NEL FOUR SQUARE HORROR

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KURT SINGER'S GHOST OMNIBUS

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A FOUR SQUARE BOOK

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The Shadow from the Steeple

ROBERT BLOCH

William Hurley was born an Irishman and grew up to be a taxicab driver—therefore it would be redundant, in the face of both of these facts, to say that he was garrulous.

The minute he picked up his passenger in downtown Providence that warm summer evening he began talking. The passenger, a tall thin man in his early thirties entered the cab and sat back, clutching a briefcase. He gave an address on Benefit Street and Hurley started out, shifting both taxi and tongue into high gear.

Hurley began what was to be a one-sided conversation by commenting on the afternoon performance of the New York Giants. Unperturbed by his passenger's silence, he made a few remarks about the weather—recent, current, and expected. Since he received no reply, the driver then proceeded to discuss a local phenomenon; namely the reported escape, that morning, of two black panthers or leopards from the travelling menagerie of Langer Brothers Circus, currently appearing in the city In response to a direct inquiry as to whether he had seen the beasts roaming at large, Hurley's customer shook his head.

The driver then made several uncomplimentary remarks about the local police force and their inability to capture the beasts. It was his considered opinion that a given platoon of law enforcement officers would be unable to catch a cold if immured in an ice-box for a year. This witticism failed to amuse his passenger, and before Hurley could continue his monologue they had arrived at the Benefit Street address. Eighty-five cents changed hands, passenger and briefcase left the cab, and Hurley drove away.

He could not know it at the time, but he thus became the last man who could or would testify to seeing his passenger alive.

The rest is conjecture, and perhaps that is for the best. Certainly it is easy enough to draw certain conclusions as to what happened that night in the old house on Benefit Street, but the weight of those conclusions is hard to bear.

One minor mystery is easy enough to clear up—the peculiar silence and aloofness of Hurley's passenger. That passenger, Edmund Fiske, of Chicago, Illinois was meditating upon the fulfilment of fifteen years of questing; the cab-trip represented the last stage of this long journey, and he was reviewing the circumstances as he rode.

Edmund Fiske's quest had begun, on August 8, 1935, with the death of his close friend, Robert Harrison Blake, of Milwaukee.

Like Fiske himself at the time, Blake had been a precocious adolescent interested in fantasy-writing, and as such became a member of the "Lovecraft circle"—a group of writers maintaining correspondence with one another and with the late Howard Phillips Lovecraft, of Providence.

It was through correspondence that Fiske and Blake had become acquainted; they visited back and forth between Milwaukee and Chicago, and their mutual preoccupation with the weird and the fantastic in literature and art served to form the foundation for the close friendship which existed at the time of Blake's unexpected and inexplicable demise.

Most of the facts—and certain of the conjectures—in connection with Blake's death have been embodied in Lovecraft's story, *The Haunter of the Dark*, which was published more than a year after the younger writer's passing.

Lovecraft had an excellent opportunity to observe matters, for it was on his suggestion that young Blake had journeyed to Providence early in 1935, and had been provided with living-quarters on College Street by Lovecraft himself. So it was both as friend and neighbour that the elder fantasy writer had acted in narrating the singular story of Robert Harrison Blake's last months.

In his story, he tells of Blake's efforts to begin a novel dealing with a survival of New England witch-cults, but modestly omits his own part in assisting his friend to secure material. Apparently Blake began work on his project and then became enmeshed in a horror greater than any envisioned by his imagination.

For Blake was drawn to investigate the crumbling black pile on Federal Hill—the deserted ruin of a church that had once housed the worshippers of an esoteric cult. Early in spring he paid a visit to the shunned structure and there made certain discoveries which (in Lovecraft's opinion) made his death inevitable.

Briefly, Blake entered the boarded-up Free Will Church and stumbled across the skeleton of a reporter from the *Providence Telegram*, one Edwin M. Lillibridge, who had apparently attempted a similar investigation in 1893. The fact that his death was not explained seemed alarming enough, but more disturbing still was the realization that no one had been bold enough to enter the church since that date and discover the body.

Blake found the reporter's notebook in his clothing, and its contents afforded a partial revelation.

A certain Professor Bowen, of Providence, had travelled widely in Egypt, and in 1843, in the course of archaeological investigations of the crypt of Nephren-Ka, had made an unusual find.

Nephren-Ka is the "forgotten pharaoh," whose name has been cursed by the priests and obliterated from official dynastic records.

The name was familiar to the young writer at the time, due largely to the work of another Milwaukee author who had dealt with the semi-legendary ruler in his tale, *Fane of the Black Pharaoh*. But the discovery Bowen made in the crypt was totally unexpected.

The reporter's notebook said little of the actual nature of that discovery, but it recorded subsequent events in a precise, chronological fashion. Immediately upon unearthing his mysterious find in Egypt, Professor Bowen abandoned his research and returned to Providence, where he purchased the Free Will Church in 1844 and made it the headquarters of what was called the "Starry Wisdom" sect.

Members of this religious cult, evidently recruited by Bowen, professed to worship an entity they called the "Haunter of the Dark." By gazing into a crystal they summoned the actual presence of this entity and did homage with blood sacrifice.

Such, at least, was the fantastic story circulated in Providence at the time—and the church became a place to be avoided. Local superstition fanned agitation, and agitation precipitated direct action. In May of 1877 the sect was forcibly broken up by the authorities, due to public pressure, and several hundred of its members abruptly left the city.

The church itself was immediately closed, and apparently individual curiosity could not overcome the widespread fear which resulted in leaving the structure undisturbed and unexplored until the reporter, Lillibridge, made his ill-fated private investigation in 1893.

Such was the gist of the story unfolded in the pages of his notebook. Blake read it, but was nevertheless undeterred in his further scrutiny of the environs. Eventually he came upon the mysterious object Bowen had found in the Egyptian crypt—the object upon which the Starry Wisdom worship had been founded—the asymmetrical metal box with its curiously hinged lid, a lid that had not been closed for countless years. Blake thus gazed at the interior, gazed upon the four-inch red-black crystal polyhedron hanging suspended by seven supports. He not only gazed *at* but also *into* the polyhedron; just as the cult-worshippers had purportedly gazed, and with the same results. He was assailed by a curious psychic disturbance; he seemed to "see visions of other lands and the gulfs beyond the stars," as superstitious accounts had told.

And then Blake made his greatest mistake. He closed the box.

Closing the box—again, according to the superstitions annotated by Lillibridge—was the act that summoned the alien entity itself, the Haunter of the Dark. It was a creature of darkness and could not survive light. And in that boarded-up blackness of the ruined church, the thing emerged by night.

Blake fled the church in terror, but the damage was done. In mid-July, a thunderstorm put out the lights in Providence for an hour, and the Italian colony living near the deserted church heard

bumping and thumping from inside the shadow-shrouded structure.

Crowds with candles stood outside in the rain and played candles upon the building, shielding themselves against the possible emergence of the feared entity by a barrier of light.

Apparently the story had remained alive throughout the neighbourhood. Once the storm abated, local newspapers grew interested, and on July 17 two reporters entered the old church, together with a policeman. Nothing definite was found, although there were curious and inexplicable smears and stains on the stairs and the pews.

Less than a month later—at 2.35 a.m. on the morning of August 8, to be exact—Robert Harrison Blake met his death during an electrical storm while seated before the window of his room on College Street.

During the gathering storm, before his death occurred, Blake scribbled frantically in his diary, gradually revealing his innermost obsessions and delusions concerning the Haunter of the Dark. It was Blake's conviction that by gazing into the curious crystal in its box he had somehow established a link with the non-terrestrial entity. He further believed that closing the box had summoned the creature to dwell in the darkness of the church steeple, and that in some way his own fate was now irrevocably linked to that of the monstrosity.

All this is revealed in the last messages he set down while watching the progress of the storm from his window.

Meanwhile, at the church itself, on Federal Hill, a crowd of agitated spectators gathered to play lights upon the structure. That they heard alarming sounds from inside the boarded-up building is undeniable; at least two competent witnesses have testified to the fact. One, Father Merluzzo of the Spirito Santo Church, was on hand to quiet his congregation. The other, Patrolman (now Sergeant) William J. Monahan, of Central Station, was attempting to preserve order in the face of growing panic. Monahan himself saw the blinding "blur" that seemed to issue, smokelike, from the steeple of the ancient edifice as the final lightning-flash came.

Flash, meteor, fireball—call it what you will—erupted over the city in a blinding blaze; perhaps at the very moment that Robert Harrison Blake, across town, was writing, "Is it not an avatar of Nyarlathotep, who in antique and shadowy Khem even took the form of man?"

A few moments later he was dead. The coroner's physician rendered a verdict attributing his demise to "electrical shock" although the window he faced was unbroken. Another physician, known to Lovecraft, quarrelled privately with that verdict and subsequently entered the affair the next day. Without legal authority, he entered the church and climbed to the windowless steeple where he discovered the strange asymmetrical—was it golden?—box and

the curious stone within. Apparently his first gesture was to make sure of raising the lid and bringing the stone into the light. His next recorded gesture was to charter a boat, take box and curiously-angled stone aboard, and drop them into the deepest channel of Narragansett Bay.

There ended the admittedly fictionalized account of Blake's death as recorded by H. P. Lovecraft. And there began Edmund Fiske's fifteen-year quest.

Fiske, of course, had known some of the events outlined in the story. When Blake had left for Providence in the spring, Fiske had tentatively promised to join him the following autumn. At first, the two friends had exchanged letters regularly, but by early summer Blake ceased correspondence altogether.

At the time, Fiske was unaware of Blake's exploration of the ruined church. He could not account for Blake's silence, and wrote to Lovecraft for a possible explanation.

Lovecraft could supply little information. Young Blake, he said, had visited him frequently during the early weeks of his stay; had consulted with him about his writing, and had accompanied him on several nocturnal strolls through the city.

But during the summer, Blake's neighbourliness ceased. It was not in Lovecraft's reclusive nature to impose himself upon others, and he did not seek to invade Blake's privacy for several weeks.

When he did so—and learned from the almost hysterical adolescent of his experiences in the forbidding, forbidden church on Federal Hill—Lovecraft offered words of warning and advice. But it was already too late. Within ten days of his visit came the shocking end.

Fiske learned of that end from Lovecraft on the following day. It was his task to break the news to Blake's parents. For a time he was tempted to visit Providence immediately, but lack of funds and the pressure of his own domestic affairs forestalled him. The body of his young friend duly arrived and Fiske attended the brief ceremony of cremation.

Then Lovecraft began his own investigation—an investigation which ultimately resulted in the publication of his story. And there the matter might have rested.

But Fiske was not satisfied.

His best friend had died under circumstances which even the most sceptical must admit were mysterious. The local authorities summarily wrote off the matter with a fatuous and inadequate explanation.

Fiske determined to ascertain the truth.

Bear in mind one salient fact—all three of these men, Lovecraft, Blake and Fiske—were professional writers and students of the supernatural or the supranormal. All three of them had extraordinary access to a bulk of written material dealing with ancient

legend and superstition. Ironically enough, the use to which they put their knowledge was limited to excursions into so-called "fantasy fiction" but none of them, in the light of their own experience, could wholly join their reading audience in scoffing at the myths of which they wrote.

For as Fiske wrote to Lovecraft, "the term, myth, as we know, is merely a polite euphemism. Blake's death was not a myth, but a hideous reality. I implore you to investigate fully See this matter through to the end for if Blake's diary holds even a distorted truth, there is no telling what may be loosed upon the world."

Lovecraft pledged co-operation, discovered the fate of the metal box and its contents, and endeavoured to arrange a meeting with Doctor Ambrose Dexter, of Benefit Street. Doctor Dexter, it appeared, had left town immediately following his dramatic theft and disposal of the "Shining Trapezehedron," as Lovecraft called it.

Lovecraft then apparently interviewed Father Merluzzo and Patrolman Monahan, plunged into the files of the *Bulletin*, and endeavoured to reconstruct the story of the Starry Wisdom sect and the entity they worshipped.

Of course he learned a good deal more than he dared to put into his magazine story. His letters to Edmund Fiske in the late autumn and early spring of 1936 contain guarded hints and references to "menaces from Outside." But he seemed anxious to reassure Fiske that if there had been any menace, even in the realistic rather than the supernatural sense, the danger was now averted because Doctor Dexter had disposed of the Shining Trapezehedron which acted as a summoning talisman. Such was the gist of his report, and the matter rested there for a time.

Fiske made tentative arrangements, early in 1937, to visit Lovecraft at his home, with the private intention of doing some further research on his own into the cause of Blake's death. But once again, circumstances intervened. For in March of that year, Lovecraft died. His unexpected passing plunged Fiske into a period of despondency from which he was slow to recover; accordingly, it was not until almost a year later that Edmund Fiske paid his first visit to Providence, and to the scene of the tragic episodes which brought Blake's life to a close.

For somehow, always, a black undercurrent of suspicion existed. The coroner's physician had been glib, Lovecraft had been tactful, the press and general public had accepted matters completely—yet Blake was dead, and there had been an entity abroad in the night.

Fiske felt that if he could visit the accursed church himself, talk to Doctor Dexter and find out what had drawn him into the affair, interrogate the reporters, and pursue any relevant leads or clues he might eventually hope to uncover the truth and at least clear his dead friend's name of the ugly shadow of mental unbalance.

Accordingly, Fiske's first step after arriving in Providence and registering at a hotel was to set out for Federal Hill and the ruined church.

The search was doomed to immediate, irremediable disappointment. For the church was no more. It had been razed the previous autumn and the property taken over by the city authorities. The black and baleful spire no longer cast its spell over the Hill.

Fiske immediately took pains to see Father Merluzzo, at Spirito Santo, a few squares away. He learned from a courteous housekeeper that Father Merluzzo had died in 1936, within a year of young Blake.

Discouraged but persistent, Fiske next attempted to reach Doctor Dexter, but the old house on Benefit Street was boarded up. A call to the Physicians' Service Bureau produced only the cryptic information that Ambrose Dexter, M.D., had left the city for an indeterminate stay.

Nor did a visit with the city editor of the *Bulletin* yield any better result. Fiske was permitted to go into the newspaper's morgue and read the aggravatingly short and matter-of-fact story on Blake's death, but the two reporters who had covered the assignment and subsequently visited the Federal Hill church had left the paper for berths in other cities.

There were, of course, other leads to follow, and during the ensuing week Fiske ran them all to the ground. A copy of *Who's Who* added nothing significant to his mental picture of Doctor Ambrose Dexter. The physician was Providence born, a life-long resident, 40 years of age, unmarried, a general practitioner, member of several medical societies—but there was no indication of any unusual "hobbies" or "other interests" which might provide a clue as to his participation in the affair.

Sergeant William J. Monahan of Central Station was sought out, and for the first time Fiske actually managed to speak to someone who admitted an actual connection with the events leading to Blake's death. Monahan was polite, but cautiously noncommittal.

Despite Fiske's complete unburdening, the police officer remained discreetly reticent.

"There's really nothing I can tell you," he said. "It's true, like Mister Lovecraft said, that I was at the church that night, for there was a rough crowd out and there's no telling what some of them ones in the neighbourhood will do when riled up. Like the story said, the old church had a bad name, and I guess Sheeley could have given you many's the story."

"Sheeley?" interjected Fiske.

"Bert Sheeley—it was his beat, you know, not mine. He was ill of pneumonia at the time and I substituted for two weeks. Then, when he died—"

Fiske shook his head. Another possible source of information

gone: Blake dead, Lovecraft dead, Father Merluzzo dead, and now Sheeley. Reporters scattered, and Doctor Dexter mysteriously missing. He sighed and persevered.

"That last night, when you saw the blur," he asked, "can you add anything by way of details? Were there any noises? Did anyone in the crowd say anything? Try to remember—whatever you can add may be of great help to me."

Monahan shook his head. "There were noises aplenty," he said. "But what with the thunder and all, I couldn't rightly make out if anything came from inside the church, like the story has it. And as for the crowd, with the women wailing and the men muttering, all mixed up with thunderclaps and wind, it was as much as I could do to hear myself yelling to keep in place let alone make out what was being said."

"And the blur?" Fiske persisted.

"It was a blur, and that's all. Smoke, or a cloud, or just a shadow before the lightning struck again. But I'll not be saying I saw any devils, or monsters, or whatchamacallits as Mister Lovecraft would write about in those wild tales of his."

Sergeant Monahan shrugged self-righteously and picked up the desk-phone to answer a call. The interview was obviously at an end.

And so, for the nonce, was Fiske's quest. He didn't abandon hope, however. For a day he sat by his own hotel phone and called up every "Dexter" listed in the book in an effort to locate a relative of the missing doctor; but to no avail. Another day was spent in a small boat on Narragansett Bay, as Fiske assiduously and painstakingly familiarized himself with the location of the "deepest channel" alluded to in Lovecraft's story.

But at the end of a futile week in Providence, Fiske had to confess himself beaten. He returned to Chicago, his work, and his normal pursuits. Gradually the affair dropped out of the foreground of his consciousness, but he by no means forgot it completely or gave up the notion of eventually unravelling the mystery —if mystery there was.

In 1941, during a three-day furlough from Basic Training, Private First Class Edmund Fiske passed through Providence on his way to New York City and again attempted to locate Dr. Ambrose Dexter, without success.

During 1942 and 1943, Sergeant Edmund Fiske wrote, from his stations overseas, to Dr. Ambrose Dexter, c/o General Delivery, Providence, R.I. His letters were never acknowledged, if indeed they were received.

In 1945, in a U.S.O. library lounge in Honolulu, Fiske read a report in—of all things—a journal on astro-physics which mentioned a recent gathering at Princeton University, at which the guest speaker, Dr. Ambrose Dexter, had delivered an address on "Practical Applications in Military Technology."

Fiske did not return to the States until the end of 1946. Domestic affairs, naturally, were the subject of his paramount consideration during the following year. It wasn't until 1948 that he accidentally came upon Dr. Dexter's name again—this time in a listing of "investigators in the field of nuclear physics" in a national weekly news-magazine. He wrote to the editors for further information but received no reply. And another letter, dispatched to Providence, remained unanswered.

But in 1949, late in autumn, Dexter's name again came to his attention through the news columns; this time in relation to a discussion of work on the secret H-Bomb.

Whatever he guessed, whatever he feared, whatever he wildly imagined, Fiske was impelled to action. It was then that he wrote to a certain Ogden Purvis, a private investigator in the city of Providence, and commissioned him to locate Doctor Ambrose Dexter. All that he required was that he be placed in communication with Dexter, and he paid a substantial retainer fee. Purvis took the case.

The private detective sent several reports to Fiske in Chicago and they were, at first, disheartening. The Dexter residence was still untenanted. Dexter himself, according to the information elicited from governmental sources, was on a special mission. The private investigator seemed to assume from this that he was a person above reproach, engaged in confidential defence work.

Fiske's own reaction was panic.

He raised his offer of a fee and insisted that Ogden Purvis continue his efforts to find the elusive doctor.

Winter of 1950 came, and with it, another report. The private investigator had tracked down every lead Fiske suggested, and one of them led eventually to Tom Jonas.

Tom Jonas was the owner of the small boat which had been chartered by Doctor Dexter one evening in the late summer of 1935—the small boat which had been rowed to the "deepest channel of Narragansett Bay."

Tom Jonas had rested his oars as Dexter threw overboard the dully-gleaming, asymmetrical metal box with the hinged lid open to disclose the Shining Trapezehedron.

The old fisherman had spoken freely to the private detective; his words were reported in detail to Fiske via confidential report.

"Mighty peculiar" was Jonas' own reaction to the incident. Dexter had offered him "twenty smackers to take the boat out in the middle o' midnight and heave this funny-lookin' contraption overboard. Said there was no harm in it; said it was just an old keepsake he wanted to git rid of. But all the way out he kep' starin' at the sort of jewel-thing set in some iron band inside the box, and mumblin' in some foreign language, I guess. No, 'tweren't French or German or Italian talk either. Polish, mebbe. I don't remember any words, either. But he acted sort-of drunk. Not that I'd say

anything against Doctor Dexter, understand; comes of a fine old family, even if he ain't been around these parts since, to my knowing. But I figgered he was a bit under the influence, you might say. Else why would he pay me twenty smackers to do a crazy stunt like that?"

There was more to the verbatim transcript of the old fisherman's monologue, but it did not explain anything.

"He sure seemed glad to git rid of it, as I recollect. On the way back he told me to keep mum about it, but I can't see no harm in telling at this late date; I wouldn't hold anythin' back from the law."

Evidently the private investigator had made use of a rather unethical stratagem—posing as an actual detective in order to get Jonas to talk.

This did not bother Fiske, in Chicago. It was enough to get his grasp on something tangible at last; enough to make him send Purvis another payment, with instructions to keep up the search for Ambrose Dexter. Several months passed in waiting.

Then, in late spring, came the news Fiske had waited for. Doctor Dexter was back; he had returned to his house on Benefit Street. The boards had been removed, furniture vans appeared to discharge their contents, and a manservant appeared to answer the door, and to take telephone messages.

Doctor Dexter was not at home to the investigator, or to anyone. He was, it appeared, recuperating from a severe illness contracted while in government service. He took a card from Purvis and promised to deliver a message, but repeated calls brought no indication of a reply.

Nor did Purvis, who conscientiously "cased" the house and neighbourhood, ever succeed in laying eyes upon the doctor himself or in finding anyone who claimed to have seen the convalescent physician on the street.

Groceries were delivered regularly; mail appeared in the box; lights glowed in the Benefit Street house nightly until all hours.

As a matter of fact, this was the only concrete statement Purvis could make regarding any possible irregularity in Doctor Dexter's mode of life—he seemed to keep electricity burning twenty-four hours a day.

Fiske promptly dispatched another letter to Doctor Dexter, and then another. Still no acknowledgment or reply was forthcoming. And after several more unenlightening reports from Purvis, Fiske made up his mind. He would go to Providence and see Dexter, somehow, come what may.

He might be completely wrong in his suspicions; he might be completely wrong in his assumption that Doctor Dexter could clear the name of his dead friend; he might be completely wrong in even surmising any connection between the two—but for fifteen years

he had brooded and wondered, and it was time to put an end to his own inner conflict.

Accordingly, late that summer, Fiske wired Purvis of his intentions and instructed him to meet him at the hotel upon his arrival.

Thus it was that Edmund Fiske came to Providence for the last time; on the day that the Giants lost, on the day that the Langer Brothers lost their two black panthers, on the day that cabdriver William Hurley was in a garrulous mood.

Purvis was not at the hotel to meet him, but such was Fiske's own frenzy of impatience that he decided to act without him and drove, as we have seen, to Benefit Street in the early evening.

As the cab departed, Fiske stared up at the panelled doorway; stared at the lights blazing from the upper windows of the Georgian structure. A brass name-plate gleamed on the door itself, and the light from the windows played upon the legend, Ambrose Dexter. M.D.

Slight as it was, this seemed a reassuring touch to Edmund Fiske. The doctor was not concealing his presence in the house from the world, however much he might conceal his actual person. Surely the blazing lights and the appearance of the name-plate augured well.

Fiske shrugged, rang the bell.

The door opened quickly. A small, dark-skinned man with a slight stoop appeared and made a question of the word, "Yes?"

"Doctor Dexter, please."

"The Doctor is not in to callers. He is ill."

"Would you take a message, please?"

"Certainly." The dark-skinned servant smiled.

"Tell him that Edmund Fiske of Chicago wishes to see him at his convenience for a few moments. I have come all the way from the Middle-West for this purpose, and what I have to speak to him about would take only a moment or two of his time."

"Wait, please."

The door closed. Fiske stood in the gathering darkness and transferred his briefcase from one hand to the other.

Abruptly, the door opened again. The servant peered out at him.

"Mr. Fiske—are you the gentleman who wrote the letters?"

"Letters—oh, yes, I am. I did not know the Doctor ever received them."

The servant nodded. "I could not say. But Doctor Dexter said that if you were the man who had written him, you were to come right in."

Fiske permitted himself an audible sigh of relief as he stepped over the threshold. It had taken him fifteen years to come this far, and now—

"Just go upstairs, if you please. You will find Doctor Dexter waiting in the study, right at the head of the hall."

Edmund Fiske climbed the stairs, turned at the top to a doorway, and entered a room in which the light was an almost palpable presence, so intense was its glare.

And there, rising from a chair beside the fireplace, was Doctor Ambrose Dexter.

Fiske found himself facing a tall, thin, immaculately dressed man who may have been fifty but who scarcely looked thirty-five; a man whose wholly natural grace and elegance of movement concealed the sole incongruity of his aspect—a very deep suntan.

"So you are Edmund Fiske."

The voice was soft, well-modulated, and unmistakably New England—and the accompanying handclasp warm and firm. Doctor Dexter's smile was natural and friendly. White teeth gleamed against the brown background of his features.

"Won't you sit down?" invited the doctor. He indicated a chair and bowed slightly. Fiske couldn't help but stare; there was certainly no indication of any present or recent illness in his host's demeanour or behaviour. As Doctor Dexter resumed his own seat near the fire and Fiske moved around the chair to join him, he noted the bookshelves on either side of the room. The size and shape of several volumes immediately engaged his rapt attention—so much that he hesitated before taking a seat, and instead inspected the titles of the tomes.

For the first time in his life, Edmund Fiske found himself confronting the half-legendary *De Vermis Mysteriis*, the *Liber Ivonis*, and the almost mythical Latin version of the *Necronomicon*. Without seeking his host's permission, he lifted the bulk of the latter volume from the shelf and riffled through the yellowed pages of the Spanish translation of 1622.

Then he turned to Doctor Dexter, and all traces of his carefully-contrived composure dropped away. "Then it must have been you who found these books in the church," he said. "In the rear vestry room beside the apse. Lovecraft mentioned them in his story, and I've always wondered what became of them."

Doctor Dexter nodded gravely. "Yes, I took them. I did not think it wise for such books to fall into the hands of the authorities. You know what they contain, and what might happen if such knowledge were wrongfully employed."

Fiske reluctantly replaced the great book on the shelf and took a chair facing the doctor before the fire. He held his briefcase on his lap and fumbled uneasily with the clasp.

"Don't be uneasy," said Doctor Dexter, with a kindly smile. "Let us proceed without fencing. You are here to discover what part I played in the affair of your friend's death."

"Yes, there are some questions I wanted to ask."

"Please." The doctor raised a slim brown hand. "I am not in the best of health and can give you only a few minutes. Allow me to anticipate your queries and tell you what little I know."

"As you wish." Fiske stared at the bronzed man, wondering what lay behind the perfection of his poise.

"I met your friend Robert Harrison Blake only once," said Doctor Dexter. "It was on an evening during the latter part of July, 1935. He called upon me here, as a patient."

Fiske leaned forward eagerly. "I never knew that!" he exclaimed.

"There was no reason for anyone to know it," the doctor answered. "He was merely a patient. He claimed to be suffering from insomnia. I examined him, prescribed a sedative, and acting on the merest surmise, asked if he had recently been subjected to any unusual strain or trauma. It was then that he told me the story of his visit to the church on Federal Hill and of what he had found there. I must say that I had the acumen not to dismiss his tale as the product of a hysterical imagination. As a member of one of the older families here, I was already acquainted with the legends surrounding the Starry Wisdom sect and the so-called Haunter of the Dark.

"Young Blake confessed to me certain of his fears concerning the Shining Trapezehedron—intimating that it was a focal point of primal evil. He further admitted his own dread of being somehow linked to the monstrosity in the church.

"Naturally, I was not prepared to accept this last premise as a rational one. I attempted to reassure the young man, advised him to leave Providence and forget it. And at the time I acted in all good faith. And then, in August, came news of Blake's death."

"So you went to the church," Fiske said.

"Wouldn't you have done the same thing?" parried Doctor Dexter. "If Blake had come to you with this story, told you of what he feared, wouldn't his death have moved you to action? I assure you, I did what I thought best. Rather than provoke a scandal, rather than expose the general public to needless fears, rather than permit the possibility of danger to exist, I went to the church. I took the books. I took the Shining Trapezehedron from under the noses of the authorities. And I chartered a boat and dumped the accursed thing in Narragansett Bay, where it could no longer possibly harm mankind. The lid was up when I dropped it—for as you know, only darkness can summon the Haunter, and now the stone is eternally exposed to light.

"But that is all I can tell you. I regret that my work in recent years has prevented me from seeing or communicating with you before this. I appreciate your interest in the affair and trust my remarks will help to clarify, in a small way, your bewilderment. As to young Blake, in my capacity as examining physician, I will gladly give you a written testimony to my belief in his sanity at the time of his death. I'll have it drawn up tomorrow and send it to your hotel if you give me the address. Fair enough?"

The doctor rose, signifying that the interview was over. Fiske remained seated, shifting his briefcase.

"Now if you will excuse me," the physician murmured.

"In a moment. There are still one or two brief questions I'd appreciate your answering."

"Certainly." If Doctor Dexter was irritated, he gave no sign.

"Did you by any chance see Lovecraft before or during his last illness?"

"No. I was not his physician. In fact, I never met the man, though of course I knew of him and his work."

"What caused you to leave Providence so abruptly after the Blake affair?"

"My interests in physics superseded my interest in medicine. As you may or may not know, during the past decade or more, I have been working on problems relative to atomic energy and nuclear fission. In fact, starting tomorrow, I am leaving Providence once more to deliver a course of lectures before the faculties of eastern universities and certain governmental groups."

"That is very interesting to me, Doctor," said Fiske. "By the way, did you ever meet Einstein?"

"As a matter of fact, I did, some years ago. I worked with him on—but no matter. I must beg you to excuse me, now. At another time, perhaps, we can discuss such things."

His impatience was unmistakable now. Fiske rose, lifting his briefcase in one hand and reaching out to extinguish a table-lamp with the other.

Doctor Dexter crossed swiftly and lighted the lamp again.

"Why are you afraid of the dark, Doctor?" asked Fiske, softly.

"I am not af—"

For the first time the physician seemed on the verge of losing his composure. "What makes you think that?" he whispered.

"It's the Shining Trapezehedron, isn't it?" Fiske continued. "When you threw it into the bay you acted too hastily. You didn't remember at the time that even if you left the lid open, the stone would be surrounded by darkness there at the bottom of the channel. Perhaps the Haunter didn't want you to remember. You looked into the stone just as Blake did, and established the same psychic linkage. And when you threw the thing away, you gave it into perpetual darkness, where the Haunter's power would feed and grow.

"That's why you left Providence—because you were afraid the Haunter would come to you, just as it came to Blake. And because you knew that now the thing would remain abroad forever."

Doctor Dexter moved towards the door. "I must definitely ask that you leave now," he said. "If you're implying that I keep the lights on because I'm afraid of the Haunter coming after me, the way it did Blake, then you're mistaken."

Fiske smiled wryly. "That's not it at all," he answered. "I know you don't fear that. Because it's too late. The Haunter must have come to you long before this—perhaps within a day or so after you gave it power by consigning the Trapezehedron to the darkness of the Bay. It came to you, but unlike the case of Blake, it did not kill you.

"It used you. That's why you fear the dark. You fear it as the Haunter itself fears being discovered. I believe that in the darkness you look *different*. More like the old shape. Because when the Haunter came to you, it did not kill but instead, *merged*. *You* are the Haunter of the Dark!"

"Mr. Fiske, really—"

"There is no Doctor Dexter. There hasn't been any such person for many years, now. There's only the outer shell, possessed by an entity older than the world; an entity that is moving quickly and cunningly to bring destruction to all mankind. It was you who turned 'scientist' and insinuated yourself into the proper circles, hinting and prompting and assisting foolish men into their sudden 'discovery' of nuclear fission. When the first atomic bomb fell, how you must have laughed! And now you've given them the secret of the hydrogen bomb, and you're going on to teach them more, show them new ways to bring about their own destruction.

"It took me years of brooding to discover the clues, the keys to the so-called wild myths that Lovecraft wrote about. For he wrote in parable and allegory, but he wrote the truth. He has set it down in black and white time and again, the prophecy of your coming to earth—Blake knew it at the last when he identified the Haunter by its rightful name."

