!"

Rigid, the man looked back at him cataleptically, seeming, for a moment, all eye. Then, his mouth stretching in that medieval grimace, risorial and equivocal, whose mask appears sometimes on one side of the stage, sometimes on the other, he fell forward on the desk, with a long, mewing sigh.

Before the doctor could reach him, he had raised himself on his arms and their foreheads touched. They recoiled, staring downward. Between them on the desk, as if one of its mahogany shadows had become animate, something seemed to move—small, seal-coloured, and ambiguous. For a moment it filmed back and forth, arching in a crude, primordial inquiry; then, homing straight for the doctor, whose jaw hung down in a rictus of shock, it disappeared from view.

Sputtering, the doctor beat the air and his own person wildly with his hands, and staggered upward from his chair. The breeze blew hypnotically, and the stranger gazed back at him with such perverse calm that already he felt an assailing doubt of the lightning, untoward event. He fumbled back over his sensations of the minute before, but already piecemeal and chimerical, they eluded him now, as they might forever.

"It's unbelievable," he said weakly.

His visitor put up a warding hand, shaking it fastidiously. "*Au contraire!*" he replied daintily, as though by the use of another language he would remove himself still further from commitment. Reaching forward, he gathered up his papers into a sheaf, and stood up, stretching himself straight with an all-over bodily yawn of physical ease that was like an affront. He looked down at the doctor, one hand fingering his wallet. "No," he said reflectively, "guess not." He tucked the papers away.

"Shall we leave it on the basis of—er—professional courtesy?" he inquired delicately.

Choking on the sludge of his rage, the doctor looked back at him, inarticulate.

Moving toward the door, the visitor paused. "After all," he said, "with your connections . . . try to think of it as a temporary inconvenience." Regretfully, happily, he closed the door behind him.

The doctor sat at his desk, humped forward. His hands crept to his chest and crossed. He swallowed, experimentally. He hoped it was rage. He sat there, waiting. He was thinking of the luncheon table.

The Cloak

by Isak Dinesen

Karen Dinesen (she took the name "Isak" later in life) was born in Denmark in 1885. Married to the Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke, a cousin from Sweden, she set out with her husband for Kenya in 1913. There they raised coffee on a farm at Ngong, near the new town of Nairobi. (The Ngong hills are today the fashionable Nairobi suburb called Karen.) Eventually both the coffee crop and the marriage failed, and Dinesen left Africa in 1931. She died in 1962.

Some critics have commented that Dinesen's greatest artistic creation was her life itself. Certainly among her most widely read books have been Out of Africa *and* Shadows on the Grass, *moving accounts of her African years, but equally enduring are her collections of stories, most notably* Seven Gothic Tales *and* Winter's Tales.

In Denmark, Dinesen lived at Rungstedlund, fifteen miles up the coast from Copenhagen. The front of the house looks out across the waters of the Oresund to Sweden just visible in the distance. Behind the house there is a tranquil pond and a footpath that leads up a wooded hillside. At the crest of the hill, in a grassy clearing, a giant oak towers over the woods. Beneath the tree, a simple slab of stone, inscribed with only her name, Karen Blixen, lies upon the earth. The site seems perfectly appropriate as the resting place of Isak Dinesen: stark, dramatic, eerie, and beautiful.

When the great old master, the sculptor Leonidas Allori, whom they called the Lion of the Mountains, was arrested for rebellion and high treason and condemned to death, his pupils wept and stormed. For to them he had been spiritual father, archangel and immortal. They assembled in Pierino's hostelry outside the town, in a studio or in

an attic, where they could sob, two or three, in each other's arms, or—like a big tree in a gale with its bare branches reaching upward—crowded in a cluster, could shake ten pairs of clenched fists to the sky, in a cry for rescue of their beloved, and for revenge on tyranny.

