

THE THIRD PAN BOOK OF HORROR STORIES

Selected by
Herbert van Thal

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not for bed-time reading!



**THE THIRD PAN BOOK
OF HORROR STORIES**

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THE THIRD PAN BOOK OF
HORROR STORIES

Edited by
HERBERT VAN THAL



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THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A PRIVATE SECRETARY IN NEW YORK

By Algernon Blackwood

IT WAS never quite clear to me how Jim Shorthouse managed to get his private secretaryship; but, once he got it, he kept it, and for some years he led a steady life and put money in the savings bank.

One morning his employer sent for him into the study, and it was evident to the secretary's trained senses that there was something unusual in the air.

"Mr Shorthouse," he began, somewhat nervously, "I have never yet had the opportunity of observing whether or not you are possessed of personal courage."

Shorthouse gasped, but he said nothing. He was growing accustomed to the eccentricities of his chief. Shorthouse was a Kentish man; Sidebotham was 'raised' in Chicago; New York was the present place of residence.

"But," the other continued, with 'a puff at his very black cigar, "I must consider myself a poor judge of human nature in future if it is not one of your strongest qualities."

The private secretary made a foolish little bow in modest appreciation of so uncertain a compliment. Mr Jonas B. Sidebotham watched him narrowly, as the novelists say, before he continued his remarks.

"I have no doubt that you are a plucky fellow and—" He hesitated, and puffed at his cigar as if his life depended upon it keeping alight.

"I don't think I'm afraid of anything in particular, sir — except women," interposed the young man, feeling that it was time for him to make an observation of some sort, but still quite in the dark as to his chief's purpose.

"Humph!" he grunted. "Well, there are no women in this

case so far as I know. But there may be other things that – that hurt more.”

‘Wants a special service of some kind, evidently,’ was the secretary’s reflection. “Personal violence?” he asked aloud.

“Possibly (puff), in fact (puff, puff) probably.”

Shorthouse smelt an increase of salary in the air. It had a stimulating effect.

“I’ve had some experience of that article, sir,” he said shortly; “but I’m ready to undertake anything in reason.”

“I can’t say how much reason or unreason there may prove to be in this particular case. It all depends.”

Mr Sidebotham got up and locked the door of his study and drew down the blinds of both windows. Then he took a bunch of keys from his pocket and opened a black tin box. He ferreted about among blue and white papers for a few seconds, enveloping himself as he did so in a cloud of blue tobacco smoke.

“I feel like a detective already,” Shorthouse laughed.

“Speak low, please,” returned the other, glancing round the room. “We must observe the utmost secrecy. Perhaps you would be kind enough to close the registers,” he went on in a still lower voice. “Open registers have betrayed conversations before now.”

Shorthouse began to enter into the spirit of the thing. He tiptoed across the floor and shut the two iron gratings in the wall that in American houses supply hot air and are termed ‘registers.’ Mr Sidebotham had meanwhile found the paper he was looking for. He held it in front of him and tapped it once or twice with the back of his right hand as if it were a stage letter and himself the villain of the melodrama.

“This is a letter from Joel Garvey, my old partner,” he said at length. “You have heard me speak of him.”

The other bowed. He knew that many years before, Garvey & Sidebotham had been well known in the Chicago financial world. He knew that the amazing rapidity with which they accumulated a fortune had only been surpassed by the amazing rapidity with which they had immediately afterwards disappeared into space. He was further aware – his position afforded facilities – that each partner was still to some extent in

the other's power, and that each wished most devoutly that the other would die.

The sins of his employer's early years did not concern him, however. The man was kind and just, if eccentric; and Shorthouse, being in New York, did not probe to discover more particularly the sources whence his salary was so regularly paid. Moreover, the two men had grown to like each other and there was a genuine feeling of trust and respect between them.

"I hope it's a pleasant communication, sir," he said in a low voice.

"Quite the reverse," returned the other, fingering the paper nervously as he stood in front of the fire.

"Blackmail, I suppose."

"Precisely." Mr Sidebotham's cigar was not burning well; he struck a match and applied it to the uneven edge, and presently his voice spoke through clouds of wreathing smoke.

"There are valuable papers in my possession bearing his signature. I cannot inform you of their nature; but they are extremely valuable *to me*. They belong, as a matter of fact, to Garvey as much as to me. Only I've got them—"

"I see."

"Garvey writes that he wants to have his signature removed — wants to cut it out with his own hand. He gives reasons which incline me to consider his request—"

"And you would like me to take him the papers and see that he does it?"

"And bring them back again with you," he whispered, screwing up his eyes into a shrewd grimace.

"And bring them back again with me," repeated the secretary. "I understand perfectly."

Shorthouse knew from unfortunate experience more than a little of the horrors of blackmail. The pressure Garvey was bringing to bear upon his old enemy must be exceedingly strong. That was quite clear. At the same time, the commission that was being entrusted to him seemed somewhat quixotic in its nature. He had already 'enjoyed' more than one experience of his employer's eccentricity, and he now caught himself wondering whether this same eccentricity did not sometimes go — further than eccentricity.

"I cannot read the letter to you," Mr Sidebotham was explaining, "but I shall give it into your hands. It will prove that you are my - er - my accredited representative. I shall also ask you not to read the package of papers. The signature in question you will find, of course, on the last page, at the bottom."

There was a pause of several minutes during which the end of the cigar glowed eloquently.

"Circumstances compel me," he went on at length almost in a whisper, "or I should never do this. But you understand, of course, the thing is a ruse. Cutting out the signature is a mere pretence. It is nothing. *What Garvey wants are the papers themselves.*"

The confidence reposed in the private secretary was not misplaced. Shorthouse was as faithful to Mr Sidebotham as a man ought to be to the wife that loves him.

The commission itself seemed very simple. Garvey lived in solitude in the remote part of Long Island. Shorthouse was to take the papers to him, witness the cutting out of the signature, and to be specially on his guard against any attempt, forcible or otherwise, to gain possession of them. It seemed to him a somewhat ludicrous adventure, but he did not know all the facts and perhaps was not the best judge.

The two men talked in low voices for another hour, at the end of which Mr Sidebotham drew up the blinds, opened the registers and unlocked the door.

Shorthouse rose to go. His pockets were stuffed with papers and his head with instructions; but when he reached the door he hesitated and turned.

"Well?" said his chief.

Shorthouse looked him straight in the eye and said nothing.

"The personal violence, I suppose?" said the other. Shorthouse bowed.

"I have not seen Garvey for twenty years," he said; "all I can tell you is that I believe him to be occasionally of unsound mind. I have heard strange rumours. He lives alone, and in his lucid intervals studies chemistry. It was always a hobby of his. But the chances are twenty to one against his attempting

violence. I only wished to warn you – in case – I mean, so that you may be on the watch.”

He handed his secretary a Smith and Wesson revolver as he spoke. Shorthouse slipped it into his hip pocket and went out of the room.

* * *

A drizzling cold rain was falling on fields covered with half-melted snow when Shorthouse stood, late in the afternoon, on the platform of the lonely little Long Island station and watched the train he had just left vanish into the distance.

It was a bleak country that Joel Garvey, Esq., formerly of Chicago, had chosen for his residence and on this particular afternoon it presented a more than usually dismal appearance. An expanse of flat fields covered with dirty snow stretched away on all sides till the sky dropped down to meet them. Only occasional farm buildings broke the monotony, and the road wound along muddy lanes and beneath dripping trees swathed in the cold raw fog that swept in like a pall of the dead from the sea.

It was six miles from the station to Garvey's house, and the driver of the rickety buggy Shorthouse had found at the station was not communicative. Between the dreary landscape and the drearier driver he fell back upon his own thoughts, which, but for the spice of adventure that was promised, would themselves have been even drearier than either. He made up his mind that he would waste no time over the transaction. The moment the signature was cut out he would pack up and be off. The last train back to Brooklyn was 7.15; and he would have to walk the six miles of mud and snow, for the driver of the buggy had refused point blank to wait for him.

For purposes of safety, Shorthouse had done what he flattered himself was rather a clever thing. He had made up a second packet of papers identical in outside appearance with the first. The inscription, the blue envelope, the red elastic band, and even a blot in the lower left-hand corner had been exactly reproduced. Inside, of course, were only sheets of blank paper. It was his intention to change the packets and to let Garvey see him put the sham one into the bag. In case of

violence the bag would be the point of attack, and he intended to lock it and throw away the key. Before it could be forced open and the deception discovered there would be time to increase his chances of escape with the real packet.

It was five o'clock when the silent Jehu pulled up in front of a half-broken gate and pointed with his whip to a house that stood in its own grounds among trees and was just visible in the gathering gloom. Shorthouse told him to drive up to the front door but the man refused.

"I ain't runnin' no risks," he said; "I've got a family."

This cryptic remark was not encouraging, but Shorthouse did not pause to decipher it. He paid the man, and then pushed open the rickety old gate swinging on a single hinge, and proceeded to walk up the drive that lay dark between close-standing trees. The house soon came into full view. It was tall and square and had once evidently been white, but now the walls were covered with dirty patches and there were wide yellow streaks where the plaster had fallen away. The windows stared black and uncompromising into the night. The garden was overgrown with weeds and long grass, standing up in ugly patches beneath their burden of wet snow. Complete silence reigned over all. There was not a sign of life. Not even a dog barked. Only, in the distance, the wheels of the retreating carriage could be heard growing fainter and fainter.

As he stood in the porch, between pillars of rotting wood, listening to the rain dripping from the roof into the puddles of slushy snow, he was conscious of a sensation of utter desertion and loneliness such as he had never before experienced. The forbidding aspect of the house had the immediate effect of lowering his spirits. It might well have been the abode of monsters or demons in a child's wonder tale, creatures that only dared to come out under cover of darkness. He groped for the bell-handle, or knocker, and finding neither, he raised his stick and beat a loud tattoo on the door. The sound echoed away in an empty space on the other side and the wind moaned past him between the pillars as if startled at his audacity. But there was no sound of approaching footsteps and no one came to open the door. Again he beat a tattoo, louder and longer than the first one; and, having done so, waited with his back to the

house and stared across the unkempt garden into the fast gathering shadows.

Then he turned suddenly, and saw that the door was standing ajar. It had been quietly opened and a pair of eyes were peering at him round the edge. There was no light in the hall beyond and he could only just make out the shape of a dim human face.

"Does Mr Garvey live here?" he asked in a firm voice.

"Who are you?" came in a man's tones.

"I'm Mr Sidebotham's private secretary. I wish to see Mr Garvey on important business."

"Are you expected?"

"I suppose so," he said impatiently, thrusting a card through the opening. "Please take my name to him at once, and say I come from Mr Sidebotham on the matter Mr Garvey wrote about."

The man took the card, and the face vanished into the darkness, leaving Shorthouse standing in the cold porch with mingled feelings of impatience and dismay. The door, he now noticed for the first time, was on a chain and could not open more than a few inches. But it was the manner of his reception that caused uneasy reflections to stir within him – reflections that continued for some minutes before they were interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps and the flicker of a light in the hall.

The next instant the chain fell with a rattle, and gripping his bag tightly, he walked into a large ill-smelling hall of which he could only just see the ceiling. There was no light but the flickering taper held by the man, and by its uncertain glimmer Shorthouse turned to examine him. He saw an undersized man of middle age with brilliant, shifting eyes, a curling black beard, and a nose that at once proclaimed him a Jew. His shoulders were bent, and, as he watched him replacing the chain, he saw that he wore a peculiar black gown like a priest's cassock reaching to the feet. It was altogether a lugubrious figure of a man, sinister and funereal, yet it seemed in perfect harmony with the general character of its surroundings. The hall was devoid of furniture of any kind, and against the dingy walls stood rows of old picture frames, empty and disordered,

and odd-looking bits of wood-work that appeared doubly fantastic as their shadows danced queerly over the floor in the shifting light.

"If you'll come this way, Mr Garvey will see you presently," said the Jew gruffly, crossing the floor and shielding the taper with a bony hand. He never once raised his eyes above the level of the visitor's waistcoat, and, to Shorthouse, he somehow suggested a figure from the dead rather than a man of flesh and blood. The hall smelt decidedly ill.

All the more surprising, then, was the scene that met his eyes when the Jew opened the door at the further end and he entered a room brilliantly lit with swinging lamps and furnished with a degree of taste and comfort that amounted to luxury. The walls were lined with handsomely bound books, and armchairs were arranged round a large mahogany desk in the middle of the room. A bright fire burned in the grate and neatly framed photographs of men and women stood on the mantelpiece on either side of an elaborately carved clock. French windows that opened like doors were partially concealed by warm red curtains, and on a sideboard against the wall stood decanters and glasses, with several boxes of cigars piled on top of one another. There was a pleasant odour of tobacco about the room. Indeed, it was in such glowing contrast to the chilly poverty of the hall that Shorthouse already was conscious of a distinct rise in the thermometer of his spirits.

Then he turned and saw the Jew standing in the doorway with his eyes fixed upon him, somewhere about the middle button of his waistcoat. He presented a strangely repulsive appearance that somehow could not be attributed to any particular detail, and the secretary associated him in his mind with a monstrous black bird of prey more than anything else.

"My time is short," he said abruptly; "I hope Mr Garvey will not keep me waiting."