"And that is?" snapped the doctor.

"Nyarlathotep!"

The brown face creased into a grimace of laughter. "I'm afraid you're a victim of the same fantasy-projections as poor Blake and your friend Lovecraft. Everyone knows that Nyarlathotep is pure invention—part of the Lovecraft mythos."

"I thought so, until I found the clue in his poem. That's when it all fitted in; the Haunter of the Dark, your fleeing, and your sudden interest in scientific research. Lovecraft's words took on a new meaning:

> And at last from inner Egypt came
> The strange dark one to whom the fellahs bowed."

Fiske chanted the lines, staring at the dark face of the physician.

"Nonsense—if you must know, this dermatological disturbance of mine is the result of exposure to radiation at Los Alamos."

Fiske did not heed; he was continuing Lovecraft's poem:

> "—That wild beasts followed him and licked his hands.
> Soon from the sea a noxious birth began;

Forgotten lands with weedy spires of gold.
The ground was cleft and mad auroras rolled
Down on the quaking cities of man.
Then crushing what he chanced to mould in play
The idiot Chaos blew Earth's dust away."

Doctor Dexter shook his head. "Ridiculous on the face of it," he asserted. "Surely, even in your—er—upset condition, you can understand that, man! The poem has no literal meaning. Do wild beasts lick my hands? Is something rising from the sea? Are there earthquakes and auroras? Nonsense! You're suffering from a bad case of what we call 'atomic jitters'—I can see it now. You're preoccupied, as so many laymen are today, with the foolish obsession that somehow our work in nuclear fission will result in the destruction of the earth. All this rationalization is a product of your imaginings."

Fiske held his briefcase tightly. "I told you it was a parable, this prophecy of Lovecraft's. God knows what he *knew* or *feared*; whatever it was, it was enough to make him cloak his meaning. And even then, perhaps, *they* got to him because he knew too much."

"*They?*"

"They from Outside—the ones you serve. You are their Messenger, Nyarlathotep. You came, in linkage with the Shining Trapezehedron, out of inner Egypt, as the poem says. And the fellahs—the common workers of Providence who became converted to the Starry Wisdom sect—bowed before the 'strange dark one' they worshipped as the Haunter.

"The Trapezehedron was thrown into the Bay, and soon from the sea came this noxious birth—your birth, or incarnation in the body of Doctor Dexter. And you taught men new methods of destruction; destruction with atomic bombs in which the 'ground was cleft and mad auroras rolled down on the quaking cities of man.' Oh, Lovecraft knew what he was writing, and Blake recognized you, too. And they both died. I suppose you'll try to kill me now, so you can go on. You'll lecture, and stand at the elbows of the laboratory men urging them on and giving new suggestions to result in greater destruction. And finally you'll blow earth's dust away."

"Please." Doctor Dexter held out both hands. "Control yourself—let me get you something! Can't you realize this whole thing is absurd?"

Fiske moved towards him, hands fumbling at the clasp of the briefcase. The flap opened, and Fiske reached inside, then withdrew his hand. He held a revolver now, and he pointed it quite steadily at Doctor Dexter's breast.

"Of course it's absurd," Fiske muttered. "No one ever believed

in the Starry Wisdom sect except a few fanatics and some ignorant foreigners. No one ever took Blake's stories or Lovecraft's, or mine for that matter as anything but a rather morbid form of amusement. By the same token, no one will ever believe there is anything wrong with you, or with so-called scientific investigation of atomic energy, or the other horrors you plan to loose on the world to bring about its doom. And that's why I'm going to kill you now!"

"Put down that gun!"

Fiske began suddenly to tremble; his whole body shook in a spectacular spasm. Dexter noted it and moved forward. The younger man's eyes were bulging, and the physician inched towards him.

"Stand back!" Fiske warned. The words were distorted by the convulsive shuddering of his jaws. "That's all I needed to know. Since you are in a human body, you can be destroyed by ordinary weapons. And so I do destroy you—Nyarlathotep!"

His finger moved.

So did Doctor Dexter's. His hand went swiftly behind him, to the wall master-lightswitch. A click and the room was plunged into utter darkness.

Not utter darkness—for there was a glow.

The face and hands of Doctor Ambrose Dexter glowed with a phosphorescent fire in the dark. There are presumably forms of radium poisoning which can cause such an effect, and no doubt Doctor Dexter would have so explained the phenomenon to Edmund Fiske, had he the opportunity.

But there was no opportunity. Edmund Fiske heard the click, saw the fantastic flaming features, and pitched forward to the floor.

Doctor Dexter quietly switched on the lights, went over to the younger man's side and knelt for a long moment. He sought a pulse in vain.

Edmund Fiske was dead.

The doctor sighed, rose, and left the room. In the hall downstairs he summoned his servant.

"There has been a regrettable accident,' he said. "That young visitor of mine—an hysteric—suffered a heart attack. You had better call the police, immediately. And then continue with the packing. We must leave tomorrow, for the lecture tour."

"But the police may detain you."

Doctor Dexter shook his head. "I think not. It's a clear-cut case. In any event, I can easily explain. When they arrive, notify me. I shall be in the garden."

The doctor proceeded down the hall to the rear exit and emerged upon the moonlit splendour of the garden behind the house on Benefit Street.

The radiant vista was walled off from the world, utterly deserted.

The dark man stood in moonlight and its glow mingled with his own aura.

At this moment two silken shadows leaped over the wall. They crouched in the coolness of the garden, then slithered forward towards Doctor Dexter. They made panting sounds.

In the moonlight, he recognized the shapes of two black panthers.

Immobile, he waited as they advanced, padding purposefully towards him, eyes aglow, jaws slavering and agape.

Doctor Dexter turned away. His face was turned in mockery to the moon as the beasts fawned before him and licked his hands.

The House Beyond Midnight

ALLISON V. HARDING

You know how hard it is these days to get rooms—to even get one room. Well, you don't realize exactly how hard it is until you're actually out looking. It didn't help any that I'd lost my coat in the accident and that Eve's pretty face still bore an ugly mark on the cheekbone from when she'd leaped from the car.

When I'd walk into hotels and boarding houses and say, "Name's John Drew. This is my wife. I wonder if you have a room? Anything at all," they'd look me up and down and smile in that superior way that hotel clerks and boarding house people have these days. No dice.

Even telling them of our most disastrous experience that morning drew little sympathy, much less a place to lay our weary heads. And so we found ourselves three thousand miles away from home and friends in a strange East Coast city with not too much money and evening coming on. For myself, I could have got by, but I certainly couldn't picture my lovely young wife spending the night bumming it on a subway station bench or riding around in a bus with me.

The only hostelry clerk that we'd met who seemed halfway human—though I'll admit these days they're a harassed bunch—suggested confidently to us that our best bet was to head for the Everglade section of town, that by going from house to house we might, just might, find something, so we'd spent the last afternoon hours walking the streets with the care of a rookie policeman on his first beat, but there was nothing.

We sat on a bench in the Square and talked over our situation. Although she tried to smile bravely, I could see Eve was fagged out.

There was plenty we needed and all of it seemed awfully far away sitting on this bench. I had an important business contact to make for my office the next day. In fact our choice of this section as a trip was a combination of business and honeymoon. That was one of the reasons why we'd decided not to get involved with the police that morning, a decision, although we didn't know it, that was to shape our next twenty-four hours in strange and hideous ways.

I slapped a mosquito absently on my wrist, hugged Eve tighter.

"Well, honey, we certainly can't stay here all night."

The Travellers' Aid people at the station had said kindly but with no hope that if we dropped around later that evening, they would certainly keep their ears open for us. We got up and began to walk. It was twilight. The avenues were gloomy and the street lamps, already lighted, did little about it. Some of the places we passed in retracing our steps I half-recognized or remembered because here a woman had shrilled, "Go away! We got no room." And there the janitor had laughed at us, and some place else a little black dog had barked.

Suddenly Eve's petite figure at my side stiffened. We both stopped, and I followed her pointing arm. Diametrically across the street was a house. Old, ramshackle, four stories, its brownstone front weather-beaten and its high stoop sagging. But there outside a second-story window on a small rusty bar was a white-painted sign with rude letters, ROOM TO LET.

We fairly ran, and still gasping, I had raised my hand to touch the bell when the door opened before us as though someone inside had seen our approach. A man stood there with fuzzy greyish-brown hair that needed cutting, a very white solemn face. He was dressed nicely, too nicely for the house, I thought fleetingly, but I remembered my tongue. "The room to let, is it . . . ?"

He nodded. I noticed then the newspaper under his arm. He glanced at it and then at us, and there was a mournful widening of his lips as though he were trying to smile. I burbled on about how desperately we were in need of finding a place. It was Eve's nudge that shut me up, for our landlord, if that he was, was paying little attention. I held out a twenty-dollar bill and said, "It's worth this to me."

He took it almost absently and then turned, motioning that we were to follow. The heavy door swung shut behind us, shutting out the city and its noises. The interior of the old house was even more gloomy than its outside. The panelling was wood, yellow with age. There was one ceiling light gleaming weakly in the hall, and by its light we followed the man to the stairs and up them.

We climbed three flights.

On the fourth floor he stopped and motioned to a door.

"We're very full just now."

Eve nodded and murmured something about how nice it was of

him. The room wasn't much. It had two rude twin cots, a chair, and a table boxed in by faded strips of wallpaper.

"My name is Mr. Melkin," our guide introduced himself.

We nodded and I replied, "I'm John Drew, and this is my wife."

"Of course," said Melkin, "and now if you'll excuse me, I must go downstairs to join the others."

Alone in our two-by-four, the first thing we both did after congratulating ourselves was to sit down on the edge of our beds and take off our shoes.

"Better than the park bench, honey," I philosophized as I noticed my wife's rather critical looks around the room.

"I suppose so, Johnny, but for twenty dollars!"

We stretched out and enjoyed the luxury of relaxing for a while.

"There are things to be found out," I said. "For instance, what about meals? Certainly we're entitled to them for my one night's rate of payment."

My mouth watered at the thought of a well-laid boarding house table. I left Eve and went down the creaking stairs. On the second floor there was a large back room taking the width of the building. From it I heard "people" sounds. My first feeling upon going in was one of embarrassment at my untidy appearance, for these people were neat, well-dressed, in some cases, richly so. But Mr. Melkin seemed in no way ashamed of me.

He came over from where he'd been talking to a group of men. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask him about supper when he said, "You're looking surprisingly well, you know."

I thanked him. I was about to return the compliment as convention dictates, but in all honesty. I couldn't. Mr. Melkin did not look surprisingly well. He looked surprisingly poorly. You don't say those things, of course. Then he said that he wanted to introduce me to some of the others. I said that was jake but I knew I looked so terrible.

"You see, I lost my coat in an accident early this morning."

"Of course," said Mr. Melkin interrupting me almost impatiently. "You're like him," he said absently pointing into a corner.

I looked. There was a man there I hadn't seen at first, also without a coat but horribly disfigured, his scars looking almost open in the dim light. I looked away. Melkin's voice droned monotonously now making introductions. I smiled politely. The main thought in my mind was, *When do we eat?* The people, too, had a sameness that made it hard for me even if I'd been sincerely trying to remember their names. I wondered again why such rather well-dressed clientele should be in such a ramshackle, broken-down old house.

The times, I supposed.

They certainly weren't a very lively bunch. There weren't any three I'd like to get to join me in a midnight's poker session, and the women, too, were on the rather subdued, glassy-eyed side. Finally, Melkin had finished, and I saw an opportunity to nudge him and ask how about supper.

"Will there be anything to eat?"

He almost glared at me, reared his white sepulchral head back and said firmly, "Drew, we don't go in much for jokes around here."

Jokes, I thought to myself. That's the brush-off. I guess the joke's on me. Twenty bucks a night for that lousy little room and no food thrown in. I was mad, so I didn't push the point. I'd take Eve out and we'd go to a restaurant somewhere. I still had a few dollars left.

Somebody else said, "You're looking surprisingly well."

Corny compliments these people handed out.

I went up the stairs to find Eve. She was pacing the floor nervously.

"Guess we'll have to go out to get some food, honey."

"Listen, Johnny, the funniest thing happened while you were downstairs." The words catapulted out of her. I could see Eve was upset. "Two women came in. At least, I looked up suddenly and found them standing inside the door. All dressed up, Johnny, and such stern grey faces! One of them said, 'This is Mrs. Drew,' and I nodded and the other said, 'You're looking surprisingly well.' Johnny, there was something sort of scary about them. They seemed to know who I was and they told me who they were and they just stood there and looked. It was creepy the way they looked at me!"

I put my arms around Eve. She was an imaginative little thing, anyway.

"Just trying to be neighbourly," I offered.

"But that wasn't all. When they turned around to go, one of them . . ." Eve made a sick face. "Really, Johnny, one of them had a hole in the back of her head you could put your fist into!"

I smiled in superior male fashion.

"Probably the way the shadows fell, honey."

"No, no, I tell you, I saw it! It was like someone had dug out the whole back of her head!"

"Oh, well," I laughed. "Some injury or something. Forget it. Look, we'll go out somewhere and get a bite to eat."

She said that was even worth putting her shoes on again for. We traipsed down the stairs. In the front hall we met Melkin.

"Just stepping out to get something to eat," I explained. "We'll be back in a moment."

He looked at me steadily, his pallid face expressionless. Finally he spoke.

"Surely you're joking."

I shook my head. What kind of double-talk was this? I explained again painstakingly and added, as though I needed further justification for our trip, "I want to pick up an evening paper, too."

He stood there staring at me appraisingly.

"Doubtless you have reasons, Mr. Drew, for your frivolity, but I can only say that this house is now closed. As for an evening paper, I believe we have one." He stepped to a sideboard and offered me the paper I'd seen under his arm earlier.

I was for making an argument out of it, but Eve tugged at me and pulled me up the stairs.

"Darling, it's better than spending the night out on that park bench! What of it, if he's a little eccentric. Certainly he's no more of a dragon than some of the other hotel people we've met."

I sighed. I didn't like backing down to old Cheeseface, but I knew Eve's words were of wisdom, and I went with her back up to our room.

Anyway, it was nice to take our shoes off again. My wife curled up at the window, and after looking out into the dim street for a moment over her shoulder, I sat down on one of the cots with the evening paper. Eve chattered away as she does and I answered monosyllabically, all the time absorbing the details of the box score on the day's ball game.

"Valley Street. This is Valley Street and Everglades Avenue, Johnny. I could swear we passed by here before. Certainly there was no sign then for a room to let. I wonder who left."

"Um hum," said I, reading about a great catch Hoskins had made in centre field for the Blue Sox.

" 'Fact I don't even remember this old house."

"Um."

Eve was silent then for a moment and I got finished with the story of the ball game. My eyes drifted downward idly over the page. They stopped. Something slugged me in the stomach. My jaw fell open. The heading said:

TWO DIE IN AUTO CRASH

August 9. Mr. and Mrs. John Drew of Briarville, California, died today in Westville River when their car skidded off Gormley Highway, police reported.

The type before my eyes swam a bit. Eve said, "What is it, dear?" and pattered over to my side. I had enough presence of mind to start to flip the paper shut but she was too quick for me. She read and sank down beside me.

"Johnny!" she said. "Johnny!"

I took her hand. I wanted to say all sorts of things about the ghastly mistake, about how we'd have to get down to Police Headquarters in a hurry the next morning and explain everything, and Eve, don't look so white—but strangely nothing came out.

Then the tapping came at the door and I sprang to my feet like an overwound spring. It was Melkin. He stood in the doorway regarding me with those sober, colourless eyes, and said, "Drew, you're new here and there are one or two things I have to explain to you about this place. You see, Drew, it's not an ordinary house!"

As our host advanced into the room towards us, the garish light of the ceiling fixture accentuated the pallor of the man, gave it an almost blue quality that was unearthly. I decided to seize the opportunity to speak before Melkin could.

"See here," I said with what I meant to be a disarming smile, "I certainly respect the rules of this boarding house, but something has come up that requires our attention immediately. Mr. Melkin, I am sorry but we'll have to go out just for a few minutes."

The gathering storm of displeasure showed on my host's face and I hurried on. Certainly under the circumstances my request was reasonable.

"You see, there's been a rather grisly mistake that needs correcting."

I flipped the paper over, pointing to the article about our accident and "demise." I thought that this would surely clinch my argument. But instead of showing any interest, Melkin glanced casually at the item and then looked once again at me, his dark expressionless eyes unblinking. Most of the anger had left his face, and there was instead a look of almost scorn. I pushed on, almost embarrassed by the sound of my own voice in that small echoing chamber. I tried the smile again.

"It says John Drew and wife are dead, and being John Drew," I gave Eve's wrist an affectionate pinch, "and wife, I feel this has got to be corrected at Police Headquarters. We haven't any friends in this section of the country; but if the word got back to the Coast, it would be kind of a mean trick."

Melkin gazed at me as though my words had had no meaning. I stood up, took Eve's hand in one of mine and stepped towards the door. I am big enough to be able to see over other people's heads at parades and I didn't anticipate having any trouble with our host, and knew I looked rather menacing. However, Melkin merely grimaced a bit and admonished, "You can't hurt a dead man, you know! I am sorry, you can't go out!"

I gulped and stopped short. "Now wait a minute—!"

"You can't go out."

I reached for the paper again and thumped the item. "I tell you this has to be corrected! A thing like that can make a lot of trouble."

The boarding-house proprietor's lips curled almost in a sneer. Then he sighed.

"So many of you act this way," he said almost to himself, "but in time you'll get used to it. They all do."

His lips came back from yellowed teeth in what was supposed to be a smile. He turned and headed for the door and I was too amazed to do anything until finally I shouted "Melkin, my wife and I are leaving this place! If you don't want us to come back, well, that's too bad but we must speak to the police and have this business corrected!"

He turned at the door, looked back at us.

"You can't go out. Some of the others take time to get used to this idea, but one and all we have to reconcile ourselves to it. After all, Mr. Drew, you two are dead, you know!"

He left, shutting the door behind him. Eve was the colour of the departed Melkin when I turned to look at her. I sat her on the bed and gripped her shaking hands, although mine were none too steady.

"Honey," I said, "the guy's loco. We'll get out of here."

"Johnny, he's so terribly white. You know, when I first saw him downstairs, I thought that. White like a dead person! And those women who came in to see me!"

She hid her head in her hands and her square little shoulders shook.

"Don't be silly," I blustered, spilling words of reassurance out as fast as I could but all the time thinking, What is this? Those people I'd blundered into downstairs. People? Creatures! Strange, and all with the peculiar pallor.

I comforted Eve for a moment more and then I sprang to the door. Perhaps I expected it to be locked. It was not. It flew open. I leaped out into the hall. The corridor to the stairs was dim, and along its sides were lounging a score or more of figures. I took a step towards the stairs and the figures, men they were if you could call them that, tensed. Obviously, I was their business. I felt a sickness in my stomach. Even in the dim light, I could see that they were monstrous, misshapen and disfigured in one way or another.

Here was a man, or what had once been one, with a half-crushed skull. Someone else with a twisted back; a third with no leg, and so on. As I stood uncertainly, one of the creatures started towards me. I stepped hurriedly back inside our room and threw the bolt. I dreaded that Eve would discover what I had seen, that we were no longer free to leave the house but were guarded by an odd assortment of inhumans. Somehow, I now knew we had stumbled on some fantastic sort of insane asylum.

I turned away from the door and tried to smile for Eve. It was a poor attempt. I knew it. She knew it, but her smiling back bravely at me helped. It was a courageous, pathetic little gesture on her part and my heart thumped as I thought of her exquisite young beauty, and outside those profane, godless travesties of humanity.

I sat by her side and said softly, "Don't worry, honey, I'll think of something."

She looked as if she were going to cry. "What sort of place *is* this, Johnny?"

"Not the kind of joint I'd pick for you ordinarily, my sweet," I tried to joke.

"Is it some sort of private insane asylum, or something?"

So she'd thought of it too!

"I don't know."

"And why does everyone look so strange? That whiteness?"

The thought had persisted in my mind too.

"Not enough sunlight and vitamins," I quipped.

Whatever else we might have said was interrupted. A voice came from outside. It was Melkin.

"Drew," he called.

"Yes," I answered.

"You can see by now that it would be quite wrong for you to attempt to leave this house."

I said nothing.

"I think in time you'll understand that all this is for your own good. You see, we of the Older Ones know that sudden death has its shocking qualities, that after one has crossed into the Beyond, one still continues to try to live, psychically at least, in the dimensions and traditions of the living. You'll get used to being dead, Drew, you and yo[illegible], and then you will be just like any of us.

"I wonder if you[illegible] open the aperture of this door a minute."

I looked and dis[illegible] the peep-slide that one finds on many apartment front do[illegible] through and saw with distaste the pallid face and shou[illegible]kin.

"I am placing outside [illegible]m," he went on as soon as he saw my eye at the ape[illegible], "a [illegible]elper of mine to keep you from doing anything [illegible]ch, shall we say, you might regret!"

At that he gestured, and from one side came a heavy step. Suddenly, into my view loomed up a huge monster of a man. It was, I saw, surely one of the figures I'd seen lounging along the hall earlier. A monster of a man with a brutal face and one side of his head bashed in. It was an incredible, revolting sight, highlighted by the absurdity of the gay red-flowered tie he wore around his bull neck.

"This is Jacob," said Melkin. "He's going to stay outside your door and I would suggest you and Mrs. Drew get used to the idea of being in the Beyond. You will pardon, I'm sure, Drew, our little house joke, but you see one is dead such a long time that the sooner one becomes accustomed to it, the better."

The monstrous Jacob grimaced at this appreciatively, and I slammed the one-inch peep shut. I put my fingers to my lips, and Eve and I sat together on the bed, silently listening to the mute,

unintelligible sounds of the house grow small and finally cease, until there was nothing but the soft rustle of the wind outside the window. My watch showed two-thirty.

It was then that I started a minute examination of the room in stocking feet. There was nothing of interest. No furniture even heavy enough to act as a formidable weapon. Finally I turned to the window and eased it up inch by inch. I looked out. There was a narrow ledge running the width of the house. The dingy, poorly lit street below was, of course, completely empty at this hour.

Eve was off the bed and after me as she sensed what was in my mind. Her tiny feet, likewise shoeless to keep from making a sound, pattered towards me.

"No, Johnny!" she clung to me. "We can't go out that way!"

"I'm going to take a look in the rooms on either side of us."

She pleaded with me.

"Nothing to it, Eve," I reassured. "Now just sit tight and I'll be right back."

She pulled at my arm desperately as though she could hold me back by main force, but finally I convinced her, and with a kiss I edged carefully out of the window. If I were seen from the street and a call put in to the police, so much the better, but I knew the chances of anyone passing by in this section of the city and at this hour were infinitesimal.

The window to the right of ours was ti[illegible] locked, but with my eyes growing accustomed to the gloom, [illegible] see that it opened into nothing more productive than a [illegible] closet. There were brooms and odds and ends and sh[illegible]gh with ill-arranged boxes and bric-à-brac.

Retracing my steps gingerly [illegible] the [illegible]er direction, and on the left was rewarded by [illegible] open wind[illegible]. I eased myself through and found I was in a room very simil[illegible] to ours, but with two doors. One, I figured, opened on to the stairs; the other was smaller, I found on closer examination not reaching quite to the floor. I opened it cautiously and found a small shaft before me, disappearing into blackness. A stout rope hung in the centre, and suddenly it came to me that these old houses were often equipped with rope-pulley dumbwaiters to serve the different floors.

As I was about to shut the dumbwaiter door, voices came to me from some room adjacent to the shaft in the evil old house. Melkin's tones were unmistakable. He was talking with several other people, and I could tell that there was excitement between them, and then my ears caught my own name. I leaned way over the coping of the door and the voices came clearer.

"You fool!" said one voice which carried with its sepulchral tones a note of authority. "Their reported death was one of those imbecile mistakes that the authorities make!"

"But . . ." whined Melkin defensively, ". . . I'd seen the item in the paper and naturally I thought—"

"You thought!" went on the other voice, and the strains had an oddly metallic reverberating character. "You know now, of course, what we must do and immediately!"

A third voice joined in agreeing.

"Yes," said Melkin. "People in this house-beyond-life must obviously be dead. If they are not—well, I shall attend to it."

"Do!" snapped the authoritative voice.

"At once!" replied Melkin, cowed.

I shut the door as quickly as I could and hurried towards the window. I still couldn't figure quite what the pitch was here, but that we were dealing with a deadly bunch of characters who now intended to murder us, I did not doubt. I gained our window and beckoned to Eve just as Melkin's rap came at the door. I hurried her over the ledge and pushed her into the next room. Melkin called again, and the rapping became louder. Then I heard his quick order to someone, probably Jacob, and as I slithered sideways along the ledge, one arm around Eve's waist, I heard the sudden splintering crash of wood panel and I pictured those pallid, loathsome faces and forms hurtling into the room we'd just left.

I hurried my wife into the next chamber, got in after her, shut and locked the window and then bolted the door. But I knew, my mind working now with the rapidity of desperation, that it would only be a matter of moments before these creatures of the Devil were upon us again. Already I heard steps outside in the corridor. Heavy, lumbering steps. Jacob, of course, and others. A few steps more and they would be splintering this door.

I whirled suddenly, opened the dumbwaiter shaft and jiggled the rope. It was a heavy rope and there was a weight at the end. Like a madman I heaved on the pulley, and groaning and creaking, finally the little two-shelved lift came up out of the darkness and drew level with us. There was no time for talk now. I swept Eve's soft round figure into my arms and stowed her into the dumbwaiter. I loved her more then than I think I ever had. No hysterics, no tears, just her white strained face turned towards mine.

She said, grasping quickly what was going on, "Please come with me, Johnny, or let me stay with you."

I shook my head, and that was that. I was the boss. With a prayer for her safety, I began to lower the waiter and Eve feverishly. This would, at least, throw them off for a while.

And then even before the thundering knocks came at the door of the room, I saw Melkin's diabolically evil face leering at me from the window. While slow-witted Jacob had lumbered down the corridor searching aimlessly, Melkin had anticipated my moves and come along the ledge in pursuit. Like a football player, I dived at the window, carrying the sash and glass with me, counting on catching myself against the bottom with my thighs.

My arms were outstretched in frenzied action. He must not surmise which way Eve's trail led. I felt my hands hit the solidity of his knees and then he pitched out from the ledge. It was so easy and I felt a little sick. I didn't look down, but there was the unmistakable sound of a human body landing four floors below on the cobblestones.

There was no time to be weak-kneed now, though. The door of the room was being attacked from the outside, and I heard Jacob's slobbering curses. Another idea came to me, and again I opened the shaft. I crawled in myself this time, gripping the rope with one hand and letting the dumbwaiter door shut behind me. Then, hand over hand, I lowered myself into that black pit, unmindful of the rope splinters digging into my fingers. Above, and always farther away as I let myself down, came the sound of those creatures pouring into the room Eve and I had left.

Finally my feet thumped against wood, and Eve's hushed voice came.

"Johnny?"

"Darling," I said. "Where are we?"

"I think it's some sort of sub-basement," she whispered.

I crawled between the top of the dumbwaiter and the opening of the shaft. It was a tight squeeze for a big man and I had no buttons left on my shirt when I finally stood beside her in the darkness.

"Now let's be getting out of here!"

We explored and bumped our way in the darkness, and from what we ran into, I decided there were boxes and furnace fixtures, and what not. I tripped over one such something and then found to my joy that it was a heavy poker. I claimed it and we went on. "At least, honey," I said, "we won't be bothered with that Melkin any more. I took care of him!"

Eve didn't press me for details, but the thought of what I'd done to our murderous, sinister host no longer nauseated me.

Luckily we were standing behind some packing cases when the cellar door up ahead was thrown open abruptly. I pulled Eve down as light streaked the sub-basement. I couldn't see, but we were not yet out of the woods. People were coming. One of them was Jacob. Although there was no talk among them now, I could tell by the ponderous, lumbering footsteps. They had flashlights, and the wavering beams passed a few feet from where we crouched.

My heart thumped and turned over in my throat as someone leaned against our packing case. The others went on and I could see Jacob and two or three more. Then as though the sound of our breathing had drawn him, the man leaning against our packing case turned slowly, inexorably before us. I rose up and hit him with the poker with all my strength even before he'd turned fully towards us—even before I saw who it was. For had I seen, I never could have struck that mighty blow. It was Melkin! How shall I

say it? Disfigured as a man is who falls four flights on to cobblestone, but Melkin, alive as he had been before. Alive, did I say? His words to me earlier that fateful night came back now. *You can't hurt a dead man!*

The force of my blow at his head shattered the bone and sent him reeling backwards. But the injury was as nothing to him.

"Run, Eve!" I screamed. "Run for the door!"

She did my bidding and I charged after Melkin, who leered at me, his soulless, empty eyes looked like Satan himself in the battered head. It was Eve's scream that brought me whirling about. She had run fully into the huge Jacob, who stood half a body above her as he raised his massive arms around her, and I could see over her head that grotesquely humorous red-flowered tie of his.

I charged towards my wife and the monster who sought to crush the life out of her body. Other limping, stumbling creatures were behind me thumping along in pursuit, but my eyes were fixed only on Jacob and Eve. I hit him with the poker and he let go of Eve to come at me, his ham hands spread apart. I sidestepped his elephant charge and shoved Eve towards the basement door that beckoned to us. She ran, and I followed, but at the steps Jacob with surprising speed caught us. He took the poker from my hands as though it were a slim reed of wood, one thick forearm snaked around Eve's legs and she, who had refused to dash up the steps to safety until I was beside her, fell gasping to the stairs.

I dived at Jacob and knew immediately that my strength, considerable though it was, would be no match for his. Others led by Melkin were coming up. I knew I had a few more seconds and then we would be prisoners again—and for good—in that evil house of monstrous horrors.

I let myself go completely slack, and my assailant taken unawares, relaxed his efforts against me. Eve, poor dear, doubtless thinking that I had been overcome, redoubled her own efforts and Jacob turned his attentions to her.

It was then that I sprang from out of my relaxed position. I caught Jacob off his balance with my shoulder, and at the same time swept Eve clear with one arm. He clawed at me desperately and I rammed my fingers into his bull-like neck. In the mêlée that gaudy, red-flowered tie ripped off in my grasp, but Jacob, thank God, lost his balance and stumbled backwards down the stairs, knocking down those led by Melkin like so many tenpins.

In an instant more, Eve and I had scampered on up the stairs and somehow found ourselves outside in the night. We stumbled and staggered through dark, deserted, twisting streets. I drove Eve to frantic haste because behind, for a while, I could hear the clumping, sinister sounds of those creatures in pursuit.

After a time we reached a brighter section of the city, and Eve fell against me.

"I can't go any farther," she gasped.

I supported her the rest of the way to the nearest police station. We stopped outside to tidy up a bit, and looking into each other's face, we both realized at the same time that our preposterous story would never be believed. We decided to say nothing about our recent experience but only to mention and set right the report of our death in the automobile accident.

I made the overtures to the usual blasé desk sergeant. He seemed considerably bored, but allowed that mistakes sometimes happen, and after all when a car skids into the river and is raised from under water with both doors sprung open and suitcases found, it's presumed that the parties have drowned and will, as he said in jolly fashion, turn up later somewhere floating in the river.

Sergeant Truckett, for so his name proved to be, was, though, interested in the tie that peeked out of my right-hand pocket. It was Jacob's, torn off him in the mêlée and I had stuffed it there absently.

"Yours?" said the sergeant.

I evaded a direct answer and he went on.

"Funny, you know, there's only one guy around here who wore ties like that. Was quite a character, he was. Loved those loud red-flowered ties. Just like that one, mister. Would have thought it was one of his," the good sergeant laughed.

"Who was this—?"

"Jacob, his name was. He was a wrestler in these parts. Great, big fellow. Died, oh about a year ago in an accident. He and his manager."