Only one out of all of them in those days continued to live as if he had neither heard nor understood the terrible news. And that one was the disciple whom the master had loved above all others, whom he had called son, as the young man had called him father. Angelo Santasilia's schoolfellows took his silence to be the expression of infinite sorrow; they respected his pain and left him alone. But the real reason for Angelo's absence of mind was that his heart was filled with passion for the master's young wife, Lucrezia. The love and understanding between her and him just at this time had gone so far that she had promised him her total surrender.

In vindication of the faithless wife it must be pleaded that for a long time, and in deep agitation and alarm, she had resisted the divine and merciless power which held her in its hands. With the most sacred names she had sealed—and had made her lover seal—an oath: that never again should word or glance at which the master himself could not have rejoiced pass between the two. As she felt that neither of them could keep the oath, she entreated Angelo to go to Paris to study. Everything was prepared for his journey. It was only when she realized that this resolve could not be carried out, either, that she gave herself up to her destiny.

The faithless disciple, too, might have pleaded extenuating circumstances, even if these might not have been accepted by every judge or juryman. Angelo in his young life had had many love affairs, and in every single case had surrendered himself utterly to his passion, but none of these adventures had ever for any length of time left a deep impression on his being. It was inevitable that, someday, one of them must become the most important of all. And it was reasonable, it was perhaps inevitable, that the chosen mistress should be the wife of his teacher. He had loved no human being as he had loved Leonidas Allori; no other human being had he at any time whole-

heartedly admired. He felt that he had been created by the hands of his master, as Adam by the hands of the Lord; from these same hands he was to accept his mate. The Duke of Alba, in Spain, who was a handsome and brilliant man, married a plain and simple-minded lady of the court and remained faithful to her, and when his friends, amazed at the fact, jestingly questioned him upon it, he answered them that the Duchess of Alba must needs, in her own right, and irrespective of personal qualities, be the most desirable woman in the world. So it was with the disloyal pupil. Once his strong amorous urge was joined with that great art which to him was the highest ideal of all—and was, moreover, coupled with a deep personal devotion—a fire was kindled, which later on he himself could not restrict.

Neither was Leonidas himself without blame in regard to the two young people. Day by day, in conversations with his favorite pupil, he had dwelt on Lucrezia's beauty. While making the young woman pose for his lovely and immortal Psyche with the Lamp he called upon Angelo to try, at his side in the studio, his hand at the same task, and did indeed interrupt his own work in order to point out the beauties in the living, breathing and blushing body before them, enraptured and inspired as in front of a classic work of art. Of this strange understanding between the old and the young artist neither of them was really conscious, and if a third person had spoken to them of it, they would have rebuffed him with indifference, perhaps with impatience. The one who suspected it was the woman, Lucrezia. And through it she suspected—at the same time with a kind of dismay and giddiness—the hardness and coldness which may be found in the hearts of men and artists, even with regard to the ones whom these hearts do embrace with deepest tenderness. Her own heart lamented, in complete loneliness, much as a lamb laments when led by its shepherd to the shamble.

As now, through various unusual occurrences in his daily life, Leonidas realized that he was being watched and followed, and as from this fact he concluded that he was in great danger, he was seized so deeply by the idea

of his own death, and of the approaching end to his artistic career, that his whole being closed round it. He spoke no word of his danger to the people surrounding him, because these people, in the course of a few weeks, to him had become infinitely distant and thus, in accordance with the law of perspective, infinitely small. He might have wished to complete the work on which he was engaged, but soon his work, too, to him seemed an unreasonable and inconvenient distraction from the matter which really engrossed him. In the last days before his arrest, he stepped out of his isolation, unwontedly gentle and considerate toward all those around him. He now also sent Lucrezia away to the house of a friend, the owner of a vineyard, in the mountains a few miles from town. As, in order to give a reason for this arrangement—for he did not wish her to have any suspicion of the actual position—he explained to her that she looked pale and feverish; he himself believed that he was using a casual pretense to persuade her to leave him, and he smiled at the deep concern with which she received his command.