A strange flicker of a smile appeared on the Jew's ugly face and vanished as quickly as it came. He made a sort of deprecating bow by way of reply. Then he blew out the taper and went out, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

Shorthouse was alone. He felt relieved. There was an air of obsequious insolence about the old Jew that was very offensive.

He began to take note of his surroundings. He was evidently in the library of the house, for the walls were covered with books almost up to the ceiling. There was no room for pictures. Nothing but the shining backs of well-bound volumes looked down upon him. Four brilliant lights hung from the ceiling and a reading lamp with a polished reflector stood among the disordered masses of papers on the desk. The lamp was not lit, but when Shorthouse put his hand upon it he found it was *warm*. The room had evidently only just been vacated.

Apart from the testimony of the lamp, however, he had already felt, without being able to give a reason for it, that the room had been occupied a few moments before he entered. The atmosphere over the desk seemed to retain the disturbing influence of a human being; an influence, moreover, so recent that he felt as if the cause of it were still in his immediate neighbourhood. It was difficult to realize that he was quite alone in the room and that somebody was not in hiding. The finer counterparts of his senses warned him to act as if he were being observed; he was dimly conscious of a desire to fidget and look round, to keep his eyes in every part of the room at once, and to conduct himself generally as if he were the object of careful human observation.

How far he recognized the cause of these sensations it is impossible to say; but they were sufficiently marked to prevent him carrying out a strong inclination to get up and make a search of the room. He sat quite still, staring alternately at the backs of the books, and at the red curtains; wondering all the time if he was really being watched, or if it was only the imagination playing tricks with him.

A full quarter of an hour passed, and then twenty rows of volumes suddenly shifted out towards him, and he saw that a door had opened in the wall opposite. The books were only sham backs after all, and when they moved back again with the sliding door, Shorthouse saw the figure of Joel Garvey standing before him.

Surprise almost took his breath away. He had expected to see an unpleasant, even a vicious apparition with the mark of the beast unmistakably upon its face; but he was wholly unprepared for the elderly, tall, fine-looking man who stood in

front of him – well-groomed, refined, vigorous, with a lofty forehead, clear grey eyes, and a hooked nose dominating a clean shaven mouth and chin of considerable character – a distinguished looking man altogether.

“I’m afraid I’ve kept you waiting, Mr Shorthouse,” he said in a pleasant voice, but with no trace of a smile in the mouth or eyes. “But the fact is, you know, I’ve a mania for chemistry, and just when you were announced I was at the most critical moment of a problem and was really compelled to bring it to a conclusion.”

Shorthouse had risen to meet him, but the other motioned him to resume his seat. It was borne in upon him irresistibly that Mr Joel Garvey, for reasons best known to himself, was deliberately lying, and he could not help wondering at the necessity for such an elaborate misrepresentation. He took off his overcoat and sat down.

“I’ve no doubt, too, that the door startled you,” Garvey went on, evidently reading something of his guest’s feelings in his face. “You probably had not suspected it. It leads into my little laboratory. Chemistry is an absorbing study to me, and I spend most of my time there.” Mr Garvey moved up to the armchair on the opposite side of the fireplace and sat down.

Shorthouse made appropriate answers to these remarks, but his mind was really engaged in taking stock of Mr Sidebotham’s old-time partner. So far there was no sign of mental irregularity and there was certainly nothing about him to suggest violent wrong-doing or coarseness of living. On the whole, Mr Sidebotham’s secretary was most pleasantly surprised, and, wishing to conclude his business as speedily as possible, he made a motion towards the bag for the purpose of opening it, when his companion interrupted him quickly—

“You are Mr Sidebotham’s *private* secretary, are you not?” he asked.

Shorthouse replied that he was. “Mr Sidebotham,” he went on to explain, “has entrusted me with the papers in the case and I have the honour to return to you your letter of a week ago.” He handed the letter to Garvey, who took it without a word and deliberately placed it in the fire. He was not aware that the

secretary was ignorant of its contents, yet his face betrayed no signs of feeling. Shorthouse noticed, however, that his eyes never left the file until the last morsel had been consumed. Then he looked up and said, "You are familiar then with the facts of this most peculiar case?"

Shorthouse saw no reason to confess his ignorance.

"I have all the papers, Mr Garvey," he replied, taking them out of the bag, "and I should be very glad if we could transact our business as speedily as possible. If you will cut out your signature I—"

"One moment, please," interrupted the other. "I must, before we proceed further, consult some papers in my laboratory. If you will allow me to leave you alone a few minutes for this purpose we can conclude the whole matter in a very short time."

Shorthouse did not approve of this further delay, but he had no option than to acquiesce, and when Garvey had left the room by the private door he sat and waited with the papers in his hand. The minutes went by and the other did not return. To pass the time he thought of taking the false packet from his coat to see that the papers were in order, and the move was indeed almost completed, when something – he never knew what – warned him to desist. The feeling again came over him that he was being watched, and he leaned back in his chair with the bag on his knees and waited with considerable impatience for the other's return. For more than twenty minutes he waited, and when at length the door opened and Garvey appeared, with profuse apologies for the delay, he saw by the clock that only a few minutes still remained of the time he had allowed himself to catch the last train.

"Now I am completely at your service," he said pleasantly; "you must, of course, know, Mr Shorthouse, that one cannot be too careful in matters of this kind – especially," he went on, speaking very slowly and impressively, "in dealing with a man like my former partner, whose mind, as you doubtless may have discovered, is at times very sadly affected."

Shorthouse made no reply to this. He felt that the other was watching him as a cat watches a mouse.

"It is almost a wonder to me," Garvey added, "that he is

still at large. Unless he has greatly improved it can hardly be safe for those who are closely associated with him."

The other began to feel uncomfortable. Either this was the other side of the story, or it was the first signs of mental irresponsibility.

"All business matters of importance require the utmost care in my opinion, Mr Garvey," he said at length, cautiously.

"Ah! then, as I thought, you have had a great deal to put up with from him," Garvey said, with his eyes fixed on his companion's face. "And, no doubt, he is still as bitter against me as he was years ago when the disease first showed itself?"

Although this last remark was a deliberate question and the questioner was waiting with fixed eyes for an answer, Shorthouse elected to take no notice of it. Without a word he pulled the elastic band from the blue envelope with a snap and plainly showed his desire to conclude the business as soon as possible. The tendency on the other's part to delay did not suit him at all.

"But never personal violence, I trust, Mr Shorthouse," he added.

"Never."

"I'm glad to hear it," Garvey said in a sympathetic voice, "very glad to hear it. And now," he went on, "if you are ready we can transact this little matter of business before dinner. It will only take a moment."

He drew a chair up to the desk and sat down, taking a pair of scissors from a drawer. His companion approached with the papers in his hand, unfolding them as he came. Garvey at once took them from him, and after turning over a few pages he stopped and cut out a piece of writing at the bottom of the last sheet but one.

Holding it up to him Shorthouse read the words "Joel Garvey" in faded ink.

"There! That's my signature," he said, "and I've cut it out. It must be nearly twenty years since I wrote it, and now I'm going to burn it."

He went to the fire and stooped over to burn the little slip of paper, and while he watched it being consumed Shorthouse put the real papers in his pocket and slipped the imitation ones into the bag. Garvey turned just in time to see this latter movement.

"I'm putting the papers back," Shorthouse said quietly; "you've done with them I think."

"Certainly," he replied as, completely deceived, he saw the blue envelope disappear into the black bag and watched Shorthouse turn the key. "They no longer have the slightest interest for me." As he spoke he moved over to the sideboard, and pouring himself out a small glass of whisky asked his visitor if he might do the same for him. But the visitor declined and was already putting on his overcoat when Garvey turned with genuine surprise on his face.

"You surely are not going back to New York tonight, Mr Shorthouse?" he said, in a voice of astonishment.

"I've just time to catch the 7.15 if I'm quick."

"But I never heard of such a thing," Garvey said. "Of course I took it for granted that you would stay the night."

"It's kind of you," said Shorthouse, "but really I must return tonight. I never expected to stay."

The two men stood facing each other. Garvey pulled out his watch.

"I'm exceedingly sorry," he said; "but, upon my word, I took it for granted you would stay. I ought to have said so long ago. I'm such a lonely fellow and so little accustomed to visitors that I fear I forgot my manners altogether. But in any case, Mr Shorthouse, you cannot catch the 7.15, for it's already after six o'clock, and that's the last train tonight." Garvey spoke very quickly, almost eagerly, but his voice sounded genuine.

"There's time if I walk quickly," said the young man with decision, moving towards the door. He glanced at his watch as he went. Hitherto he had gone by the clock on the mantelpiece. To his dismay he saw that it was, as his host had said, long after six. The clock was half an hour slow, and he realized at once that it was no longer possible to catch the train.

Had the hands of the clock been moved intentionally? Had he been purposely detained? Unpleasant thoughts flashed into his brain and made him hesitate before taking the next step. His employer's warning rang in his ears. The alternative was six miles along a lonely road in the dark, or a night under Garvey's roof. The former seemed a direct invitation to catastrophe, if catastrophe there was planned to be. The latter –

well, the choice was certainly small. One thing, however, he realized, was plain – he must show neither fear nor hesitancy.

“My watch must have gained,” he observed quietly, turning the hands back without looking up. “It seems I have certainly missed that train and shall be obliged to throw myself upon your hospitality. But, believe me, I had no intention of putting you out to any such extent.”

“I’m delighted,” the other said. “Defer to the judgment of an older man and make yourself comfortable for the night. There’s a bitter storm outside, and you don’t put me out at all. On the contrary, it’s a great pleasure. I have so little contact with the outside world that it’s really a god-send to have you.”

The man’s face changed as he spoke. His manner was cordial and sincere. Shorthouse began to feel ashamed of his doubts and to read between the lines of his employer’s warning. He took off his coat and the two men moved to the armchairs beside the fire.

“You see,” Garvey went on in a lowered voice, “I understand your hesitancy perfectly. I didn’t know Sidebotham all those years without knowing a good deal about him – perhaps more than you do. I’ve no doubt, now, he filled your mind with all sorts of nonsense about me – probably told you that I was the greatest villain unhung, eh? and all that sort of thing? Poor fellow! He was a fine sort before his mind became unhinged. One of his fancies used to be that everybody else was insane, or just about to become insane. Is he still as bad as that?”

“Few men,” replied Shorthouse, with the manner of making a great confidence, but entirely refusing to be drawn, “go through his experiences and reach his age without entertaining delusions of one kind or another.”

“Perfectly true,” said Garvey. “Your observation is evidently keen.”

“Very keen indeed,” Shorthouse replied, taking his cue neatly; “but, of course, there are some things” – and here he looked cautiously over his shoulder – “there are some things one cannot talk about too circumspectly.”

“I understand perfectly and respect your reserve.”

There was a little more conversation and then Garvey got up

and excused himself on the plea of superintending the preparation of the bedroom.

"It's quite an event to have a visitor in the house, and I want to make you as comfortable as possible," he said. "Marx will do better for a little supervision. And," he added with a laugh as he stood in the doorway, "I want you to carry back a good account to Sidebotham."

II

The tall form disappeared and the door was shut.

The conversation of the past few minutes had come somewhat as a revelation to the secretary. Garvey seemed in full possession of normal instincts. There was no doubt as to the sincerity of his manner and intentions. The suspicions of the first hour began to vanish like mist before the sun. Sidebotham's portentous warnings and the mystery with which he surrounded the whole episode had been allowed to unduly influence his mind. The loneliness of the situation and the bleak nature of the surroundings had helped to complete the illusion. He began to be ashamed of his suspicions and a change commenced gradually to be wrought in his thoughts. Anyhow a dinner and a bed were preferable to six miles in the dark, no dinner, and a cold train into the bargain.

Garvey returned presently. "We'll do the best we can for you," he said, dropping into the deep armchair on the other side of the fire. "Marx is a good servant if you watch him all the time. You must always stand over a Jew, though, if you want things done properly. They're tricky and uncertain unless they're working for their own interest. But Marx might be worse, I'll admit. He's been with me for nearly twenty years — cook, valet, housemaid, and butler all in one. In the old days, you know, he was a clerk in our office in Chicago."

Garvey rattled on and Shorthouse listened with occasional remarks thrown in. The former seemed pleased to have somebody to talk to and the sound of his own voice was evidently sweet music in his ears. After a few minutes, he crossed over to the sideboard and again took up the decanter of whisky, holding it to the light. "You will join me this time," he said pleasantly,

pouring out two glasses, "it will give us an appetite for dinner," and this time Shorthouse did not refuse. The liquor was mellow and soft and the men took two glasses apiece.

"Excellent," remarked the secretary.

"Glad you appreciate it," said the host, smacking his lips. "It's very old whisky, and I rarely touch it when I'm alone. But this," he added, "is a special occasion, isn't it?"

Shorthouse was in the act of putting his glass down when something drew his eyes suddenly to the other's face. A strange note in the man's voice caught his attention and communicated alarm to his nerves. A new light shone in Garvey's eyes and there flitted momentarily across his strong features the shadow of something that set the secretary's nerves tingling. A mist spread before his eyes and the unaccountable belief rose strong in him that he was staring into the visage of an untamed animal. Close to his heart there was something that was wild, fierce, savage. An involuntary shiver ran over him and seemed to dispel the strange fancy as suddenly as it had come. He met the other's eye with a smile, the counterpart of which in his heart was vivid horror.