Eve put the question that flashed into my mind, too.

"Was his manager's name Melkin?"

The sergeant nodded. "Guess you know about 'em, eh? They say wrestling's crooked. Maybe so, but they put on some great shows. I remember once this Jacob—"

We went out into the street, Eve and I, my arm around her waist, and we walked. Dawn was streaking the sky above the city, and without a word to each other but by apparent mutual consent, we turned our steps in the direction of that sinister four-story house. We wended our way down Everglades Avenue. Six blocks, five blocks, then three, two, and we were suddenly there across the street from where we'd spent the most harrowing night of our lives.

I think, looking back now, that I wasn't surprised, and I saw that Eve was not. We have not discussed it since, naturally. Of course, you have guessed it. There was no four-story, rambling house on the corner in the morning light. There was nothing. No sign of a house. Just an open lot with its incidental collection of rubbish.

I have the clipping from the paper. You don't often see the notice of your own death. The gaudy, red-flowered tie? No, I didn't keep that, for it belongs to Jacob . . . wherever he may be!

Mrs. Lannisfree

AUGUST DERLETH

If it comes right down to it, there is not much that I know about either Mr. or Mrs. Lannisfree, even though I worked for him for almost a month. He was a stranger to me; that is, I left the city to go with him. The agency called me and asked whether I would mind working in the country.

Not farm work. Simply as a companion to a man who had been told to get some rest and did not want to spend alone the month or so before his wife came to join him. I needed money just then, too, and I took it. He was down at the agency, and wanted me to come down.

"I wanted an older man," he said when I walked in and was introduced to him. "Are you likely to get lonely?"

I said I didn't think so. It depended on where we were going.

"Into the lake country up along the coast."

"If I can get into the woods once in a while, I won't be lonesome," I said.

He thawed out a little, though he still seemed morose—a medium-sized man, with a firm jaw and hard eyes. You could see that he was used to having his way about things, and I felt that he resented having to go away, and yet, somehow, had to go. He explained that he was not very talkative, not at all good company, and yet needed someone around to take care of little things. It had to be a man, to preserve propriety since his wife would join him as soon as she could get away. He had a cottage on a lake up north, and we would be rather isolated. But the month was June; there would be fishing, if I cared for it, and I would have enough time to myself to make up for his moods and his solitudes.

It was really more than a cottage. Perhaps it had started out like one, but the fact was that Mr. Lannisfree had added to it from time to time; so that now it resembled a rambling cabin. It was attractive, too, set in a little grove of oak and cedar not far from the lake—probably about two hundred feet. I had a room all to myself, but I saw that taking care of the place would mean more work than I figured on, because there were a large living-room, a glassed-in porch on the south side, where he intended to work—if he worked at all—three bedrooms, and a kitchen besides the store-room and the open veranda. The cabin was far enough from the road so that dust was not as much of a problem as I had thought it might be. So I had to keep it clean—he did the cooking—look after the grounds, and just keep myself fairly close by in

case Mr. Lannisfree got into the mood for talk or anything else —like chess, which he played and soon taught me to play.

He never told why he had been ordered to rest, but he certainly did not have to tell it; you could see that he was a nervous type, despite his big frame. He did not look like a lawyer, which he was; he looked more like a football player, and it turned out that he used to play football in high school. But he was fifty or more now, though he looked younger. I got used to his nervous habits after a while, but at first he startled me. The first time I noticed anything was during the second game of chess we played—after I had learned enough about the game to play it without always being told what I could do and what I couldn't. I was thinking about a move, and finally made it; but he didn't move; so I looked at him, and there he sat, with his head bent to one side a little.

"Your move, Mr. Lannisfree," I said.

"Did you hear anything, Jack?" he asked.

"Why, no," I said. "Nothing, that is, except a loon out there on the lake."

"Oh, was that what it was?"

"Yes," I said.

Just then the loon called again and he never batted an eyelash; so I knew it was not the loon he thought he had heard.

"What was it like?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said curtly, and that was that.

The next thing I found out about him was that he liked to prowl around at night. It was not that I ever saw him, but I found evidence of it often enough. The worst of that was, as I soon discovered, he didn't remember that he did it, and more or less suspected me of doing it.

It was about a week after we came that he called me on it. He got up late that morning, and I overslept, too. He got out first, and next thing I knew I heard him calling me. He sounded angry and anxious.

I got out of bed and went into the living-room. All the bedrooms opened off the living-room; they were small, but comfortable, with good beds—not just cots in them. He was standing just outside his door, and his face was a colour that might have meant he was angry or sick or both.

"Did you do this, Jack?" he asked.

I saw what he meant. Someone had walked across the floor with wet feet, leaving a trail of blurred wet footprints; and the knob of his door was wet, too. I knew I hadn't been out in the night; so that left him walking in his sleep or going out to take a swim in the lake and not remembering it.

"I might have been walking in my sleep," I said.

"Do you swim in your sleep, too?" he asked.

"If you're asleep, you might not know it," I said.

"Clean it up," he said.

Then and there I discovered something very strange. The lake was a freshwater lake, of course, about ten miles from the Maine coast, but when I came with a rag to wipe up the wet spots and bent over them I noticed right away that it was sea-water. I was born in Gloucester, and the smell of the ocean is just like second-nature to me. I didn't say anything to Mr. Lannisfree, because I thought it might bother him. As it was, it bothered me. I couldn't figure it out, and for the first time I began to look forward to the time when his wife came and I could go back.

He talked a good deal about his wife. It was "Mrs. Lannisfree this" and "Mrs. Lannisfree that" for long spells at a time. I got the picture of her pretty soon—an Irish-French girl, somewhat younger than he: about ten years or so—with dark blue eyes and black hair, worn long, down to her waist, he said. According to his lights, she was a very beautiful woman. Right now she was at work writing a book, and she could not take herself too far away from her references, or she would be at a loss for the finishing of the book. The Lannisfrees moved in a circle of writers and artists and well-known people of all kinds. I thought it was queer that, with all the way he had her on his mind, he didn't have a picture of her up, and I asked about it. But he smiled and said that no picture "could do her justice," but he had a small snapshot of her and showed it to me. I agree that she was beautiful, and also that the picture probably didn't do right by her.

"I'll be looking forward to seeing her," I said.

"I don't blame you; most men do. She's always been very popular."

The days went by slowly. It was one round of cleaning up and chess and fishing. Sometimes he played game after game; whole afternoons or evenings were taken up with chess. Sometimes it seemed that he didn't want to talk; he was moody, and would sit for a long time over legal papers on the glassed-in porch or the open veranda and just look out into the woods or over the lake. And then there were times when he sat or stood with his head cocked, just as if he were listening.

Sometimes I watched him, keeping myself hidden. It was strange. He would look around very furtively, as if he expected someone to show himself. Sometimes I walked right up to him, and every time he would give himself away somehow. It was, "Anybody been straying around this afternoon, Jack?" or "Do you hear someone walking?" I never did. I understood that this was his nervousness and this was why he needed a rest.

It went on this way for a few days.

Something else went on that I could not figure out. That was the wet doorknobs and the wet footprints on the floor. Most of the time I managed to get up before he did—early enough to clean them

up before he saw them. But once in a while he saw the marks where the carpet or the floor hadn't quite dried. He never said anything again; he just looked away as if nothing were there. I couldn't get that out of my mind. I wanted to ask him about it, time after time, but something there was in his eyes, I couldn't do it. I wanted to know how it was if he went out and took a swim in the night in the lake he came in dripping sea-water. For it was sea-water every time; I could feel the salt on my hands. I could taste it, and I did. There was never the doubt of it in my mind. But how he did it, I didn't know, though sometimes I sat for a long time trying to figure it out. There was a broad brook running down from the lake to the ocean; it grew into a small river before it emptied into the Atlantic, but of course the brook was freshwater, too.

I thought the best thing to do would be to catch him at it. So I laid my plans and I never slept one night—just sat up and listened. I never heard him go out, but I heard him come in. I heard him coming along the hall, quiet as could be; and I planned to step out and surprise him, but just then I heard a strange voice.

"Roger," it said. "Roger!"

A woman's voice, calling to Mr. Lannisfree, and, judging by the sound of it, she was standing just outside his door. She was calling in a husky, urgent voice, as if she wanted him badly, and yet with a kind of command in it.

"Roger!" she called in that harsh whisper. "*Roger!*"

There was something about it to make a man grow cold. Sometimes it begged him, and sometimes it ordered, and sometimes it wept. It was a terrible thing. I thought that all the time Mr. Lannisfree was up here waiting for his wife he was carrying on with some other woman. That was what I thought. So I didn't go out of my room that night; I just listened and waited for him to answer; but he never did—he just lay there in his room and tossed and fretted and once or twice he moaned, as if he were having a bad dream.

In the morning those footprints were there again, and the wetness on his doorknob. I looked at all the tracks carefully, and one of them was not so blurred; it looked more like a woman's footprint. I got them all wiped up before he came out, and they were dried, too, before he showed up.

He looked bad that morning—just as if he hadn't slept much.

"Did you hear anything last night, Jack?" he asked.

Naturally, I didn't want him to think I had heard anything, if there were something between him and some woman in the neighbourhood. So I said no.

"You didn't call me?"

"Not unless it was in my sleep," I said. "They tell me sometimes I talk in my sleep—but I don't remember it."

"No, you don't usually."

I couldn't imagine what he would be able to see in another woman with a wife as beautiful as Mrs. Lannisfree, and I tried to imagine what he would do about that woman when she got there. I could figure out the footprints now, all right—even if I couldn't figure out the smell of the sea. The woman probably lived somewhere along the lake and swam over to our shore, and came on in. That would account for everything—everything, that is, but the smell. I got to thinking of that so strongly that I couldn't help blurting it out.

"Is there any body of salt water around here any place, Mr. Lannisfree?" I asked.

"Not back from the coast."

"Sure?"

"I know this country. I could walk it blindfolded. Why?"

"Because—" I felt foolish now. "Because that wetness on your doorknob and the marks on the floor are salt-water."

He got red, and then white. His jaw set tautly. "That's damned nonsense," he said harshly.

I went into the kitchen and got the rag I had used to wipe it up. I brought it out and held it under his nose. "Smell that," I said.

He did. He glared at me in a kind of disgust and shook his head.

"It smells of sea-water," I said.

"It's your imagination, Jack. Put that thing away and let's hear no more about it."

I did what I was told. But that didn't alter anything. That rag was soaked with sea-water. When it dried out it showed a frost of salty white. I know sea-water to the taste and the feel and the smell. I was born in Gloucester, and a boyhood in Gloucester puts the tang of the salt sea air in a man's blood. You don't make a mistake like that. I don't say it can't be done; I just say I didn't make it. That was sea-water, or I've never tasted or felt or smelled sea-water.

But all that day Mr. Lannisfree was silent and moody. He did no work, and the only time he spoke to me after that was when I came up to him and found him sitting in front of his opened watch, gazing at the little picture of his wife.

"I don't want you to say anything of this to Mrs. Lannisfree when she comes," he said.

"Very well," I said. "I won't."

Well, that night ended it.

It was a clear, moonlit night, with some clouds wind-driven across the heavens, and a wonderful pine smell in the air, not the kind of a night you want to go to bed early, and we didn't go, either; we played two games of chess, but Mr. Lannisfree's heart wasn't in it, and around about eleven o'clock we finally went to bed.

I was tired, but I did not want to sleep. I had the feeling you sometimes get when you know something is going to happen. I was

sure that woman would be coming back, and tonight I was going to open the door and talk to her. So I lay there wide awake. I heard the old ormulu clock on the fireplace mantel in the living-room strike twelve, and then one, and then two.

And then I heard the door open, the same as the night before, and I think, now that I've thought it all over, it was the same time. I heard those footsteps sort of whispering along the floor across the living-room from the outer door, and come to a pause before his door. And then I heard her voice again, the same as the night before.

"Roger!" she called. "Roger!"

I walked over to my own door and opened it. I looked out.

She was standing about ten feet away, her back towards me. She was at Mr. Lannisfree's door all right. But I was surprised—more than I had expected to be. I thought she would be in a bathing suit, but she wasn't. She was in travelling clothes—a kind of business suit, such as women wear, and I could see from my doorway that she had had an accident, for it was sopping wet.

I stepped out into the hall and I said, "Why don't you go in?"

She turned around slowly, and I felt cold all over. She didn't say anything, but just stood there looking at me. Then she took a step forward, and her face came into a patch of moonlight and I saw that it was Mrs. Lannisfree herself.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Lannisfree," I said.

"Where is Roger?"

"You know he's in there," I said.

"His door is locked."

"My key will fit it."

"Thank you."

I got my key and gave it to her. Her hand was so cold, and I could almost hear her teeth chattering. When I gave her the key I saw her eyes. They were not like the eyes in that snapshot Mr. Lannisfree had in the back of his watch; they did not seem to see me at all; they looked straight through me and seemed to be fixed on something and she never once seemed to swivel them around or anything, but just held her gaze straight in front of her, and she took that key and turned to the door, working at it with the key. And I was almost drowned in the smell of the sea, it was that strong; it even seemed to come in under my door after I was back in my own room once more.

And then I heard Mr. Lannisfree scream. Just once. It was terrible; I did not know he could be so surprised at his wife's sudden coming. He called out her name. "Myra!" Just like that.

"I've come, Roger," she said.

Then there was a series of sounds, and I thought she was getting out of those wet clothes, but after a little while, I heard her walking

out of that room, and out of the house. I opened my window and looked out; the moon was still shining brightly, but I couldn't see anything. I stepped out on the veranda, and then I saw her walking down through the woods towards the brook, away from the lake. She hadn't taken off her wet clothes at all, but just walked there straight away from the cabin, and I could see her in the moonlight just as plain as I can see you now, with the moonlight white on her face and hands, the way it should be.

I didn't sleep much the rest of that night, waiting for her to come back, and next morning the wet footprints were there again, and Mr. Lannisfree's doorknob was wet, and I cleaned it all up and waited for him to come. But he didn't come, and he didn't come, and then I went into his room at last, after he didn't answer to my knocks, I found him just the way he was when the sheriff got there—dead in his bed, with that long black hair wound around his neck to choke him to death!

That was just six hours after I saw Mrs. Lannisfree.

And that is why I don't believe it when they say that Mr. Lannisfree took his wife out off the coast of Maine that day almost a month ago and pushed her into the water and drowned her because he was jealous of that other man they say Mrs. Lannisfree liked, even if her body was recovered, because I saw her just as plain as I see you now, with the moonlight white on her face and hands, walking through the woods towards the sea.

What Beckoning Ghost?

HAROLD LAWLOR

What beckoning ghost along the moonlight shade
Invites my steps, and points to yonder glade?
Pope: *To the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*

Not so long ago I came across the above lines, and it seemed to me they might have been written with Sharon Powell in mind—yes, even to the very title. I never told what I knew at the time, and indeed I've sometimes wondered what I did know. I'm only telling it now as a form of mental catharsis, that my mind, weary of fruitless speculation, might be set at rest and freed to concentrate on other things.

I remember it was an unseasonably hot night for early May, the night the terror first struck Ballard Powell. I've often thought since that it should have been a night of vivid lightning, crashing

thunder and teeming rain. But it was a singularly unghostly night, despite what happened later.

I'd driven him back to Lake Forest from a concert in town, and after leaving him at the door of the big house, I ran the Cadillac into the garage and climbed the stairs to the three-roomed apartment above my quarters as chauffeur-gardener. I mopped my brow and wiped the sweat-band of my visored cap as I climbed, and once upstairs I lost no time in peeling off my tan gabardine tunic and shirt.

It was much too hot to work on the novel (which was why I had taken the job in the first place, upon leaving college the year before. The pay, food and quarters were good enough, and as the Powells lived very quietly, the job left me time enough to write).

But not tonight. I turned the radio on low, and threw myself down on the sofa with a sigh, just as I was, in puttees, breeches and undershirt. As I lay there, meaning to rest only a moment, the soft hot winds blew over me through the open windows, and I must have dropped off into a doze.

It was shortly after midnight when the pounding began, though I had heard nothing to herald it. But now someone was hammering on the gumwood door belowstairs, and hammering with both fists to judge by the racket being raised.

The agonized immediacy that I sensed behind it brought me to my feet with a jerk, wide-awake. I clattered down the uncarpeted stairs, my heart pounding, and threw the door open. Ballard Powell tumbled in past me, his eyes dilated with fright, his head turned back over his shoulder as if watching something in the grounds between the garage and the big house, something that had been pursuing him.

"Bolt the door!" he gibbered hoarsely. He didn't even wait to see if I obeyed him, but scrambled up the stairs to my quarters as if, even now, the thing he fled thundered at his heels.

I had seen nothing in the moonlit grounds that brief instant I held the opened door ajar, but now I lost no time in bolting it and following my employer upstairs.

He'd collapsed on the studio couch. His breath was still wheezing in and out of his lungs noisily. The sweat was pouring down his face, and he made no move to wipe it away.

It was hard for me to believe that this figure of dishevelment was Ballard Powell. He was a tall man, slender, dark-eyed, grey at the temples, about forty-eight years old. Cool, self-contained, unemotional, he had always been in the past. It was strange to see him looking anything but admirably poised.

"What happened?" I asked.

He shook his head. He still hadn't breath to answer. I hesitated a moment, then went over and mixed him a highball, though I feared he wouldn't approve of his chauffeur having liquor in his

possession. But he said nothing—only took the drink gladly enough and gulped it down, his Adam's apple bobbing convulsively as he swallowed.

"What happened?" I asked again. "What frightened you?"

His eyes narrowed secretively, evaded mine. "Nothing."

Nothing! I stared my disbelief.

"That is, I thought I—I heard something." He wiped his face again with a fine linen handkerchief, straightened his tie with a shaking hand, smiled weakly. "But of course I didn't," he muttered. "I couldn't have. It's—it's preposterous."

But still he couldn't meet my eyes, and it seemed significant. He sounded to me like a man who was trying to convince himself. He didn't *want* to believe he'd heard whatever it was that he had heard.

"But what was it that you thought you heard?" I persisted.

"I told you I couldn't have heard anything!" he said irritably, stubbornly. He had a grip on himself again now, and the cold glance he gave me was meant, I knew, to remind me that I was only his chauffeur and hence in no position to persist in pestering him with embarrassing questions.

I repressed a shrug. After all, if Powell chose to let "nothing" frighten him into a state of witlessness, it was no business of mine. So I only said, "Would you like me to walk back to the big house with you, sir?"

He hesitated. I think he meant to refuse at first, once having convinced himself that his mysterious fear was unfounded. But some memory of it must have lingered still, deciding him against foolhardiness, for he said at last, "Perhaps it would be better if you will, Haines."

I pulled on a light jacket, and we started up the cement drive to the main house. The grounds were extensive, elaborately landscaped with overhanging shrubbery, and we had quite a little walk before us. As a precaution I took a flashlight from one of the cars to light our way, though the night was bright enough.

Halfway up to the house, Powell laughed shortly. "Sorry I was in such a blue funk. I know I must have startled you. To tell you the truth, I thought I had heard a burglar in the grounds."

I could feel his eyes on me, judging the effect of this. I said, "When we reach the house, I'll make a circuit of it and search the shrubbery."

But I didn't believe a word of Powell's belated explanation. He'd had time to think, time to make up a story with which he hoped to satisfy me. I was sure Powell was no physical coward, and I seem to remember thinking, even then, that it must have been more than a burglar in the grounds that had sent him down to me at the garage in such a state of gibbering terror.

But perhaps I am merely being wise after the event.

The drive curves around the service quarters, and on the far side,

to the south, is the flagstone terrace upon which the french doors opening from the living-room give. It was just as we neared the steps leading to the terrace that I heard it.

Powell heard it too. He must have. But I think he hoped against hope that he had not. For he kept walking. Doggedly. Determined to go on if I made no sign. Thinking perhaps that the sound was only a figment of his own imagination.

I know now how desperately he must have hoped so!

But I caught his arm. "Listen!" I warned.

It was enough. He couldn't pretend any longer, not even to himself. He wilted visibly. "Oh, God," he said, with dull despair. "You—hear it, too?"

I nodded, more interested at the moment in the sound than in Ballard Powell. It came faintly from the living-room. A song. A song I'd heard dozens of times at funerals. A woman with a soft, husky, strangely familiar contralto was singing *Beautiful Isle of Somewhere*. There was a grisly, mortuary touch about it coming so softly from that darkened room. I felt a faint chill, a mounting sense of depression.

Powell stood hunched over, like a man who'd received a blow in the solar plexus. "I—I cannot go on."

"Wait here," I said.

I went as silently as I could up the flagstone steps, crossed the terrace, entered the open french doors to come to a halt just over the threshold. The room was pitch-dark, but I'd been in the house often enough before, and I knew where the piano was. On the long wall opposite the fireplace.

I pointed the flashlight towards where I knew the piano to be, clicked it on. The beam fell right upon the keyboard. It was playing. *Someone* was playing it, for I could see the keys as they were depressed. And the voice was still singing eerily.

But—there was no one seated on the bench before the piano!

I swept the room with the torch. "Who's there?" I called, foolishly enough.

For I could see plainly at once that there was no one at the piano, no one in the room. And naturally I received no answer.

The voice sang on as if uninterrupted. And then I knew. And, knowing, superstitious terror pricked my scalp. I stood there listening, shivering. It was as if someone trailed icy fingers up the channel of my spine.

No wonder that voice had sounded strangely familiar! I recognized it now. And the knowledge was enough to send me backing from the room, across the terrace and down the steps until I was at Powell's side again.

Mercifully, before I reached him, the song stopped.

"That voice!" I whispered. "It was Mrs. Powell singing. I tell you, it was *Mrs. Powell*!"

I expected him to deny it. Prayed that he would.

But he only said again, without emphasis, "Oh, God." His face was terror-washed in the moonlight. "And she is dead. You know that, as well as I. Sharon has been dead these six months past."

I nodded dumbly, greatly shaken. What could I say? It was true. Sharon Powell had been dead six months, yet that was her voice we heard. It had a distinctive husk to it, unlike any other, once-heard, never-forgotten. I was completely bewildered.

You must understand that there is in my make-up nothing of the mystic. I believe that when you're dead, you're dead. And that's an end of it. I do not hold with the spiritualists that the soul, the spirit, the essence—whatever you wish to call it—can return to indulge in table-rapping, bell-ringing or any other form of asinine hell-raising. If I seem to write that last sentence with acerbity, it is because the Powell affair outraged, from beginning to end, every tenet of my beliefs.

And yet I *had* to believe what I saw with my own eyes, heard with my own ears!

Powell brought me back to the present by clutching my arm convulsively. "I—I cannot go in." He looked at me defiantly. "Call me a coward if you like, but I can't enter that house. I'll spend the night in your quarters."

God knows I couldn't blame him. We went down the drive together, back to my apartment.

Now here's a strange thing.

You would have thought that we'd spend the rest of the night in conjecture, wondering at what we'd seen and heard. But we did not. I gave Powell the bedroom, and slept myself on the studio couch in the living-room. And we didn't say a word about what we'd heard! Something in Powell's manner, a cautious withdrawal, absolutely forbade my questioning him. It gave me the uneasy feeling that while the whole thing was completely baffling to me, Powell at least had some inner knowledge, some secret understanding that would have helped him explain the mystery, had he but cared to do so.

But he was silent.

Morning brought with it a feeling of unreality. It seemed as if I must have dreamed the events of the night before.

To begin with, Ballard Powell was not in my quarters when I woke up. Sometime after dawn, his courage must have returned sufficiently for him to leave and make his way to the big house. I might have doubted he'd been with me at all if it weren't for the tumbled bed he'd left behind him, evidence of the fact that he must have tossed and turned sleeplessly for most of the remainder of that night.

I had no time for conjecture. Mystery is for the hours of darkness. With morning, the day's duties begin, and life crowds in upon one.

At eight-thirty, I had the car at the front door, as usual, ready to

drive Powell into town. He was an investment counsellor with offices on La Salle Street, and even though Mrs. Powell's death had left him as sole heir independently wealthy, he still continued faithfully to go to his office every day.

When he emerged from the house, he seemed much as ever, except that I thought I detected a faint aura of sheepishness hanging about him. He made no mention of the night before, and I hardly felt it was my place to bring up the subject. If he had succeeded in forgetting that eerie singing, God knows I was willing to try! I suppose if it had ended there, the bizarre events of the night before would have passed into the limbo of forgotten things, for the human mind is adept at forgetting what is unpleasant to remember.

But that afternoon something else happened.

Powell left his office somewhat earlier than usual, so that it was only shortly after four o'clock when we returned to Lake Forest. Powell had brought home several files of business papers, and he asked me if I'd carry them into his study for him. They made a sizeable bundle as I gathered them up. He held the outer door open for me and followed through close on my heels, so that we entered the main hall almost simultaneously

I noticed something at once. A powerful odour of tuberoses, those flowers of the dead. And then I saw what had caused it. On an easel facing the front door was a large wreath of flowers, with a gold-lettered band of mauve gauze stretched across it at an angle.

It looked, unmistakably, like a funeral wreath.

We'd stopped short when we first saw it, but now curiosity drove us forward together. I don't think Powell was alarmed at first. He gave no evidence of it. He just seemed puzzled by the sight of such a macabre offering standing in the front hall of his home.

But I heard the air suck sharply into his lungs as we bent forward to read the inscription:

MY DEAR HUSBAND
BALLARD POWELL
Requiescat in Pace

Bewilderment, first. Then, as understanding sunk in, I felt a creeping sensation as of a cold hand tightening on my heart. Oh, the thing was inoffensive enough in itself. Just a harmless wreath of flowers. It was in its connotation that it was so terrible, hinting as it did that Ballard Powell was—dead? Or about to die? God knows there was little to choose between either!

Powell swallowed twice noisily in the silence that gripped us before he was able to say harshly, "Take that thing out to the incinerator, Haines, and destroy it at once!"

His pallor rivalled milk. He took out his linen handkerchief to dab at his lips, and I saw that they were blue and trembling.

It was only in common humanity that I suggested, "This must be

someone's warped idea of a practical joke," as I picked up the wreath, easel and all.

Powell looked at me strangely. Again I received the impression that he had his own suspicions. But he only said, "Yes. Yes of course. That must be it."

I couldn't imagine what other possible theory he might have for this sudden appearance of a wreath so suggestive of his own death. The funeral odour of tuberoses was overpowering, miasmic, horrible. I was glad myself when I had it afire in the incinerator, and I stood there watching until it crumbled into grey ash.

When I returned to the house to see if he required anything further of me, I found Powell interviewing Mrs. Giddings, the housekeeper, in the library.

"It was delivered just about half an hour before you returned, Mr. Powell," she was saying as I entered. "I signed for it, but I'm afraid I didn't notice what florist it came from."

"But surely you must have been curious when you saw what it was, and what inscription it bore?" Powell asked testily.

"But I didn't see it, Mr. Powell," the housekeeper defended herself. "I still don't know what it was, except that it was a floral offering of some kind. It was covered with brown manilla wrapping paper, and I just stood it in the hall, meaning to remove the paper before you returned. But you came home before I had a chance to do it."

"But someone must have removed the paper!"

"No one could have done it!" Mrs. Giddings objected. "It's the maids' day off, and I was the only one in the house until you and Haines returned."

Powell looked shaken at this, but he finally let her go. When she had left the room, he sat there tugging at his lower lip, apparently in bewilderment.

I waited patiently for minutes before asking, "Is there anything else, sir?"

He waved an abstracted hand. "Nothing, Haines."

When I left the library, it was to find Mrs. Giddings lying in wait for me in the back hall. At her beckoning gesture, I joined her, and she drew me into the little housekeeper's office behind the main staircase. I left the door standing slightly ajar.

"There's something very strange going on in this house," Mrs. Giddings said in a low voice.

I raised my eyebrows.

"I was afraid to show this to Mr. Powell," Mrs. Giddings went on. "I found it this afternoon on the night table beside his bed."

"This" was an antique bracelet of Etruscan gold set with oblongs of topaz. I held it on the palm of my hand. It was meaningless to me.

"It was Mrs. Powell's," Mrs. Giddings explained. "Mr. Powell

bought it for her in Italy when they were on their honeymoon. She told me so herself, one time when I admired it."

"I can't see anything so strange about its being on his night table," I said. "No doubt he'd been looking at it, and put it there to be placed away later on."

"No. No, that couldn't be." Mrs. Giddings shook her head. "For you see—the bracelet was buried with her!"

"What!"

"Let me see that bracelet!" a voice broke in.

Mrs. Giddings and I jumped guiltily, absurdly. Powell was standing in the doorway. He took the bracelet from my hand, and examined it closely.

"It *is* hers!" he confirmed at last. "It *was* on her arm when she was buried!"

He stood there, staring down at the thing.

The expression on his face almost defied description. No terror in it now, only wonder, doubt, anger and a sort of sullen defiance. But of what I don't know. He silenced any further comment from Mrs. Giddings and myself.

He said to me sharply, "I know it's your night off, Haines, but I want you to stay in your quarters instead. I intend to remain in myself, but—but I'd like to feel you were there in case I should—need you."

I said I would, of course. I'd intended to work on the book anyway, so Powell's halting request didn't interfere with any other plans I might have made.

And I wondered what Powell expected to happen next to make him feel that he might—need me.

I found, once I was alone in my own apartment, that the book was far from my mind. I spent the evening, instead, going over what I remembered of the Powells—especially Mrs. Powell, dead now these past six months—seeking some clue to the bewildering occurrences of the past twenty-four hours.

In her lifetime, Sharon Powell certainly had never inspired fear in anyone. She had been a fluttery, wistful-eyed little lady when I'd first come to work for them a year before. And she had been very, very much in love with her husband, or I was no judge. All the money was really hers (according to the servants' gossip I'd heard) and Powell was some five years her junior. Nevertheless, her love for him had made her docile. She'd delight in deferring to him.

Perhaps three months after my arrival, the trouble began. Mrs. Powell began to complain of hearing voices in her bedroom when she was alone at night. Several times she called Powell in to listen, but he could hear nothing. Then, too, she began to mislay things, to grow forgetful. Her mind seemed to be failing her, and it worried her desperately. She grew thinner and thinner, more and more

silent, brooding. Until even I—a newcomer—could see the change in her.

For all his natural coldness of character, Powell really behaved admirably. It would have been so easy for him to grow impatient of her vagaries, but he did his best to reassure her, instead. I used to hear them talking about it in the car. Mrs. Powell would weep helplessly, and he would do his best to comfort her. But I thought I could detect a faintly dubious overtone, as if he were afraid, too, that she was growing insane.

The climax came when Mrs. Powell stole a brooch from her best friend. Oh, it was hushed up, but servants hear everything, sooner or later. The theft had occurred at a dinner given by the friend, which the Powells had attended. Shortly after arriving home, the friend phoned to say her brooch was missing. Later Mrs. Powell's bag had fallen to the floor, and among the spilled contents was the missing brooch!

Powell himself picked it up from the floor, faced her with sick accusation in his face.

She had, she'd said, no memory of taking it. Hysteria, then.

Poor little woman! It must have been the final straw. For it was that night that she had committed suicide. Her farewell note made it clear she was convinced that she was going insane, and she couldn't face the slow horror of it.

Powell was grief-stricken at her death. Everyone was amazed that a man so reserved should break down so utterly. I distinctly remembered one incident at the funeral, especially as the memory of it was to return to me unpleasantly enough later. Mrs. Powell had always loved pink camellias. Just before they closed her casket, Powell unostentatiously had placed a pink camellia in her hand.

The gesture was infinitely touching, seeming, as it did, mute testimony to a love and grief too deep for utterance.

And now someone—for some inexplicable and heartless reason—was recalling to Powell the memory of the wife he had loved. And for what object? I marshalled what facts I had, and tried to reach some sort of intelligent conclusion.

If it were some practical joker, as I strongly suspected, who had sent the wreath and placed that bracelet (a clever copy, surely?) on the night table—why? And who could it be? For the Powells had no living relatives, no really intimate friends. As for Sharon Powell's voice singing *Beautiful Isle of Somewhere*—there didn't seem to be any rational explanation for that!