She at once sent word to Angelo and told him of her husband's decision. The lovers, who in anguish had been seeking an opportunity to meet and fulfill their love, looked each other in the eyes in triumphant certainty that now, and from now on, all powers of life were uniting to serve them, and that their passion was the loadstone which according to its will attracted and ranged everything around them. Lucrezia before now had visited the farm; she instructed Angelo as to how, by a certain path in the mountains, he could approach the house unseen, and come to her window. The window faced west, the moon would be in her first quarter, she would be able to discern the figure of her lover between the vines. When he picked up a pebble from the ground and threw it against the windowpane, she would open the window. As, in the course of their deliberation, they came to this moment, the voices of both faltered. To regain his equilibrium Angelo told her that for the nocturnal journey he had bought himself a large and fine cloak of violet goat's wool with brown embroidery, which a friend from

the country, who was hard up for the moment, had offered him. All this they discussed in Lucrezia's room next to the studio where the master was working, and with the door to it open. The meeting, they decided, was to take place on the second Saturday evening.

They parted; and just as, all through the following week, the thought of death and eternity accompanied the master, the thought of Lucrezia's body against his own accompanied the young disciple. This thought, without having at any time really left him, constantly seemed to return to him anew like a forgotten, surprising, joyful message—"Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine."

On Sunday morning Leonidas Allori was arrested and taken to prison. In the course of the week several interrogations of him followed, and possibly the old patriot might have justified himself in some of the accusations brought against him. But in the first place the government was resolved this time to make an end of such a dangerous enemy, and in the second place the accused himself was resolved not to upset, by any ups and downs, the sublime balance of mind he had attained. There was from the very beginning no real doubt as to the outcome of the case. Judgment was passed, and orders were given that next Sunday morning that most famous son of the people should be stood up against the prison wall, to fall against the cobbles with six bullets in his breast.

Toward the end of the week the old artist asked to be paroled for twelve hours in order to go to the place where his wife was staying, and to take leave of her.

His plea was refused. But such great strength had this man still in him, and with such an aura of radiance did his fame and his integrity of heart surround his person, that his words could not die quickly in the ears of those to whom they were addressed. The last request of the condemned man was brought up again and weighed by his judges, even after he himself had give up hope.

It so happened that the topic was raised in a house where Cardinal Salviati was present.

"No doubt," said His Eminence, "clemency here might set a dangerous precedent. But the country—and the royal house itself which possesses some of his works—is in debt to Allori. This man has often by his art restored men's faith in themselves—maybe men should now have faith in him."

He thought the matter over and continued: "It is said that the master—do they not call him the Lion of the Mountains?—is deeply loved by his pupils. We might find out if he has really been able to awaken a devotion which will defy death. We might, in his case, make use of the old rule which will allow a prisoner to leave his prison for a specified period, on the condition that he produce a hostage to die in his stead, if he does not return in time.

"Allori," said the Cardinal, "last summer did me the honor of executing the reliefs on my villa at Ascoli. He had with him there his beautiful young wife and a very handsome young disciple, Angelo by name, whom he called his son. We might let Leonidas know that he can obtain his freedom for a period of twelve hours, during which, as he wishes, he can take leave of his wife. But the condition will be that this young Angelo shall enter the prison cell as he himself leaves it, and that it will be made clear to both the old and the young artist that at the expiration of the twelve hours, at all events an execution will be carried out in the prison yard."

A feeling that in the circumstances it would be correct to decide on something unconventional made the powerful gentlemen with whom the matter rested accept the Cardinal's suggestion. The condemned man was informed that his request had been granted, and on which conditions. Leonidas sent word to Angelo.

The young artist was not in his room when his schoolfellows came to bring him the message and to fetch him to prison. Even though he had not paid any attention to the sorrow of his friends, it had nevertheless upset and distressed him, since at this moment he himself conceived the universe as perfect in beauty and harmony, and life in itself as boundless grace. He had kept apart from his

fellows in a sort of antagonism, just as in respect and commiseration they had kept apart from him. He had traveled afoot the long way to the Duke of Miranda's villa to see a recently unearthed Greek statue of the god Dionysus. Still, without really knowing it, he had wished and resolved to have a powerful work of art confirm his conviction of the divinity of the world.