"It is a special occasion," he said, as naturally as possible, "and, allow me to add, very special whisky."

Garvey appeared delighted. He was in the middle of a devious tale describing how the whisky came originally into his possession when the door opened behind them and a grating voice announced that dinner was ready. They followed the cassocked form of Marx across the dirty hall, lit only by the shaft of light that followed them from the library door, and entered a small room where a single lamp stood upon a table laid for dinner. The walls were destitute of pictures, and the windows had venetian blinds without curtains. There was no fire in the grate, and when the men sat down facing each other, Shorthouse noticed that, while his own cover was laid with its due proportion of glasses and cutlery, his companion had nothing before him but a soup plate, without fork, knife, or spoon beside it.

"I don't know what there is to offer you," he said; "but I'm sure Marx has done the best he can at such short notice. I only

eat one course for dinner, but pray take your time and enjoy your food."

Marx presently set a plate of soup before the guest, yet so loathsome was the immediate presence of this old Hebrew servitor, that the spoonfuls disappeared somewhat slowly. Garvey sat and watched him.

Shorthouse said the soup was delicious and bravely swallowed another mouthful. In reality his thoughts were centred upon his companion, whose manners were giving evidence of a gradual and curious change. There was a decided difference in his demeanour, a difference that the secretary *felt* at first, rather than saw. Garvey's quiet self-possession was giving place to a degree of suppressed excitement that seemed so far inexplicable. His movements became quick and nervous, his eye shifting and strangely brilliant, and his voice, when he spoke, betrayed an occasional deep tremor. Something unwonted was stirring within him and evidently demanding every moment more vigorous manifestation as the meal proceeded.

Intuitively Shorthouse was afraid of this growing excitement, and while negotiating some uncommonly tough pork chops he tried to lead the conversation on to the subject of chemistry, of which in his Oxford days he had been an enthusiastic student. His companion, however, would have none of it. It seemed to have lost interest for him, and he would barely condescend to respond. When Marx presently returned with a plate of steaming eggs and bacon the subject dropped of its own accord.

"An inadequate dinner dish," Garvey said, as soon as the man was gone; "but better than nothing, I hope."

Shorthouse remarked that he was exceedingly fond of bacon and eggs, and, looking up with the last word, saw that Garvey's face was twitching convulsively and that he was almost wriggling in his chair. He quieted down, however, under the secretary's gaze and observed, though evidently with an effort—

"Very good of you to say so. Wish I could join you, only I never eat such stuff. I only take one course for dinner."

Shorthouse began to feel some curiosity as to what the nature of this one course might be, but he made no further

remark and contented himself with noting mentally that his companion's excitement seemed to be rapidly growing beyond his control. There was something uncanny about it, and he began to wish he had chosen the alternative of the walk to the station.

"I'm glad to see you never speak when Marx is in the room," said Garvey presently. "I'm sure it's better not. Don't you think so?"

He appeared to wait eagerly for the answer.

"Undoubtedly," said the puzzled secretary.

"Yes," the other went on quickly. "He's an excellent man, but he has one drawback – a really horrid one. You may – but, no, you could hardly have noticed it yet."

"Not drink, I trust," said Shorthouse, who would rather have discussed any other subject than the odious Jew.

"Worse than that a great deal," Garvey replied, evidently expecting the other to draw him out. But Shorthouse was in no mood to hear anything horrible, and he declined to step into the trap.

"The best of servants have their faults," he said coldly.

"I'll tell you what it is if you like," Garvey went on, still speaking very low and leaning forward over the table so that his face came close to the flame of the lamp, "only we must speak quietly in case he's listening. I'll tell you what it is – if you think you won't be frightened."

"Nothing frightens me," he laughed. (Garvey must understand that at all events.) "Nothing can frighten me," he repeated.

"I'm glad of that; for it frightens *me* a good deal sometimes."

Shorthouse feigned indifference. Yet he was aware that his heart was beating a little quicker and that there was a sensation of chilliness in his back. He waited in silence for what was to come.

"He has a horrible predilection for vacuums," Garvey went on presently in a still lower voice and thrusting his face further forward under the lamp.

"Vacuums!" exclaimed the secretary in spite of himself. "What in the world do you mean?"

"What I say, of course. He's always tumbling into them, so that I can't find him or get at him. He hides there for hours at a time, and for the life of me I can't make out what he does there."

Shorthouse stared his companion straight in the eyes. What in the name of Heaven was he talking about?

"Do you suppose he goes there for a change of air, or – or to escape?" he went on in a louder voice.

Shorthouse could have laughed outright but for the expression of the other's face.

"I should not think there was much air of any sort in a vacuum," he said quietly.

"That's exactly what *I* feel," continued Garvey with ever growing excitement. "That's the horrid part of it. How the devil does he live there? You see—"

"Have you ever followed him there?" interrupted the secretary.

The other leaned back in his chair and drew a deep sigh.

"Never! It's impossible. You see I can't follow him. There's not room for two. A vacuum only holds one comfortably. Marx knows that. He's out of my reach altogether once he's fairly inside. He knows the best side of a bargain. He's a regular Jew."

"That is a drawback to a servant, of course—" Shorthouse spoke slowly, with his eyes on his plate.

"A drawback," interrupted the other with an ugly chuckle. "I call it a draw-in, that's what I call it."

"A draw-in does seem a more accurate term," assented Shorthouse. "But," he went on, "I thought that nature abhorred a vacuum. She used to, when I was at school – though perhaps – it's so long ago—"

He hesitated and looked up. Something in Garvey's face – something he had *felt* before he looked up – stopped his tongue and froze the words in his throat. His lips refused to move and became suddenly dry. Again the mist rose before his eyes and the appalling shadow dropped its veil over the face before him. Garvey's features began to burn and glow. Then they seemed to coarsen and somehow slip confusedly together. He stared for a second – it seemed only for a second – into the visage of a

ferocious and abominable animal; and then, as suddenly as it had come, the filthy shadow of the beast passed off, the mist melted out, and with a mighty effort over his nerves he forced himself to finish his sentence.

"You see it's so long since I've given attention to such things," he stammered. His heart was beating rapidly, and a feeling of oppression was gathering over it.

"It's my peculiar and special study on the other hand," Garvey resumed. "I've not spent all these years in my laboratory to no purpose, I can assure you. Nature, I know for a fact," he added with unnatural warmth, "does *not* abhor a vacuum. On the contrary, she's uncommonly fond of 'em, much too fond, it seems, for the comfort of my little household. If there were fewer vacuums and more abhorrence we should get on better – a damned sight better in my opinion."

"Your special knowledge, no doubt, enables you to speak with authority," Shorthouse said, curiosity and alarm warring with other mixed feelings in his mind; "but how *can* a man tumble into a vacuum?"

"You may well ask. That's just it. How can he? It's preposterous and I can't make it out at all. Marx knows, but he won't tell me. Jews know more than we do. For my part I have reason to believe—" He stopped and listened. "Hush! here he comes," he added, rubbing his hands together as if in glee and fidgeting in his chair.

Steps were heard coming down the passage, and as they approached the door, Garvey seemed to give himself completely over to an excitement he could not control. His eyes were fixed on the door and he began clutching the tablecloth with both hands. Again his face was screened by the loathsome shadow. It grew wild, wolfish. As through a mask, that concealed, and yet was thin enough to let through a suggestion of, the beast crouching behind, there leaped into his countenance the strange look of the animal in the human – the expression of the were-wolf, the monster. The change in all its loathsomeness came rapidly over his features, which began to lose their outline. The nose flattened, dropping with broad nostrils over thick lips. The face rounded, filled, and became squat. The eyes, which, luckily for Shorthouse, no longer sought his own,

glowed with the light of untamed appetite and bestial greed. The hands left the cloth and grasped the edges of the plate, and then clutched the cloth again.

"This is *my* course coming now," said Garvey, in a deep guttural voice. He was shivering. His upper lip was partly lifted and showed the teeth, white and gleaming.

A moment later the door opened and Marx hurried into the room and set a dish in front of his master. Garvey half rose to meet him, stretching out his hands and grinning horribly. With his mouth he made a sound like the snarl of an animal. The dish before him was steaming, but the slight vapour rising from it betrayed by its odour that it was not born of a fire of coals. It was the natural heat of flesh warmed by the fires of life only just expelled. The moment the dish rested on the table Garvey pushed away his own plate and drew the other up close under his mouth. Then he seized the food in both hands and commenced to tear it with his teeth, grunting as he did so. Shorthouse closed his eyes, with a feeling of nausea. When he looked up again the lips and jaw of the man opposite were stained with crimson. The whole man was transformed. A feasting tiger, starved and ravenous, but without a tiger's grace — this was what he watched for several minutes, transfixed with horror and disgust.

Marx had already taken his departure, knowing evidently what was not good for the eyes to look upon, and Shorthouse knew at last that he was sitting face to face with a madman.

The ghastly meal was finished in an incredibly short time and nothing was left but a tiny pool of red liquid rapidly hardening. Garvey leaned back heavily in his chair and sighed. His smeared face, withdrawn now from the glare of the lamp, began to resume its normal appearance. Presently he looked up at his guest and said in his natural voice—

"I hope you've had enough to eat. You wouldn't care for this, you know," with a downward glance.

Shorthouse met his eyes with an inward loathing, and it was impossible not to show some of the repugnance he felt. In the other's face, however, he thought he saw a subdued, cowed expression. But he found nothing to say.

"Marx will be in presently," Garvey went on. "He's either listening, or in a vacuum."

"Does he choose any particular time for his visits?" the secretary managed to ask.

"He generally goes after dinner; just about this time, in fact. But he's not gone yet," he added, shrugging his shoulders, "for I think I hear him coming."

Shorthouse wondered whether vacuum was possibly synonymous with wine cellar, but gave no expression to his thoughts. With chills of horror still running up and down his back, he saw Marx come in with a basin and towel, while Garvey thrust up his face just as an animal puts up its muzzle to be rubbed.

"Now we'll have coffee in the library, if you're ready," he said, in the tone of a gentleman addressing his guests after a dinner party.

Shorthouse picked up the bag, which had lain all this time between his feet, and walked through the door his host held open for him. Side by side they crossed the dark hall together, and, to his disgust, Garvey linked an arm in his, and with his face so close to the secretary's ear that he felt the warm breath, said in a thick voice—

"You're uncommonly careful with that bag, Mr Shorthouse. It surely must contain something more than the bundle of papers."

"Nothing but the papers," he answered, feeling the hand burning upon his arm and wishing he were miles away from the house and its abominable occupants.

"Quite sure?" asked the other with an odious and suggestive chuckle. "Is there any meat in it, fresh meat – raw meat?"

The secretary felt, somehow, that at the least sign of fear the beast on his arm would leap upon him and tear him with his teeth.

"Nothing of the sort," he answered vigorously. "It wouldn't hold enough to feed a cat."

"True," said Garvey with a vile sigh, while the other felt the hand upon his arm twitch up and down as if feeling the flesh. "True, it's too small to be of any real use. As you say, it wouldn't hold enough to feed a cat."

Shorthouse was unable to suppress a cry. The muscles of his

fingers, too, relaxed in spite of himself and he let the black bag drop with a bang to the floor. Garvey instantly withdrew his arm and turned with a quick movement. But the secretary had regained his control as suddenly as he had lost it, and he met the maniac's eyes with a steady and aggressive glare.

"There, you see, it's quite light. It makes no appreciable noise when I drop it." He picked it up and let it fall again, as if he had dropped it for the first time purposely. The ruse was successful.

"Yes. You're right," Garvey said, still standing in the doorway and staring at him. "At any rate it wouldn't hold enough for two," he laughed. And as he closed the door the horrid laughter echoed in the empty hall.

They sat down by a blazing fire and Shorthouse was glad to feel its warmth. Marx presently brought in coffee. A glass of the old whisky and a good cigar helped to restore equilibrium. For some minutes the men sat in silence staring into the fire. Then, without looking up, Garvey said in a quiet voice—

"I suppose it was a shock to you to see me eat raw meat like that. I must apologize if it was unpleasant to you. But it's all I can eat and it's the only meal I take in the twenty-four hours."

"Best nourishment in the world, no doubt; though I should think it might be a trifle strong for some stomachs."

He tried to lead the conversation away from so unpleasant a subject, and went on to talk rapidly of the values of different foods, of vegetarianism and vegetarians, and of men who had gone for long periods without any food at all. Garvey listened apparently without interest and had nothing to say. At the first pause he jumped in eagerly.

"When the hunger is really great on me," he said, still gazing into the fire, "I simply cannot control myself. I must have raw meat — the first I can get—" Here he raised his shining eyes and Shorthouse felt his hair beginning to rise.

"It comes upon me so suddenly too. I never can tell when to expect it. A year ago the passion rose in me like a whirlwind and Marx was out and I couldn't get meat. I had to get something or I should have bitten myself. Just when it was getting

unbearable my dog ran out from beneath the sofa. It was a spaniel."

Shorthouse responded with an effort. He hardly knew what he was saying and his skin crawled as if a million ants were moving over it.

There was a pause of several minutes.

"I've bitten Marx all over," Garvey went on presently in his strange quiet voice, and as if he were speaking of apples; "but he's bitter. I doubt if the hunger could ever make me do it again. Probably that's what first drove him to take shelter in a vacuum." He chuckled hideously as he thought of this solution of his attendant's disappearances.