The whole sorry business passed my understanding completely.

I paced my quarters restlessly that evening, half-expecting to hear a pounding on the door below, receive again another urgent summons from Ballard Powell.

But there were no further demonstrations that night.

You realize, of course, that I can't vouch for what passed

through Ballard Powell's mind those hours of darkness. But at some time during that night he must have reached a decision.

The house phone rang while I was shaving, early the next morning. It was Mrs. Giddings on the wire.

"Mr. Powell told me to tell you," she said, "that he won't be going to the office today, but he'll want the car at one o'clock."

I hung up thoughtfully. In the year that I'd worked for him, I'd never known Powell to fail to go to the office on a weekday, except for the three days at the time of Mrs. Powell's death.

There was a fresh surprise in store for me at one o'clock, when Powell came out of the house.

"To the cemetery, Haines," he directed.

It wasn't his custom to make regular visits to the cemetery. I'd driven him there only once since the funeral, just before Christmas when Powell had brought a wreath out there to place it before the marble slab behind which Mrs. Powell was sleeping that long last sleep in the black marble and bronze mausoleum.

But now we stopped for no wreaths, and Decoration Day was still two weeks in the future. Powell must have some other reason for the visit.

Except for a few caretakers engaged in raking up the debris of the past winter, the cemetery was deserted when we reached it. I pulled up before the Powell mausoleum, which stood on a triangular island of ground formed by three driveways that bordered it.

Powell got out of the car, reaching for his key-ring. But when he had the key in the bronze-and-crystal door, he hesitated and turned to where I was still sitting behind the wheel of the car.

"Will you come in with me, Haines?" he asked.

I could see that he was very nervous, and reluctant to enter alone. What did he expect to find? More than a little puzzled, I left the car and walked up the three steps. He opened the door then, and we walked in.

The air was a little stale, naturally, despite the ventilator grilles, and the wreath he had placed there at Christmas was withered now. But with the open door, and the light that was coming through the window in the back wall, the place was not too depressing.

I watched Powell curiously.

He went to the marble slab on the left, and began to run his fingers over it. The slab bore the inscription:

SHARON POWELL
Born September 11, 1894
Died November 23, 1946

Powell continued to examine closely the joints where the marble was joined. The cemented joints were dry, and obviously hadn't been tampered with since the tomb was sealed, if that was what he was seeking to learn.

I looked away.

At the same time the inscription had been cut on Mrs. Powell's tomb, Powell had had his own slab on the right marked, too. Like the other, it read:

BALLARD POWELL
Born June 12, 1899
Died

with the date of his death, of course, left blank.

It seemed to me it must be a gruesome thing to see it every time you visited the cemetery—that blank line waiting ominously to be filled in. Impossible not to speculate when that date might come! But I knew it was a common enough custom, especially when, as in Powell's case, the sole survivor had no descendants or other relatives to perform that melancholy office for him later.

My eye fell on Powell's slab now, and I stiffened with sudden shock. Unconsciously I must have made a strangling noise of surprise, for Powell wheeled nervously.

"What is it?" he asked sharply.

Before I could explain, or even point my finger at it, he saw it himself.

The blank line on his slab had been filled in!

Died May 16, 1947

Why, that—that was *tomorrow!*

A slow creeping paralysis of horror twitched the muscles of my back.

If it affected me so sombrely, you may well imagine Powell's reaction. He slumped against the wall, shuddering, making dry, retching sounds in his throat, his eyes dilated.

He'd grabbed my arm, and I could feel the fingernails biting into my muscles.

"Get—get me out of here," he whispered hoarsely.

I got my shoulder under his armpit, and though he leaned on me, a dead-weight, I managed to assist him down the steps and into the car. I took the key-ring from his listless fingers, locked the door of the mausoleum, returned the keys to him, and lost no speed in getting out of the cemetery.

By the time we reached hime, he was able to get into the house by himself. But I could see that he was in a state of shock, as well he might be. Surely he had never expected to find that date inscribed on his waiting tomb? No, it was obvious by then, even to me, why he had gone to the cemetery in the first place.

To make sure that Sharon Powell—*was still there!*

He must believe that it was she motivating these unholy attacks on his nerves.

Quite apart from my natural scepticism, my puzzlement only increased.

Even if the dead *could walk*, why should Sharon Powell return to torture so maddeningly a husband she had loved, and who had loved her so dearly, if inarticulately?

For I remember again his last touching gesture of placing the pink camellia in her dead hand.

I saw Powell no more that afternoon, but Mrs. Giddings called me on the telephone from the main house late that night. She sounded worried, and my heart leaped jerkily.

"What is it now?" I asked.

But it wasn't what I had feared.

"Mr. Powell locked himself into the library when he returned this afternoon," Mrs. Giddings said, "and I think he's been drinking steadily ever since. He looked so odd when he came in that I'm—I'm afraid. You'd better come up here, Haines, and see if you can persuade him to go to bed."

"All right."

When I reached the house I rapped three times on the library door, as Mrs. Giddings hovered anxiously. But there was no response.

"I'll go around outside," I said, "and see if the window is open." I was afraid of what I might find in the library, and I wanted no fainting woman on my hands. "You'd better go to your room, Mrs. Giddings. Mr. Powell won't want you to see him in his present state."

She did as I asked immediately, glad enough to escape any possible unpleasantness.

The library window was open and, pushing up the sash, I threw my leg over the sill. I switched on a light, then breathed a sigh of relief. Powell had not harmed himself, as I had feared, for I'd known his demoralization to be complete. But he was safe enough.

He was sunk deep in a drunken stupor, sprawling in one of the leather chairs. He roused as he sensed someone in the room with him. He looked up glassy-eyed, starting a little from his chair, but evidently he recognized me at once, for he sank back, as if relieved.

"Mrs. Giddings thought I'd better come up and help you to bed," I'd said soothingly.

"I'm not going to bed." His speech was remarkably unslurred, considering the amount of liquor he must have downed. The empty bottles lying around gave testimony to that. "I'm afraid."

"Afraid?"

He put his finger alongside his nose, drunkenly elfin, and regarded me owlishly. "Haines, do the dead—walk?"

I was taken by surprise. "I—I don't think so." I realized then what I was saying, and added more forcefully, "I mean—of course, they don't. Certainly not!"

He was shaking his head in reproof. "You were right, Haines, the first time. They do. *I* know it. And I tell you, *I'm afraid!*"

I was carried back many years, to the time when my grandmother had died while I was a child, and I'd been afraid to sleep in the same house with her corpse, those three days before the funeral. I'd been reluctant to go to bed, and something of my fear must have penetrated to my mother. She'd said something then that I've always remembered, "It's only the living whom you must fear, Donnie. The dead will never hurt you."

Haltingly I repeated something of this sort now.

But Powell shook his head stubbornly. "But what if *you* had harmed the dead *first*?" He eyed me in drunken triumph, and then seemed to wilt and collapse at his own words. He gave a despairing cry and began to sob drunkenly. "I never thought—Haines, Haines, I did it!" The words poured out in the relief of confession. "I never thought she'd kill herself, as God is my judge! I only meant to drive her insane, that I might gain sole control of the estate. *I* planted the microphone in her room, misplaced her things, stole the brooch! But I swear I never intended to have her do what she did!"

He had driven her to her death? But I'd thought he had loved her! I shrank from him in disgust. It had only been a role he'd played, every move cunningly calculated for effect—yes, even to the pink camellia he'd placed in her waxen hand to disarm any possible suspicion, while in his heart he must have been exulting that she was gone and he was sole master at last!

But he was a sorry enough looking object now. And I found myself wondering who had suspected him from the first. Who was so shrewdly playing on *his* nerves now to drive him the way his wife had gone? It seemed unbelievable that these last forty-eight hours could so have disintegrated the suave Ballard Powell.

I felt myself softening unwillingly as I eyed him. The evil was done, and who was I to judge? Almost I could feel pity for the man, as one would for a crippled lizard, however loathsome.

So it was that I took it upon myself to say, "Perhaps it is only this house that is playing on your nerves. Why not leave here? Now. Tonight. Come, I'll drive you in to the apartment in town."

One last duty, and then I wanted to get away. Never wanted to see him again.

His eyes lost their fixed stare, as he tried to concentrate on my words. Then slowly his head began to nod in agreement. "Yes. That would be better. Perhaps—*she* won't be there."

Strange how he persisted in thinking it was the dead Sharon Powell behind all this!

For the first time I thought I really understood the meaning of that line—the guilty flee where none pursue.

As it was my suggestion that he go to the apartment, I suppose I could be held to blame for what followed. But I'm inclined to believe that it was inevitable.

The drive to town sobered Powell up considerably. It was after midnight by the time we'd drawn up before the co-operative apartment house on Lake Shore Drive, and he seemed almost his usual self. He didn't meet my eyes as he got out of the car, and I knew he was regretting already the impulsive confession he'd made to me. I had confirmation of this at once.

"If you'll come up with me, Haines, I'll write out a cheque for what is due you. Your services are no longer required."

I smiled contemptuously. I knew he was doing it for self-protection, already formulating cross-accusations if I should ever tell what I knew. Who would believe the story of a disgruntled chauffeur he'd been forced to discharge?

In silence we took the lift up to the penthouse floor.

The Powell studio apartment was small in point of number of rooms, but the rooms themselves were huge. The living-room was enormous, giving an effect of even greater spaciousness by virtue of the wall-to-wall eggshell-coloured carpeting that floored it. And the entire east wall was one huge studio window of glass, overlooking the park and lake far below.

Powell opened the door and switched on the lights. The room sprang from darkness, dramatically, like a stage setting. We froze where we were. I—I couldn't stand much more of this! Every light in the room was focused to bring out in sharp relief the thing that sprawled before the fireplace.

A coffin!

Bronze. Empty. Horribly suggestive in its very emptiness! As if it waited—patiently to be filled!

I swallowed dryness.

Something halfway between a groan and a sob tore through Ballard Powell's lips. Then silence, pregnant, brooding, while a cold, damp draught, as from a vault, swept the apartment.

But the terror was as nothing to the way Powell behaved.

He lifted his head, and began to speak, in a whisper indescribably eerie. "It's you, Sharon? You're here? You know now—that it was I?"

I edged away from him. Surely he had gone quite mad?

He cocked his head, as if listening. I listened, too, chilled to the marrow, dreading what might come.

And then I heard something. And God! I never want to hear anything like it again! A woman's voice began singing softly, huskily—

Nearer, My God To Thee!

Powell stared wildly at something over my shoulder. I wheeled. I don't know what—or who—he was watching. *I* saw nothing.

"No!" Powell screamed. He backed haltingly, his eyes insane, glaring at some nameless Dread. Then he turned from that oncoming thing, that ultimate horror. Turned and ran blindly straight down the room, leaped through the great window,

shattering it with a brittle, spilling, crashing crescendo of sound!

I saw the dark sky, the darker figure outlined momentarily against it. I ran towards the window, my hand outstretched, as if even yet it weren't too late for me to stop what had already happened.

I reached the window, leaned out gingerly. I was just in time to see Powell's body strike the ground thirty-six stories below. I still remember with awful clarity that it bounced a very little with the impact. But lifelessly. Like a dead tennis ball.

Then I was swallowing back the sickness in my throat. My dazed mind tried to encompass everything at once. The doctor. The police. The building superintendent. Someone must be called.

I started to run for the phone. And then I stopped. Uncertainly. Unwilling to believe.

To this day no one has ever known what it was that I saw in the centre of that vast expanse of carpeting. I could never bring myself to tell, could never bring myself really to believe the only way it might have got there.

I stooped and picked it up. Infinite in its pathos, grey as the ashes of a dead love. No thing of horror. No thing to make the hand recoil in fear.

Only a pink camellia, dropped there by—

What beckoning ghost?

A Witch's Curse

PAUL ERNST

This is a strange tale, of ancient beliefs—or misbeliefs if you will—projected into a twentieth-century setting; of bizarre happenings with never a tangible foundation of fact on which to rest the bewildered mind of the observer; of events that, it seems, could never occur outside the covers of those old hand-illuminated volumes dealing with "Black Magycke."

You may believe it or not. Frankly, the newspapers did not. There was in their uninspired columns no hint of anything beyond the realm of everyday happenings. Mrs. Boyd Barringer, wife of the last of that family of Barringers who had packed their Puritanical belongings and landed in New England long before the tea party—had suddenly and completely disappeared! Simple enough, the newspapers implied. A husband who was not too attentive, a secret admirer—and flights to parts unknown.

But in this implication the newspapers were wrong—or at least

only half right. Mrs. Barringer, granted, had departed for parts unknown. But it was not because of a too indifferent husband; nor was it due to one of those unfortunate love affairs that occasionally upset the most solidly established homes. There was a different reason from either of these behind her sudden disappearance—a reason that goes back two hundred and thirty years to the mysterious labour of an elderly woman who lived, and died with suddenness and violence, in Salem, Massachusetts.

To begin with, Boyd Barringer was not an indifferent husband. There never lived a man who loved more profoundly, nor who was more kindly attentive than he was to Clara Barringer, his wife. And she in her turn adored him too completely to gaze at another man with more than the casual glance of a stranger.

Their very marriage is proof of this love of theirs. For Clara, apprehensive of the curse that she felt was laid upon her, did not want to inflict sorrow on Boyd; and for months she held out against his urgent pleading that she be his wife. That he continued so to plead until he had won her in spite of her loving fears, and that she consented at last to his pleading in spite of every obstacle her harassed mind could set forth, indicates more than any other circumstance the depth of their affection for each other.

The scene in which Boyd had finally won over her unwillingness to risk bringing him harm was a stormy one in some respects.

"Clara," said Boyd, his hands closing over her round, firm arms rather cruelly and his eyes searching into hers, "Clara, is there someone else? Do you refuse me because there is another man before me in your heart?"

Clara hesitated before answering that question. Her eyes took in every detail of the man before her with a painful accuracy; for she firmly intended that they should never meet again, and she wanted a last mental picture of him to carry with her.

Boyd was rather tall, but his inclination towards heaviness took away from his height. Wide, thick shoulders sloped into a powerful neck. His features were purposeful, almost grim. A typical man of the business world, one would say, successful and commanding, with not too much sentiment or dreamy nonsense to hinder his path among the material things of life. But his eyes contradicted the rest of his appearance. Deep blue, they were, almost like a woman's in their tenderness and understanding. His eyes lent a softness to his firm mouth, and took away some of the harshness of his chin. A man of action with the eyes of a lover. It is small wonder that Clara should find it hard to utter the lie that was intended to drive him away.

Nevertheless, driving her rebellious tongue with her head instead of with her pleading heart, lie she did.

"You have guessed it," she said, looking straight into his eyes. "I love another man. That is why I can never marry you."

But Boyd had not been fooled. He had looked back into her own

eyes—those odd eyes of hers with the spindle-shaped, feline pupils—and he had smiled.

"You aren't telling me the truth, Clara. That's not the reason why you won't marry me. Are you still letting yourself think about that fantastic curse that's supposed to crop out in your family tree sometime? Would you actually let such an insane legend keep us apart when we want each other so badly?"

"It's not an insane legend!" Clara cried, a break in her words. "Look at me! Just look at me! Can't you see the seeds of fulfilment of that old prophecy in my eyes, in my head, in the very way I walk?" She began to weep, wildly, her shoulders shaking with incipient hysteria.

Boyd attempted to calm her, to humour her.

"Come now," he suggested, "let's assume that this two-hundred-year-old fable has some truth in it. Let us do it the honour of investigating it thoroughly so that our reason may kill it for ever. You are too intelligent to believe in such a fantastic old wives' tale without proof of some kind. Show me the proof, then, and tell me the whole history. And if, after I have heard it all, I still want you to marry me, you will, won't you? Say you will, dear."

"How can I answer?" whispered Clara. "Surely no one was ever in such a position before. But I will tell you the whole story now instead of the hints and snatches of it that I have allowed you to hear. Wait just a moment while I go up to the attic—there is an old trunk there with the documents and pictures relating to my family history."

"I'll go with you. There is a light up there? Good." And Boyd followed her up the flights of steps that ended under the gables of the old stone house—and in a discovery astounding enough, though of course utterly unbelievable.

The place in which a story is related has much to do with the inpression made by that story. In the full light of day, in some prosaic spot, Boyd would have laughed at the crazy tale, proof or no proof—as, indeed, he did next morning. But up there under the roof, in the dim light of a single small electric globe, he must have spent a most uncomfortable hour listening to Clara's incredible history of a feud that had endured for seven generations.

The big attic had been floored but never finished off further. Like square-hewn ribs the beams depended overhead, festooned with cobwebs, vague and uncertain in the illumination of the unshaded, dust-crusted light bulb. The place was cluttered with old chairs and tables with legs like tentacles in the shadowy darkness. An eerie spot, certainly, and almost too well fitted for Clara's words.

Several very old chests were in a far corner; and one of these Boyd dragged out under the light at Clara's request. After a

struggle with the rusty catches this was opened, revealing a miscellany of ancient garments, pictures, and yellowed papers.

"In 1692," Clara began dully, "a solitary old woman lived in a shack on the edge of Salem, Massachusetts. She was supposed to have a son somewhere, but no one knew for sure, and he never came to visit her. She kept herself alive by raising vegetables and selling them or trading them to the neighbouring townspeople.

"She must have been rather a repulsive-looking creature—very old and wrinkled, with a long chin and a long nose that almost met like pincers, due to her lack of teeth. She was not very clean, and her mind was a bit unhinged. But she did no one harm and was not herself molested; at least at the time my story begins.

"My mother's ancestors also lived in Salem—the Manfred Jones clan. There was, among other children of this family, a brooding, dark-haired little girl by the name of Emily—my own ancestress. Here is a picture of her as a small child."

Clara handed Boyd a miniature, rather dimmed by age, but cleverly done and quite legible. It was the picture of a girl of about eleven years; though the eyes, dark and intense, looked older. Boyd gazed at the picture with interest, then handed it back silently.

"The old woman I spoke of had often brought her vegetables to the Jones home, and she met Emily. She seemed immensely attracted to the little girl. But Emily, possibly because she was afraid, would never make up to her. So it was that one day when the old crone passed her hand longingly over Emily's fine dark hair, the girl squirmed out of her grasp, kicked and clawed at her like a little animal, and ran away. Then from a safe distance she proceeded to make faces at her and taunt her with her bent ugliness of age. It was a very regrettable thing, but, after all, it was natural in a child so young.

"From that one scene grew the shadow that has clung to my mother's family ever since. For the old woman hated the child from then on. And that hatred was mutual. Emily Jones went out of her way to invent pranks to play on the woman, and incited all her little friends to do the same. This, too, was regrettable, but it was something any child might do.

"It was in the early spring of that year that queer tales began to get around concerning the old lady. Farmers complained that cattle sickened when she looked in their direction. A neighbour of hers said that she had the Evil Eye. In short, all the stock tales of a witch's persecution were told on her. She began to be known as the Witch of Salem town. Everyone avoided her. No one bought or traded for her vegetables, and she was near to starving to death.

"The vague rumours concerning her might never have amounted to much. The most rabid period of the witch craze lasted only a year or so, you know. And she might have weathered the storm of the neighbourhood's disapproval and fear very easily—but for little Emily Jones.

"With an intelligence older than her eleven years, Emily took in all the talk concerning the old woman she hated with the petulance of childhood. And as she listened she remembered a sentence that the crone had flung after her when she was particularly annoyed at some prank the little girl had played on her:

" 'I'll turn you into a cat, Emily Jones! I'll turn you into a cat if you don't stop your nuisance! Folks say I'm a witch. Well—a witch can turn little girls into cats. And that's just what I'll do to you, Emily Jones!'

"That threat rankled in the girl's mind, and it ripened and grew until a thought flashed on her one day: Suppose she pretended that the witch really was turning her into a cat! What a joke that would be! How it would plague her!

"Old enough and intelligent enough to reason thus far, Emily was yet unable to go further and realize the extreme gravity of her plan. She was too young, of course, to understand the strength of the feeling that was gathering against the old hag.

"So the child put her scheme in motion. . . .

"She began, one evening, to crawl catlike under the tables and chairs, mewing and scratching with imaginary claws at her brothers and sisters. She licked her arms with her tongue and glared blankly about, imitating a cat with all the monkey cleverness a child has for imitations.

"Naturally the father, Manfred Jones, was astounded. More, he was as badly frightened as a grown man can be.

" 'Emily! Emily!' he cried, 'What in heaven's name possesses you? You act as though you were bewitched!'

" 'I am!' was the solemn answer. 'The old witch said she would turn me into a cat. And I can feel her doing it now!'

"Manfred Jones was an influential man. Also, in common with a great many other normally intelligent men, he believed in witchcraft. He took his little daughter's statement at face value and proceeded against the so-called witch with all the power at his command.

"In April of the year 1692 he urged action against the old lady in a public hearing presided over by six magistrates and four ministers of the gospel. So violent were his charges and so high was feeling running against the old woman that she was promptly 'cried out,' or accused formally of being a witch. Without further ceremony she was thrown into the crude town jail.

"And now the girl Emily was terrified at the consequences of her thoughtless prank. She told of the trick she had played. She pleaded that the old woman be released, swearing that she had made up the whole thing. But no one believed her. Solemnly it was judged that Emily's denials were a further proof of the witch's guilt: She had sent a demon to the child which impelled her to withdraw her charges!

"The jailer, an ignorant and superstitious man, furthered the

misfortune of the unhappy woman. He accused her of bewitching his stomach so that it was seized with violent cramps. And this absurd, utterly insane charge was the last straw. The people of Salem were now so frightened and angry that they visited the magistrates in a body and demanded that the witch be put to death.

"The magistrates obeyed the people's wish. They decreed that the witch be hanged.

"By some odd telepathy the crone had a premonition of her fate. At the moment when the death decree was signed, according to the jailer, she cried out and sank in a senseless heap to the floor of the cell. And then comes the strangest part of all. . . .

"When she regained consciousness she began to pace her cell like a maniac, shrieking and shaking her fists. 'They're going to hang me!' she shouted in her high, shrill voice. 'They're going to kill me! And it's the Jones brat that's the cause! She told them I said I'd change her into a cat. So they're going to hang me!'

"And it was at this point, the jailer said in his later account, that she stopped dead-still and raised her joined hands as though she were praying.

" 'They're killing me on the word of a child!' she said harshly. 'Very well—I'll be quit with the child! By all the devils in hell, by the stars in heaven's floor, by all the ghostly guards of that witchcraft of which I am accused, I'll do as the child charged. I *will* change her into a cat!'

"And there in that dimly lit cell the desperate old hag squatted on the dirt floor and closed her eyes and mumbled and whined to herself. And back in the Jones home, Emily, half sick with terror at the things she'd done, began to change under the very eyes of her amazed family! With every syllable the condemned witch uttered half a mile away, the girl jerked convulsively as though she had been struck.

"The pupils of her eyes quivered and shook, and finally became slitted and catlike. She began to crawl around the floor in dead earnest now, mewing and spitting. Actually a fine, almost imperceptible growth of hair, like fur, showed on her arms and the backs of her hands!

"We'll never know what dread thing would have happened—for action was swift in Massachusetts in 1692. The mob poured down to the jail with the death decree, burst open the doors and proceeded to hang the witch from a beam in her own cell.

"Just before the final moment she laughed, a high, empty, awful laugh. 'You've got me now,' she screamed. 'But I'll have my revenge! If I must wait till the seventh generation, I'll have revenge!'

"And then the end. She died with a curse on her lips against the family that had been the cause of her execution."

Clara shuddered and covered her face with her hands. And

Boyd, his own face ashen and his lips white and dry, drew her close to him.

"A mad, dangerous legend to let live," he whispered. "But, Clara—by heavens! Surely you aren't believing such a monstrous thing!"

"Our ancestors in Salem were strong, firm-minded, material men, Boyd. If so many of such men believed in witchcraft—were so desperately afraid of it that they took human life to protect themselves—it would indicate that there is actually something in the Black Art, wouldn't it?"

"Impossible!" said Boyd. But there was a shadow on his face that contradicted the spoken word.

"Anyway, there are proofs," said Clara drearily. "Awful proofs! Here are the records of the public hearing where the witch was cried out. And here is the death warrant. And here is the document of Manfred Jones." She handed him a packet of yellow papers, documents. "But here, Boyd, is the most conclusive proof of all—a picture of Emily Jones when she was a woman, years after the witch's curse."

Boyd was conscious of a shudder as he looked into the miniature that showed the girl Emily grown up.

With uncanny intuition the artist had caught at secret, hidden things in the sad face. The eyes, with their spindle-shaped, ominously slitted pupils; the odd set of the head; the hint of unnatural hair in the shading of the delicate upper lip; all breathed of unbelievable metamorphosis. Boyd suddenly covered the picture with his hand to shut out the queer eyes that seemed to live and stare at him.

"And my eyes, too, Boyd," Clara murmured, reading his thought. "They are the same. And I—am the seventh generation! The witch, with her last breath, said distinctly the seventh generation. And I am the seventh!"

"Clara, compose yourself, dear." Boyd's face was white but steady. "What you deduce, the thing you fear, is not possible. Let us laugh at this silly tale as it deserves, and forget it forever. Clara—will you marry me?"

"In spite of—of—"

"In spite of the legend? Of course. All the fairy-stories in the world couldn't change my love for you. Please!"

He held out his arms, and Clara, doubting and wondering still but tired to the death of bearing her heavy burden alone, crept close to him and gave her promise.

"Just one thing more," Boyd called out as he was leaving, "what was the name of that old witch of yours? I'd like to look her up and see from the records whether her son was mythical or a real being who left a family. It might help make our minds easy if I gather all the facts in the case."

"I'm not sure of her name," said Clara slowly. "The records I

have are contradictory there. The death decree named her Joan Byfield. But in the minutes of the public hearing she was written down as Joan Basfield. I don't know which is correct."

"Basfield!" cried Boyd, startled. "Basfield! Clara, tell me—is that spelled with one 's' or two?"

"Spelled with one 's,' " said Clara, wondering at his excitement. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh—nothing. If it is spelled with one 's,' or if it was Byfield, it couldn't be the same. But—the devil! It couldn't be the same in any event. The very idea is preposterous!"

"What are you talking of, Boyd?"

"Nothing, dear," said Boyd, refusing to meet her puzzled eyes. "Nothing. A foolish passing thought of mine, not worth mentioning."

Slowly he descended the steps, his head bent, his thoughts far away.

Life flowed smoothly for Boyd and Clara Barringer.

Realizing that setting is half the trouble of any chronic mind disorder, Boyd insisted on selling Clara's old stone house, putting the proceeds in trust for her, and shortly afterwards they moved down to New York.

The apprehension gradually faded from Clara's eyes—those eyes with the odd, slitted pupils—and she was a normal, loving wife. Boyd was content to believe that the fantasy that had festered in her brain since she was a girl, had faded from her consciousness forever. The aged documents treating with one Joan Basfield, or Byfield, witch, who went about transforming little girls into cats, had been burned in the furnace with all the ceremony the rite demanded; and the uncanny miniature of Emily Jones had accompanied the records into the fire.

Clara moved contentedly and prosaically about the handsome house Boyd had bought in New York. And, after two years, during which no shadow of her delusion had obtruded, Boyd felt that it was safe to make a request—a request he would certainly have made sooner had he not felt that trouble might result from a certain similarity of names.

"Clara," he said casually one evening, "we have plenty of room here. I wonder if you would mind very much if I had my Aunt Jane up for a long visit? She's quite old and helpless, alone in the world. Do you care if I invite her?"

Clara smiled. That Boyd was fond of his mother's sister she knew well. Quite often he had mentioned her. An old woman now, but still almost dismayingly clever, she lived alone with a few friends and few interests in life. She was devoted to her favourite nephew, Boyd. Clara wondered idly why he had never asked to have her visit them before; and she found herself eager to meet the woman who commanded her man's admiring respect and affection.

"I'll be glad to have her come for as long as she wants, dear," she assured him. "It's a pity for an old person to be alone as she is. Too bad she hasn't a nice old husband to share her life."

Boyd grinned. "I'm afraid the young men of her day and acquaintance were too much in awe of her to propose. She had rather a sharp tongue, I've been told, in addition to too many brains for the proper wife. And her temper was notorious. Even now she's a terror when anything angers or upsets her. Anyway, she never married."

"Well, I'll write and ask her at once, Boyd. What is her full name and address? If you've ever called her anything but just Aunt Jane I can't remember it."

This, under the circumstances, was a disturbing question, and Boyd had dreaded it in spite of two years of peace which had done so much to erase the childish bogy of the witch's curse from Clara's mind. As he answered he was very careful to seem carelessly offhand.

"Her name," he said lightly, "is Jane Evers Bassfield. The address is—why, Clara!"

He caught her as she swayed and seemed about to faint.

But Clara's surrender to old fears was over in a few moments.

"The names are so much alike," she explained later in the evening. "Joan Basfield the witch—and Jane Bassfield, your aunt. For an instant I was rather startled. I'm sorry to be such a fool, Boyd."

"I was afraid the name would bother you," Boyd confessed, "or I would have asked her here long ago. But now that you have cleared this last hurdle I think we can safely say that you are cured of your superstition—if you don't mind my calling a spade a spade."

When Jane Bassfield arrived in answer to her invitation, Clara was further reassured. Obviously she was a strong-minded, prideful old lady with her firm, projecting chin and arrogant nose. And her eyes were that cool grey that can be glacial in moments of anger. But her manner was warm and charming in the extreme.

"I've been dying to meet Boyd's wife for two years. But I couldn't very well come without being invited, and I was afraid you didn't want to be bothered with doddering old age. Show me the room you've picked for me, my dear, and come along and tell me how Boyd is treating you.. If he's a cruel husband I'll set the spirits on him!"

Boyd hastened to answer the perturbed question that instantly rose in Clara's eyes.

"She means that she'll disturb my morning coffee by ghostly rappings on the breakfast table," he laughed. "Aunt Jane is supposed to be psychic and everything."

"Are you—really?" asked Clara, gazing wide-eyed at the

vigorous old woman, and with that in her voice that made Boyd wince in alarm.

Jane Bassfield shrugged, the gesture seeming almost masculine.

"Who can say?" she evaded. "Everyone assures me so often that psychic phenomena are all faked that I'm beginning to believe it myself. But long ago I found that I could defend myself from ignorant and undesirable people by claiming that I was psychic. It became, and still is, a favourite threat of mine to 'set the spirits on' anyone who tries to cross me. Heavens, child, don't look at me like that! I won't bite you!"

She put her hand in a kindly way over Clara's cold fingers, seeming not to notice when the younger woman quickly drew away from her. "Come and show me your new house. You must be fearfully successful, Boyd, to buy such a tidy little mansion."

Two days after Jane Bassfield arrived, Clara's maid, Agnes, left the Barringer employ. She left in a panic at eleven o'clock at night, announcing her change of heart, packing her belongings, and fleeing out of the front gate all within one short half-hour.

To Clara she gave no explanation at all. To her good friend Beulah, the cook, she gave a reason of sorts, but it was so vague and unconvincing that it was worse than no reason.

"I don't see anything wrong with old Miss Bassfield," Beulah had said in answer to Agnes' statement that she was leaving because of Mr. Barringer's aunt. "She's awful strong-minded and kind of particular. But aside from that she's all right."

"Oh, Beulah, you should have seen what I saw just a few minutes ago. You'd march right down and say you were going to quit too!"

"What'd you see?"

"Well, you know I've been waiting on the old woman, kind of, since she got here. And Mrs. Barringer said it would be nice if I took her up a glass of hot milk. That was at half past ten, just a few minutes ago. Well, I heated some milk—you saw me—and took it up to her.

"I knocked on her door and didn't get an answer, so I just went in, thinking the old lady was asleep and that I'd put the milk on the stand near the bed for her when she woke up. But she wasn't asleep.