His friends thus had to wait for him a long time in a small room high above the narrow street. When the chosen one finally entered, they pounced on him from all sides and informed him of the sad honor that awaited him.

So little had the master's favorite understood the nature and extent of the misfortune that had befallen himself and all of them, that the messengers had to repeat their tidings to him. When at last he comprehended, he stood petrified for a while, in the deepest grief. In the manner of a sleepwalker he inquired about the sentence and the execution, and his comrades, with tears in their eyes, gave him their answers. But when they came to the offer made to Leonidas, and the prisoner's request for Angelo, light returned to the young man's eyes and color to his cheeks. He asked his friends, indignantly, why they had not informed him at once—then without words he tore himself from their grasp to hasten to the prison.

But on the doorstep he stopped, seized by the solemnity of the moment. He had walked a long way and had slept on the grass, his clothes were covered with dust, and he had torn a rent in one sleeve. He did not wish to appear before his master like this today. He lifted his big new cloak from the hook on which it hung, and put it on.

The warders in the prison knew in advance of his coming. He was led to the condemned man's cell, and let in. He threw himself into his master's arms.

Leonidas Allori calmed him. To make the young man forget the present, he turned the conversation round to the stellar heavens, of which he had often talked with his son, and in the knowledge of which he had instructed him. Soon his great gaze and deep, clear voice lifted his pupil up there with him, as if the two of them, hand in hand, had slipped back many years, and were now speaking together all by themselves in a lofty, carefree world. Only

when the teacher had seen the tears dry on the pale young face did he return to the ground, and he asked his pupil if he was indeed prepared to spend, in his place, the night in the prison. Angelo replied that he knew he was.

"I thank you, my son," said Leonidas, "for giving me twelve hours which will be of boundless importance to me.

"Aye, I believe in the immortality of the soul," he continued, "and perhaps the eternal life of the spirit is the one true reality. I do not know yet, but I shall know tomorrow. But this physical world around us, these four elements—earth, water, air and fire—are these not realities as well? And is not also my own body—my marrow-filled bones, my flowing, never-pausing blood, and my five glorious senses—divinely true? Others think that I am old. But I am a peasant and of peasant stock, and our soil to us has been a stern, bountiful nurse. My muscles and sinews are but firmer and harder than when I was a youth, my hair is as luxurious as it was then, my sight is not in the least impaired. All these my faculties I shall now leave here behind me, for as my spirit goes forth on new paths, the earth—my own well-loved Campania—will take my honest body in her honest arms and will make it one with herself. But I wish to meet Nature face to face once more, and to hand it over to her in full consciousness, as in a gentle and solemn conversation between friends. Tomorrow I shall look to the future, I shall collect myself and prepare myself for the unknown. But tonight I shall go out, free in a free world, among things familiar to me. I shall observe the rich play of light of the sunset, and after that the moon's divine clarity, and the ancient constellations of the stars round her. I shall hear the song of running water and taste its freshness, breathe the sweetness and bitterness of trees and grass in the darkness and feel the soil and the stones under the soles of my feet. What a night awaits me! All gifts given to me I shall gather together into my embrace, to give them back again in profound understanding, and with thanks."

"Father," said Angelo, "the earth, the water, the air and the fire must needs love you, the one in whom none of their gifts have been wasted."

"I believe that myself, son," said Leonidas. "Always, from the time when I was a child in my home in the country, have I believed that God loved me.

"I cannot explain to you—for the time is now but short—how, or by what path, I have come to understand in full God's infinite faithfulness toward me. Or how I have come to realize the fact that faithfulness is the supreme divine factor by which the universe is governed. I know that in my heart I have always been faithful to this earth and to this life. I have pleaded for liberty tonight in order to let them know that our parting itself is a pact.

"Then tomorrow I shall be able to fulfill my pact with great Death and with things to come." He spoke slowly, and now stopped and smiled. "Forgive my talking so much," he said. "For a week I have not talked to a person whom I loved."