Shorthouse seized the poker and poked the fire as if his life depended on it. But when the banging and clattering was over Garvey continued his remarks with the same calmness. The next sentence, however, was never finished. The secretary had got upon his feet suddenly.

"I shall ask your permission to retire," he said in a determined voice; "I'm tired tonight; will you be good enough to show me to my room?"

Garvey looked up at him with a curious cringing expression behind which there shone the gleam of cunning passion.

"Certainly," he said, rising from his chair. "You've had a tiring journey. I ought to have thought of that before."

He took the candle from the table and lit it, and the fingers that held the match trembled.

"We needn't trouble Marx," he explained. "That beast's in his vacuum by this time."

III

They crossed the hall and began to ascend the carpetless wooden stairs. They were in the well of the house and the air cut like ice. Garvey, the flickering candle in his hand, throwing his face into strong outline, led the way across the first landing and opened a door near the mouth of a dark passage. A pleasant room greeted the visitor's eyes, and he rapidly took in its points while his host walked over and lit two candles that stood on a table at the foot of the bed. A fire burned brightly

in the grate. There were two windows, opening like doors, in the wall opposite, and a high canopied bed occupied most of the space on the right. Panelling ran all round the room reaching nearly to the ceiling and gave a warm and cosy appearance to the whole; while the portraits that stood in alternate panels suggested somehow the atmosphere of an old country house in England. Shorthouse was agreeably surprised.

"I hope you'll find everything you need," Garvey was saying in the doorway. "If not, you have only to ring that bell by the fireplace. Marx won't hear it, of course, but it rings in my laboratory, where I spend most of the night."

Then, with a brief goodnight, he went out and shut the door after him. The instant he was gone Mr Sidebotham's private secretary did a peculiar thing. He planted himself in the middle of the room with his back to the door, and drawing the pistol swiftly from his hip pocket levelled it across his left arm at the window. Standing motionless in this position for thirty seconds he then suddenly swerved right round and faced in the other direction, pointing his pistol straight at the keyhole of the door. There followed immediately a sound of shuffling outside and of steps retreating across the landing.

'On his knees at the keyhole,' was the secretary's reflection. 'Just as I thought. But he didn't expect to look down the barrel of a pistol and it made him jump a little.'

As soon as the steps had gone downstairs and died away across the hall, Shorthouse went over and locked the door, stuffing a piece of crumpled paper into the second keyhole which he saw immediately above the first. After that, he made a thorough search of the room. It hardly repaid the trouble, for he found nothing unusual. Yet he was glad he had made it. It relieved him to find no one was hiding under the bed or in the deep oak cupboard; and he hoped sincerely it was not the cupboard in which the unfortunate spaniel had come to its vile death. The French windows, he discovered, opened on to a little balcony. It looked on to the front, and there was a drop of less than twenty feet to the ground below. The bed was high and wide, soft as feathers and covered with snowy sheets – very inviting to a tired man; and beside the blazing fire were a couple of deep armchairs.

Altogether it was very pleasant and comfortable; but, tired though he was, Shorthouse had no intention of going to bed. It was impossible to disregard the warning of his nerves. They had never failed him before, and when that sense of distressing horror lodged in his bones he knew there was something in the wind and that a red flag was flying over the immediate future. Some delicate instrument in his being, more subtle than the senses, more accurate than mere presentiment, had seen the red flag and interpreted its meaning.

Again it seemed to him, as he sat in an armchair over the fire, that his movements were being carefully watched from somewhere; and, not knowing what weapons might be used against him, he felt that his real safety lay in a rigid control of his mind and feelings and a stout refusal to admit that he was in the least alarmed.

The house was very still. As the night wore on the wind dropped. Only occasional bursts of sleet against the windows reminded him that the elements were awake and uneasy. Once or twice the windows rattled and the rain hissed in the fire, but the roar of the wind in the chimney grew less and less and the lonely building was at last lapped in a great stillness. The coals clicked, settling themselves deeper in the grate, and the noise of the cinders dropping with a tiny report into the soft heap of accumulated ashes was the only sound that punctuated the silence.

In proportion as the power of sleep grew upon him the dread of the situation lessened; but so imperceptibly, so gradually, and so insinuatingly that he scarcely realized the change. He thought he was as wide awake to his danger as ever. The successful exclusion of horrible mental pictures of what he had seen he attributed to his rigorous control instead of to their true cause, the creeping over him of the soft influences of sleep. The faces in the coals were so soothing; the armchair was so comfortable; so sweet the breath that gently pressed upon his eyelids; so subtle the growth of the sensation of safety. He settled down deeper into the chair and in another moment would have been asleep when the red flag began to shake violently to and fro and he sat bolt upright as if he had been stabbed in the back.

Someone was coming up the stairs. The boards creaked beneath a stealthy weight.

Shorthouse sprang from the chair and crossed the room swiftly, taking up his position beside the door, but out of range of the keyhole. The two candles flared unevenly on the table at the foot of the bed. The steps were slow and cautious – it seemed thirty seconds between each one – but the person who was taking them was very close to the door. Already he had topped the stairs and was shuffling almost silently across the bit of landing.

The secretary slipped his hand into his pistol pocket and drew back further against the wall, and hardly had he completed the movement when the sounds abruptly ceased and he knew that somebody was standing just outside the door and preparing for a careful observation through the keyhole.

He was in no sense a coward. In action he was never afraid. It was the waiting and wondering and the uncertainty that might have loosened his nerves a little. But, somehow, a wave of intense horror swept over him for a second as he thought of the bestial maniac and his attendant Jew; and he would rather have faced a pack of wolves than have to do with either of these men.

Something brushing gently against the door set his nerves tingling afresh and made him tighten his grasp on the pistol. The steel was cold and slippery in his moist fingers. What an awful noise it would make when he pulled the trigger! If the door were to open how close he would be to the figure that came in! Yet he knew it was locked on the inside and could not possibly open. Again something brushed against the panel beside him and a second later the piece of crumpled paper fell from the keyhole to the floor, while the piece of thin wire that had accomplished this result showed its point for a moment in the room and was then swiftly withdrawn.

Somebody was evidently peering now through the keyhole, and realizing this fact the spirit of attack entered into the heart of the beleaguered man. Raising aloft his right hand he brought it suddenly down with a resounding crash upon the panel of the door next the keyhole – a crash that, to the crouching eavesdropper, must have seemed like a clap of thunder out of a

clear sky. There was a gasp and a slight lurching against the door and the midnight listener rose startled and alarmed, for Shorthouse plainly heard the tread of feet across the landing and down the stairs till they were lost in the silences of the hall. Only, this time, it seemed to him there were four feet instead of two.

Quickly stuffing the paper back into the keyhole, he was in the act of walking back to the fireplace when, over his shoulder, he caught sight of a white face pressed in outline against the outside of the window. It was blurred in the streams of sleet, but the white of the moving eyes was unmistakable. He turned instantly to meet it, but the face was withdrawn like a flash, and darkness rushed in to fill the gap where it had appeared.

"Watched on both sides," he reflected.

But he was not to be surprised into any sudden action, and quietly walking over to the fireplace as if he had seen nothing unusual he stirred the coals a moment and then strolled leisurely over to the window. Steeling his nerves, which quivered a moment in spite of his will, he opened the window and stepped out on to the balcony. The wind, which he thought had dropped, rushed past him into the room and extinguished one of the candles, while a volley of fine cold rain burst all over his face. At first he could see nothing, and the darkness came close up to his eyes like a wall. He went a little farther on to the balcony and drew the window after him till it clashed. Then he stood and waited.

But nothing touched him. No one seemed to be there. His eyes got accustomed to the blackness and he was able to make out the iron railing, the dark shapes of the trees beyond, and the faint light coming from the other window. Through this he peered into the room, walking the length of the balcony to do so. Of course he was standing in a shaft of light and whoever was crouching in the darkness below could plainly see him. *Below?* — That there should be anyone *above* did not occur to him until, just as he was preparing to go in again, he became aware that something was moving in the darkness over his head. He looked up, instinctively raising a protecting arm, and saw a long black line swinging against the dim wall of the house. The shutters of the window on the next floor, whence it

depended, were thrown open and moving backwards and forwards in the wind. The line was evidently a thickish cord, for as he looked it was pulled in and the end disappeared in the darkness.

Shorthouse, trying to whistle to himself, peered over the edge of the balcony as if calculating the distance he might have to drop, and then calmly walked into the room again and closed the window behind him, leaving the latch so that the lightest touch would cause it to fly open. He relit the candle and drew a straight-backed chair up to the table. Then he put coal on the fire and stirred it up into a royal blaze. He would willingly have folded the shutters over those staring windows at his back. But that was out of the question. It would have been to cut off his way of escape.

Sleep, for the time, was at a disadvantage. His brain was full of blood and every nerve was tingling. He felt as if countless eyes were upon him and scores of stained hands were stretching out from the corners and crannies of the house to seize him. Crouching figures, figures of hideous Jews, stood everywhere about him where shelter was, creeping forward out of the shadows when he was not looking and retreating swiftly and silently when he turned his head. Wherever he looked, other eyes met his own, and though they melted away under his steady, confident gaze, he knew they would wax and draw in upon him the instant his glances weakened and his will wavered.

Though there were no sounds, he knew that in the well of the house there was movement going on, *and preparation*. And this knowledge, inasmuch as it came to him irresistibly and through other and more subtle channels than those of the senses kept the sense of horror fresh in his blood and made him alert and awake.

But, no matter how great the dread in the heart, the power of sleep will eventually overcome it. Exhausted nature is irresistible, and as the minutes wore on and midnight passed, he realized that nature was vigorously asserting herself and sleep was creeping upon him from the extremities.

To lessen the danger he took out his pencil and began to draw the articles of furniture in the room. He worked into elaborate detail the cupboard, the mantelpiece, and the bed,

and from these he passed on to the portraits. Being possessed of genuine skill, he found the occupation sufficiently absorbing. It kept the blood in his brain, and that kept him awake. The pictures, moreover, now that he considered them for the first time, were exceedingly well painted. Owing to the dim light, he centred his attention upon the portraits beside the fireplace. On the right was a woman, with a sweet, gentle face and a figure of great refinement; on the left was a full-size figure of a big handsome man with a full beard and wearing a hunting costume of ancient date.

From time to time he turned to the windows behind him, but the vision of the face was not repeated. More than once, too, he went to the door and listened, but the silence was so profound in the house, that he gradually came to believe the plan of attack had been abandoned. Once he went out on to the balcony, but the sleet stung his face and he only had time to see that the shutters above were closed, when he was obliged to seek the shelter of the room again.

In this way the hours passed. The fire died down and the room grew chilly. Shorthouse had made several sketches of the two heads and was beginning to feel overpoweringly weary. His feet and his hands were cold and his yawns prodigious. It seemed ages and ages since the steps had come to listen at his door and the face had watched him from the window. A feeling of safety had somehow come to him. In reality he was exhausted. His one desire was to drop upon the soft white bed and yield himself up to sleep without any further struggle.

He rose from his chair with a series of yawns that refused to be stifled and looked at his watch. It was close upon three in the morning. He made up his mind that he would lie down with his clothes on and get some sleep. It was safe enough, the door was locked on the inside and the window fastened. Putting the bag on the table near his pillow he blew out the candles and dropped with a sense of careless and delicious exhaustion upon the soft mattress. In five minutes he was sound asleep.

There had scarcely been time for the dreams to come when he found himself lying sideways across the bed with wide open eyes staring into the darkness. Someone had touched him, and

he had writhed away in his sleep as from something unholy. The movement had awakened him.

The room was simply black. No light came from the windows and the fire had gone out as completely as if water had been poured upon it. He gazed into a sheet of impenetrable darkness that came close up to his face like a wall.

His first thought was for the papers in his coat and his hand flew to the pocket. They were safe; and the relief caused by this discovery left his mind instantly free for other reflections.

And the realization that at once came to him with a touch of dismay was, that during his sleep some definite *change* had been effected in the room. He felt this with that intuitive certainty which amounts to positive knowledge. The room was utterly still, but the corroboration that was speedily brought to him seemed at once to fill the darkness with a whispering, secret life that chilled his blood and made the sheet feel like ice against his cheek.

Hark! This was it; there reached his ears, in which the blood was already buzzing with warning clamour, a dull murmur of something that rose indistinctly from the well of the house and became audible to him without passing through walls or doors. There seemed no solid surface between him, lying on the bed, and the landing; between the landing and the stairs, and between the stairs and the hall beyond.

He knew that the door of the room *was standing open!* Therefore it had been opened from the *inside*. Yet the window was fastened, also on the inside.

Hardly was this realized when the conspiring silence of the hour was broken by another and a more definite sound. A step was coming along the passage. A certain bruise on the hip told Shorthouse that the pistol in his pocket was ready for use and he drew it out quickly and cocked it. Then he just had time to slip over the edge of the bed and crouch down on the floor when the step halted on the threshold of the room. The bed was thus between him and the open door. The window was at his back.

He waited in the darkness. What struck him as peculiar about the steps was that there seemed no particular desire to move stealthily. There was no extreme caution. They moved

along in rather a slipshod way and sounded like soft slippers or feet in stockings. There was something clumsy, irresponsible, almost reckless about the movement.