"I slipped in quiet and she didn't hear me, I guess. She was sitting straight up in bed with a night-cap on and just that little night-light going. And then—what I saw!"

"Well, what'd you see?" asked Beulah impatiently.

"Shadows!" said Agnes with a tensity that would have been absurd had it not been for the pallor of her face.

"What about the shadows?" Beulah urged her.

"She was sitting so the night-light threw a big shadow of her against the wall. And such a shadow! The end of her nose and the end of her chin almost came together. The night-cap looked like

a—a—I can't tell you just what, Beulah. All I can say is—she looked like an old witch!"

"Go on!" scoffed Beulah. "You a grown woman, saying such things!"

"But that wasn't the worst," said Agnes, unheeding the jeer. "There were other shadows sort of swimming around hers on the wall. They looked like shadows of nightmare animals all bowing and dancing around the shadow of her head with the nose and chin almost coming together. But then I looked at her and not at her shadow I couldn't see any shapes of animals around her. It was only the shadows I could see." Agnes stopped for breath.

"Then what?" prompted Beulah.

"Isn't that enough? The old lady saw me standing there all of a sudden, and she glared like she was going to jump at me. Her eyes were all whites, and she said, 'Get out, you!' And I got out. And I'm going to keep right on getting out, Beulah. I won't live in a place with anyone like that. Honest, I think she *is* a witch!"

Which met with the scorn it deserved. Beulah was a realistic soul, and she treated Agnes' raving with amused indifference. But she was, nevertheless, unable to persuade Agnes to change her mind and stay under the Barringer roof.

It was soon after this that Clara Barringer began to be troubled with insomnia. It was not the ordinary affair of being unable to go to sleep—it was a matter of being afraid to let herself sink into slumber: her dreams were so hideous! Just what these nightmares were she couldn't have said herself. She never remembered any of them. All she knew was they were utterly horrible and left her weak and shaken in the morning.

Boyd was more familiar with her nightmares than she herself was—he heard her mumbled, feverish whispering during the night only too often. And piecing the broken snatches of her sleep talk together, and viewing with alarm the delirious pattern the words produced, he went one day to a famous mind specialist. To him he told the story of the fantastic curse that haunted his wife, and he recounted the bits of sentences and phrases that voiced her terror in the nightmare-ridden night.

At the conclusion of the account the specialist pronounced the same opinion that Boyd himself had formed: his aunt, Jane Bassfield, must leave their home at once!

"For there is no doubt, my dear man, that the presence of your aunt and the odd coincidence of names have wrought up the feelings of your wife to a dangerous pitch. Really, I couldn't answer for her sanity if the disturbing element, Miss Bassfield, is not removed at once!"

"And you think she'll be herself again as soon as my aunt leaves?" Boyd's voice was shaken. To the doctor this was a most

interesting and intriguing case, but to Boyd it was the anguish of his beloved wife.

"I'm sure she'll be all right when your aunt leaves, Mr. Barringer."

Boyd hesitated an instant before putting his next question. He felt like a fool, but for the life of him he couldn't restrain it.

"Then there is no danger of—of this thing coming true? There is no chance that—?" He coloured with embarrassment.

"No danger that the lady will turn your wife into a cat?" The specialist's voice was as heavy with scorn as he dared make it, what with the size of the fee he had in mind as suitable for the Barringer purse. "Hardly, my dear fellow! That is a metamorphosis rather incompatible with the best customs of biology!"

"I know it sounds ridiculous," Boyd confessed. "But if you had seen my wife's eyes last night? Her eyes were always queerly catlike, and last night they were enormous, with glints of green and yellow—"

"Mr. Barringer, you will be my patient too if you don't watch your step. Use your reason, man! Just go out into the street here, and watch the motors and trolley cars go by, and to the accompaniment of that friendly din say to yourself a dozen times—I am afraid my aunt is going to change my wife into a cat! If that doesn't make you roar with cleansing laughter in about three seconds—you'd better come back here and take a few treatments yourself."

Jane Bassfield took Boyd's awkward attempts at mollifying explanation better than he had hoped she would. Indeed, she seemed almost to have suspected some such condition.

"I was afraid that Clara didn't like me," she sighed. "I have tried hard to be friends, but she seems almost to fear me. I'll go immediately, of course."

With Clara she seemed deeply sympathetic.

"I'm so sorry you haven't been feeling as well as usual. And I'm so sorry I have to leave you—some business matters at home that I must tend to at once."

But for one instant, just before train time, she and Clara were alone. And if Boyd could have heard and seen he would not have been so sure that the mere withdrawal of his aunt's presence would leave his wife as she had been before the visit.

With her eyes gleaming like cold fires, the grim old woman whispered one sentence to Clara. The words wiped the colour from the younger woman's face and sent the thick blood rushing to her brain. It confirmed her every dazed suspicion; and, indicating only one possible explanation to her mind, this sentence can be pointed to as the final seal of her fate.

"Distance won't stop me, Clara *Jones*, and you know it—you who also know the history of Joan Basfield!"

Boyd was vastly disappointed that day. He had hoped to the

last that he could reconcile his wife to the old lady; so it was most unfortunate that Clara had suddenly become too ill to accompany them to the train. . . .

Clara Barringer's illness, mentioned by the later newspaper accounts of her curious disappearance, persisted from this time on. In the course of the next month Boyd called often at the office of the specialist in mind disorders.

"Can it be that there is something physically wrong with her brain—tumour or bone pressure or something?" he asked the doctor once.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because she is suffering from the most frightful headaches. Her eyes have been tested and found excellent, so that this could not be the cause."

"What does Mrs. Barringer say about her headaches?" the doctor probed.

"She says they are due to—but what she says is so fanciful that it wouldn't help you any to know."

"Nevertheless, tell me what she says is the cause, please."

"Well then," answered Boyd, his eyes averted, "she says that it is due to the changing of the shape of her head. She says that her skull is gradually growing rounder and flatter—like a cat's!"

The doctor shook his head.

"I've never heard nor seen before so persistent a delusion," he mused. "But I'm afraid there is nothing we can do. Power of mind over matter, you know. She will probably continue to suffer from these headaches until we can cure her. If I could only see her!"

But this Boyd would not consent to.

"She becomes terribly angry if I even mention you," he confessed. "She simply would not see you or admit for one instant the chance that her mind is not quite right."

However, he was soon forced to accede and obey the doctor's request that he see his patient personally.

"Clara," he asked anxiously one day, "why do you walk so queerly, with your arms hung so? You are getting very round-shouldered."

Her voice was more disturbing in the hopeless calm of its answer than any wild hysteria would have been, and her words sent him rushing once again to the specialist's office.

"You know why, Boyd," she said. Just that and nothing more; no attempt to explain or to answer his words of protest.

"You must come and see for yourself, doctor," he pleaded later. "The time has arrived when we must do something drastic. This must stop!"

"Describe to me the way she walks, please."

"It is very hard to describe. About all I can say is that she walks almost like—like an animal! Her arms hang straight down before

her, and are drawn close together as though they were—were forelegs. She bends far over from the waist so that her hands are nearly on a level with her knees. And her stride itself has changed so that, while she seems to rise and fall as though on pads, she is yet more awkward."

"Quite in order with the cat delusion," pronounced the doctor. "I'll come this evening as a personal friend. Don't hint to her that I'm calling in a professional capacity."

The call was not productive. After talking with Clara Barringer and sounding her as deeply as he dared, the specialist admitted that he was rather undecided as to what to do next. And, as it is the custom to do in such cases, he advised consulting another specialist.

Writing a name and address on his card, he handed it to Boyd.

"Go and see this man," he suggested. "Your wife's case has passed beyond the confines of the mind and into the purely physical. A physician should see her at once, and this man is of the best. He is particularly well informed concerning bone ailments—and I think he will need all his knowledge to diagnose the trouble that has bent your wife's shoulders and rounded them so decidedly."

So another great specialist called at the Barringer home and examined Clara with microscopic care. This time the identity was admitted. Boyd did not attempt to pass the doctor off as a friend. Specimen blood was taken, and the specialist left in a noncommittal fog of silence to take his problem to the laboratory and pronounce sentence accordingly.

"Poor Boyd!" said Clara softly. "It's no use, dear. You might as well save us both grief and wasted time. No doctor can help me—unless he can go back two hundred years and save old Joan Basfield from a witch's death!"

"Clara, for God's sake—" At the look in her eyes, Boyd stopped helplessly.

The findings of the second specialist threw no scientific light on the subject of the malformation of Clara's back and shoulders.

"There is absolutely nothing wrong with Mrs. Barringer that I can lay my finger on with definite knowledge," he said. "Yet there is something decidedly wrong with the set of her shoulders and the curve of her spine."

Boyd eyed the doctor intently, sensing evasion.

"You are quite sure your laboratory tests revealed no unusual circumstance?" he insisted.

The doctor stroked his bearded chin.

"There was one perplexing discovery," he said uneasily. "However, I can only think it was the fault of the microscope. I have sent the instrument out to be inspected for lens flaws, and have submitted the slide I was studying to a professional laboratory for their opinion. But of course the error must lie in my microscope.

There could actually be no such blood corpuscles as the glass revealed."

"What was the matter?" Boyd's voice was strained.

"There were present, in the blood specimen I obtained, some corpuscles that were—I hardly know how to say it—"

"Not human?" Boyd suggested, biting his lips for self-control.

"Yes," said the doctor, staring, "exactly."

"Like a cat's?" Boyd's voice was unrecognizable.

"How in the world did you guess that, man?" cried the doctor.

Boyd told haltingly of the delusions from which Clara suffered.

"But she is mad!" said the doctor. "Utterly mad! She needs more than a physician, my friend. Forgive me for saying it, but she should be given the expert care of an institution for the mentally deranged."

"Your microscope findings?" Boyd said dully. "They prove—"

"They prove no such crack-brained thing as you suggest," interrupted the doctor. "In these days of highly artificial civilization humanity is rapidly succumbing to new diseases. Assuming my microscope is correct, I have merely been fortunate enough, from my standpoint at least, to be in a position to tabulate and announce a new medical discovery: that is all."

But it was not quite all. The worthy doctor was offered another profound scientific puzzle before a week had passed.

A fine, downy growth of hair was appearing on Clara Barringer's arms and body!

With detached excitement the doctor took several specimens and hastened to his microscope, which had been returned to him marked mechanically perfect. He examined the specimen intently. Then he phoned Boyd and asked him to come to his office at once.

"It is like no hair that I have ever seen before," he concluded. "It is not like hair at all. It is like—*fur!*"

Boyd was utterly beyond words. He merely nodded, with his eyes closed and his lips compressed. Still without a word he left the doctor's office and went directly to the railway station. . . .

Boyd's interview with his aunt, a hundred miles away, was not very satisfactory.

"Boyd, you are entirely insane! Clara's family history is correct. There was a Joan Basfield who was hanged for witchcraft in Salem in the year 1692. I will go further and admit that I am a direct descendant of that unfortunate woman—her son changed the name to Bassfield, with a double 's,' for reasons that are now unknown. But as for the preposterous bewitchment you are talking of—"

"So you are of the blood of Joan Basfield, the witch!" Boyd flung at her. "And this is the seventh generation! The seventh generation!" Then he leaned back, ashamed of his violence.

"You poor boy!" murmured Jane Bassfield without reproach.

"Go back to Clara. She needs you. And give her my sincerest love and sympathy."

On the train that bore him back, Boyd tried not to think of the shadow of a cold, unearthly smile that had seemed to tighten the corners of the old woman's lip. He had, of course, imagined this. He was imagining many things of late. . . .

At the door of his home he hesitated before admitting himself. He was imagining things again. It seemed to him as though a palpable aura of loathsome shadows hung over that house of his. But he was not left to stand long. Mary—the maid who had replaced Agnes—flung open the door and beckoned him in before he could insert his key in the lock. She had, it appeared, waited there for him, and her relief at his return was almost hysterical.

"Oh. Mr. Barringer, Mr. Barringer, something's the matter with your missus! Something's the matter—something—"

Boyd shook the girl roughly as her voice rose from key to key in overstrung distress. His hands, clutching at her arms more savagely than he knew, jerked her back to some control of herself.

"What is wrong?" he urged. "Tell me!"

"I don't know what it is. Something. She's in her room and won't let anyone come in. She's locked the door!"

"Why did she lock herself in?" Boyd was white-faced with a foreboding he would not admit to himself. "Was she ill?"

"No, not exactly. I can't say she was sick, hardly. Worse than that!" Mary wept noisily, fearfully.

"What was the matter, then? Tell me how she looked!"

"She looked awful, Mr. Barringer. I can hardly tell you. But less than an hour after you left she began to *change*. The hair on her arms and body that you went to see the doctor about got longer and thicker like it was growing under your very eyes. And she got—smaller!"

"Smaller? What are you talking about, Mary!"

"That's just what!" repeated Mary, her voice rising shrilly again. "She sort of shrivelled up. She sat down in the big chair in the library, and she fell asleep. I looked in at her when she was just dozing off, and again when she just woke up. And I saw all the change in her. And I say she was littler! She was a foot shorter when she got up than when she had sat down!"

"Mary—think what you're saying!" Boyd shook her again. "You don't mean to say such a thing. You were mistaken!"

"No I wasn't, either. She was really smaller. Her clothes hung loose all over her. And she was stooped more than I ever saw her before!"

"Then what?" prompted Boyd, licking his dry lips.

"Then's when she went to her room. All of a sudden she woke up. I was watching her. And she gave one look at herself in the big mirror in the hall. She screamed out like someone had stabbed her. And before I could say a word she turned and scuttled up the

stairs. She didn't run, Mr. Barringer—she *scuttled!* As she went her hands hung so low that they touched the stairs, and she seemed to help herself along with them, too, like an animal! And her eyes—"

Boyd waited to hear no more. Releasing the girl from his clutch so suddenly that she nearly fell, he turned and raced up the stairway to Clara's room. He did not stop to turn on the lights but ran down the dark hall with the certainty of long familiarity.

"Clara," he called, tapping on the panels of her door. No light showed from the slit under the door. Her room was in pitch darkness; and there was no answer to his call.

"Clara—it's Boyd. Open the door." Still there was no answer, no sound from the darkened room. He twisted at the knob, but the door was locked.

"Clara, can you hear me?" He pounded on the panels till the skin was knocked from his knuckles, though he did not feel the pain.

"I will have to break the door down," he said, speaking aloud and entirely unaware that he had so spoken.

There was a stir in the darkened room, a voice that he could hardly recognize as Clara's.

"Go away! Oh, please go away!"

"I must get in, Clara."

"No! No! Go away!" The voice was high and keen, almost metallic. It sounded more like a violin string that had been plucked too harshly than like a human voice.

"But, darling," soothed Boyd, "don't you see—if you're not well I'll have to call the doctor. You can't stay on in there by yourself. You must have some kind of attention."

"Boyd, no!"

"Won't you let me send Mary in to you if you don't want me?"

"No!"

"Clara, dear—please."

"No, Boyd, no! Oh, go away!"

Boyd called upon his will for a last effort.

"I'll break in if you don't unlock the door!"

"Boyd, you mustn't—"

With his shoulder aching and tingling from the shock, Boyd stepped through the splintered doorway and into the darkness of the room. The shades were tightly drawn, and this in addition to the natural gloom of a moonless night made the room like a pocket. He tried to penetrate the blackness with his eyes but could see nothing.

His hand groped along the wall for the light switch. The movement was arrested by the voice—the voice that was like and yet not like Clara's. At the sound of that voice his searching fingers seemed to coil in on themselves as though they had touched ice.

"Don't light the light! Oh, don't light the light! Whatever you do you mustn't touch the light!"

Boyd held his breath till his chest ached. The voice had come from low down—from almost the level of the floor!

What sight would meet his eyes if he flooded that room with light? What machination of Joan Basfield, dead two hundred and thirty years, would reveal itself? Better never to enter this room again, better never to look on his wife's face again, than stun his brain with the spectacle that intuition told him would confront his eyes!

But this was nonsense! Such things could not be! He would light the light so that he could go to Clara and soothe her out of her fears. Then—after she was well again—they would smile together at their fantastic terrors. His fingers sought along the wall for the switch.

"Don't! Don't!" the voice pleaded.

Out of the whirlpool of his mind Boyd clutched at one perplexing straw. It was a small thing, it seemed, to take up his thoughts at such a moment, but the wonder of it grew and grew.

"How—how do you know what I am doing?" he whispered at last. "It is too dark for you to see me. I can't see you."

"I see every move you make," said the voice. "I can see as well in this room as you can in daylight."

"But how? It is pitch-dark in here! How can you see?"

"Oh, Boyd," moaned the voice, "you know why I can see in the dark as well as in the light! You know!"

"I won't believe it," said Boyd hoarsely. "I tell you I won't believe it! I won't! I won't!"

Again his questing fingers fumbled for the light switch. "I'm going to turn on this light!"

"You mustn't, I say! You *must not*—"

There was a click and the room was flooded with light.

For a dozen eternities Boyd stood there in the doorway, staring with frightful eyes at a small, furry body that shuddered and huddled in the corner.

There was a soft patter of frantic paws. The supple, feline body flashed by him and out of the door with a scream that was almost human.

The Insistent Ghost

EMIL PETAJA

Seagulls, their bellies filled with herring spawn, halted their greedy peregrinations long enough to perch on Tessa Alder's faded sign, and not infrequently to add a brief comment to Tessa's corny but commercially sound device for luring tourists and townspeople into her little gift and book shop. Her beloved landlord would do nothing at all to relieve the peeled, dilapidated condition of the double-flat's façade (or indeed any other part of the house) so Tessa, with her usual delicate counterbalance of shrewd realism and affection for whimsy, painted the legend "YE OLDE GHOSTE SHOPPE" on an old piece of driftwood, and set it to swinging on the low brick wall in front of her window. Occasionally, when some young couple breathlessly asked her who haunted the shop and why, she would blandly improvise something appropriate.

Today, the sky having produced rain several times already, remained bleak and gusty and portentous. Inside the shop Tessa was giving her friend Verbena Smith tea.

"Artists sometimes take poison. Don't they, Verbena?" Tessa was asking, in her invariably mild sweet way.

As a matter of fact they had been discussing last night's film, a lavish musical. Verbena Smith smoothed down her lavender ruffles and smiled uncertainly. She wished Tessa would not ramble so. People frequently asked her if Tessa Alder wasn't just a little off her head, and Verbena's no was not always as convincing as it might be. But she did enjoy taking tea with Tessa, and going to the movies with her. Then, too, Tessa was *old*—Tessa was sixty-seven, while she was only sixty-one.

"More tea, darling?" Tessa asked, when Verbena, in her old maid's brown study, neglected to answer her.

Verbena shook her head and sipped from her egg-shell cup significantly. Tessa hummed as she reached behind the little coal stove for her own special earthen pot and poured herself a third cup. Verbena coughed to conceal her smile. Tessa was so odd. She would serve herself from that ugly earthen pot behind the stove, whereas guests were served from the pretty China pot with the cosy on it, the jaunty red and yellow cosy Verbena herself had knitted Tessa for Christmas. Well, it was likely her way of indicating that her guests were better than she was. Verbena was willing to accept this judgement.

The pursed grimace she put forth to camouflage all this mental

activity was intended to be a gracious smile. She would string along with Tessa's odd fancies, humour the poor thing.

"Sometimes they hang themselves," she tittered.

"Who—ah—oh, yes! What I meant, Verbena, is that artists are peculiar. They get so intense about their work, and then when their paintings don't sell and nobody even wants to look at them—" She tilted her dark eyebrows significantly.

Verbena smiled.

"I know who you're thinking about. You're thinking about the young man in the flat upstairs."

"Mr. Teufel. Perhaps. He *is* an artist—and come to think, I don't imagine he sells many paintings."

"He doesn't sell any," Verbena corrected. "We were discussing him only yesterday at the Ladies' Sewing and Bridge Club."

"Oh?"

"Mrs. Abernathy's husband knows all about him. He can't pay his rent. He can't pay for anything. He tried to get a loan from the bank, but Mr. Abernathy wouldn't give him one because of course he has no security. Imagine him trying to put up some of his outlandish pictures as security! Mr. Abernathy said if Mr. Heckle, the grocer, wants to be silly and exchange food for those ridiculous daubs of his, let him. As for Mrs. Abernathy's husband's *bank*—"

"Poor Mr. Teufel."

Tessa wagged her head and poured herself more tea.

"What I say is why doesn't he go to work? Oh, Tessa, there's another seagull on your sign."

"Let him," Tessa said recklessly. "What else are the dear ladies doing these days, Verbena?"

"Oh, they're doing some marvellous things for the community, Tessa. Our bazaar alone made enough to plant flowers all along the boardwalk over the city dump and keep the Bird Fanciers going for another year at least."

"Poor Mr. Teufel." Evidently Tessa's thoughts were jammed on an earlier track.

"Why do you keep saying that, Tessa?" Verbena found Tessa's vagueness very irritating. What she had really hoped from this tea was to acquire some new tidbit to dispense at the card party tonight. "Surely you must know something about Mr. Teufel by this time, something the rest of us don't. Something *definite*."

"I never eavesdrop," Tessa said.

"Of course not, but—" Verbena wiggled her cup impatiently.

"But I don't have to with Mr. Teufel. He has a phonograph and he plays it very loudly at all hours. And you can hear every footstep up there, the ceiling is so thin."

Verbena set her cup down and cocked an ear upwards. "I don't hear a thing."

"Mr. Teufel is sleeping."

"At three o'clock!"

"Mr. Teufel always sleeps 'til four. I imagine he paints better at night, although I always thought artists preferred sunlight to artificial light."

Verbena sniffed. "With the junk he paints I don't know what difference it makes. All great gobs of nasty colours with no pictures to them at *all*."

"Anyway I wish he'd paint in the daytime," Tessa sighed. "I have to put a pillow over my head to get to sleep, with all that clumping around and that wild music."

"Any visitors?" Verbena leaned forward. "Any *girl* visitors?"

"Not that I know of. I doubt if poor Mr. Teufel has any visitors at all."

"Oh." Verbena lost her gleam. She stood up briskly. "Well, dear, I must run along home and feed Poo."

"Your cat," Tessa said, without relish.

There was more chit-chat at the door, and out along the rococo veranda. Tessa watched her gossip-loving guest mince around the pools of water remaining in the sunken portions of the brick patio and destined for early refills. All at once came a great clatter of army surplus shoes over Tessa's head, down the open stairs leading to the upper flat. Lean Mr. Teufel swooped past Verbena so rapidly that Verbena's umbrella lost its moorings and went skittering and bobbing down the walk.

The artist's gaunt face lifted in the semblance of a smile when he retrieved and handed it back to her. Verbena emitted an explosive little shriek and drew back, as if Mr. Teufel had been a springing cobra.

Mr. Teufel scowled and said, "Boo!"

Verbena fled.

Mr. Teufel looked at Tessa and grinned. Tessa smiled politely, then went in the shop and poured herself another drink from the earthen pot.

After a while, sitting there and watching the day gradually droop and vanish, Tessa became quite tiddly. The sun made a last lavish gesture just before it dipped behind the Farallons. Its burst of brilliance highlighted Alcatraz and the populous hills of San Francisco, and put colour to the muddy masses of clouds that hemmed in the East Bay horizon. While this was everyday stuff to Tessa, she was not entirely oblivious to its spectacle, and now, when the brilliance was blotted out and the Bay presented the appearance of something shrouded and good as dead, she shivered. There were seagulls, many seagulls, wheeling ambiguously across the heavy sky. But they were like vultures, and the sound they made, like that last fling of sunlight, only intensified the melancholy assurance of death. . . .

Tessa started thinking about Herb.

It was time to start thinking about him.

She poured herself another cup of sherry from the earthen pot and let him take over her thoughts. He would anyway.

Thinking about her dead husband had its amusing aspects, when you came right down to it. Maybe that was why she allowed him to keep possession of her emotions and her thoughts now, even as he had while he was alive. Oh yes. Herb had been a greedy man that way. He had expected Tessa to give him first consideration in every instance, even in her most secret thoughts. In a way she had, too. And there was no reason to assume that Herb's character had undergone any change now that he was dead, even if his physical self had. No, Herb could never change. He would remain as cantankerous, as selfish, as vindictive as ever, until there was no more anything at all.

Of course she had loved him.

He was handsome, bold, amusing. He captured her fancy completely. It was later, years later, when these traits blossomed forth and enveloped her with what was apparently a studied desire to strangle her and crush her.

But Tessa didn't crush easily. For all her flights of whimsy, Tessa was an intensely practical woman. So practical as to drive Herb insane with rage at times. She refused to accept surface excuses and reasons, dissecting each one to its very core. She saw into Herb as if he were made of plastic, and after a while that made him hate her. He couldn't lie to her and foist off cheap excuses or third-class reasoning on her. She always saw what was underneath and indicated she did, in her calm sweet voice.

When his heart went bad—mainly from self-indulgence in spite of his doctor's stern periodic admonishments—he blamed Tessa. She should have stopped him. How she could have done this, particularly with a self-willed individual like himself, was something Herb never bothered to consider. He had to blame somebody, besides himself, so he blamed Tessa. He took it out on her both in petty vindictiveness, and by a constant stream of ill-temper that would surely have crushed and destroyed a less valiant creature than wiry little Tessa.

He lost his handsomeness. The lines in his face which had formerly suggested swaggering boldness turned to visual evidences of mean suspicion and lurking sadism. He couldn't work, so Tessa invested the little money he hadn't squandered or needed for doctors in "YE OLDE GHOSTE SHOPPE." She made it pay, too. Not much, to be sure, but enough to keep them independent, if she were very careful.

One thing association with Herb had done for Tessa—good or bad—it had given her a taste for sherry, even mediocre sherry. There were so many remembered times when it had proved a great solace. But after Herb became really ill, so ill that he could do nothing but sit in his chair and let Tessa wait on him hand and

foot while he raged and bellowed about the condition of the world and about Tessa's inadequacies, there was no more sherry. None for Herb. It would have killed him. None for her because Herb couldn't have any. They couldn't afford luxuries, to be sure, but a thimbleful of sherry now and then wouldn't have made much difference. But Herb said no, and it was folly to cross him.

Herb was a dog in the manger other ways, too. He didn't want Tessa to take a stroll down the breakwater, or go to the films, or have any friends. Every facet of her existence must belong to him.

Tessa wanted an occasional glass of sherry, she wanted to see Gregory Peck's latest, she wanted to hear Verbena's newest gossip. She wanted to very much. But Herb always provided logical (to him) reasons why she shouldn't have these things. And it was so much easier to let him have his way. It was easier to stay home and wait on him and listen to his invalid grumblings, because if she didn't Herb would surely make her pay for it—some way.

This insistence on revenge for disobedience was carried to fantastic lengths. Herb was very near-sighted, so near-sighted that he couldn't even read any longer. But he seemed to develop an uncanny second-sight about everything Tessa did. He had to know everything that went on, every tiny little thing. He distrusted all her actions. He would accuse Tessa of stinting him on cream for his gruel. She was saving it for herself—or for somebody who would slip in later. Then he would proceed to take it out on her. Always he must have his revenge, even when the reason for it existed only in his imagination.

Little things, surely. And yet little horrors, piled one on top of the other, *ad infinitum*, can lead to desperation. . . .

Tessa began to dream, and in all her dreams there was no Herb. He just wasn't there. And being essentially a practical person her dreams began to lean towards reality. Herb was near-sighted. For this reason and for selfish reasons he insisted on having a hodgepodge collection of items on a large round table near his chair. Besides his heart medicine, there was salt and catsup and mustard and picture books and a kaleidoscope—and any number of other things.

One day when Herb picked up a vinegar bottle and started spooning vinegar into the water glass Tessa had brought for his medicine, Tessa's dreams began to take definite shape. She knew about the other medicine bottle in the bathroom, the medicine which was not poison but would surely kill a person with a serious heart condition. And she knew just how to provoke Herb into waiting on himself when it came time for his medicine.

Tessa wouldn't kill Herb. Oh, no. But she would make it convenient for him to kill himself.

The dangerous medicine bottle found its way on to Herb's cluttered table. It became an interesting gamble to see just how long it

would be before Herb drank some of that, believing it to be his own medicine. Tessa invented excuses for being out of the room at medicine time, then peeked between the dining-room drapes behind Herb to see what happened. It was always a breathless moment. Then she would breathe a sigh of relief when Herb picked the good bottle. After several months the strained sigh of relief became just a sigh.

A year or so went by. It seemed longer. Tessa dreamed harder than ever. Not only would she be able to have her sherry again when Herb was gone, but there would be more money to afford it. During this long period of waiting and dreaming Tessa determined that *if* anything happened she would never stint herself. She would go to bed tiddly from sherry every night. She would!

It happened finally and she did.

Tessa put her cup down, regretfully, and prepared to shut up shop for the night. Humming snatches of old songs all mixed together, she took the "Open" sign out of the window, locked the shop door, and snapped off the light.

Outside the seagulls made patterns on the wind. The tide gushed in on the breakwater. Tessa's driftwood sign creaked gently. Tiny drops of vagrant rain smeared the darkness.

Tessa found her way to bed by feeling the walls, the drapes, the familiar jumble of too much furniture. She went to sleep like a baby. There was nothing to prevent her. No Herb, with his querulous rasp. No Mr. Teufel, with his wild phonograph music and his clumping. Mr. Teufel was out. And the contents of the earthen pot had made her all warm and cosy inside.

But that warmth wore off—and then something cold, something ice cold, entered the dark room. It was the room Tessa and Herb had shared for so many years. And now the coldness made her shiver and waken. She yawned and half sat up.

"Herb?" she called, after a long moment. "Is that you?"

There was no other sign—only the cold wind. But somehow she *knew*. All those years with him had given her a sixth sense where Herb was concerned. She could feel those muddy grey, half-blind eyes watching her as they had when he was alive. Crafty, suspicious, vindictive.

"Herb!" She was not afraid, no. But she was startled and uneasy. It wasn't nice of Herb to come back like this. Her voice cut the darkness sharply. "I know you're there, sitting in that same chair, just as you always did. Well? Why don't you answer me?"

Still no answer.

All the same she knew he was there in that big ugly chair of his. She meant to get rid of that chair right after the funeral, but somehow she hadn't got to it.

"Herb Alder! I know you're in this room! You might as well let me see you."

Her neck muscles twitched. She knew something strange was about to happen. It did happen. Even though this middle room was closed in so that there was no stray light from the outside at all she knew just where to look, and she was looking there. The chair began to glow. It was an untidy unrelated mass of phosphorescence, first, then it took shape and became Herb. She could still see the chair behind him, it was as if he were etched on plastic.

"Took you long enough," Tessa greeted him. "What are you up to? Oh, I see. You are back to spy on me, again. To keep track of everything I do, as you did before. Well, let me tell you, Herb. Last night I went to the films. With Verbena. Yes, and I've seen her nearly every day since you died. And I've been drinking sherry, too. Lots of sherry, Herb. Like you couldn't have and wouldn't let me have. How do you like that, Herb?"

The figure in the chair didn't like it. It clouded up redly and elongated, as if to reach out for her.

Tessa began to laugh.

"Trying to frighten me, are you? Let me tell you this, Herb. You never did scare me, with all your yelling and snarling. You didn't then and you don't now."

She paid no attention to the ghost's feral gyrations. She had always wanted to tell Herb off. Now that he was dead she could. She flared up in a flame of righteous triumph.

"I put up with you a long time, Herb. With your childish tantrums and your petty suspicions. And your little revenge when you thought I was neglecting you or slighting you. Well, I got my share of revenge too! Do you know how, Herb? Haven't they told you where you are?"

The ghostly figure rippled like so many phosphorescent sea-worms on a glassy night-ocean.

"Surprise, surprise, Herb!" Tessa chortled, nearly hysterical by now with this supreme adventure of telling Herb off. "It was I who killed you, Herb! It was *I* who put that bad medicine on your cluttered table. I had to wait a long time for you to pick that bottle. But the gamble kept me amused while I waited. What do you say to all that, Herb?"