But when he spoke again his voice and mien were deeply serious.

"And you, my son," he said, "you, whom I thank for your faithfulness throughout our long happy years—and tonight—be you also always faithful to me. I have thought of you in these days, between these walls. I have frevently wished to see you once again, not for my own sake, but in order to tell you something. Yes, I had got much to say to you, but I must be brief. Only this, then, I enjoin and implore you: keep always in your heart the divine law of proportion, the golden section."

"Gladly, gladly do I remain here tonight," said Angelo. "But even more gladly would I tonight go with you, such as, many nights, we have wandered together."

Leonidas smiled again. "My road tonight," he said, "under the stars, by the grass-grown, dewy mountain paths, takes me to one thing, and to one alone. I will be, for one last night, with my wife, with Lucrezia. I tell you, Angelo, that in order that man—His chief work, into the nostrils of whom He had breathed the breath of life—might embrace and become one with the earth, the sea, the air and the fire, God gave him woman. In Lucrezia's arms I shall be sealing, in the night of leave-taking, my

pact with all these." He was silent for a few moments, and motionless.

"Lucrezia," he then said, "is a few miles from here, in the care of good friends. I have, through them, made sure that she has learned nothing of my imprisonment or my sentence. I do not wish to expose my friends to danger, and they shall not know, tonight, that I come to their house. Neither do I wish to come to her as a man condemned to death, with the breath of the grave on me, but our meeting shall be like our first night together, and its secrecy to her shall mean a young man's fancy and a young lover's folly."

"What day is it today?" Angelo suddenly asked.

"What day?" Leonidas repeated. "Do you ask that of me—me who have been living in eternity, not in time? To me this day is called: the last day. But stay, let me think. Why, my child, to you, and to the people around you, today is named Saturday. Tomorrow is Sunday.

"I know the road well," he said a short while later, thoughtfully, as if he were already on his journey. "By a mountain path I approach her window from behind the farm. I shall pick up a pebble and throw it against the windowpane. Then she will awake and wonder, she will go to her window, discern me amongst the vines, and open it."

His mighty chest moved as he drew his breath.

"Oh, my child and my friend," he exclaimed, "you know this woman's beauty. You have dwelt in our house and have eaten at our table, you know, too, the gentleness and gaiety of her mind, its childlike tranquillity and its inconceivable innocence. But what you do not know, what nobody knows in the whole world but I, is the infinite capacity of her body and soul for surrender. How that snow can burn! She has been to me all glorious works of art of the world, all of them in one single woman's body. Within her embrace at night my strength to create in the daytime was restored. As I speak to you of her, my blood lifts like a wave." After some seconds he closed his eyes. "When I come back here tomorrow," he said, "I shall come with my eyes closed. They will lead me in here from the gate, and later, at the wall, they

will bind a cloth before my eyes. I shall have no need of these eyes of mine. And it shall not be the black stones, nor the gun barrels, that I shall leave behind in these my dear, clear eyes when I quit them." Again he was silent for a while, then said in a soft voice: "At times, this week, I have not been able to recall the line of her jaw from ear to chin. At daybreak tomorrow morning I shall look upon it, so that I shall never again forget it."

When again he opened his eyes, his radiant gaze met the gaze of the young man. "Do not look at me in such pain and dread," he said, "and do not pity me. I do not deserve that of you. Nor—you will know it—am I to be pitied tonight. My son, I was wrong: tomorrow, as I come back, I shall open my eyes once more in order to see your face, which has been so dear to me. Let me see it happy and at peace, as when we were working together."

The prison warder now turned the heavy key in the lock and came in. He informed the prisoners that the clock in the prison tower showed a quarter to six. Within a quarter of an hour one of the two must leave the building. Allori answered that he was ready, but he hesitated a moment.

"They arrested me," he said to Angelo, "in my studio and in my working smock. But the air may grow colder as I get into the mountains. Will you lend me your cloak?"