For a second the steps paused upon the threshold, but only for a second. Almost immediately they came on into the room and as they passed from the wood to the carpet Shorthouse noticed that they became wholly noiseless. He waited in suspense, not knowing whether the unseen walker was on the other side of the room or was close upon him. Presently he stood up and stretched out his left arm in front of him, groping, searching, feeling in a circle; and behind it he held the pistol, cocked and pointed, in his right hand. As he rose a bone cracked in his knee, his clothes rustled as if they were newspapers, and his breath seemed loud enough to be heard all over the room. But not a sound came to betray the position of the invisible intruder.

Then, just when the tension was becoming unbearable, a noise relieved the gripping silence. It was wood knocking against wood, and it came from the farther end of the room. The steps had moved over to the fireplace. A sliding sound almost immediately followed it and then silence again over everything like a pall.

For another five minutes Shorthouse waited, and then the suspense became too much. He could not stand that open door! The candles were close beside him and he struck a match and lit them, expecting in the sudden glare to receive at least a terrific blow. But nothing happened, and he saw at once that the room was entirely empty. Walking over with the pistol cocked he peered out into the darkness of the landing and then closed the door and turned the key. Then he searched the room – bed, cupboard, table, curtains, everything that could have concealed a man; but found no trace of the intruder. The owner of the footsteps had disappeared like a ghost into the shadows of the night. But for one fact he might have imagined that he had been dreaming: *the bag had vanished!*

There was no more sleep for Shorthouse that night. His watch pointed to 4 a.m. and there were still three hours before daylight. He sat down at the table and continued his sketches. With fixed determination he went on with his drawing and

began a new outline of the man's head. There was something in the expression that continually evaded him. He had no success with it, and this time it seemed to him that it was the eyes that brought about his discomfiture. He held up his pencil before his face to measure the distance between the nose and the eyes, and to his amazement he saw that a change had come over the features. The eyes were no longer open. *The lids had closed!*

For a second he stood in a sort of stupefied astonishment. A push would have topped him over. Then he sprang to his feet and held a candle close up to the picture. The eyelids quivered, the eyelashes trembled. Then, right before his gaze, the eyes opened and looked straight into his own. The holes were cut in the panel and this pair of eyes, human eyes, just fitted them.

As by a curious effect of magic, the strong fear that had governed him ever since his entry into the house disappeared in a second. Anger rushed into his heart and his chilled blood rose suddenly to boiling point. Putting the candle down, he took two steps back into the room and then flung himself forward with all his strength against the painted panel. Instantly, and before the crash came, the eyes were withdrawn, and two black spaces showed where they had been. The old huntsman was eyeless. But the panel cracked and split inwards like a sheet of thin cardboard; and Shorthouse, pistol in hand, thrust an arm through the jagged aperture and, seizing a human leg, dragged out into the room – the Jew!

Words rushed in such a torrent to his lips that they choked him. The old Hebrew, white as chalk, stood shaking before him, the bright pistol barrel opposite his eyes, when a volume of cold air rushed into the room, and with it a sound of hurried steps. Shorthouse felt his arm knocked up before he had time to turn, and the same second Garvey, who had somehow managed to burst open the window came between him and the trembling Marx. His lips were parted and his eyes rolled strangely in his distorted face.

“Don’t shoot him! Shoot in the air!” he shrieked. He seized the Jew by the shoulders.

“You damned hound,” he roared, hissing in his face. “So I’ve got you at last. That’s where your vacuum is, is it? I know your vile hiding-place at last.” He shook him like a dog.

"I've been after him all night," he cried, turning to Shorthouse, "All night, I tell you, and I've got him at last."

Garvey lifted his upper lip as he spoke and showed his teeth. They shone like the fangs of a wolf. The Jew evidently saw them too, for he gave a horrid yell and struggled furiously.

Before the eyes of the secretary a mist seemed to rise. The hideous shadow again leaped into Garvey's face. He foresaw a dreadful battle, and covering the two men with his pistol he retreated slowly to the door. Whether they were both mad, or both criminal, he did not pause to inquire. The only thought present in his mind was that the sooner he made his escape the better.

Garvey was still shaking the Jew when he reached the door and turned the key, but as he passed out on to the landing both men stopped their struggling and turned to face him. Garvey's face, bestial, loathsome, livid with anger; the Jew's white and grey with fear and horror – both turned towards him and joined in a wild, horrible yell that woke the echoes of the night. The next second they were after him at full speed.

Shorthouse slammed the door in their faces and was at the foot of the stairs, crouching in the shadow, before they were out upon the landing. They tore shrieking down the stairs and past him, into the hall; and, wholly unnoticed, Shorthouse whipped up the stairs again, crossed the bedroom and dropped from the balcony into the soft snow.

As he ran down the drive he heard behind him in the house the yells of the maniacs; and when he reached home several hours later Mr Sidebotham not only raised his salary but also told him to buy a new hat and overcoat, and send in the bill to him.

THE LAST NIGHT

By Charles Birkin

"PLEASE, DOCTOR," the girl's voice quavered, "please, doctor, let Nurse stay with me. Something awful is going to happen. I know it. Tell Nurse she's to stay with me tonight. It's my last night. I'm going out tomorrow. If you don't tell her to stay I'll kill myself somehow. I swear I will."

The nurse looked at Doctor Patterson with the resigned, patient look that adults employ when dealing with a naughty child.

Dr Patterson smiled. "But, my dear," he said, "what could possibly happen to you? What is it you're afraid of?"

"I can't tell you. I'm afraid to . . . but tell her not to leave me, doctor; tell her she mustn't leave me alone."

He raised his eyebrows at the nurse.

"She won't confide in me. I've no idea what she means, doctor."

"I tell you I daren't. He'd get to hear of it."

"He? Who do you mean?"

"Dr Morris."

"Dr Morris?" Patterson was puzzled.

"Yes." Nora almost whispered the answer.

She glanced apprehensively round her small white room with its heavily barred windows and narrow spotless bed. There was an air of impersonal and cleanly efficiency that is only found in hospitals and institutions.

"She's a little tired tonight with the excitement," the nurse broke in crisply. "Your mother will be here tomorrow, Nora," she added; "you mustn't over-excite yourself, you know, or we'll have to keep you here a little longer until you are quite well again."

Nora sat down on the edge of her bed. Keep her here longer, would they? For three years she had been in this 'mental

home' - 'A private home,' Mrs Little had impressed upon her friends, "of course Nora is in a *private* home. Poor child. But the doctor says she has been much better lately, and so she'll soon be back with me again."

"Yes, Nora - your mother will come for you tomorrow, and she mustn't see a tired-eyed child, must she? Now, don't think any more about it, or, as nurse says, you won't be fit to leave. You're not behaving at all reasonably, you know." He believed in humouring the patients . . . to a point! "Just a minute, nurse," he said.

Together they crossed to the door and went outside into the whitewashed corridor. Nora could hear the low murmur of their voices. What were they saying? she asked herself frenziedly. Were they saying that she was mad - that she didn't know what she was talking about? She shuddered, rocking backwards and forwards, her face set mask-like with fear. Dr Morris would come along tonight as he had said he would. She couldn't bear it - she couldn't. His eyes would look at her - those terrible eyes. . . .

Dimly she heard a woman laughing - high, shrieking maniac laughter. It rose shrilly - a penetrating animal scream. The door opened - and the doctor said: "That's number 18 started again. I suppose I'd better see what's the matter." The nurse came into the room. Nora heard the clatter of the doctor's feet on the oil-cloth of the corridor floor.

"Really, Nora, no more of this nonsense, if you please. Come now and get ready for bed. It's eight o'clock."

"Nurse . . . if I tell you, you'll help me, won't you. You'll believe me?"

"That's enough. If you say any more I'll tell the doctor you're bad again. You're a very naughty girl."

Mutely Nora started her evening preparations. If she said any more they wouldn't let her go . . . dear God, that would mean more nights. Perhaps Doctor Morris wouldn't come after all.

"Well, goodnight, Nora." The nurse switched off the light by the door. "Go to sleep, dear, and don't let me hear another word from you." The door closed with an angry bang.

Nora lay beneath her blankets, her eyes open. Sleep - she

must sleep. Tomorrow wasn't far away. She was going home tomorrow. She must go to sleep. In the silence she heard the wild laughter of the woman in No. 18. She was bad tonight, the doctor had said. She must go to sleep . . . she must go to sleep . . . she must go to sleep. . . .

Dr Patterson was worried. He realized of course that it was absurd to pay any attention to Nora's words. She was excited at the prospect of her discharge on the following day, that was all. And yet her terror had seemed so genuine. . . .

He wondered if he should consult Morris; but decided that it would only disturb him needlessly. He mustn't pay any attention. Good Lord, if he took all that his patients said seriously, he would have been one of them years ago. But still – there was something tragic in Nora's pleading. No, he decided, he'd say nothing to Morris. He hadn't seemed very fit lately; he'd been working too hard – and overdoing his pleasures too, if he, Patterson, wasn't mistaken. He was a good-looking brute of a man, and had an extremely strong personality . . . forceful. Dr Patterson was very precise and liked to amend his thought sentences until they expressed his exact meaning.

Dr Patterson thought of his own rather meagre form, and sighed perhaps a little enviously. But there was no time for speculation, he told himself; there was too much to do. The woman in No. 18, for instance, would need settling off for the night. A sleeping draught might make the poor soul easier.

Hugh Morris pressed the bell on his desk, and bent his dark head once more over his writing. There was a knock on the door.

"Come in." Hugh's voice was slow and deep. "Oh, Todd," he continued, "I rang to say I shouldn't need you any more tonight. You may go to bed. I've a lot of work to get through, and do not wish to be disturbed under any consideration."

"Very good, sir. And will you be wanting anything left out for you, sir?"

"No, Todd. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, sir."

Morris listened to the sound of his retreating footsteps. No – on no account did he wish to be disturbed . . . Todd could swear he had been working in his study all night. He took off his dinner-jacket and shrugged his shoulders into his professional white linen coat. Then he drew soft rubber gloves on to his hands. He crossed to the mirror above the mantelpiece and looked at his reflection with satisfaction.

He saw a man in his middle forties, of immense physique, with dark hair curling crisply back from his forehead, strong chin, and a firm mouth with thick rather negroid lips. It was a good-looking face – but not in any way remarkable, with the exception of the eyes. Large and of a deep blue, they burned with the light of fanaticism. His enemies said that his eyes were those of a demented man. His lady friends, and they were many, said that they were “terrified by Hugh’s eyes – they’re hypnotic.” But Morris really paid little attention to what friends or enemies said – he had only one aim and object in his life, his profession – the study of the human brain – and tonight . . . tonight, he smiled exultantly, he was going to test his theory of how far a subject under hypnotic influence could resist bodily pain. He glanced at the time. It would be safer to wait an hour.

The moonlight flooded Nora’s tiny room, bleaching it of what little colour it possessed. For hours it had seemed to Nora that she had lain awake, stark with fear, listening, listening for those sure and heavy footsteps that she knew so well. She would have run out into the corridor, but the door was self-locking, and could only be opened from the outside, unless one had a key, and she would get into trouble if she were found wandering in the corridors.

And then, when her taut nerves told her she could bear the suspense no more, sleep had come to her.

The clock over the gateway of the Menyham Mental Home struck two. The building was in darkness, except where one patch of dull orange showed the room in which the nurse on night duty sat reading or knitting. It was seldom that she was disturbed by her patients.

Softly Morris opened the door of his dispensary. The passage was deserted. Like most men of great physical strength, he could, when occasion demanded it, move as lightly as a cat. Outside room 18 he paused. There was no sound.

He noted with satisfaction that the patient had responded to the sleeping draught that Patterson had prescribed. His hand caressed a small scalpel in the pocket of his coat – lovingly fingering the cold metal.

Nora opened her eyes. Surely, oh surely, it was nearly morning. She glanced anxiously at the window. It was so difficult to judge time. In a few hours her mother would be here. It was today she was leaving. Her mother! Oh, it would be good to be home again; among colour and warmth and friendly interest.

A slight noise outside the door startled her. She saw a thin wedge of light. It slowly widened. Fascinated, she could not tear her eyes away. Doctor Morris! She knew that there had been no chance of escape. Why hadn't she told nurse – insisted on Dr Patterson listening to her. He'd told her only that morning. "It's to be our secret, my dear," Dr Morris had said, "you understand that, don't you? If you tell anyone that I shall come, I'll kill you."

She shivered as she thought of his blue eyes blazing down into hers. She had seemed paralysed, incapable of speech. And now he was here. . . .

Hugh's broad bulk filled the lighted space.

"Doctor Morris," Nora whispered the words.

"Be quiet, you little fool."

He stepped inside the room and leant against the door. The gentle click of its closing was very clear in the silence of the room. With two strides he was standing over her. Her face, a pallid moon-blanced oval, looked pitifully up at him. "Doctor Morris," she repeated.

Hugh sat on her bed, which creaked protestingly beneath his weight. His hands caught hers.

"Nora – look at me." His face was very near her – his large square teeth gleaming startlingly white against the tan of his skin.

"Nora . . . remember what I said to you this morning. You told no one I was coming here – did you?"

"No one, doctor."

"Look at me," his grip on her hands tightened. "You will do as I say – do you hear?" he spoke without expression. "You feel no pain – there is no such thing as pain. Repeat that after me. There is no such thing as pain. There is no need to be frightened. Repeat it. . . . There is no need to be frightened. . . . 'There is no such thing as pain.' "

"There is no such thing as pain."