Herb expressed himself by elongating almost to the ceiling. He made himself into a luminescent tower of rage. His lips moved and although no spoken words came out he seemed to be saying: *I suspected as much. That's why I came back. Now I know for certain and now. . . .*

"What can you do about it now, Herb?" Tessa taunted him. "What can you do?"

She fell back, rocking with laughter.

A faint wisp of light entered the room, a tenuous harbinger of daylight. A blast of freezing cold swept the room and just before Herb vanished, Tessa was sure she heard him rasp:

"I always have my revenge, Tessa. Make the most of your freedom, because you have only until tomorrow night. . . ."

Tessa lagged about her duties the next day. Try as she might she could never quite erase those words from her mind. Her head was fuzzy, too, from over-indulgence in the tea department the day before. She had been a fool to *tell* Herb she killed him! What a stupid thing to do! And now, typically, he wanted his revenge. That ugly rasped threat! *Tomorrow night. . . .*

He wasn't giving her much time, was he?

The more she thought about it the uneasier she became. She hadn't a very clear idea just what Herb could do to her, dead and all. But he would do something. Trust Herb. And it wouldn't be at all nice.

Her frugal lunch of cottage cheese and canned peaches was interrupted by the strident tinkle of the cat-bell over the shop door. She hurried out to the front.

"Can I help you?"

It was a young couple, happy honeymooners, trying to match their delirious mood in her quaint little shop, inasmuch as the lowering skies outside did not.

"Tell me, is the shop really haunted?" the girl twittered.

"Yes." Tessa frowned. It used to be rather fun, building up sham gothic romances for tourists. Not now.

"Really?" The new bride bubbled over. Her husband winked at her fondly.

"Who haunts it?" he asked Tessa.

"My husband."

"No!" The bride, fondling her new husband's lapel, assumed interest in the shelf nearest her to hide her smile. "Look, dear. Isn't this just the darlingest little Chinese elephant?"

"If you think so, sweet. Why does he haunt it?" The young man's lips twitched suspiciously.

"He wants revenge," Tessa found herself blurting. "He was murdered, and he's come back to—"

"Who murdered him?" The young man peeled off a dollar for the elephant.

Tessa took it, staring at him. "Nobody!" she snapped. "It's just a story!"

They left, the bride cooing about the quaintness of the shop and the darlingness of the driftwood sign and wasn't Tessa the cutest thing. Tessa picked up the nearest object to hand with the idea of hurling it after them. It turned out to be the earthen pot, and it wasn't quite empty. So she sank back in the chair by the window and had a slug.

Two more and she began to relax.

She must think, think, *think*. What did Herb have up his ghostly

sleeve, and how was she going to circumvent him? It was past one already. Not much time. . . .

Think fast, Tessa!

Something sifted into her thoughts, interrupting them. Music. Dirge-like music from upstairs. At this hour! Mr. Teufel was actually up at one-thirty, playing his blankety-blank phonograph. The dirge ended and was followed by some wild modern dissonances. Tessa couldn't help listening. After a while it struck her that there was some insidious pattern to Mr. Teufel's selection of music. It all suggested a particular train of emotion. And when a scratchy, banal interpretation of *Good-bye* began to smite her eardrums Tessa leaped to her feet.

By the time it repeated for the third time Tessa was upstairs peeking through the bamboo slats into Mr. Teufel's studio.

"Mr. Teufel, no!" she exclaimed. "You mustn't do that!"

The young artist was inside, busily engaged in hanging himself from the middle rafter.

Tessa banged on the door without result, so she whipped out her own door keys and tried them. One of them, with the added impetus of a severe inward push, sent her plunging through.

The studio was sizable but dreary. The bare floor made it ice cold, and the artist's furnishings consisted mainly of nail kegs and orange crates. Somehow the gay bohemian dash was utterly lacking. True, there was a half-completed oil on his easel, but the canvas had been slashed across as if in a spasm of despondent rage.

"You stop that right now," she told the emaciated young man on the nail keg. Mr. Teufel was endeavouring to thrust his head into an ill-made noose of clothes-line rope.

"Why should I?" he demanded, scowling down at her.

"For one thing you're not doing it right," Tessa told him. "Always put the noose around your neck first, then wrap the rope twice around the rafter, overloop, and—never mind!" she finished off tartly.

"*What are we waiting for, oh, my heart?*" queried the tenor dismally. ". . . *the leaves must fall, and the lambs must die. . . .*"

Tessa snapped him off. His voice deepened and mushed out and vanished. The artist stared at her sullenly, then collapsed his lanky frame to a sitting position on the keg. Tessa marched about the room briskly. Mr. Teufel's studio was an exact replica of her own bedroom, except for the lack of furniture and the rafters. Paint it up a little, apply a few rugs and pictures, and it would be livable.

Tessa turned her attention to the artist.

"You make an awful amount of noise nights," she reprimanded him. "Don't you realize you're supposed to sleep nights and work days?"

"Then why didn't you let me go through with it?" he demanded bitterly. "Suppose you go downstairs now and forget what you saw." He brightened perceptibly.

"That wouldn't help," Tessa said. "You need furniture. The place is like a barn."

"I need a lot of things—including talent." He got up and began to pace. The clump of his army surplus shoes on the bare floor was all too familiar, although easier to take here than downstairs. Pacing up and down was, then, one of the best things Mr. Teufel did. And his self-expressed lack of talent was the bone of contention.

"Who says you have no talent?" Tessa's sharp eyes travelled to a nearby corner, to a heap of canvases carelessly tossed therein. They, like the one on the easel, had been slashed across.

"Everybody says so," the artist growled irritably. "Yesterday was my last chance to prove to myself that I might someday be an artist, even a passable good artist. A critic from Paris was visiting San Francisco. All the others said I stink, but Charles Demeaux is notoriously aloof from them. He helped a friend of mine once, a nobody like me, just on the strength of what he saw in his paintings. My friend told him about me, and yesterday a letter came saying Charles Demeaux would see me if I could get over there yesterday, as he was leaving today. I waited until twelve-thirty last night in the rain, until he came home from the ballet. Demeaux was very kind. He fed me I don't know how many crepe suzettes and how many glasses of wine. But when it came to my paintings—"

"He didn't like them?"

A spasm of utter misery crossed the artist's gaunt face. "He didn't say it like that. He was too kind, too polite. But that's what it boiled down to. No talent. No expression. No future in art. Nothing!"

Mr. Teufel was plainly a man obsessed. His world had crumbled. Tessa made a tentative effort to cheer him up.

"There must be other critics. Maybe you are ahead of your time."

"They all pretend that." Mr. Teufel's lip curled. "Not me. At least I can be honest with myself. I'm no good. I never have been and I never will be."

"Of course I don't exactly understand—" Tessa said soothingly.

"No, you don't!" Mr. Teufel raged. "You don't know a damn thing about it, so why don't you get the hell out of here and leave me alone? Nobody understands anything! The world is full of sadistic morons who pretend to mean well. Bah! Bring on your atom bombs! The sooner the better!"

Tessa's sharp eyes widened, then closed.

"Well?" Mr. Teufel glared at her scornfully. "Aren't you going to go call the police or something?"

"Nope," Tessa said. "I've got a job for you."

Mr. Teufel's expression told her what he thought of work. Tessa just waited.

"Well, if I'm forced to delay my departure I guess I'll have to eat sometime. What kind of a job?"

"I want you to help me move some furniture. Yes, I'm giving it to you, Mr. Teufel—in return for a small favour."

Tessa slept well that night. She went to sleep brimming over with great satisfaction in having done a good deed. There was nothing, she told herself before Morpheus took over, quite as edifying to a human being as having performed a kindness for another human being.

Near dawn she woke with a start. The thought that awakened her was the illusion that she had missed her cue, that her alarm clock hadn't gone off, that she had left a dangerous heater burning all night. *Something*. . . .

And yet full consciousness assured her it was actually none of those things.

The springs creaked as she hiked herself up on the pillows. She cast her eyes about the darkness but she saw no shred of light anywhere. It was as if she had just missed hearing something.

"*Herb?*"

Her whisper vibrated into the dark, but there was no answer.

Then it came, a far-off sound like a sigh. Or was it only a seagull calling mournfully over the dark waters? Tessa chose to think it wasn't a seagull. She folded aside the covers and slid her legs down on the shag rug. Her feet groped for her sheepskin-lined slippers and invaded them. Without snapping on a light she found her robe and wrapped it around her. A habitual toss of her long black hair to unsnarl it from the collar and she went to the outside door.

She idled a second or two, listening to the swirling sucking noises the tide made as it drained away from the rocks, then she pattered to Mr. Teufel's door and listened.

She heard nothing.

She applied her key and pushed. . . .

There had been sounds in there, mysterious sounds, and movements. She could sense their aftermath. Now there was only darkness and the cold swirling of air, as if a grave had opened and closed.

"Mr. Teufel!" she called across the room.

She knew exactly where the bed was. She knew just where everything was, inasmuch as she had given Mr. Teufel most of this furniture and had helped him arrange it.

"Are you there, Mr. Teufel?"

Still no answer.

"*Herb?*"

Nothing.

Tessa took a deep breath and pulled the string that switched on the ceiling light. The room leaped harshly to life. Ah. There was Herb's big chair, which she had given Mr. Teufel. And by it was

Herb's old table, the one that used to be so cluttered. All there was on it now was an empty bottle.

There was no label on the bottle, none at all, but it looked like some kind of medicine Herb had taken at one time but which a normal heart could never stand. It was rather careless of Tessa not to have thrown it out, and to have scrupulously removed the label.

She didn't touch it. There would be fingerprints.

The bed was quite a mess, as if Mr. Teufel had threshed about in the throes of great misery—or under the hypnotic influence of some demanding spectre. But now that he was dead Mr. Teufel looked so calm, so peaceful, so happy with the world—or to be leaving it.

Tessa smiled there a moment, as at some teasing memory. Then she stepped softly out on the veranda and locked the door behind her. The sky was brighter now. There would be sun today, bright sun.

Tessa leaned on a rococo pillar and sighed. If Herb hadn't been quite so insistent on his revenge— Anyway, now he could rest in peace. And so could dear Mr. Teufel. He had been so definite about destroying himself, and who can stop a man from doing that if he has firmly made up his mind? And it was so much nicer than hanging himself, so neat. No bother for anybody.

Herb had followed his cue to perfection. His ironic revenge had consisted of forcing Tessa to drink medicine that would kill her, too. Only Herb couldn't know that Tessa had got Mr. Teufel to exchange flats with her this afternoon, and poor Herb was so nearsighted—

They Shall Rise

AUGUST W. DERLETH AND MARK SCHORER

Sometimes I have tried to tell this story, but I have always failed. Even when I knew that it was all over, when I found myself strapped on a cot in the university hospital, perfectly cognizant of my surroundings, with all those eager faces leaning towards me and Doctor Montague standing near me, urging me to speak, I could not. Thoughts and words were all a hopeless jumble, and I knew that what I was saying was but incoherent fragments of sentences, words without meaning. I *tried* to tell the story as it happened, and in my mind the whole thing was clear as day, but I could not say it. They thought I had lost my mind; for a while I, too, thought so. They gave me up as hopeless, in the end, and sent me home. They

did not understand that men sometimes come through experiences so horrible that they are unable ever after to speak coherently of them. The last of that experience is now six months away, and I am going to write what I have never been able to say.

Stan Elson and I were fourth year medics at the University of Wisconsin. One night last spring we had been working fairly late in a Science Hall laboratory, and when we had finished, Stan had gone out before me. It was raining. Just as I came out of the door and started running down the steps towards him, Stan was coming back up.

"Where the devil have you been, Valens?" he asked, as I came up to him. "Why didn't you say it'd take you a while yet; I've been standing here in the rain, thinking you were on my heels. I might just as well have been inside."

"It was the most extraordinary thing, Stan. I wasn't more than eighty feet behind you—but, by the way, you must have passed the old boy."

"Passed whom?"

"The old man who stopped me in the hall. I'd just turned the corner to take the stairs and almost ran into him; a tall, pasty-faced individual, dressed in old-fashioned clothes—long black frock coat, muffler, beaver hat; carried an old green umbrella. You must have seen him."

Elson shook his head. "I saw no one."

"That's strange. I would have sworn that he passed you."

"He might have been in the building," said Elson a little sharply.

I shook my head. "No, I don't think he was," I said.

I put up the collar of my slicker and turned to walk at Elson's side. We descended to the road and started up Langdon Street. The rain came down in sheets on the asphalt and ran along the gutters in swift streams. I said nothing, thinking of the stranger I had seen in the corridor. Finally my silence grated on Stan.

"Well, what about him?" he said almost irritably; "the man in the hall."

"Oh, nothing exactly," I answered. "Struck me as rather queer, that's all. Asked to look over the dissection laboratories, and mumbled something about his interest in anatomical fields. His face hit me, though—so damned white; looked like a Frosh who'd stumbled into a lab by accident."

Elson chuckled. "What'd you tell him?"

"Said I didn't have any authority; for all of me he could go ahead. He was very grateful, and went. I repeated that I couldn't be held responsible if he were found there. He only smirked and thanked me again. I didn't like the look of that fellow at all."

"I wouldn't hold his looks against him," said Elson. "That's something none of us has much choice about."

"I was thinking about something I read recently," I began. Then

I broke off and looked at Stan. "Have you read the *Cardinal* of late?"

Elson smiled. "Not since I was wearing the green, Valens. Why?"

"For the past few weeks it's been carrying some mighty odd articles. And I think that an old man, dressed in old-fashioned clothes, and carrying a green umbrella, was mixed up in most of them."

Elson stopped in the rain, grasping my arm abruptly. "Valens!" he exclaimed, "you don't mean those laboratory disturbances?"

"You've heard of them, then," I said. "There's been some strange talk."

"Those horrible things that started at Columbia, and spread to Harvard and Yale, and all the Eastern universities and colleges. And they've been hushed up considerably, too, if I'm any judge."

I nodded. "Yes. Two days ago they were at the University of Chicago, and at Northwestern, and at Illinois. Do you understand what that suggests?"

"Do you think—" began Elson, but I read his question and cut him off.

"Two were killed at Columbia, seven at Harvard, five at Yale, four at Princeton—need I go on? I know them all, and needless to say, I did not get most of my information from the papers because I *know* that most of it was suppressed. Friends have written me most of it. Forty-seven students—medics—have died from mysterious causes since the trouble began in the East. Found cold and distorted, and no sign on them as to how they might have been killed! I've been watching the thing. And that's not all—it's not only in this country, but for years—for years, it's been all over the world! In 1873, at the University of Edinburgh. In 1880 at Guy's in London. Not five years later in Vienna, then the Sorbonne, Heidelberg, Bonn—all over the Continent, in all the major institutions for medical research. And now it has come to America."

Elson broke in. "But what's behind it?"

"I don't know, I'm going to try to find out!"

We walked on in the rain, neither speaking. Then I began again, and I think I must have given away the repressed excitement I was feeling. "Do you know, Stan, I've seen that old man before, I think."

"Where?"

"I don't know. I haven't the remotest idea. But I'm going to look him up." I stopped suddenly, glancing abruptly at the row of houses along the street. I was about to say good-night to Elson, for we stood before the house in which I lived. Then I realized that I was without my notebook.

"Hell! Stan, I forgot my notebook."

"Don't need it tonight, do you?"

"I do. I've got to get up that back work. It's due tomorrow."

"Going back?"

"I'll have to, I'm afraid. Want to walk along?"

"Might as well. I haven't anything better to do."

We turned and started back up the wet street. The rain was still coming down. We had not gone far when we met two of our fellow-students who had been working in the laboratory when we had left it shortly before.

"Where to?" one of them asked.

"You didn't notice my notebook on my table, did you, Asham? I left it up there somewhere."

"Didn't see it. Everybody's gone now."

"Lab's not locked, is it?"

"Wasn't when we left. But we saw the janitor down the hall," said Dean, the younger of the two.

"We'll have to make it before he leaves," I said.

We went on up the street towards Science Hall, and Asham and Dean were lost in the rain.

"Suppose we'll meet your pale friend?" asked Elson.

"I don't know. The janitor has probably put him out if he's been wandering around the building in the fashion he was when I met him."

We mounted the stone steps leading up to Science Hall, and pulled open the heavy door. The dim hall lights of the building seemed to be the only ones burning. We started up the first of the five flights we had to climb, when, looking up suddenly, we saw the old man with the umbrella standing motionless before us.

"Hello!" I cried. "Find the laboratories all right?"

The fixed smile on the man's dead white face gave place to a frown. "No, no," he said in a soft voice. "I have changed my mind."

"We're going up now," offered Elson. "Don't you want to come up with us?"

"No, no. Thank you. I will return in the morning." He eyed us closely and brushed past down the stairs. His footsteps fell heavily, echoing in the stillness. Elson and I turned and followed him with our eyes.

"Funny way of walking," observed Elson.

"Like a machine," I suggested.

The retreating figure of the old man disappeared in the hall below. We heard the great outer door close after him.

"Well, let's go on," said Elson.

We had just started up the stairs again when a voice behind us called loudly, "Where to, boys?" Once more we turned. It was the janitor.

"Oh, I left my notebook in 500. I've got to have it. We were only going up to get it."

"Well, I'm just going up there to lock up. I'll go with you."

The janitor joined us, and we went slowly up the five flights of steps. At last we came to the door of Room 500. Asham and Dean, the last to leave, had apparently turned off the lights, for all was dark. But the door was unlocked, and for a moment I fancied I heard a stealthy movement within. Then I opened the door and turned on the lights.

For a minute I noticed nothing; then, abruptly, I stopped dead in my path across the room to my table, feeling the blood rush from my face.

"Stan! Mr. Brown!" I called, without moving.

The two came running into the room.

"My God!" cried Elson.

The janitor stood speechless, his mouth open.

There before us were four cadavers, propped into peculiarly life-like positions, stiff and rigid, their opened eyes staring glassily before them. One of them was seated, his dead fingers gripped tightly on the arms of the chair. Another leaned against the wall, his knees bent, as if he would fall in another moment. Yet he did not fall. The other two were perhaps the most horrible. They sat on the edge of a table, side by side, as students sit when resting from their work; but on the faces of these dead things were utterly shocking expressions—expressions not at all like those of people long dead, long preserved, but rather like those of people newly dead. Their lips were lifted above their teeth in frightful, unspeakably horrible leers.

The janitor was the first to find his voice. "This is Asham's idea of a good joke," he said.

"Nonsense!" I snapped. "No medical student would do anything like this. This is *not* our idea of a good joke. It's some outsider, someone else." And all the time I was thinking: this happened in Europe, in the East, at Illinois, Northwestern, Chicago. And now here. . . .

"I'm going to call Doctor Montague," said the janitor, making for the door. "You two wait," he called back.

Elson looked at me, incredulity on his face. "What does it mean?" he whispered.

I shook my head. "I don't know. But I do know that it wasn't Asham and Dean." I turned quickly from Elson and the scene before us, determined to forget the horrible suggestions that rushed into my mind.

Elson said, "It's lucky the 'stiff float' wasn't open. No telling what might have happened if it had been."

I nodded in agreement. A shudder of horror passed through my body at the thought. In a moment more the janitor was back in the room.

"This yours?" he asked curtly, picking up a notebook from my table. I went forward and took it from him. "Doctor Montague will

be down in a little while. You boys want to wait? If not, you can go."

"Let's go," suggested Elson hurriedly.

I pulled myself together. "Yes, I've got to finish this work tonight."

Together we left the room. Maddening thoughts pushed themselves into my mind.

Half of the four-hour laboratory period was over next morning before the whispered discussions of a *Cardinal* news-story about mysterious disturbances in Laboratory 500 during the previous night had died down. Finally, however, students were once more settling down to work. I was busy at my table, working at Stan's side, when suddenly I saw the door of the room slowly pushed open.

In the broad light of day now, we saw the old man with the umbrella and the pasty face. He was in the act of removing an antiquated beaver hat from his head. From behind square-rimmed spectacles, strange hollow eyes looked curiously into the room. He walked forward a few steps, somewhat uncertainly, moving his tall thin body with short, jerky steps, not unlike those of an automaton. Then suddenly he was speaking to the student nearest the door, in a strikingly repulsive and hollowly gelatinous sort of bass voice. "Would you be so kind as to direct me to Doctor Montague?"

The student to whom he had spoken whirled around on hearing his voice. He backed instinctively away before this strangely repellent man, this man who, though he looked to be fifty, yet gave forth an impression of much greater age, age that could not be put into convincing numbers. "Over there," murmured the student finally, pointing to Doctor Montague, who stood near the table at which I was working with Elson.

The old man approached the professor with the same short, uncertain steps. Doctor Montague looked up.

"You are Professor Montague? You are head of the courses in anatomy here at Wisconsin?"

What a peculiar accent! flashed into my mind.

"Yes, I am Doctor Montague," replied the professor.

"My name is Brock, Doctor Septimus Brock. My practice is in Scotland, though now I am touring your splendid country. As my interests are in medical research, I have naturally been seeking out those places in America which further such work." He indicated the laboratory with a sweep of his hand. "I wonder if it would be possible for me to examine your different laboratories?"

Professor Montague, who had been eyeing his visitor with undisguised curiosity, came to himself suddenly, saying, "Certainly, Doctor Brock; let me call a guard to show you around."

"Thank you, Professor."

Elson and I had been standing at our table listening intently to this short conversation. The sudden appearance of an assistant sent both of us quickly to work. Elson, however, who was by nature nervous, in turning so suddenly to his cadaver and attempting to resume his work casually, as if nothing had happened, quite accidentally severed the tongue in the head of his specimen.

Then something unaccountably strange occurred. The man with the umbrella, who had apparently observed the accident, jumped at once to Elson's side. He looked at him sharply and said in a cold voice, "You deface the dead!" There was a surprising malevolence in his glance, which escaped neither Elson nor me.

Elson, who was at once thoroughly upset, began to explain. "I'm sorry. I assure you, it was purely accidental."

Professor Montague, who had been observing as well, said with a casual gesture, "It's all right, Elson. Accidents will happen."

He turned to the man at his side, "Your comment about defacing the dead, Doctor Brock, seems to me somewhat strange coming from a medical man."

The old man pulled himself up and made a careless motion with the hand that gripped the green umbrella. "Of course, Doctor Montague. I am losing the scientific attitude, I fear. It seemed needlessly careless."

Doctor Montague nodded shortly. A guard had come forward at a motion from him. "Your guard, Doctor Brock. I hope you will find the laboratories of sufficient interest to justify your visit. Please order the guard about at your pleasure."

"Thank you, Doctor Montague. You are kind indeed," With that he turned to the guard and spoke to him in a voice that could not be overheard. But in a moment the guard was leading the way to the short corridor leading to a group of smaller laboratories.

Then, for the second time that morning, something strange happened.

It was Elson who first noticed it. "Look at Dean!" he whispered excitedly to me.

I looked up. Dean, a pale and very sensitive young man, stood staring at the approaching Doctor Brock, his eyes wide and fixed. It flashed into my mind that something had powerfully upset him, for I had seen him react to strong mental stimuli, hypnotic stimuli, before. Dean had evidently been at work, for he still held tightly to a large dissecting-knife. The doctor passed his table with the guard, never once looking at Dean; the student turned his whole body and continued to regard our visitor with that unnatural stare.

Then suddenly it happened. Dean's hand shot up, and, as if the arm had been loosed by a powerful spring, the knife went flying at the doctor's back. It lodged there, thudding against his back with a horrible dull sound. Dean screamed suddenly and collapsed limply in his chair.

Then his voice rang hysterically through the laboratory—"I

couldn't help it, I couldn't! I had to do it!" He put his head on his arms and began to sob wildly.

But strangest of all was the attitude of Doctor Brock. He turned calmly around, apparently not noticing the affected student nor the rest of us standing aghast. He reached behind him and drew away the knife just as Doctor Montague ran forward.

"What's wrong?"

Doctor Brock smiled his characteristic fixed smile. "Nothing at all," he said suavely. "Fortunately, it lodged in my clothing." He held the knife in his hand. It was as clean and spotless as it had been when Dean so suddenly threw it!

Doctor Montague took in the situation at a glance. "Buck up, Dean!" He clutched the student by the shoulder. "You'd better come along with me. Sorry this happened, Doctor Brock. I hope it hasn't disturbed you unduly."

"Not at all," replied the old man, and turned abruptly to the guard. "Shall we go on?"

Leaning on the professor's arm, Dean left the room, while Doctor Brock and his guard went on down the dorridor. There was an excited babble among the students.

Elson turned to me in great agitation. "My God, I thought Dean got him!"

"I'd have sworn that knife went six inches into his back!" I said, grasping Elson's wrist suddenly, holding it tight in my hand. I could feel myself trembling.

Turning simultaneously, we saw the guard unlocking the metal-barred door to the "stiff" room, where all the cadavers of the medical school lined the walls and floated in the great preserving-vat.

That night, at my request, Elson came to my room. I was sitting at my desk before a row of heavy medical books, a lamp with a green glass shade bent close to the open book through which I was leafing. Elson sat in a deep chair in the grey darkness at the side of my desk, lost almost entirely in shadows, his eyes watching me. I closed the book suddenly and turned to him. "I *know* I've seen him somewhere. If it's a picture I saw, I'm almost positive it's in one of my books. I haven't used the library at all this year, nor during most of the last."

I pulled another book down before me—an out-of-print medical encyclopaedia—and again went quickly through the pages.

"Got him," I said. "Come here, Stan."

Elson rose and came over to the desk. He leaned over my shoulder, and together we read: "Brock, Septimus Asa, M.D., born, 1823, Duncardin, Scotland. Unmarried. Educated at University of Edinburgh. Set up small practice there, and practised for about four years, during which time he wrote and published two small pamphlets and a monograph: *The Dead? How Shall We*

Regard Them; A Treatise on the Horror of Dissection; and *When the Soul Has Gone, Shall the Body Die?* These three works, especially the latter, though now out of print, were regarded as the product of a deranged mind, and after an examination, Doctor Brock was incarcerated in Denham Asylum for the Insane. From this asylum he disappeared in 1872, his disappearance being made doubly mysterious by the fact that he was at the time on his death-bed, and was certainly too weak to walk. He was never again heard from, and it is assumed that he met his death shortly after his miraculous escape. Doctor Brock's case is mentioned as one of the world's most startling disappearances."

Elson looked down at me. "What do you make of it?" he asked.

"I don't want to guess at it, but I think I'm beginning to see."

"This man with the green umbrella—"

"I have seen him before," I cut in, "or his picture. It was probably his picture. And I think it was in his monograph, *When the Soul Has Gone, Shall the Body Die?* which I think I have on file somewhere."

"Where?" asked Elson, interested now.

I motioned towards a file close to the wall in the darkness where he had been sitting, but I made no move to go towards it.

Elson said, "Why don't you get it?"

Suddenly, inexplicably, I shuddered. A most peculiar feeling came over me abruptly, an odd feeling of fear, of warning, telling me not to go on. I turned quickly to Stan, explaining that sudden sensation.

"Nonsense!" he cut in sharply. "Your imagination's working on your nerves, old man."

I came to my feet with an effort and went stiffly to the file. There I pulled open the top drawer, and my fingers began to go swiftly through the miscellaneous papers it contained. The monograph was not there, nor was it in the second. It was half hidden in the third drawer, where I found it only when I went over the papers a second time. I drew it out hurriedly and brought it over to the desk, putting it down in the green glow of the desk lamp.

On the cover under the title there was a dim, poorly reproduced picture of a man with square-rimmed glasses, and the man was terrifyingly like the doctor who had visited the laboratory that morning, was indeed the same man, if I were any judge. Yet that would place his age above one hundred years!

I sat down slowly, put out a hesitant hand, and turned the first two pages of the monograph. I was not eager to read what was printed therein. The text seemed to leap out at me, its first words flung across the page in heavy blackface. "*There is a use in life for bodies from which the soul has gone!*"

Elson laughed unconvincingly. "How awkwardly he points out their use for anatomical purpose!" he said.

I looked at him. "Do you think so, Stan?"

"Don't you?"

I closed the monograph suddenly; once again I shuddered. "No," I said. "I don't. I remember this thing now—very distinctly."

"Old man, I think something's the matter with you," said Elson quickly. "Do you think a shot of gin would do us any good? You're making me feel whatever it is you're feeling."

Impatiently, I brushed the suggestion aside. "A paper on the power of animation which certain little known aspects of black magic have over dead bodies. And there is something about ways in which the soul can be driven from a living body and the body kept animate." I was talking more to myself than to Elson, but suddenly, looking closely at my friend, I said, "Was he mad, do you think?"

"Mad as a hatter," said Elson quickly.

I went on, "He disappeared, they said, but he was never really found; they never recovered his body."

"No, no, not that," said Elson suddenly, his face revealing the feeling of terror suddenly gripping him. "The man could not be Brock. He'd be over a hundred years old. You don't know what you're suggesting."

But I was not listening. Could it be—was it possible that he had animated himself?

"Listen," I murmured abruptly, taking Stan's arm; "he wrote something about dead bodies rising against the living through the power of this weird hypnotic influence, great masses of dead rising."

Once more I turned to the monograph, leafing rapidly through it, stopping on the last page. " '*I shall return, and lay hands upon them, and they shall become animate. And they shall rise in great numbers, they shall rise up against those who have defaced them, against those who have defiled their bodies for other men. They shall rise against all the living, and weapons shall be powerless against them. And they shall sweep over all the earth, slaying and destroying, and I shall be their lord and master; for without me, without the power that shall emanate from me, they die and shall be for ever dead. O dead, look for the day! I shall come, and you shall rise against the living!*' "

Elson shook my arm almost roughly. "That's madness! It's the raving of a madman!"

I put my hands on the table to steady myself. Elson went on, urgently, "Let's drop this stuff, Valens. We've still got our notebooks to get up tonight, remember. We've set this night to finish the job."

I nodded. "Of course," I said. "I'd forgotten. We'd better hurry to the lab—it's almost nine now."

Elson was at the same time relieved and uneasy. I think he thought for a moment that I had let my nerves get the better of me,

and felt glad at the same time that he had kept his own imagination so well under control. Yet he was oddly uneasy about returning to the laboratory, that same laboratory where Doctor Septimus Brock had walked that morning. He shrugged his shoulders and said nothing, fearing, no doubt, that he would excite me again.

We entered the laboratory with some trepidation, though neither of us showed his uneasiness. We went to work immediately, and yet felt not in the least like working, nor did we work particularly rapidly. After a while, Elson leaned back and lit a cigarette.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Ten o'clock," I told him, looking at my watch.

"On this dissection of the heart, do you have—"

"Listen!" I said, breaking into his sentence. I had heard something.

"What's the matter?"

"Stan, didn't you hear a noise just then?"

"No."

"As if someone were talking, far away?"

"Not a thing. Valens, you'd better watch your nerves."

"Yes. That must be it." I shuddered.

Elson turned again to his notebook, keeping an eye on me still. "In this dissection of the heart," he began again, "do you have a cross of the left auricular—"

"Listen!" I said again, tense now, my body rigid in the chair.

There *was* a sound, and both of us heard it. And we were alone in the laboratory, alone on the floor. Someone was talking in a deep voice, but the voice seemed to come from a great distance, away on the campus perhaps, or in a vault below the buildings; yet there was a curiously terrifying quality in the deep tones coming to us in the sombre stillness. And there was an additional sound, a confused pattering, soft yet distinct, as if many people were running barefooted here and there on a hard floor.

"Do you hear it?" I asked quickly.

Elson nodded. "I hear it. But where is it? And what is it?"

I got up and walked slowly towards the door that opened on the locked and barred "stiff" room. I pressed my ear to the metal. Then as I turned to Elson I felt the blood drain from my face. My lips opened, trembling, eager to speak, but no sounds came. I had heard something within; those mysterious noises had come from behind the door to the "stiff" room. Elson came towards me, but I motioned him away. Abruptly I spoke in a horror-strangled voice, and I felt the grotesque impression I made on Stan. "It's in there—the stiffs—someone talking—walking on bare feet!"