Angelo removed the violet cloak from his shoulders and handed it to his teacher. As he fumbled at his throat with the hook, with which he was unfamiliar, the master took the young hand that helped him, and held it.

"How grand you are, Angelo," he said. "This cloak of yours is new and costly. In my native parish a bridegroom wears a cloak like this on his wedding day.

"Do you remember," he added as he stood ready to go, in the cloak, "one night, when together we lost our way in the mountains? Suddenly you collapsed, exhausted and cold as ice, and whispered that it was impossible for you to go any farther. I took off my cloak then—just as you did now—and wrapped it around us both. We lay the whole night together in each other's arms, and in my

cloak you fell asleep almost immediately, like a child. You are to sleep tonight too."

Angelo collected his thoughts, and remembered the night of which the master was speaking. Leonidas had always been a far more experienced mountaineer than he himself, as altogether his strength had always exceeded his own. He recalled the warmth of that big body, like that of a big friendly animal in the dark, against his own numb limbs. He remembered, further, that as he woke up the sun had risen, and all mountain slopes had become luminous in its rays. He had sat up, then, and had cried out, "Father, this night you have saved my life." From his breast came a groan, wordless.

"We will not take leave tonight," said Leonidas, "but tomorrow morning I shall kiss you."

The jailer opened the door and held it open, while the towering, straight figure stepped over the threshold. Then the door was once more shut, the key turned in the lock, and Angelo was alone.

Within the first seconds he felt the fact that the door was locked, and that nobody could come in to him, as an incomparable favor. But immediately after, he fell to the floor, like a man struck by, and crushed beneath, a falling rock.

In his ears echoed the voice of the master. And before his eyes stood the figure of the master, illuminated by the radiance of a higher world, of Art's infinite universe. From this world of light, which his father had once opened to him, he was now cast down into darkness. After the one whom he had betrayed had gone from him, he was completely alone. He dared not think of the stellar heavens, nor of the earth, nor of the sea, nor of the rivers, nor of the marble statues that he had loved. If at this moment Leonidas Allori himself had wanted to save him, it would not have been possible. For to be unfaithful is to be annihilated.

The word "unfaithful" was now flung on him from all angles, like a shower of flints on the man who is being stoned, and he met it on his knees, with hanging arms, like a man stoned. But when at last the shower slackened, and after a silence the words "the golden section"

rose and echoed, subdued and significant, he raised his hands and pressed them against his ears.

And unfaithful, he thought after a time, *for the sake of a woman. What is a woman? She does not exist until we create her, and she has no life except through us. She is nothing but body, but she is not body, even, if we do not look at her. She claims to be brought to life, and requires our soul as a mirror, in which she can see that she is beautiful. Men must burn, tremble and perish, in order that she may know that she exists and is beautiful. When we weep, she weeps, too, but with happiness—for now she has proof that she is beautiful. Our anguish must be kept alive every hour, or she is no longer alive.*

All my creative power, his thoughts went on, *if things had gone as she wished, would have been used up in the task of creating her, and of keeping her alive. Never, never again would I have produced a great work of art. And when I grieved over my misfortune, she would not understand, but would declare, "Why, but you have me!" While with him—with him, I was a great artist!*

Yet he was not really thinking of Lucrezia, for to him there was in the world no other human being than the father whom he had betrayed.

Did I ever believe, Angelo thought, *that I was, or that I might become, a great artist, a creator of glorious statues? I am no artist, and I shall never create a glorious statue. For I know now that my eyes are gone—I am blind!*

After a further lapse of time his thoughts slowly turned away from eternity and back to the present.

His master, he thought, would walk up the path and stop near the house, among the vines. He would pick up a pebble from the ground and throw it against the windowpane, and then she would open the window. She would call to the man in the violet cloak, such as she was wont to do at their meetings, "Angelo!" And the great master, the unfailing friend, the immortal man, the man sentenced to death, would understand that his disciple had betrayed him.