"Pain exists only in the imagination."

"Pain exists only in the imagination."

Gradually Nora felt her consciousness slipping. She was tired – oh, so tired. She couldn't keep awake any longer. . . . Something in the back of her mind told her it was dangerous to let herself go to sleep, very dangerous. But really she didn't care dreadfully any more. She wished Doctor Morris would stop looking at her. His terrible eyes seemed boring into her head . . . she tried to cry out – and then everything went black.

Hugh saw her expression go blank. With a soft grunt of pleasure he released her hands. Still peering steadfastly into her face he pulled out the small gleaming scalpel. He touched her hand with the cold steel, but the girl gave no sign of feeling it.

"Nora – can you hear me?"

There was no response. Carefully he picked up the tiny instrument. The blade glimmered in the cold light of the moon. He made a small incision on the back of the girl's hand. Immediately a thin scarlet line showed on the white flesh.

"Pain exists only in the imagination." Hugh was triumphant. His experiment had started well.

Nora was moving her hand, vaguely and without purpose. She was smiling – a silly, meaningless smile. He watched what would happen. Abruptly her hand quivered and crawled spider-like across the sheet towards his. It grasped the scalpel. Morris stood up. It was interesting, he thought, to see what her next move would be. His scientist's fascination rooted him to the spot.

"Nora – make a small cut on your left thumb – do you hear me? There is no such thing as pain."

The girl hesitated. Morris was tense with excitement – if the subject inflicted injury on herself without suffering. . . .

Nora was standing facing the window, her face clear in the moonlight; calmly she raised her right hand holding the knife. For a moment she stood quite still, then, with a deliberate movement, she moved her hand across her throat.

"Stop." Hugh's voice was frenzied.

It seemed to his horrified gaze that the girl had two mouths – two red smiling mouths. And the lower one was in her throat. With a little sigh she sank to the floor, and he saw the blood gushing over her thin regulation nightgown.

"Nora—" he stood spellbound, petrified. It seemed to him that there was blood everywhere – on the floor, the bed, on his hands. His one thought now was to get away. No one had seen him leave his dispensary; if he could get back to his study with the scalpel, perhaps, when the tragedy was discovered, he could 'find' an ordinary table knife – the explanation would be that Nora had hidden it herself, had planned suicide.

He turned to the door, and only at that moment did he realize the terror of the situation. The key was on the outside – he himself had closed the door, and he was a prisoner until the morning. He glanced at the bloody heap on the floor. He must keep his head, he told himself. He took a step towards the window, and his foot slithered. Blood – blood everywhere. He crept to the window, but the iron bars mocked him. Desperately he tore at them with the terrific force of his giant muscles. He must keep calm . . . he mustn't lose his nerve. It depended on himself alone. He stumbled back to the bed and sat there, his head in his hands, staring unseeingly before him.

Outside the clock struck three. Three o'clock! He must hurry, the night nurse went her rounds at half past three.

The figure on the floor moved . . . he could swear that he saw it move.

"Keep your head . . . keep your head. She didn't suffer – no of course not, because there is no pain."

He wondered who that was he could hear talking. Of course, it was his own voice. You can't be frightened of your own

voice. "It's only in your imagination. There is no pain. There is no pain – oh, let me out! God help me, let me out!" He was screaming, screaming with the full force of his lungs. "There is no pain, I tell you – it only exists in the imagination. I've proved it. Proved it. Proved it. Let me out!"

He flung himself against the door, battering upon it until his hands bled, his great strength impotent. He could hear voices in the corridor, frightened whisperings. Then a man's urgent tones. That must be Patterson, Hugh thought. Then more voices – the warders.

"Let me out – I've proved it. I was right . . . right. Pain is an illusion!"

Cautiously the key was turned. Framed in the door was a group of men, behind them the frightened faces of the nurses.

"Morris!" Patterson was wide-eyed with horror.

"I've proved it, Patterson – there is no pain." Hugh was laughing wildly, triumphantly. "Do you realize what it means? I've won. I've conquered pain."

MESHES OF DOOM

By Neville Kilvington

*(Extracts from the code-diary of Jacob Trezbond,
Fellow of the Botanical Society)*

OCTOBER 12th, 11 p.m. This has been, for me, a day marked by two highly gratifying achievements. To begin with, at half past one this morning, I strangled my wife with the cord of my dressing-gown, and buried her body in the largest of my conservatories. It is pleasing to be able to recall the detached calmness with which I carried out this operation. Emotionally, it meant no more to me than the vivisection of a frog might mean to a medical student. Indeed, it proved to be an exceedingly interesting process, particularly since it held for me all the charm of novelty. Frances must have suffered very little, for she lost consciousness surprisingly soon. It was curious to watch her eyes projecting, and her tongue lolling out. What a remarkable thing reflex action is. Her legs and arms continued to twitch, and her body to writhe for some minutes after she was dead. I was so absorbed in observing these spasmodic movements that I felt quite regretful when they finally ceased. I could have gone on watching them for ever.

I must admit that my six years of married life have proved disastrous. No doubt, I myself am partly to blame for this. I ought never to have married. My falling in love I now realize to have been the one serious lapse of my life from that aloof, calculating reason which I have always tried to practise, and which, to my mind, is the crowning accomplishment of a perfect man. In disposing of Frances thus dispassionately, divorced from any of that superstitious dread of retribution which assails most men whose minds turn to murder, I have restored my self-respect in my own eyes.

Frances was a pretty little thing, with a face like a white flower, and arms like clinging tendrils. Our marriage was as

unfortunate for her as for me, so what I have done has obviously been a happy way out for both of us. Of course, I might have let her go on in her own way until she provided me with grounds for divorce, as no doubt she would eventually have done. I should have been glad enough to have seen the Gordian knot cut, but publicity of any kind is abhorrent to me. The step I have taken is obviously the better one.

I shall be able to live very economically now that Frances is dead, and there will be no one to distract me from my work. Frances was a great distraction, always wanting to be rushing off somewhere on enjoyment bent. Not that I ever went with her, nor, for that matter, did I see much of her when she was at home. I was too absorbed in my botanical researches. But my work needs money, and the annuity my uncle left me was sadly depleted by her extravagances. Consequently, there were many rare, costly specimens of plants that I had to forego, and often my conservatories fell into disrepair through lack of funds. A thousand a year goes but a short way when one has a wife who spends the summer gadding about London, and the winter on the Riviera.

Today's second noteworthy event has been my acquiring one of the two giant creeper seeds that Armand brought back from the Amazon basin last July. He brought it to show me as soon as he returned to England. It was very like a black walnut. He said that the creeper, when full grown, was enormous, and that it was an entirely new species. His account of the plant's peculiarities made me set my heart on obtaining the seed. He offered it me, but dropped a hint that he was hard up, and that he had sold one of the seeds for fifty pounds to a man who would gladly pay the same price to acquire the other. He was unable to obtain more than two, he explained, and they cost him the lives of three of his boys. I don't see why he should assess the lives of three niggers at a hundred pounds; they weren't his property; but I suppose his trouble was worth something.

I hadn't got the money then - thanks to Frances - so Armand promised to hold the seed until my half-yearly allowance came in in October. If I didn't claim the seed then, he warned me, he'd sell it elsewhere.

When my allowance arrived, my lady Frances, if you please, began whining about her annual jaunt to the Riviera. I assented outwardly to her going, for appearances' sake, while secretly determining to put a stop to her money-devouring games for good.

At half past six this morning, Frances being safely buried, I set off in the car for London. I had a double purpose in starting so early. I wanted to catch Armand before he started for Brussels, where he was attending a conference, and also, I didn't want people in the neighbourhood to know that Frances wasn't with me. I had let her put it about that she was leaving for the Riviera today, and that I was driving her to Town. She used to take a malicious pleasure in dangling her jaunts before her acquaintances, because it pleased her to see the envy in their faces.

The servants left yesterday, all but an odd-job man for outside work, who will be back next week after a short holiday. His wife will come in once a week to clean down. I can do for myself very well with the aid of a tin-opener. This is the usual arrangement whenever Frances goes away, so no one will notice anything unusual. In a week or so I shall announce that I've not heard from Frances, then the police can start dragging the Dover Straits if they like. I don't see how anyone can prove she didn't get as far as Dover, anyhow. Not even a Southern Railway ticket collector could swear she didn't.

I took care to let the engine of my car make all the noise it could as I set out, so that the village gossips in their beds could say: "There's Trezbond and his wife off to London," and then go back to their snoring, damn them.

When I reached Armand's place off Oakley Street, Chelsea, a disturbing incident occurred, which warned me I shall have to watch my nerves carefully. I was about to ring the bell, when, on the panel of the pillar-box red door – it was freshly painted, and there was not a soiled spot on it – I saw two faint dark oval shadows. They gradually deepened, as though projected by the strengthening light of a magic lantern. At their most distinct, they resembled the staring eyes of my wife as she lay dead. After about fifteen seconds they faded away. Hallucinations, of course.

Armand didn't seem at all willing to let me have the seed, even when I showed him the fifty pounds in notes. I asked him why he hesitated. He pulled a long face and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "the seed I sold to the other man. . . . It grew."

"Quite likely it did grow," I answered. "Be queer if it didn't."

"Ah, but how it grew. It took a whole conservatory to itself, and that proved too small a habitation for it. The thing smashed the glass and broke out. They tried cutting it down, but that made it grow faster. Then they endeavoured to dig it up, but its roots seemed to go down to the centre of the earth. They killed it at last with sulphuric acid. Ordinary weed killer was no good."

"But why kill it?" I asked.

He turned a shade pale. I pooh-poohed his fears, and insisted upon having it. He fetched the seed out of a safe, and came back to sit by the fire. For an irritating time he stared at the thing. Then he shook his head, and stretched out his hand to throw it on the fire. I swore, and plunged forward to prevent him.

Immediately, another strange thing happened. (I *must* be careful.) A hand materialized out of nowhere, a small, plump woman's hand. Beneath the finger-nails lay that brownish tinge that comes to human flesh some hours after death, and, sometimes, even before. It guided Armand's hand from the fire towards mine, and forced open his fingers so that the seed dropped into my palm. Then the strange hand vanished.

"Now, I wonder what induced me to give you that, when I had intended to burn it," he said.

I gave him the money and got up to go. To tell the truth, I was feeling a little shaky. One thing more Armand said before I left:

"Do you allow any children - neighbours' children - about your place?"

I told him "No."

"Mind you don't," he warned me. "Got a couple of dogs, haven't you?"

"Yes. They're all the friends I have got."

He nodded sympathetically, having learnt how little my wife and I have been to each other.

"Keep the dogs away from *that*," he said, indicating with a monitory forefinger the pocket in which I had placed the creeper seed.

Oct. 13th, 3 am. I cannot sleep. I hope my nerves are not going to be troublesome. I went to bed last night as soon as I had entered up my diary for the day, and, being tired, fell asleep at once. I was awakened by a feeling that the bed had suddenly become afflicted with convulsions. Something beside me was tossing and writhing like a body in pain, and there were sounds as of someone choking. I switched on the light. It was exactly half past one. The bedclothes were in a turmoil of confusion, due, of course, to my own restlessness – there can be no other explanation. I sought sleep again, but it would not come, and every now and then a cold sweat broke out over me, and I fell into fits of shivering. I had to get up at last, and am writing my diary for the sake of doing something. It will be a relief when daylight dawns, and I can get to work. I propose to plant the creeper seed in the largest conservatory, so as to give the plant ample room for growth. That is where my wife – but I must forget all that. I wish I had remembered to ask Armand what kind of soil was prevalent where he found the creeper growing, but no doubt a geological survey of South America will help me. There is a book on the subject in my study.

Oct. 14th, 4.45 am. I have been walking about for the last three hours, taking sips of brandy to stop this hateful trembling. It's all nerves, of course. I did not enter my diary last night, thinking that the mental effort of writing might excite me and keep me awake. It made no difference, however. I slept well enough until one-thirty. Then came the same disturbance as before, the same writhing and choking; but to it was added the sensation of a body beside me. It had not the comforting warmth of a living body, but was cold, and exuded a faintly disgusting odour. When I lit up, there was, of course, nothing there.

I planted the seed, as I had arranged to do, yesterday morning. While I was engaged upon the task, my nerves played me another trick, for I distinctly heard a woman's low laugh that sent a chilly prickle through my scalp. I wish I could shake off this feeling of apprehension that grows on me like a weight over the heart.

Oct. 18th. It's no use going to bed. I sit up and read to keep my mind off - things, and doze in my chair when I can. I live in that detached, dreamy state that is the result of losing sleep, and every little noise electrifies my raw nerves to red heat. I don't know what is the matter with the dogs. They whine incessantly, refuse food from me, and are getting scraggy and wild-looking about the eyes. They're no comfort to me now. At times they snap at the invisible air like half-mad things.

I want to be alone. The thought of seeing anyone sets all my nerves quivering, and my heart pounding. Stupid, I know, but I so dread the return of the odd-job man and his meddlesome wife that I've written to tell them to take a longer holiday, and sent them a decent cheque to tide them over.

Oct. 19th, 11 pm. Thank goodness for sending me something of interest to think about. The creeper seedling put in an appearance above ground this morning. I hardly expected its growth to be so rapid. It is dark red and green like the stem of a beetroot.