I broke away from the door, breathing heavily.

Elson said, "We'll get the janitor. I'll get him. Someone ought to be here."

I shook my head. "No, no," I murmured. "No one else, Stan. No one would believe us, and besides, I think we can handle this better ourselves."

"What do you mean?"

"No one else knows about Doctor Brock and that monograph."

Elson made an uneasy movement with his head. "What shall we do?" he asked.

"We've got to get a look into that room—whatever it is in there must not see us, must not know we are here. That means we can't try the door."

"There's another dissecting-room upstairs, over the float. There's a panel in the floor. Perhaps we can look down through that?"

"Have you got a flashlight, Stan?"

"In my locker."

Elson went to his locker and brought out a pocket flashlight that he kept there. With this, we found our way through the now darkened hall of the building and up the wide stairs. The sounds we had heard in the laboratory were silent now, but when we had reached the floor above, when we had crossed the threshold of the dissecting-room and were standing directly above the float-room, we heard again the deep, eerie voice, but now the footsteps had stopped. I directed the light to the floor and moved it slowly to the centre of the room, and then, in the compass of the ray, we saw the panel. We walked silently over and came down on our knees beside it. The voice was clear now, and the more clear it became, the more weird it grew—a chillingly hollow voice, a voice of deep yet flat tones, thrilling us with horror. It was saying something we could not understand, and every now and then there would be answers in chorus.

I laid the flashlight on the floor and we pressed our ears to the panel. Still the words were not clear, yet some of them came: "... defiled, abused ... long have I been in coming ... but I am come ... others waited to feel my power calling to them again; once they, too, felt it, as you feel it ... now. Tonight you have tasted strength; you have tried your limbs and found them not wanting ... some have suspected, but they have died ... our purpose is lost if I am gone, for in me lies the power that will raise you to the heights."

"This is madness," murmured Elson, his face strained, white.

"Not madness," I whispered guardedly; "worse—sorcery, black sorcery!"

The droning voice below went on. "Over all Europe they have felt my touch ... they are waiting now for the call which I shall send out through space ... and they shall rise up in great numbers and destroy ... and death is powerless against them."

My fingers crept silently over the panel, seeking to push it open.

The crevice in the floor broadened into a slit-like opening. I opened it no more than six inches; then both of us bent our heads over the aperture. Excited babble came from below, and by the light of the flash reflected dimly from the surface of the stiff-float below, we saw a crowd of dripping nude bodies, leaning eagerly forward, pressing around a fully clothed man who stood in their midst. The man was Doctor Septimus Brock, and the others . . . those others . . . had until today been floating in the now empty vats!

"Get that light out!" I growled.

Elson's fingers closed on the flashlight; it slipped, thudded to the floor. In that instant, below us, the head of Septimus Brock was suddenly thrown back, glassy eyes staring upward, an arm half raised to shield his face. We drew back. *Had he seen us?*

The light was out now, and I quickly pushed the panel to. We rose and crept silently from the room, the flash throwing its ray before us as we went down the stairs, into our own laboratory, where we took our notebooks, and out into the street. Neither of us spoke until we were well up Langdon Street.

"I'm not sure," Elson said at last, "exactly what he's aiming at."

"Wait," I told him. "The pamphlet tells it. I'll show you."

In my room once more, I took up the monograph and turned to Elson. "His general theory is that he has a power which enables him to animate dead bodies for his own use, and against these bodies no ordinary weapon has any power. I feel that his is a hypnotic power self-induced with the aid of sorcery, of which he seems to have been a student. His intention is simply to organize the dead of the world—and what better place to recruit them than dissecting-laboratories?—but it is necessary for him first to establish contact with them, or else he can have no future power over them. That is why he has taken so long, so many years since his escape from the asylum. He is looking forward to the day when the dead shall rise against the living, sent into the world to destroy, through his power."

"But his motive?" demanded Elson. "He's mad, raving mad!"

"The motive is here, too," I went on, everything suddenly clear now, and my thoughts collected after that last tremendous shock in the laboratories. I read from the monograph: " 'Men have called me mad. Even now there are some who contemplate my incarceration in an asylum. I am fully aware of all this. I wait for it, for my revenge on society will be more terrible, more awful, with this injustice rankling in my breast. For I, Septimus Brock, have power to give life to the dead. I shall give them life, and there will come a day when they shall rise up against the society which has looked upon my work as that of a madman, against the society which has mutilated and defiled those who have died!' "

"My God!" Elson murmured in a strangled voice, clutching me

by the arm. "The way he looked at me yesterday when I cut out that tongue! The way he looked at me! . . ."

I was rudely awakened next morning by someone shaking me.

"Awake, Valens?" I heard.

I pulled myself up, yawning, and nodded.

It was Stan. He was speaking.

"Remember yesterday morning, Valens? . . . that guard . . . Septimus Brock?"

I nodded again, only half understanding. As I took the paper from Elson I saw that it was that morning's *Cardinal*. Stan had marked a small paragraph on an inner page, circling it in heavy black crayon:

> It is reported that Henry Petersen, a guard in the Science department, did not return home last night. Inquiries have brought no response. Anyone knowing of the possible whereabouts of Henry Petersen will please communicate at once with John Petersen, through the *Cardinal*.

Elson was looking at me inquiringly.

I said, hurriedly, "It was Petersen with Brock yesterday morning—Petersen went into the stiff-room with Brock. Did he come out?"

Elson shook his head. "I didn't see him."

"Nor I." I paused, took up the paper, and looked at it again. "And I didn't see Brock come out either," I added.

Elson fidgeted. "Valens, did we see people in the stiff-room last night? Or was it, do you think, our imagination?"

I looked at him. "What do *you* think?"

I jumped from my bed before he could answer, and began to dress, leaving Elson agape near the bureau.

I turned to him abruptly and said, "Listen, Stan, I'm not coming to lab this morning. I've got something else to do—something more important."

"May I know what it is?"

Should I tell Elson? I wondered. Then I said, "Only a silver bullet has any power against black magic, I understand." I was trying to speak matter-of-factly. "I am definitely curious to know how a silver bullet would affect Doctor Brock."

I was gone before Elson could say another word.

It was already quite late that night when I returned to my room and found the note that Elson had left for me. I took it up and read:

> Brock was in the lab again this morning. Doc Montague told me he had asked about us, asking especially about "that student who had cut the tongue yesterday." Call me when you come in.

I read the note a second time, musingly, my hand straying unconsciously to my coat pocket, caressing the revolver hidden there. Then I went to the telephone and called Elson's number. A strange voice answered me—certainly not Elson's.

"Is that Asham?" I ventured.

"Yes. Who's calling?"

"Valens. Where's Stan?"

"He went out after he got your note."

I started. "My note? What's that? Repeat that, Asham."

"I said he went out after he got your note. Just a minute."

There was a sound suggesting that Asham had left the telephone. What was this about a note from me? Good God, was it perhaps . . . I thought quickly of something I had heard in that half-real conversation from the stiff-room the night before—"Some have suspected—they have died!" But Asham was back, reading:

" 'Stan, come pronto to 500 Science Hall. I've struck something.'—Didn't you send that, Valens? There's a 'V' or something at the bottom, like a signature."

I said, "I always sign notes to Stan like that, but I sent him no note tonight. You're sure that came tonight?"

"Positive. Say, Valens, there's nothing wrong, is there? You know, Stan's been acting sort of queer, and I thought maybe—you know, a fellow can't help thinking, Valens."

I dropped the receiver, pushing the telephone away from me. There was no time to lose. Something had gone wrong. I ran from the house, and began to tear down Langdon Street towards Science Hall, rearing itself upward at its end.

The hall was dark, save for a faint illumination from the window of laboratory room number 500. I slunk silently into the building, paused to listen for sounds, and not hearing any, went softly along, up the stairs, one flight, two, holding my breath at each creak of the stairs. There was no light in the hall on the top floor. I paused uncertainly. Should I go on? There was no telling what I might encounter. The feeling of the revolver and the memory of the silver bullet reassured me. I went on.

A dark figure loomed up suddenly beside the door to room 500. For an instant I drew back, then came forward again. It was Elson. I went on, more quickly now.

"Stan," I whispered, "thank God you're all right! What's up?" Elson did not answer. He put his finger to his lips, signing for silence. I came up to him.

"Nothing the matter, is there?" I asked, suddenly suspicious once more.

Elson waved one hand before him for silence, still pressing his finger to his colourless lips. Terror suddenly possessed me. I slipped my hand into my pocket, feeling the revolver close to my skin. Elson's face was so white, his eyes so unnaturally glassy, expressionless, as if he were dazed from a horrible fright.

Then he put his hand suddenly on the knob of the door, indicating with his head that I should precede him. Still facing him, I edged through the partly open door. Then, just as I had crossed the threshold, I saw through Elson's half-parted lips, saw a cavity which brought to me abruptly a terrifying vision of a tongueless cadaver, and two fierce blazing eyes boring at Elson from beneath a shock of white hair and an old beaver hat. God, what had happened to Elson . . . his tongue?

Instantly warned, I whirled. Before me I saw what seemed to be an endless host of cadavers, and at their head a tall frock-coated figure—Doctor Brock. I understood. They had lured Elson here, to punish him for mutilating his cadaver, to set him up as an example for the rest of the world. . . . Then Elson was . . . not living . . . yet he walked! There was a slow movement towards me, the doctor smiling malevolently, hissing something at me. I felt what had been Elson advancing from behind, and in that moment I lunged forward, grasping the wrist of the living dead man before me. At the same instant I pulled the trigger in my pocket, saw in a fleeting glance a frozen expression of terror on that malignant dead face peering into my own, and, amid the sounds of falling bodies dinning into my semi-conscious ears, there rose the welcome sound of quick-running footsteps on the stairs beyond. Then I knew no more, save an overwhelming blackness that pressed upon me from all sides.

I opened my eyes on the grim face of Doctor Montague, bending over the bed to which I was strapped. My ears were hearing a voice, my own voice, coming from far away:

". . . lured him there, killed him . . . driving the soul from his body by their magic . . . Brock's black sorcery. . . . But now they shall never rise . . . never, that hellish throng . . . he is dead for ever."

I saw Doctor Montague's face grow anxious. His voice came, suddenly; he was speaking to someone else. "Give me the paper, please; I want to see whether there is any reaction."

I knew Doctor Montague, and I wanted to say, "Hello, Doc," but somehow I couldn't. They held a paper before me, but it did not register—it meant nothing to me. Again I heard my voice, clearer now, strained, trying to tell them coherently what had happened. I thought I spoke clearly enough, but I must only have babbled nonsense. Yet—did I?

There were four days in that hospital, four days during which my brain burned with the knowledge it possessed, a knowledge that my tongue could not release despite my awful desire to tell them everything. At last they sent me home.

Even now they say I am mad; yet they have never made an attempt to explain what happened. Nor have the papers. The cadavers were disturbed, said the papers; but surely they must have

seen that all the cadavers had been taken from the "stiff" room by someone, that they had been standing in 500 before they were found collapsed on the floor? Surely they must have seen this? And why did they not explain the finding of the corpse of Henry Petersen, stripped of its clothing, among those others? They told of the finding of Stan's body, of the cutting away of his tongue. How they had been killed, they did not know. There were no signs of external injury.

Asham had pursued me, and found me there, the papers said; I was raving incoherently, in my hand a revolver from which one chamber had been emptied, and in one of the tables a silver bullet had been found embedded. Why did no one guess at the significance of the silver bullet?

And why did they touch so lightly on the most damning facts of all? *The distinct brownish dust on the floor near me, the odour of age-old decay, the fragments of old clothes, of a pair of antiquated square spectacles, and the remains of an old umbrella; and finally that conclusive evidence in my own hand, clenched tightly even in my delirium, the wrist and hand bones which were too old to have come from the laboratory itself!*

The Wolf-Girl of Josselin

ARLTON EADIE

"Art is long, but life is short—and I'm as hungry as the proverbial wolf. If you intended to remain much longer perched up there on that bleak hillside, I'd better see if I can get hold of a tent or something, so that we can camp here permanently!"

My sarcasm was entirely wasted, for it fell upon ears that were, for the time being, deaf. Alan Grantham did not even trouble to glance in my direction. He sat, a dim figure amid the bracken, crouched over his sketching-easel, oblivious of everything save the gorgeous hues of the lingering sunset which he was recording on the canvas before him with feverish but deft strokes of his brush.

Now, artistic enthusiasm is all very well in its way—I can be a bit of an enthusiast myself at a fitting time and place—but I'm afraid I'm not made of the right sort of stuff to indulge in scenic raptures at the end of a long and tiring day in the open air. Even a struggling landscape painter needs food occasionally, and I was hungry as well as tired. Alan and I had been on our way back to the little inn where we had taken up our quarters, when my chum had caught sight of the three conical-roofed towers of the distant

Château de Josselin starkly outlined against the yellow and crimson of the dying sun. Nothing would satisfy him but that he should get out his traps and make a sketch of it right away.

Thinking that he merely intended to "rough in" a lightning impression with a few broad touches, I had consented. But as the vivid hues of the sunset had become more intense, Alan had become more engrossed, the sketch had become more elaborated —and I had become more famished and impatient to discover what our good hostess had prepared for supper. Moreover, it was at least five kilometres back to the inn, and the muddy country lanes were none too pleasant to traverse in the dark.

My temper was very near the fraying-point as I knocked my pipe out against the stone on which I was seated, and rose to my feet.

"Are—you—coming—home?" I roared in a voice which awoke the echoes of the surrounding hills.

This time he condescended to look round.

"In a minute," he called back. "It's nearly finished."

"You don't say so!" I returned ironically. "But for heaven's sake don't rush your precious picture out of consideration for me. Why not wait another few minutes?—then you'll be able to dash in a moon and a few stars and call the thing a nocturne!"

My friend cut short any further badinage by wiping his palette and brushes and thrusting them into his paint-box. In a few seconds he had rejoined me on the narrow road, carrying the still wet canvas in his hand.

"You won't begrudge your wait when you see this picture," he laughed confidently as he held it up for my inspection.

"I'll admire your daub by daylight," I told him shortly. "Not being a cat, or an owl, or a mole, I'm not proficient at seeing in the dark—which reminds me that we'll need all our powers of vision to find our way back to Josselin. The night threatens to be as black as a wolf's mouth when the last streak of your wonderful sunset has vanished. We had better put our best foot forward or we shall have Madame Boussac sending out search-parties, thinking we have been carried off by the *Ankou*, the divinity of death which is popularly supposed to wander around the hills and forests at night."

"Or been devoured by the ghoul pack," Alan suggested with a smiling nod.

The name had a sinister sound, but I had never heard of it before. I asked Alan what it meant, but he shook his head.

"Oh, just one of the local superstitions," he shrugged. "The Breton peasantry is one of the most morbidly superstitious races of Europe, and the legend of the ghoul pack is one of their cheery little bedtime stories. I heard some old peasants swapping yarns about it round the fire in the common room at the inn. I could only catch a word here and there, for they spoke in the Breton dialect.

What I did manage to pick up sounded pretty ghastly—though it was all nonsense, of course. If the people hereabouts believe a tenth part of their own folklore—well, all I can say is that they must live in a constant state of terror after nightfall!"

"They are an honest and kindly folk," my sense of justice caused me to assert, "though their mentality is a bit on the primitive side."

"You're dead right there," Alan cried with hearty conviction. "For all their veneer of Christianity, the natives of Brittany are pagan to the backbone. They have their wayside shrines and Calvaries, it is true, but they also have their prehistoric Druidical megaliths and dolmens, rude masses of unshaped stone around which queer rites are sometimes enacted on moonlight nights when the parish priest is comfortably snoring in bed. All their superstitions and practices are purely pagan, and some of them date back to the dawn of the very earliest form of civilization. Their firm belief in *loup-garous*, or werewolves, is but another form of the lycanthropy of the ancient Greeks. It's curious, by the way, how widespread this particular tradition is. One finds it occurring in Norway, Russia, France, Bavaria—all over Europe, in fact—and in addition we find variants of the legend in Asia, India, Africa and South America. Considering the universality of the belief that human beings are capable of assuming the forms of wild animals, one might be tempted to suspect that there may possibly be a grain of truth in—"

"What's that?" I cried, suddenly stopping dead and pointing.

At this point the road threaded its devious way through a dense forest of towering fir trees. High above our heads the interlacing branches and heavy foliage overhung on either side, shutting out the dim light which still lingered in the rapidly darkening sky, so that our path lay like a faint grey ribbon hemmed in by a sea of impenetrable shadows. In the wall of blackness which lay to the left of the road, at a distance of only a few yards from where we stood, I had caught a glimpse of two eyes which gleamed with the lambent reddish glow that could only emanate from the luminous gaze of some night-prowling beast of prey.

"Look—the eyes!" My voice was jerky with excitement as I grasped my companion's arm.

"Where?" he demanded, gazing everywhere but in the right direction.

"There!" But even as I spoke, the luminous points were abruptly obscured.

Alan Grantham turned and gave me a queer look.

"My dear boy, you're dreaming! I can't see a thing that bears the faintest resemblance to an eye. You've been thinking about your supper so much that you've gone light-headed," he chaffed gaily. "Are you sure it was eyes you saw, and not a couple of ghostly mince-pies?"

His sceptical laugh rang out, cheery and confident. But the next instant it was cut short with the abruptness of a switched radio transmission.

"Holy mackerel!" he muttered under his breath.

A dim grey shape had emerged from the tangled undergrowth which bordered the road and was slowly crossing it slantwise to the shadows on the farther side. So closely did the creature's neutral colouring blend with the surface of the ground that it was difficult to distinguish its actual shape in that faint light. We sensed, rather than actually saw, that it was long and lean, with a pointed muzzle and upstanding ears.

Neither of us spoke until the thing had crossed the road with silent, unhurried steps and disappeared in the bushes on the other side. Then:

"It's only a dog," Alan muttered with what sounded like a sigh of relief. "Whew! the brute gave me quite a scare."

I let his remark pass without comment, though I was more than a little dubious about its correctness. My fleeting glimpse of the creature had brought to my mind thoughts unpleasantly reminiscent of the frequency with which the wolf occurs in the folk-legends of the district.

"Yes, it was a large Alsatian dog," my friend repeated. "Must have strayed from some near-by farm."

I knew well enough that there was not a single house or cottage nearer than the village of Josselin, some five kilometres distant, but I didn't feel in the humour to waste time in arguing the point.

"Let's be getting along," I said.

"Still thinking about your supper?" laughed Alan.

But he was wrong. The prospect of enjoying my own long-delayed meal had suddenly taken a secondary position in my thoughts in face of an uneasy apprehension that the creature skulking in the bushes might have hopes and designs of making its supper off me! I was prepared to wager everything I possessed that the thing I had seen was no dog. If it was a wolf—well, I had heard that wolves usually hunted their prey in packs, and if my supposition were correct we would soon have a very definite and convincing confirmation of the fact.

Until that night one of the greatest attractions of Brittany lay in the fact that the majority of its towns and villages are well off the beaten track of tourists. Josselin, for instance, the village which we had made our headquarters, did not even boast of a single-track railway connection with the outer world, and it was rare indeed for a stranger to be seen traversing its cobbled streets. Just at that moment, however, I would not have minded if whole train-loads of Cook's globe-trotters had been flocking around. But, except for ourselves, the road was destitute of a living soul. And it seemed likely to remain so, for it led nowhere in particular, terminating as it did on the summit of a neighbouring hill on which stood a

gigantic megalith bearing the designation, the "Devil's Tombstone."

We had proceeded about a quarter of a mile towards the village, and I was just beginning to hope that my forebodings had been groundless, when the sound of a faint, long-drawn howl, coming apparently from the very depths of the forest, caused us to quicken our pace.

"Your bow-wow seems to have a pal handy!" I remarked, giving Alan a mirthless grin. "Several pals, in fact," I added, as the call was answered from various directions. "Perhaps he's calling in his canine brothers and sisters to come and be patted on the back by two benighted artists!"

"Don't talk like an ass!" he retorted, "Anyone would think that you don't believe that they *are* dogs."

"Frankly, I don't," I told him bluntly.

"Of course they're dogs," he answered impatiently. "Dogs howl occasionally, don't they?"

"Yes—occasionally. But wolves always do so—especially when they're calling the pack together for a hunt."

"And whom do you imagine they are going to hunt?" he jeered.

"Us!" I answered grimly. "I don't know what you intend to do, but I'm going to run for the village as fast as I can. What is more, I'm going to dump my easel and paint-box right here in the ditch, so that I can travel faster."

Alan gave a stubborn grunt, as he shook his head.

"What!—run from a few stray curs—"

He got no further, for at that moment a pandemonium of snarling and howling broke out behind us. Round the bend of the road came a pack of a dozen or so unmistakable wolves. The hunt was up, and we were the quarry!

On they came, with muzzles held close to the track we had traversed. Their eyes gleamed redly as they caught the wan rays of the rising moon, and their long, lean bodies stretched in an easy lope which carried them over the ground at an amazing rate. My heart turned to lead as I watched their swift progress. We might as well have tried to outdistance an express train as hope to escape that tireless four-footed horde by the fleetness of our own feet.

"No use running for it," I rapped out. "You'll only exhaust yourself needlessly. If we could find a tree—"

I gazed about me in the hope of finding one up which we could scramble. In vain I looked. The tall, straight trunks offered not the slightest foothold; their jutting branches were hopelessly out of reach.

Still, with our backs against something solid, we might put up some show of resistance against the ravening pack. A large tree trunk—a stone—or—

My eyes, sweeping the hillside in one last despairing search,

caught sight of the outline of something which showed a pallid grey in the moonlight. It was the menhir which crowned the hill-top—the solitary mass of unhewn stone known as the Devil's Tombstone. If we could reach it and clamber up its rough surface, we might contrive to hold the creatures at bay until the dawn drove them back to their lairs in the depths of the woods.

"Up, up!" I pointed wildly as I began to mount the slope. "The Devil's Tombstone—it's our only chance of life!"

Then followed a nightmare scramble through briars and bracken, over slippery moss-grown stones and shifting gravel where every upward spring brought down a clattering avalanche of small stones. There was not the slightest semblance of a path, and at any moment we might have found our way blocked by an impassable wall of rock.

I dared not stop to glance behind me, but I heard the chorus of deep-throated growls and yelps which broke from the pack as we quitted the road and dashed up the hill.

Yet, although we must have been in full view by this time, the wolves did not make straight towards us by the nearest route. True to the instinct of countless generations, their tactics were the tactics of the pack. Hunting by scent rather than by sight, they followed our trail to the very spot where we had left the road, before they commenced to gallop up the hill after us.

Well it was for us that they took the longer route. Had the wolf intelligence been capable of understanding the truth of the twelfth proposition of Euclid, that any two sides of a triangle are greater than the third, they would surely have cut off our retreat. Even as it was, the race seemed fated to end in disaster. A bare dozen yards separated us from the foremost of the pack as we leapt the last of the stunted bushes and began to tear across the clearing which surrounded the ancient pillar of stone.

With a sense of relief which almost amounted to elation I noted that the weatherworn sides of the monolith, though steep, showed signs of fissures which might afford sufficient foothold to enable us to reach its summit, where—for a time, at any rate—we should be safe.

"One more spurt!" I gasped out breathlessly. "Hurrah! We'll fool the greedy brutes of their supper yet—"

My triumphant shout ended in a groan of dismay. Another wolf—a creature of huge proportions—had emerged from the shadow of the Devil's Tombstone, and was advancing straight towards us!

Even in that moment of horrified surprise I was struck by the splendid aspect of the beast—though I would have appreciated its points better had a row of stout iron bars intervened between it and me. Although the animal was much larger than I had hitherto thought any wolf could be, it was not its mere bulk that called forth my unwilling admiration. Its coat was sleek and glossy, its

body plump and well-nourished, and in its eyes there was an expression of understanding almost human. In contrast to the mangy, lean-ribbed, half-famished pack at our heels, the enormous creature stood out like an immaculate dandy amid a concourse of tattered outcasts.

All this passed through my mind in a fraction of the time it takes to tell. I realized it was a time for quick action, though I was at a loss to understand what possible form of action I could take. The only article in my possession resembling a weapon was a short knife with a pliant steel blade, which I used for scraping the paint off my palette. Its point was so blunt and rounded that I usually carried it loose in my pocket; yet it was better than my bare hands in the encounter which now seemed inevitable.

I pulled the knife from my pocket as I ran, wrapping my scarf round my right hand as some protection from the fangs of the advancing beast. Then, with the courage born of despair, I charged straight down on the wolf which stood between us and our stony refuge.

To my utmost surprise, the brute swerved aside and avoided us, leaving a clear path to the monolith!

On we raced with undiminished speed, scarcely daring to believe in our good fortune. A few moments later we had scrambled to the top of the ancient stone and lay, panting and exhausted, a good ten feet beyond the reach of the howling and yelping pack below.

Then ensued the most amazing episode of that eventful night. The lone grey wolf, instead of joining the others in their attempts to scale the rock, at once made a savage attack on the rest of the pack. Crouching back on its haunches, with hackles bristling and fangs bared, it suddenly straightened out its splendid body and, with a loud, menacing growl, hurled itself like a thunderbolt of living bone and sinew, straight into their midst.

I held my breath, expecting to see the courageous creature torn to pieces before my eyes. It was one attacking twelve—odds desperate enough to daunt the bravest thing that breathed. Yet the very fury of its onslaught seemed to strike terror to the hearts of the attacked. For a few moments I had a confused vision of a maelstrom of writhing bodies and snapping jaws; then, with what sounded like a simultaneous howl of terror, the whole pack turned tail and raced madly for the shelter of the trees, closely pursued by the solitary but indomitable champion that had routed them.

A breathless cheer burst from our lips as pursued and pursuer vanished into the brushwood.

"Well, Brer Wolf has certainly done us a good turn this time," Alan remarked with a laugh that was slightly unsteady. "I suppose it really *was* a wolf?" he added, glancing at me dubiously.

"What else?" I shrugged.

"It seemed too intelligent, too civilized, if you understand what I

mean. It seemed to understand our position and our danger at the first glance, and to do the best thing possible to help us. Now, if it had been a dog, I could understand such a display of friendly intelligence, but—good Lord! who's this?"

Following the direction of his startled gaze I beheld a sight which filled my mind with wonder. From the very spot where the wolf pack had vanished into the forest a few minutes before, the figure of a tall, slender girl was emerging into the open.

I thought that the events of the night had well nigh exhausted my capacity for feeling emotion, but now I felt my scalp prickling with horror as I realized how narrowly that fair form and shapely limbs had escaped being torn and mangled.

"If the pack had scented her—" I began.

"She does not know her own peril!" Alan broke in as he began to lower himself to the ground. "We must warn her. Come along—you can talk the Breton *patois* better than I."

Very much against my inclinations and better judgment, I found myself climbing down the rock which I had ascended so thankfully a short time since. Alan laughed as he noted the reluctance of my movements.

"Don't funk it," he chaffed. "There's not a single wolf in sight, and I hope you're not going to let yourself be outdone in daring by a mere slip of a girl."

"What business has a mere slip of a girl to be wandering about the woods at this hour of the night?" I grumbled as I reached the ground.

"That's what I want you to ask her, you sap. Gad!" he muttered under his breath, "what a perfect model for a woodland nymph!"

Fancying that I could detect a note of something warmer than mere artistic appreciation in my chum's exclamation, I looked with greater interest at the approaching girl.

I felt my breath catch in my throat as we came face to face in the moonlight. The general standard of beauty among the natives of Brittany is high indeed, but in the girl who stood before me the very pinnacle of flawless perfection seemed to have been reached.

Her features—but how can I describe that which transcends all description? Mere words seem futile and meaningless when applied to that radiant creature who confronted us out of the mystery of the night. Her loveliness seemed more than human—and most assuredly none of it was due to the "art which conceals art" in the estimation of the feminine mind. Her blonde hair waved in a profuse disorder of natural curls over her brow and neck. Her smooth skin was deeply tanned by exposure to the wind and sun. Her cheap cotton frock would have seemed a mere rag but for the superb lines of the figure beneath. Her shapely legs were bare to the knees; her feet innocent of even the wooden *sabots* which the

poorest of peasants usually wear. She seemed more like some dryad of the woods than a mundane peasant-girl.

For some reason—possibly it was the memory of my own recent fears—her very calmness irritated me.

"What are you doing here?" I cried as sharply as my halting Breton would allow. "Don't you know that there are wolves about?"

To my surprise she answered in the purest French:

"Assuredly, *m'sieu*, there are wolves. Have I not just now"—she hesitated—"have I not heard them howling? And you—you did not climb the Devil's Tombstone just to admire the view, *hein?*"

Her self-assurance staggered me. I concluded that she must either be very brave or very stupid. Yet she seemed to have all her wits about her, even to the extent of enjoying some secret joke at my expense. I was in the act of formulating a retort which would convey a rebuke with the requisite amount of dignity, when Alan forestalled me.

"You speak French?" he cried with a boyish laugh. "That's great! I was fearing that I should be left right out of this conversation. Come now, confess. Weren't you horribly frightened when those wolves passed you in the wood yonder?"

She shook her head proudly, almost fiercely.

"I did not fear—for myself."

Alan Grantham smiled.

"But you were just a little nervous on our account? It was very good of you to take such an interest in our safety, but don't you think that your attitude of mind was a little illogical? We were on the top of the high stone, you know, while you were on the ground, at the mercy of the brutes. There was one great wolf in particular, who fought the others and drove them away. Maybe you saw it—rather a fine-looking creature."

"You think so?" she gave a quick smile, almost as though she had misunderstood his meaning and applied the compliment to herself. "Yes, I know the animal you mean. But I am not afraid of it, *mais non!* It will not harm me—or you."

"You seem mighty well acquainted with the nature of the beast," I put in with a sour grin. "How can you possibly tell whom it will hurt and whom it will not?"

The girl lifted her shoulders in a little careless shrug.

"*Calmez-vous, m'sieu.* I know because I know. There are wolves and wolves"—her red lips rippled back in a smile, so that her white, even teeth gleamed in the moonlight—"just as there are men—and men. And," she added as if by an afterthought, "there are women and women, some dangerous, some not; some merciful to save, others eager to destroy." She broke off abruptly and turned on her heel. "Come, it grows very late. I will show you a near way through the woods back to Josselin."

"Through the woods!" Alan echoed in amazement. "The wolves—"

She swung round with a sudden gesture of impatience.

"Have I not said that they will not harm you?" she cried, fixing her dark eyes on my friend's face. "The pack is leagues away by now—"

"But the great grey wolf?" Alan asked softly.

The girl's gaze faltered and dropped. She hastily swung round, so that her face was hidden.

"Are you coming, or not?" she flung the words over her shoulder.

"I'm certainly not going to allow you to go through those woods by yourself!" my chum declared stoutly.

"*Allons!* Let us go."

She slipped her arm through his with the same lack of self-consciousness that a cat exhibits when jumping on one's knee to be caressed, and together they started to walk across the open space towards the wood. I followed in no very enviable frame of mind.

The whole affair was much too mysterious for my liking. I smiled grimly to myself as I wondered if my light-hearted chum would have been as willing to trust himself to her guidance if the unknown girl had been a toothless hag with a face like a wrinkled walnut!

We reached the village of Josselin without further incident. The wolves had vanished as completely as if such an animal had never existed on the face of the earth. The death-like silence of the great forest was broken only by the scrunching of our feet over the dead leaves and fir-cones which strewed the path.

Alan and the unknown girl led the way, talking gaily and incessantly. I have not the faintest idea of what was the subject of their conversation, but I guessed it wasn't politics. I didn't listen. I had other things to think about as I trudged in the rear, searching the shadows on either side for the first sign of those accursed wolves. I could scarcely persuade myself that we should get back to the inn without another encounter until I saw the turrets of the ancient Château de Josselin loomed near at hand.