During the previous day and night Angelo had walked far and slept but little, and the whole of the last day he

had not eaten. He now felt that he was tired unto death. His master's command: "You are to sleep tonight" came back to him. Leonidas' commands, when he had obeyed them, had always led him right. He slowly rose to his feet and fumbled his way to the pallet where his master had lain. He fell asleep almost immediately.

But as he slept, he dreamed.

He saw once more, and more clearly than before, the big figure in the cloak walk up the mountain path, stop and bend down for the pebble and throw it against the pane. But in the dream he followed him farther, and he saw the woman in the man's arms—Lucrezia! And he awoke.

He sat up on the bed. Nothing sublime or sacred was any longer to be found in the world, but the deadly pain of physical jealousy stopped his breath and ran through him like fire. Gone was the disciple's reverence for his master, the great artist; in the darkness the son ground his teeth at his father. The past had vanished, there was no future to come, all the young man's thoughts ran to one single point—the embrace there, a few miles away.

He came to a sort of consciousness, and resolved not to fall asleep again.

But he did fall asleep again, and dreamed the same, but now more vividly and with a multitude of details, which he himself disowned, which his imagination could only have engendered when in his sleep he no longer had control of it.

As after this dream he was once more wide awake, a cold sweat broke out over his limbs. From the pallet he noticed some glowing embers on the fireplace; he now got up, set his naked foot upon them and kept it there. But the embers were almost dead, and went out under his foot.

In the next dream he himself, silent and lurking, followed the wanderer on the mountain path and through the window. He had his knife in his hand, he leaped forward, and plunged it first in the man's heart, then in hers, as they lay clasped in one another's arms. But the sight of their blood, mingled, soaking into the sheet, like a red-hot iron, burned out his eyes. Half awake, once

more sitting up, he thought, *But I do not need to use the knife. I can strangle them with my hands.*

Thus passed the night.

When the turnkey of the prison awakened him, it was light. "So you can sleep?" said the turnkey. "So you really trust the old fox? If you ask me, I should say he has played you a fine trick. The clock shows a quarter to six. When it strikes, the warden and the colonel will come in, and take whichever bird they find in the cage. The priest is coming later. But your old lion is never coming. Honestly—would you or I come, if we were in his shoes?"

When Angelo succeeded in understanding the words of the turnkey, his heart filled with indescribable joy. There was nothing more to fear. God had granted him this way out: death. This happy, easy way out. Vaguely, through his aching head one thought ran: *And it is for him that I die.* But the thought sank away again, for he was not really thinking of Leonidas Allori, or of any person in the world round him. He felt only one thing: that he himself, within the last moment, had been pardoned.

He got up, washed his face in a basin of water brought by his guard, and combed his hair back. He now felt the pain of the burn in his foot and again was filled with gratitude. Now he also remembered the master's words about God's faithfulness.

The turnkey looked at him and said, "I took you for a young man yesterday."

After some time footsteps could be heard up the stone-paved passage, and a faint rattling. Angelo thought, *Those are the soldiers with their carbines.* The heavy door swung open, and between two gendarmes, who held his arms, entered Allori. In accordance with his words the evening before, he let himself be led forward with closed eyes by the warders. But he felt or perceived where Angelo was standing and took a step toward him. He stood silent before him, unhooked his cloak, lifted it from his own shoulders and laid it around the young man's. In this movement the two were brought close, body to body, and Angelo said to himself, *Perhaps, after all, he will not open his eyes and look at me.* But whenever had

Allori not kept a given word? The hand which—as it put the cloak round him—rested against Angelo's neck forced his head a little forward, the large eyelids trembled and lifted, and the master looked into the eyes of the disciple. But the disciple could never afterward remember or recall the look. A moment later he felt Allori's lips on his cheek.

"Well, now!" cried the turnkey with surprise in his voice. "Welcome back! We were not expecting you. Now you must take potluck! And you," he added, turning to Angelo, "you can go your way. There are still a few minutes to six o'clock. My lords are not coming till after it has struck. The priest is coming later. Things are done with precision here. And fair—as you know—is fair."

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ISBN 0-380-89881-0

Printed in U.S.A.