Loss of sleep is making me very stupid. I knocked over a particularly valuable potted cactus this morning, and trod on it. Also I have been going about all day in agony from my feet, wondering what was the matter with them. Only when I took off my boots tonight did I discover that I'd put each on the wrong foot. A sort of gloom seems to be gathering around everything here. I'm afraid the dogs are going to die. I shall go to bed tonight. I must get some sleep, and be damned to what happens.

Oct. 20th, 2 am. My God, I can't stand this. It came again at half past one, but with fresh developments. I'd go and see a nerve specialist, but that he might hand me over to a psycho-

analyst, and those fellows are so confoundedly clever at worming one's inmost secrets out of one.

When I went to bed, I left the light on. I fell asleep comfortably enough, but was awakened after a while by a cold hand insinuating itself between my neck and the pillow, while the nauseating odour of putrescent flesh smote my nostrils. Beside me lay Frances, and she was twining one clammy arm about me. Two eyes stared glassily out of her bluish-brown face. I thrust out a hand, against that face, to push it from me. The skin was coldly moist; it yielded spongily to my pressure as though it were a bag of water. Then the head began to shrivel and harden, and grew dark until it resembled the creeper seed, while the whole body slowly resolved itself before my eyes into a tangled mass of reddish-green vegetable tendrils. Abruptly, then, the thing disappeared. I shall never go to bed again, and shall not record any more of these hallucinations. I must not dwell on them.

Same day, 11 pm. When I went into the conservatory this morning, I found the creeper, which yesterday was but a seedling, had grown to be a plant twenty inches long, with three pairs of thick leaves of the diameter of tea-trays. Tendrils were sprouting out of it all over the place. During the day it has grown another eight inches. I shall continue to measure it twice daily to record its growth.

Oct. 24th, noon. There must be something at the back of Armand's hints. I don't like the way this creeper is behaving. Already it sprawls like some all-devouring monster over half the conservatory. This morning, when I went in, I found some of my most precious plants had been upset, and many of the pots broken. I fancied at first that I might accidentally have shut a stray cat in the conservatory overnight, but a closer examination showed that the creeper was the cause of the ruin. It had twisted its tendrils round the plants and had dragged them on to the floor, and still held on to its victims by means of its tough, wire-like tendrils. I tried to free the plants without breaking the creeper, but its grip was too tenacious, so I had to cut them free. As I did so, the entire plant writhed from tip

to root, and the severed limbs ejected a thick fluid, dark as congealed blood, and of a nauseating stench that made me quite sick. I had to go outside for a few minutes to get some fresh air. After that, I cleared all the other plants I could out of the conservatory, so as to let the creeper have the place to itself.

I'm afraid my poor old terrier, Trixie, won't last long. She cowers when I go near her, and glares and snaps at everything. She has grown very feeble.

Oct. 29th. The creeper sprawls, a loathsome tangle, over the entire conservatory floor, and is travelling up the sides. It is now almost entirely black, except for the finer veins and tendrils, which are a deep maroon colour. It has put buds out, too. I wish I could make up my mind to get rid of the thing.

Oct. 31st. The first flowers are out in full bloom. Great white things, as large as dinner plates, with black centres that stare like the eyes of the dead.

Nov. 2nd, 2 pm. As I went in to water the creeper this morning, a kind of rustle ran through the whole fibre of the thing, and the great flower-faces – there are dozens of them now – turned their glowering black eyes upon me. I picked my way among the tangled meshes of vegetable matter that lay about the floor, and was just stooping to give the roots some water, when cold feelers began to tickle my neck, and to twine round it. There was something so loathsome in the touch of the thing that I struck out at it, and broke one of the flower stems.

I don't know whether anyone could be prevailed upon to believe a plant capable of getting into a rage. This one certainly did. Angry quivers ran through it. It shook and souged as though a gale were blowing. The whole thing converged about me, as though endeavouring to enmesh me, while the white flowers glowered, malignant with hatred. I happened to be smoking, as I often do in the conservatories, because tobacco smoke keeps down certain pests. A stout tendril thrust itself out and twined round my pipe, wrenching it from my mouth with such violence that one of my teeth was loosened.

I dropped the bucket at that, and bounded to the door, while angry tendrils lashed out, trying to trip me up, and beating my face. I could hear the squelch of the great rope-like stems as my boots crushed them. The foul smell of the escaping sap became intolerable. I think I will get some petrol, and burn the thing out.

Same day, 11 pm. I am a prisoner in my own house. About tea-time this afternoon, I was attracted by a smashing of glass, and, on going out to investigate, found the creeper hammering at the conservatory panes with the bucket I had left there in my panic. I ran for some boarding, and a hammer and nails to close up the breach, but, as I tried to work, the thing lashed at my hands and face, and drove me away. In a very short while it was running riot over the garden.

Presently, I heard my dogs literally screaming. The plant had got hold of them, and was strangling them with its tendrils. I tried to free them, but they actually helped the murderous plant by regarding me as an enemy, and I got badly bitten about the hands. The thing killed them at last, after which, with an intelligence that was almost human, and a malevolence that was diabolical, it began to turn its attention to me. I wrenched myself free of its toils, and shut myself indoors. I'm sorry I was such a fool as to tell the odd-job man to stay away longer. I wish he were here now. I cannot fight this thing alone.

Nov. 3rd, 3 am. I have just come upstairs and locked myself in my bedroom. While reading in the study, I was attracted by something soft tapping the window, and there was that peculiar soft squeaking voice such as is made by a moist finger rubbing along glass. I put down my book – I don't remember what book it was, and I cannot recall a word of it – went to the window, drew the curtains, and looked out. A battalion of those malignant flower faces glared back at me through the glass. Then I saw something being poised in the air for a throw, and a half brick came crashing through. The plant began to crawl in.

It is following me. I can hear it rustling outside my

door. Tiny creepers like thin black snakes are crawling under. . . .

I have just been to the door and drawn my foot along that row of black, creeping tendrils, as one would slither to death a score of beetles. But fresh tendrils have taken their places, and are creeping towards me. The thing is at my window, too. I can hear its tappings and soft squealings on the glass. It is creeping out of the fireplace. Cold feelers are touching my neck. How it stinks!

On they come . . . they encircle me on every side, these meshes of doom . . . they encircle my neck. . . .

(Here the diary breaks off. Follows a note by Armand.)

When I returned to England from Brussels, where I remained for a few days after the conference was over, I went immediately to see Trezbond. I was a bit anxious about him. The last time I saw him, he seemed queer.

I arrived at his place very early on the morning of November the third, having travelled by the night mail. I was quite confident of being admitted, even so early, for Trezbond was hardly ever to be found in bed. As I reached the house there was a light in one bedroom, but my repeated knocks brought no answer. I went round to the back. The first glimpse of daylight was showing over the distant hills, and by it, I saw to my surprise that one of the conservatories was badly smashed about. The French window of the study, too, had been smashed. I stumbled over something soft and heavy. It was one of Trezbond's dogs, lying dead on its side, tongue lolling out, eyes staring, legs contorted, showing the agony which must have accompanied its death. Looking further, I saw the other one in a similar attitude.

I entered the house by the study window, and went to the foot of the stairs where I shouted. I knew Trezbond's wife and servants were away, for he had told me so in the letter in which he had promised to call upon me about the creeper seed. My shout was answered by a terrible shriek. It was Trezbond's voice, and he was saying:

"Take the thing off me; take it off me."

At that, I rushed upstairs, Trezbond shouting all the while. His bedroom door was locked, so I burst it open with all my weight.

The poor fellow was on his haunches, cowering in a corner of the room. His dilated eyes were terrible to see.

* * *

Trezbond was taken away to an asylum, and, suspicion being aroused at statements he made in his ravings, the police dug up the soil in the battered conservatory. There they found the strangled body of his wife with the dressing-gown cord round her neck. Trezbond was tried at the Woodshire Assizes, and found guilty, but insane.

I have devoted a good deal of time to deciphering his diary, which is written in a private, highly complicated code.

He never paid me the visit to Chelsea which he describes, nor did he ever come into possession of the creeper seed. The damage to the conservatory and the study window, as well as the killing of the two dogs, were of his own doing.

THE YELLOW CAT

By Michael Joseph

IT ALL began when Grey was followed home, inexplicably enough, by the strange, famished yellow cat. The cat was thin with large, intense eyes which gleamed amber in the forlorn light of the lamp on the street corner. It was standing there as Grey passed, whistling dejectedly, for he had had a depressing run of luck at Grannie's tables, and it made a slight piteous noise as it looked up at him. Then it followed at his heels, creeping along as though it expected to be kicked unceremoniously out of the way.

Grey did, indeed, make a sort of half-threatening gesture when, looking over his shoulder, he saw the yellow cat behind.

"If you were a black cat," he muttered, "I'd welcome you - but get out!"

The cat's melancholy amber eyes gleamed up at him, but it made no sign and continued to follow. This would have annoyed Grey in his already impatient humour, but he seemed to find a kind of savage satisfaction in the fact that he was denied even the trifling consolation of a good omen. Like all gamblers, he was intensely superstitious, although he had had experience in full measure of the futility of all supposedly luck-bringing mascots. He carried a monkey's claw sewn in the lining of his waistcoat pocket, not having the courage to throw it away. But this wretched yellow cat that ought to have been black did not irritate him as might have been expected.

He laughed softly; the restrained, unpleasant laugh of a man fighting against misfortune.

"Come on, then, you yellow devil; we'll sup together."

He took his gloveless hand from his coat pocket and beckoned to the animal at his heels; but it took as little notice of his gesture of invitation as it had of his menacing foot a moment before. It just slid along the greasy pavement, covering the

ground noiselessly, not deviating in the slightest from the invisible path it followed, without hesitation.

It was a bitterly cold, misty night, raw and damp. Grey shivered as he thrust his hand back into the shelter of his pocket and hunched his shoulders together underneath the thin coat that afforded but little protection against the cold.

With a shudder of relief he turned into the shelter of the courtyard which lay between the icy street and the flight of stairs which led to his room. As he stumbled numbly over the rough cobblestones of the yard he suddenly noticed that the yellow cat had disappeared.

He was not surprised and gave no thought whatever to the incident until, a few minutes later, at the top of the ramshackle stairs, the feeble light of a hurricane lamp revealed the creature sitting, or rather lying, across the threshold of his door.

He took an uncertain step backward. He said to himself: "That's odd." The cat looked up at him impassively with brooding, sullen eyes. He opened the door, stretching over the animal to turn the crazy handle.

Silently the yellow cat rose and entered the shadowy room. There was something uncanny, almost sinister in its smooth, noiseless movements. With fingers that shook slightly, Grey fumbled for matches, struck a light and, closing the door behind him, lit the solitary candle.

He lived in this one room, over a mews which had become almost fashionable since various poverty-stricken people, whose names still carried some weight with the bourgeois tradesmen of this Mayfair backwater, had triumphantly installed themselves; and Grey turned it skilfully to account when he spoke with casual indifference of 'the flat' he occupied, 'next to Lady Susan Tyrrell's'.

Grey, although he would never have admitted it, was a cardsharp and professional gambler. But even a cardsharp needs a little ordinary luck. Night after night he watched money pass into the hands of 'the pigeons', ignorant, reckless youngsters, and foolish old women who, having money to burn, ought by all the rules of the game to have lost. Yet when playing with him, Grey, a man respected even among the shabby

fraternity of those who live by their wits, they won. He had turned to roulette, but even with a surreptitious percentage interest in the bank he had lost. His credit was exhausted. Grannie herself had told him he was a regular Jonah. He was cold, hungry and desperate. Presently his clothes, the last possession, would betray him, and no longer would he be able to borrow the casual trifle that started him nightly in his desperate bout with fortune.

His room contained a wooden bed and a chair. A rickety table separated them. The chair served Grey as a wardrobe; on the table stood a candle with a few used matches which he used to light the cheap cigarettes he smoked in bed; the grease had a habit of adhering to the tobacco when the candle was used, and Grey was fastidious. The walls were bare save for a cupboard, a pinned-up *Sporting Life* Racing Calendar and two cheap reproductions of Kirchner's midinettes. There was no carpet on the floor. A piece of linoleum stretched from the empty grate to the side of the bed.

At first Grey could not see the cat, but the candle, gathering strength, outlined its shadow grotesquely against the wall. It was crouched on the end of the bed.

He lighted one of the used matches and lit the small gas-ring which was the room's sole luxury. Gas was included in the few shillings he paid weekly for rent; consequently Grey used it for warmth. He seldom used it to cook anything, as neither whisky (which he got by arrangement with one of Grannie's waiters), bread nor cheese, which formed his usual diet, require much cooking.

The cat moved and, jumping noiselessly on to the floor, cautiously approached the gas-ring, by the side of which it stretched its lean yellowish body. Very softly but plaintively it began to mew.

Grey cursed it. Then he turned to the cupboard and took out a cracked jug. He moved the bread on to his own plate and poured out the little milk it contained in the shallow bread-plate.

The cat drank, not greedily but with the fierce rapidity which betokens hunger and thirst. Grey watched it idly as he poured whisky into a cup. He drank, and refilled the cup. He then

began to undress, carefully, in order to prolong the life of his worn dinner-jacket.

The cat looked up. Grey, taking off his shirt, beneath which, having no vest, he wore another woollen shirt, became uncomfortably aware of its staring yellow eyes. Seized with a crazy impulse, he poured the whisky from his cup into the remainder of the milk in the plate.