Our mysterious guide left us at the entrance to the village, a fact for which I was deeply thankful, for I was in no mood to try to explain to our gossipy hostess things which I had so far failed to comprehend myself. I noticed, however, that the girl's parting salutation was a gay "*Au revoir*" to Alan; to me she merely vouchsafed a cold "*Bon soir*."

"Maybe you'll be seeing the young demoiselle again soon?" I asked when we had gained our room without overmuch explanations.

Alan nodded, a somewhat guilty flush overspreading his rather handsome features.

"Tomorrow," he admitted; then: "I say, isn't she wonderful!"

"Oh, yes, she's wonderful all right," was my somewhat dry rejoinder. "But who is she?"

"Her name's Corinne and she lives here in the village."

"Very explanatory! But what on earth was she doing alone in the middle of that wood?"

Alan laughed.

"I don't know—and I don't care. I only thank my lucky stars that she did happen to be there."

"Otherwise you might be dead by now?" I queried.

"No," he shook his head with a smile which gave him away completely. "Otherwise I might never have met Corinne."

He uttered the name in such a tone as to convince me that there was nothing more to be said. Seeing that my young friend was suffering from a bad attack of love at first sight, I did the only thing possible. I turned over and went to sleep.

The next morning I retrieved my painting materials from where I had dumped them during our hurried flight, and resumed work on my picture. But Alan apparently had other fish to fry. He did some work, it is true, in a desultory sort of way, but most of his time was taken up by the fascinating young lady who was not afraid of wolves.

It does not take much to set tongues wagging in an out-of-the-way, dead-and-alive place like Josselin; in a week the love affair of the handsome young English artist was the talk of the village. If ever a man was head over heels in love, that man was Alan Grantham. I was scarcely surprised, therefore, when, just ten days after our midnight adventure, he announced his forthcoming marriage and asked me to act as his best man.

You don't need to send out wedding invitations in Brittany. The notary draws up the marriage contract and spreads the good news, and the able-bodied inhabitants of the village rally round as a matter of course to wish the couple every joy and to mop up all the free eats and drinks that may be going. The number of guests who thus invite themselves is a fair criterion of the degree of esteem in which the bride and groom are held. I confess that I was rather curious to see how many would show up at this particular festivity, for I had somehow gathered the impression that the fair Corinne was not exactly popular in the village. The other young people seemed to shun her.

The Breton peasantry may be much the same as other folks in their own family circles, but to strangers—especially to foreigners like us—they are taciturn and suspicious. The most garrulous individual in the place was, strangely enough, the very man who one would think was likely to be able to keep a still tongue in his head. For he was a Government official, the public notary, the man who—with the possible exception of the village priest—was most

conversant with the family history and affairs of those around him.

Nicolas Didier was, naturally, a man of some education, and even culture of a superficial sort. He had, he was careful to inform me early in our acquaintance, studied law at Paris in his younger days, and from chance remarks which he let fall from time to time I gathered that he considered himself a cut above the simple-minded villagers—which was probably the reason why he sought the company of Alan and me whenever he could find an excuse for doing so. I came to the conclusion that he was a man of some ability, who had been side-tracked into a paltry but assured Government post amid surroundings which he found particularly irksome.

He called at the inn on the night before the wedding, to get some particulars about the bridegroom which were to be embodied in the marriage contract. Alan, as usual, was out, but I was able to supply the necessary information.

His business completed, the old man seemed in no hurry to take his departure. He sat talking about inconsequent subjects, his beady eyes straying from time to time to the sideboard on which stood the goodly array of bottles which Alan had laid in for the approaching festivity. I took the silent hint and drew the cork of one of the oldest vintages.

"Come," I said, "a glass of wine in which to pledge long life to the happy pair."

I poured out a generous measure and he drained it with relish, with a little neatly-turned oration which was evidently a stock speech that he had used on many previous similar occasions.

"I very seldom indulge in alcoholic liquor, *monsieur*," he wound up, "but on such an auspicious occasion—" He twiddled the stem of his glass between his lean fingers and gazed dreamily at the bottle.

Now, when a man starts emphasizing his extreme moderation, I have usually found him quite able and willing to drink his share, and maybe a bit over.

"It's a pity to cork such good liquor up again," I said, taking up the bottle. "Do me the honour of joining me in another glass."

"The honour is mine, *m'sieur*," he assured me, a flush coming into his parchment-like features as he sipped the rich amber liquid. "The village of Josselin is honoured too, I am sure, that your esteemed friend should have chosen his consort from its daughters. But the excellent Monsieur Grantham is a stranger from across the sea. He does not know—has never heard of our peculiar legends and—er—traditions. It is not everyone who would choose his bride from the women of Josselin!"

His manner, no less than the words themselves, caused me to stare at him across the lamplit table. Moved by a sudden impulse, I pushed the bottle, still three-quarters full, towards him.

"Help yourself, *mon ami*." When he had obeyed with alacrity I

continued in as casual a voice as I could assume: "Ah, so your village has its legends, *hein*?"

He paused to empty his glass before replying.

"Legends?" His voice had a sardonic ring that conveyed a world of meaning. "*Ma foi!* we have more than legends! Strange things have happened here—not in the remote past, but recently, mark you!—strange things, the meaning of which has been debated by learned societies in solemn conclave; things about which eminent professors have written books—weighty volumes—in their vain effort to solve their meaning. Tell me, *mon cher monsieur*, have you never heard of *The Barking Women of Josselin*?"

Dimly, very dimly, I was conscious of a faint inner stir in the recesses of my memory. I *had* heard or read those words before. But where? and in what connection? My brain was humming with a hundred half-formed doubts and suspicions as I turned again to the old lawyer.

"Tell me more about these women who bark."

"You want the legend"—his shrewd eyes narrowed—"or the truth?"

"Let's have the legend first."

Maitre Didier refilled his glass and settled himself more comfortably in his chair.

"Very well, *m'sieur*. Like most tales of its kind, it dates back a long way. I've traced it back two hundred years, but it probably originated much earlier. Once upon a time (you perceive, do you not, that it begins like the usual fairy-tale?) a beggar-woman passed through the village of Josselin. She was clothed in rags, hungry, weary and footsore, and in a fold of her tattered shawl she carried a little baby boy—her son."

"Who was she?" I asked, but the old man shrugged his narrow shoulders as he reached for the bottle.

"One version of the legend says that she was a witch, a powerful enchantress; another version credits her with being no less a personage than the Blessed Mother of God, and the babe her Divine Son. You can believe either—or neither—as you please. But both versions are in agreement as to what followed. The women of the village were down by the riverside, as you may see them any fine day even now, washing their family linen in the stream. The wandering stranger begged them to give her food and shelter, showing them her blistered and bleeding feet and endeavouring to evoke their compassion by holding up her starving child. But they drove her away with cruel and bitter words—some say they even loosed their dogs upon the helpless creature. Be that as it may, the woman and her child were hounded from the village. At first she went meek and uncomplaining, but as she passed the door of the church she chanced to look into the face of her babe—and saw that she held a tiny corpse!

"Only then did she turn on the women who yet mocked her. Laying her dead infant in the church porch, she faced them, her eyes blazing with hatred through the bitter tears, her arms upraised in furious menace.

" 'Women of Josselin!' she cried; 'over the dead body of my son I hurl my curse at you—aye, and at your daughters, and their daughters' daughters for ever! May the all-merciful and all-pitying Father on High show you no more pity or mercy than ye have shown to me and mine! May ye be accursed unto the tenth generation! Like ravening wolves have ye denied us food; like baying hounds have ye driven us from your doors. Henceforth, ye women of Josselin, ye shall be dogs and wolves in very truth!' And so saying, she died."

The old man paused and sat staring straight before him with lack-lustre eyes, as though he were indeed visualizing the scene he had so vividly described.

"A sad story," I commented. "But that is not the end?"

"No. That night there were wild scenes in the streets of Josselin—horrifying and dreadful sounds, and deeds scarcely to be described. Women and girls rushed from the houses, tearing off their garments with frenzied abandon—barking like dogs—howling like wolves! And such they were, not only in outward aspect but also in their very nature. Back into the houses they rushed, their men-folk too paralysed with terror and amazement to interfere, and when they emerged again each wolf-woman held in her reddened fangs a young child—her own or another's—which she had snatched from its cot or cradle with as little mercy or remorse as the beast into which she had been transformed! But—and note this well—it was only the *male* children that were slain. The girls were spared that they might grow up to maturity and inherit the dreadful curse that had been called down upon them, and transmit it to their female descendants, as they do even to this day. That, *monsieur*, is the legend of the Barking Women."

"I thank you for your courtesy in relating it so graphically. And now for the *real* truth about the matter?"

There was an inscrutable smile on Didier's thin lips as he poured the last of the bottle's contents into his glass.

"The truth is not quite so easy to define," he returned with portentous gravity. "Certain it is that a proportion of the women-folk of this village—the descendants, let us assume, of the women who mocked and ill-treated the homeless outcast—are at certain seasons afflicted with a mysterious complaint, or plague, or curse—call it what you will. Here we leave the realm of musty legend and come down to solid, incontrovertible facts. You will find references to the Barking Women of Josselin in innumerable scientific works. Distinguished savants have devoted years to the study of the phenomenon, though it is true that each has endeavoured to find a solution which fits his own particular bent or

mental outlook. Theologians, for instance, are convinced that it is a direct visitation of God. Physicians are equally certain that the howling and barking are caused by some obscure and hereditary disease which gives rise to spasmodic movements and contractions of the muscles of the throat. Psychologists advance the theory that it is due to some form of auto-suggestion, or mass hypnotism. Anthropologists profess to find a parallel, if not a solution, in the totemism of savages and primitive races, and point to the almost universal belief that certain human beings are able to transform themselves into animals. Science, in short, in seeking to prove too much, proves nothing whatever. I have merely mentioned these conflicting theories to show you that the actuality of this horrible curse is sufficiently well attested to merit the serious consideration of savants who do not usually pursue shadows or investigate fables. As to a solution—well, as men of plain common sense we must take the facts as we find them and explain them as best we can."

My mind flew back to the huge grey wolf that had haunted the Devil's Tombstone—the creature that had disappeared into the forest at the very spot where Corinne Lemerre had emerged a few moments later, calm and unafraid. At that moment I required very little convincing that the old legend had a firm basis of truth in it.

I leant forward and laid my hand on the old notary's shoulder.

"Tell me, Maitre Didier," I said earnestly, "what is your own theory about the matter?"

I felt the shoulder on which my hand rested twitch in a tiny shrug.

"*Mère de Dieu!* If I told you my secret thoughts you would think I was sunk as deep in black superstition as are the ignorant pleasants. I only know that this affliction—this curse, if you like to call it so—it still exists in our midst. But the people of Josselin do not publish their shame openly to the world. When the time of their periodical transfiguration approaches, the women lock themselves in their rooms, or hide in the depths of the forest, where no human eyes shall see the ghastly form they assume, where no innocent child shall tempt the hellish fury of their fangs."

In the depths of the woods! The words dinned through my brain with devilish insistence. Was it not in the depths of the wood that we had encountered Corinne Lemerre? Was my unfortunate friend about to take to himself a beautiful vampire for a wife?

Amid the whirlpool of my thoughts I became dully aware that the old man was still speaking:

"*Certainement*, considering the way in which our dread secret has been hidden, it is small wonder that the learned savants could gather such slender data on which to base their theories," he was saying. "That is why I have spoken tonight, that you may in turn warn your friend."

"And persuade him to abandon Mademoiselle Lemerre on the very eve of her wedding-day?" I cried.

"*Doucement, doucement,*" remonstrated the old man. "Softly, my impetuous friend. I am the last man to counsel creating an open scandal by breaking off the match. Besides, there is no need to fear anything for the moment. Your friend himself stands in not the slightest danger, for the werewolves of Josselin do not attack and devour grown men. It will be later, when the little ones arrive, that the tragedy will commence. If you love your friend, warn him of the peril that will come. There is no need for you to repeat my words to him yet; not for many months—many years, maybe. But, as you value his happiness, his peace of mind, his very reason, relate to him the legend of the Women of Josselin on the day that his son and heir is born."

After the old man had gone I sat for a long time by the dying embers of the fire, smoking incessantly and thinking deeply as I awaited Alan's return.

My mind was a seesaw of doubt and indecision. One moment I had determined to tell my chum everything the moment he arrived; the next, I had just as firmly decided that no word should pass my lips.

Would he believe me if I did speak? Even if he were capable of crediting my fantastic story, would he have the hardihood and strength of mind to cast off his beautiful bride at the eleventh hour? And, above all, was I justified in blasting the reputation of a young girl on the mere unsubstantiated theory of a misanthropic notary whose tongue had been loosened by a bottle of wine?

Yet in my own heart I knew the legend was no chimera Now that I possessed the clue I could recall a host of incidents, insignificant and meaningless in themselves, which confirmed it. Why, the villagers even had a special name for the afflicted women. *Aboyeuses*—"the barkers"—I had heard the strange term whispered furtively dozens of times, though at the time it had conveyed nothing to my mind. But now—

I rose to my feet and threw back the heavy window-curtains, pressing my burning forehead against the cool panes as I gazed out into the night.

The moon now slightly past its full, rode high in the cloudless heavens, bathing the whole valley of the river in its soft silver glow. At the riverside end of the village the triple towers of the ancient château reared themselves sheer from the shining waters, an imposing monument of feudal power and tyranny. Just beyond were the shallows, lined with low grassy banks, the washing-place of the village from time immemorial. It was there that the homeless outcast had vainly begged for charity. In the square open space immediately before me was the church from whose porch she had launched the fatal curse. In my mind's eye I could picture the lean, famished figure standing at the head of the steps, facing the

affrighted crowd like an avenging fury over the dead body of her child. . . .

For the first time I understood why it is that no beggar now asks in vain for alms in the streets of Josselin.

A faint sound on the pavement immediately below my window abruptly switched my train of thought. Two persons were standing at the door of the inn, talking in low, intimate tones.

"*Au revoir, ma cherie.*" It was Alan's voice, vibrant with deep passion. "Till tomorrow!"

"Tomorrow, then," came the answer, breathed so low that I could scarcely catch the words. "*Viens m'embrasser*—"

Her voice ended in the sound of a laughing struggle—a lingering kiss. . . .

I turned away from the window, sick at heart. How could I speak now? How could I rob them of their happiness?

That night I held my peace. The next morning they were married as fast as ring and Book could bind them.

The warmest friendship grows dim and faint before the fiercer fires of love. I heard from Alan occasionally during his protracted honeymoon in Italy; then his letters became briefer, and came at longer intervals, until they finally ceased altogether.

I stayed on for a while at Josselin, putting the finishing touches to the pictures I had in hand. Then I wandered farther afield, through southern France, past the frontiers of Spain—just where my fancy and the appeal of the natural scenery led me. Fresh scenes, new interests, new hopes and ambitions gradually caused the memory of Alan Grantham and his mysterious bride to fade from my mind. Beneath the glorious sun-bathed skies of Castille I could almost smile at the former fears conjured up by the grisly legend of Josselin's beast-women.

It was two years later, while seated before a little wayside *posada* overlooking the swift-rushing waters of the Tagus, near Toledo, that the memory of the past overtook and overwhelmed me like some invisible, soul-chilling sea.

A letter was handed to me by the greasy, unshaven *patróna*, a letter which bore an English postage-stamp and numerous pencilled superscriptions showing that it had followed me from place to place for weeks. Its message was brief but pregnant with dire possibilities:

> For the sake of our former friendship, come at once. I need your advice and help as I have never needed them before. I dare not attempt to explain, in case you thing that my mind has given way beneath the strain. Come—and come quickly!

Below was a hurriedly scrawled postscript that was actually longer than the body of the letter:

Corinne is in excellent health and sends her best regards. She bore the birth of our baby boy well, and is looking more beautiful than ever. The kiddie is a delightful little chap—you will love him. We have named him after you. I should be the happiest man alive, yet I am harassed by fears which are all the more terrifying because so utterly grotesque. Come quickly—for the sake of old acquaintance.

It was an appeal to which I could not remain deaf. I glanced at the postmark. The letter had been posted nearly two weeks before.

It took me just five minutes to pack my few belongings and settle the bill. Crossing the river, I had the good luck to catch a train that was on the point of starting from the Toledo terminus. I had two hours' wait at Madrid but the wasted time was more than made up by the swiftness of the Trans-Continental Express which bore me to Paris, where I entered the early morning boat-train for the coast.

Thirty hours after receiving the message I walked down the gangway of the cross-channel steamer—to meet the hearty handclasp and eager greeting of the man who had summoned me back to England.

"I got your cable from Paris," he said, as though in explanation of his unexpected presence on the landing-stage. "I can't describe how relieved I was to know that you were on your way."

I started to tell him about the way in which his letter had wandered about before reaching me, but he cut me short with what seemed unnecessary haste.

"Come on." He seized my grip and, ignoring the waiting train, made for the gate which led to the road. "I've got a car waiting. We can talk as I drive. My place is only in the next county—a few miles over the Sussex border. We can get there quicker by road than by the local trains."

The luxurious appointments of the waiting auto seemed to indicate that, whatever Alan's trouble might be, it certainly was not connected with his financial standing. I ventured a remark to that effect as the car started into motion, but he almost ignored it.

"Oh, yes. I've not been doing so badly. But I've been too worried lately to attempt much serious work. Do you know—don't think me crazy because of what I'm about to tell you—but, you remember that large grey wolf that we saw that night at the Devil's Tombstone?"

"Yes," I answered, tense with interest. "Well?"

"That damned brute has followed me over here!"

I managed to force a laugh, but, had my friend not been so engrossed in his driving, I fear my face must have betrayed my real feelings.

"Come, come," I said chaffingly. "Isn't that rather a tall yarn, old man? It's rather a long jump from Brittany to Sussex, and there's a slight obstacle known as the English Channel in between."

"I don't care how far it is, or what obstacles have to be crossed to get here. I would recognize the brute anywhere, and I'm certain that the same animal has been haunting our house for weeks—in fact, ever since the baby was born."

The baby! Here was another link of the old notary's tale that rang true.

"It's a boy, isn't it?" I asked, more for the sake of covering up a pause than anything else.

"Of course it's a boy! he answered testily. "Didn't I tell you in my letter that we'd named it after you?"

"And you think that this wolf means harm to the little fellow?"

"What else?" he demanded brusquely. "The creature has tried half a dozen times to get into the nursery, but luckily it was seen and driven away before it could do any mischief. The strange part about it is that it never attempts to attack grown people. That ought to make our task all the easier."

"Our task?" I cehoed.

"Yes. You must help me track down this beast to its lair and send a bullet through its heart. Not until I see it stretched dead before my eyes shall I feel that Corinne and her child are safe."

It took all my self-control to refrain from bursting into sardonic laughter. I mumbled some answer—heaven knows what! and for the remainder of the drive sat silent, or spoke in heedless monosyllables. My own grim thoughts were quite sufficient to occupy all my attention. Once again I had become enmeshed in a tangle of mystery and lurking peril—but little did the man beside me guess the real nature of the task in which he had solicited my aid!

The fifty-odd miles of coast roads were soon covered; then we turned inland at a spot not far from the traditional site of the Battle of Hastings. Twenty minutes later the car swept through the gates of a long, tree-bordered drive, and I got my first glimpse of the house.

"Lone Croft" it was called, and the name seemed well chosen. The rambling old house stood on a hill, surrounded by well-wooded grounds, and though its position rendered it somewhat exposed to the fierce gales which occasionally sweep in from the sea, it commanded a superb view. Southward was the long sweep of coastline, from Beachy Head to Dungeness; every other point of the compass was bounded by the vast chalk downs, desolate and deserted for the most part, though here and there one could catch a distant glimpse of the roof of an isolated farmhouse nestling in a fold of its rolling contours.

Lone Croft, as its name implied, had originally been built as a farmstead of the more substantial kind—though that was in the days when Queen Bess held sway. It was a delightful example of the rural architecture of the period, with half-timbered gables and quaint nooks and corners in its oak-raftered rooms. Its long,

rambling passages had so many queer little flights of stairs leading up and down, that it was sometimes a matter of difficulty to guess on which floor one was, without glancing out of the window. It was, in short, exactly the kind of house that any ghost with a respect for old-established traditions would choose for the scene of its midnight rambles.

I was on the point of making a laughing remark to that effect as I alighted from the car. But I caught a glimpse of Alan's set features, and refrained. At that moment he did not seem in the humour to appreciate a jest on any subject, occult or otherwise.

My friend entered the house without a word and led the way to the great, stone-flagged kitchen, now converted into a very comfortable dining-room. On the threshold he paused with a low exclamation of surprise.

"Hullo! it seems that we have visitors."

Two men, both stout and red-faced, and dressed in tweeds and gaiters, had risen from their seats near the wide fireplace and were advancing to meet us.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Grantham," said the one who appeared to be the elder, a grey-bearded man of about sixty. "I think you know me, sir? I'm Enoch Varden, from Vale Farm, down yonder. My friend here be Farmer Sowerby, from—"

"Yes, yes, I know you both," Alan broke in somewhat impatiently. "I take it that you have been awaiting my return, and that you wish to see me about something?"

"We do that, sir," answered the man with the grey beard, in a tone that was a curious mixture of deference and half-suppressed anger. "We two be come here on most unpleasant business, Mr. Grantham." He paused and cast an inquiring glance in my direc. tion. "Asking your pardon, sir, but be this gen'man a friend of yourn?"

"Indeed he is," Alan replied warmly, "my oldest chum. You need not be afraid of saying what you have to say in his presence."

Farmer Varden seemed reluctant to take advantage of the invitation to state his errand. He stood before the fireplace, clearing his throat noisily at intervals and shifting uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Look'ee here, sir," he burst out at last. "I be a peaceable man, and one as likes to keep on as good terms as may be with my neighbours, and I hopes you will take what I'm going to say in the spirit that it's meant. Three nights ago seven sheep were killed and mangled at Sowerby's Farm, and this morning I found a round dozen o' my own flock had been treated the same way."

"Indeed?" Alan's voice did not betray much surprise. "That's very unfortunate. I suppose you've come to warn me that some ferocious animal is at large in the district?"

Farmer Varden gave a quick shake of his head.

"We be come to warn you to keep your dogs chained up at night!" he said bluntly.

"Dogs!" Alan laughed loudly. "But, my dear good man, I don't keep any dogs. My wife can't bear to have one anywhere near her, and, naturally, there isn't such a thing about the place."

The two farmers stared at him with palpable incredulity.

"Nary a one?" asked Sowerby, speaking for the first time.

"Not a single hair of one!" was my friend's firm reply. "You must seek elsewhere for the animal that worried your sheep."

Enoch Varden raised his horny hand and scratched his head.

"Of course, if you say that, sir, we're bound to take your word—"

"You can do that with the greatest confidence," Alan said quietly.

"No offence, sir, no offence," Varden hastened to say. "But all the same I must say that things seem mighty queer Old Miles—Mr. Sowerby's shepherd, sir—he tracked the beast's footprints on the morning after his sheep were killed. He's no witlacker, is Old Miles and he says that the tracks were those of a big dog—the biggest he'd ever seen. I can bear him out in that, for I was up at four on the morning after the raid on my own fold, and I followed the footprints over the soft ground for miles."

"And where did they lead?" Alan asked.

"They led straight to this very house, sir—and what's more, they didn't go any further! There they were, as plain as print on paper, right up your drive. There were even a few on the doorstep, going into your front door—*but there weren't none coming out again!*"

I asw Alan Grantham suddenly go pale. Well enough could I guess the tragic poignancy of his thoughts at that moment.

"It must be the large grey wolf that I've seen hovering about the house!" he exclaimed.

The farmer's eyes grew round as saucers at his words.

"Wolf!" cried Varden. "Who ever heerd tell of such a critter on the Sussex Downs?"

"Well, there it is," shrugged Alan. "It may have escaped from somewhere—a circus, for instance. Anyway, the remedy is in your own hands. Of course you both possess guns?"

"Aye, sir," came in unison from the pair.

"Well, arm all the men you can, and lie in wait for the brute. That is what I and my friend intend to do. I hope we have the luck to get a good chance of a shot at it!"

Before nightfall, ample proof was forthcoming that my friend's theory was correct. The identity of the mysterious four-footed marauder was established by the member of the Mobile Section of the County Constabulary who rode up on a motorcycle while dinner was in progress.

"Yes, sir, it's a wolf all right," the constable stated. "One of our

patrols sighted the beast while he was on his rounds. Chap of the name of Morris. He's an old soldier who served with the Expeditionary Forces in Russia, and he's seen wolves where they grow natural. He got a near view of the creature as it trotted past him on the road, making towards this house. He was unarmed, so that he could do nothing to stop it. But he got a good look at it, and he's prepared to swear it's a wolf and not a large dog. Moreover, it's a bitch-wolf and has recently had a litter of whelps."

"Whew!" whistled Alan. "That complicates matters—we shall have the countryside overrun if they are allowed to breed! Did the lady have her family with her?"

The policeman shook his head.

"No, but the creature's dugs were heavy with milk—Morris breeds dogs himself, and he knew the signs all right. He says that such a state usually makes such animals fiercer, more cunning—and more dangerous! Thought I'd call in to put you on your guard."

"I'm much obliged to you, officer," said Alan, as he did a little sleight-of-hand with something which rustled crisply.

"Thank you, sir," the man touched the peak of his cap. "Good night."

Listening to the conversation from the dining-room doorway, I felt my last doubts vanish in a wave of horrified conviction. The mystery wolf had recently littered—Corinne's baby was just a fortnight old! It was the last—the clearest—the most convincing link in the long chain of evidence which proved that the ancient legend of Josselin was no myth!

The time had come for me to speak. Whatever might be the consequences of the revelation, my conscience would not permit me to conceal it any longer. A tragedy must be risked if an even greater tragedy was to be averted.

The moment the door had closed on the policeman's departure I took my friend's arm and drew him into his study, which adjoined the dining-room we had recently quitted.

"Why, what's in the wind?" he said as he saw me close the door.

"Alan," I said gently, "I am about to take advantage of the privilege of an old friend. But believe me, it is my duty rather than my inclinations which prompt the words I am about to utter. Corinne, the girl you married, is"—my mind groped for fitting words to break the blow that was about to fall—"is—not like other girls—"

"Don't I know it!" he broke in enthusiastically, entirely failing to grasp my meaning. "She is a pearl beyond all price! I'll thank heaven till my dying day for the strange chance which threw her across my path, and enabled me to link my life with hers!"

The fervour of his declaration almost made me falter in my purpose. The thought that I, his dearest friend, was fated to be the

instrument of his coming disillusionment was like an agonizing knife-thrust in my heart. But it was too late to stop now.

"It was not of her personal beauty, or of her mental qualities that I was speaking," I steeled myself to go on. "There is something else—something entirely beyond her own power to control. My poor boy, the girl you love so deeply is—"

"Not dead?" He caught me by the arm with a grip that made my muscles numb. "Don't tell me that Corinne has fallen a victim to that accursed wolf! Don't tell me that she is dead!"

"Would that she were!" I exclaimed almost involuntarily.

"What!" His grip tightened like a crushing vice. "In God's name—what do you mean?"

"Corinne Lemerre was, and still is a—"

Four crashing reports, fired in quick succession just outside the window, cut short my words like the stroke of a knife.

Glad of the respite, short-lived though it might be, I dashed to the front door and threw it wide. On the steps was a burly blue-clad figure. It was the constable who had just left us, and in his hand he held a heavy automatic pistol.

"The wolf!" he gasped in hurried explanation. "As I passed through the shrubbery I saw it leap from one of the lower windows. It was carrying something in its mouth. Looked like a fair-sized bundle of clothes—"

"My God!" shrieked Alan. "The child! We must follow—wait here while I get the guns."

"Did you hit the thing?" I asked.

"I think so, but the light was bad." The man flashed his lantern on the gravelled path and gave a cry. "Yes, I hit it all right. Look at the blood on the stones!"

"Here, take this." Alan thrust a sporting-rifle into my reluctant hands as he pushed past and took the steps with a flying leap. "It's loaded, but don't risk a shot unless you can make sure of not hitting my boy. Which way did it go?" he asked as he caught up with the hurrying policeman.

"Couldn't say, sir. It just disappeared in the darkness. There's its trail, though!" He flashed his light at the wavering line of crimson splashes.

"Badly wounded—it can't go far," jerked Alan, almost snatching the lantern in his excitement and pressing forward.

The next moment he uttered a cry of disappointment. The sinister trail had swerved into the dense bushes, where it was utterly lost.

"We must separate," Alan whispered urgently, "and comb this plantation thoroughly. Shoot at sight—but for God's sake mind the boy."

We obeyed and did our best to pick up the trail. But it was a weary, nerve-racking business, hunting aimlessly in the dark.

Presently the police-constable and I gravitated towards each other and met in a little clearing not far from the house.

"Some hunt!" the man muttered grimly. "Like searching in a haystack for a needle that isn't there! Probably that wolf is miles away by now—and your friend can say good-bye to his kid."

His words gave me a sudden inspiration.

"That wolf may have returned to the house," I exclaimed.

"To the house?" He looked surprised, as well as he might be. "What's the idea?"

"Oh, just an idea. But I think it's worth following up. Will you come back there with me?"

"If you think it's worth while. Shall I call the guv'nor?" he asked, jerking his head towards where Alan was noisily beating the bushes.

"I think not," I advised. "If my suspicions are correct, he'll be better out of what is coming."

We gained the house unobserved, and I immediately led the way upstairs.

"You were right, sir!" cried the man, pointing to a red smear on the white paintwork of one of the doors.

I nodded without speaking and shifted the gun so that it would be ready for instant action. The blood-stained door was the one which gave access to Corinne's bedroom.

The room was in darkness as I flung open the door, but the low, menacing growl which greeted our entrance showed that it was far from being empty.

I pressed the switch—then stood staring at the unbelievable tableau which the light revealed.

It was not the sight of the huge wolf lying curled up on the bed that caused my breath to catch in my throat with a sound very much like a sob—I was prepared to see that. No, the thing that staggered me and shook my nerve was the sight of the tiny baby nestling between the huge animal's legs, crooning contentedly as it gently kneaded the soft grey fur with its little dimpled fists.

The gun slipped unheeded from my hands and fell to the floor. My brain could scarcely credit what my eyes beheld. Then, like a ray of glorious light from heaven itself, understanding rushed upon me.

Mother-love, divine and all-conquering, had triumphed over the dread, age-old curse. The great, fierce she-wolf was actually suckling the babe it had been condemned to destroy!

This much I saw, but the policeman behind me had eyes only for the hunted beast. I caught the glint of polished steel as he threw his hand forward.

"Don't fire, you fool!" I shouted, and switched off the light to baffle his aim in case he had understood.

But even as the light snapped off, the darkness was split by a

tongue of flame and the crash of his automatic followed like a miniature thunderclap.

"Fool!" I cried again. "What have you done?"

"I guess I've put 'paid' to that—"

His boast died away to a meaningless mumble as I again pressed the light-switch.

The wolf had vanished. In its place, marble-white and still in death, was the body of Corinne Grantham—the girl who had for ever broken the curse which had for centuries lain like a hideous blight over the women of Josselin.

That police officer faced the music like a man at the subsequent inquest. The poor fellow came in for more than his fair share of the nasty remarks that were made about "the careless handling of firearms." But he had the sense to hold his tongue about the wolf changing into the woman at the moment of its death.

Probably he guessed that such a story would not be believed, and had no desire to exhibit himself as a clumsy liar as well as a clumsy marksman. Thanks to Alan's open-handed and unquestioning generosity, I was able to ensure that the constable was no worse off for his reticence. Today he's probably the richest policeman in Sussex—if he hasn't retired from the force long since.

The coroner's verdict was "Death by misadventure." And so the matter stands to this day.

Alan Grantham, his mind torn between grief at his wife's death and the joy of having his baby son so unexpectedly restored to him unharmed, never so much as suspected the real nature of the "misadventure" which had mercifully cut the Gordian knot of the sinister web of fate in which she was entangled.

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