"Share and share alike," he cried. "Drink, you—"

Then the yellow cat snarled at him; the vilest, loathsome sound; and Grey for a moment was afraid. Then he laughed, as if at himself for allowing control to slip, and finished undressing, folding the garments carefully, and hanging them on the chair.

The cat went back to its place at the foot of the bed, its eyes gleaming warily in Grey's direction. He restrained his impulse to throw it out of the room and clambered between the rough blankets without molesting it.

By daylight the cat was an ugly misshapen creature. It had not moved from the bed. Grey regarded it with amused contempt.

Usually the morning found him profoundly depressed and irritable. For some unaccountable reason he felt now almost light-hearted.

He dressed, counted his money and decided to permit himself the luxury of some meagre shopping in the adjacent Warwick Market, which supplied the most expensive restaurant proprietors with the cheapest food. Nevertheless, it was an accommodating spot for knowledgeable individuals like Grey.

The cat, still crouching on the bed, made no attempt to follow him, and he closed the door as softly as its erratic hinges would allow, aware that the cat's eyes still gazed steadily in his direction.

In the market, he obeyed an impulse to buy food for the cat, and at the cost of a few pence added a portion of raw fish to his purchases. On the way home he cursed himself for a fool, and would have thrown the fish away, the clumsy paper wrapping having become sodden with moisture, when he was hailed by a voice he had almost forgotten.

"Grey! Just the man I want to see!"

Grey greeted him with a fair show of amiability, although, if appearance were any indication, the other was even less prosperous than himself. He, too, had been an *habitué* of Grannie's in the old days, but had long since drifted out on the sea of misfortune. Despite his shabby appearance, he turned to Grey and said:

"You'll have a drink?" Then, noting Grey's dubious glance, he laughed and added: "It's on me all right. I've just touched lucky."

A little later Grey emerged from the public-house on the corner the richer by five pounds, which the other had insisted on lending him in return for past favours. What exactly the past favours had been, Grey was too dazed to inquire; as far as he could recollect he had always treated the man with scant courtesy. He did not even remember his name.

He was still trying to remember who the man was when he climbed the stairs. He knew him well enough, for Grey was the type who never forgets a face. It was when his eyes alighted on the yellow cat that he suddenly remembered.

The man was Felix Mortimer. And Felix Mortimer had shot himself during the summer!

At first Grey tried to assure himself that he had made a mistake. Against his better judgment he tried to convince himself that the man merely bore a strong resemblance to Felix Mortimer. But at the back of his mind *he knew*.

Anyway, the five-pound note was real enough.

He methodically placed the fish in a saucepan and lit the gas-ring.

Presently the cat was eating, in that curious, deliberate way it had drunk the milk the night before. Its emaciated appearance plainly revealed that it was starving; yet it devoured the fish methodically, as though now assured of a regular supply.

Grey, turning the five-pound note in his hand, wondered whether the cat had after all changed his luck. But his thoughts kept reverting to Felix Mortimer. . . .

The next few days left him in no doubt. At Grannie's that night fortune's pendulum swung back unmistakably. He won

steadily. From roulette he turned to *chemin de fer*, elated to find that his luck held good.

"Your luck's changed – with a vengeance!" said one of the 'regulars' of the shabby genteel saloon.

"With a vengeance," echoed Grey, and paused; wondering with the superstition of the born gambler if there were significance in the phrase.

He left Grannie's the richer by two hundred odd pounds.

His success was the prelude to the biggest slice of luck, to use his own phrase, that he had ever known. He gambled scientifically, not losing his head, methodically banking a proportion of his gains each morning; planning, scheming, striving to reach that high-water mark at which, so he told himself with the gambler's time-worn futility, he would stop and never gamble again.

Somehow he could not make up his mind to leave the poverty-stricken room in the fashionable mews. He was terribly afraid it would spell a change of luck. He tried to improve it, increase its comfort, but it was significant that he bought first a basket and a cushion for the yellow cat.

For there was no doubt in his mind that the cat was the cause of his sudden transition from poverty to prosperity. In his queer, intensely superstitious mind, the yellow cat was firmly established as his mascot.

He fed it regularly, waiting on it himself as though he were its willing servant. He made a spasmodic attempt to caress it, but the cat snarled savagely at him and, frightened, he left it alone. If the cat ever moved from the room he never saw it go; whenever he went in or came out the cat was there, watching him with its gleaming amber eyes.

He accepted the situation philosophically enough. He would talk to the cat of himself, his plans for the future, the new people he met – for money had speedily unlocked more exalted doors than Grannie's – all this in the eloquence derived from wine and solitude, he would pour out into the unmoved ears of the cat, crouching at the foot of the bed. And then, without daring to speak of it, he would think of Felix Mortimer and the gift that had proved the turning-point of his fortunes.

The creature watched him impassively, contemptuously

indifferent to his raving or his silence. But the weird *ménage* continued, and Grey's luck held good.

The days passed and he became ambitious. He was now within reach of that figure which he fondly imagined would enable him to forsake his precarious existence. He told himself that he was now, to all intents and purposes, safe. And he decided to move into more civilized and appropriate surroundings.

Nevertheless, he himself procured an expensive wicker contraption to convey the yellow cat from the garret to his newly acquired and, by contrast, luxurious *maisonnette*. It was furnished in abominable taste, but the reaction from sheer poverty had its effect. And then he had begun to drink more than was good for a man who required a cool head and a steady nerve for at least part of a day which was really night.

One day he had cause to congratulate himself on his new home. For he met, for the first time in his thirty odd years of life, a woman. Now Grey divided women into two classes. There were 'the regulars' – soulless creatures with the gambler's fever and crook's alphabet – and 'pigeons', foolish women, some young, most of them old, who flourished their silly but valuable plumage to be plucked by such as he.

But Elise Dyer was different. She stirred his pulses with a strange, exquisite sensation. Her incredible fair hair, flaxen as waving corn, her fair skin, her deep violet eyes and her delicate carmine mouth provoked him into a state of unaccustomed bewilderment.

They talked one night of mascots. Grey, who had never mentioned the yellow cat to a soul, whispered that he would, if she cared, show her the mascot that had brought him his now proverbial good luck. The girl agreed, with eager enthusiasm, to his diffident suggestion to go with him to his flat; and he, in his strange simplicity, stammered that she would do him honour. He had forgotten that Elise Dyer knew him for a rich man.

Elated by his triumph, he paid her losses and called for champagne. The girl plied him skilfully with wine, and

presently he was more drunk than he had been since the beginning of his era of prosperity.

They took a cab to the flat. Grey felt that he had reached the pinnacle of triumph. Life was wonderful, glorious! What did anything matter now?

He switched on the light and the girl crossed his threshold. The room which they entered was lavishly illuminated, the lights shaded into moderation by costly fabrics. The room, ornate and over-furnished, reflected money. The girl gave a gasp of delight.

For the first time the cat seemed aware of something unusual. It stretched itself slowly and stood up, regarding them with a fierce light in its eyes.

The girl screamed.

"For God's sake take it away!" she cried. "I can't bear it! I can't be near it. Take that damned cat away!" And she began to sob wildly, piteously, retreating towards the door.

At this Grey lost all control and, cursing wildly, shouting bestial things at the oncoming animal, seized it by the throat.

"Don't - don't cry, dearie," panted Grey, holding the cat; "I'll settle this swine soon enough. Wait for me!" And he staggered through the open door.

Grey ran through the deserted streets. The cat had subsided under the clutch of his fingers and lay inert, its yellowish fur throbbing. He scarcely knew where he was going. All he realized was an overwhelming desire to be rid of the tyranny of this wretched creature he held by the throat.

At last he knew where he was going. Not far from Grey's new establishment ran the Prince's canal, that dark, sluggish stream that threads its way across the fashionable residential district of the outlying west. To the canal he ran; and without hesitation he threw the yellow cat into the water.

The next day he realized what he had done. At first he was afraid, half hoping that the superstitious spasm of fear would pass. But a vivid picture swam before his eyes, the broken surface of a sluggish dream. . . .

"You're a coward," she taunted him. "Why don't you act

like a man? Go to the tables and see for yourself that you can still win in spite of your crazy cat notions!"

At first he refused, vehemently; but it gradually dawned on him that therein lay his chance of salvation. Once let him throw down the gauntlet *and win* and his peace of mind would be assured.

That night he received a vociferous welcome on his return to the Green Baize Club.

It was as he feared. He lost steadily.

Then suddenly an idea came to him. 'Supposing the cat were still alive? Why hadn't he thought of that before? Why, there was a saying that every cat had nine lives! For all he knew it might have swum safely to the bank and got away.'

His feverish impulse crystallized into action. He hurriedly left the club and beckoned urgently to a passing taxicab.

After what seemed interminable delay he reached the spot where he had madly flung the cat away from him. The stillness of the water brought home to him the futility of searching for the animal here. This was not the way to set to work.

The thing preyed on his mind in the days that followed. Exhaustive inquiries failed to discover the least trace of the yellow cat.

Night after night he went to the tables, lured there by the maddening thought that if only he could win he would drug the torment and be at peace. But he lost. . . .

And then a strange thing happened.

One night, returning home across a deserted stretch of the park, he experienced a queer, irresistible impulse to lift his feet from the grass and make for the gravel path. He resented the impulse, fought against it; he was cold and worn out, and by cutting across the grass he would save many minutes of weary tramping. But the thing – like a mysterious blind instinct – persisted, and in the end he found himself running, treading gingerly on the sodden grass.

He did not understand why this had happened to him.

The next day Grey did not get out of his bed until late in the afternoon.

He crossed the room in search of his dressing-gown and

caught sight of himself in the glass of his wardrobe. Only then did he realize that he was clambering over the floor with his head near the carpet, his hands outstretched in front of him. He stood upright with difficulty and reached a shaking hand for brandy.

It took him two hours to struggle into his clothes, and by the time he was ready to go out it was nearly dark. He crept along the street. The shops were closing. He saw nothing of them until he reached the corner where he halted abruptly, with a queer sensation of intense hunger. On the cold marble before him lay unappetizing slabs of raw fish. His body began to quiver with suppressed desire. Another moment and nothing could have prevented him seizing the fish in his bare hands, when the shutters of the shop dropped noisily across the front of the sloping marble surface.

Grey knew that something had happened, that he was very ill. Now that he could not see the vision of the yellow cat, his mind was a blank. Somehow he retraced his footsteps and got back to his room.

The bottle of brandy stood where he had left it. He had not turned on the light, but he could see it plainly. He dragged it to his lips.

With a crash it went to the floor, while Grey leapt into the air, savage with nausea. He felt that he was choking. With an effort he pulled himself together, to find that it was beyond his power to stop the ghastly whining sound that issued from his lips. He tried to lift himself on to the bed, but in sheer exhaustion collapsed on the floor, where he lay still in an attitude not human.

The room lightened with the dawn and a new day passed before the thing on the floor moved. Something of the clarity of vision which comes to starving men now possessed him. He stared at his hands.

The fingers seemed to have withered; the nails had almost disappeared, leaving a narrow streak of hornish substance forming in their place. He tore himself frantically towards the window. In the fading light he saw that the backs of his hands were covered with a thin, almost invisible surface of coarse, yellowish fur.

Unimaginable horrors seized him. He knew now that the scarlet thread of his brain was being stretched to breaking-point. Presently it would snap. . . .

Unless – unless. The yellow cat alone could save him. To this last human thought he clung, in an agony of terror.

Unconscious of movement, he crept swiftly into the street, his shapeless eyes peering in the darkness which surrounded him. He groped his way stealthily towards the one place which the last remnant of his brain told him might yield the secret of his agony.

Down the silent bank he scrambled headlong, towards the still water. The dawn's pale radiance threw his shadow into a grotesque pattern. On the edge of the canal he halted, his hands embedded in the sticky crumbling earth, his head shaking, his eyes searching in agonized appeal, into the depths of the motionless water.

There he crouched, searching, searching . . .

And there in the water he saw the yellow cat.

He stretched out the things that were his arms, while the yellow cat stretched out its claws to enfold him in the broken mirror of the water.

SPECIAL DIET

By Charles Lloyd

“**O**F COURSE I quite understand your feelings in this matter, Mrs Willoughby, but I can't help thinking that it would be better to send your mother to a private home, where she will have every possible care. There is no chance at all of her complete recovery, and in my opinion it would be far better to put the responsibility of such a case on those whose job it is to bear it.”

Mrs Willoughby looked at the doctor with troubled eyes. “But she'd hate that! However well such homes are run, there is always the feeling of being hemmed in . . . a prisoner. It would kill my mother . . . and when she's not going through one of her phases she's as sane as you or I.”

“Well, I leave the decision in your hands. If you think that keeping her here is the best course; as long as she gets no worse, then I have no more to say. You had better get a night nurse as well as Nurse Charteris; and above all, Mrs Hinton must not be left alone day or night. I know of a very reliable woman I can get for you. I'll send her round to see you this afternoon.”

The young doctor pulled out his watch, glanced at it and continued: “If we find that such an arrangement is not satisfactory, then I am afraid that we will have to make other arrangements.” As he spoke he picked up his hat and gloves from an oak chest that stood in the hall.

Mrs Willoughby followed him down the steps to his car – a spruce Buick.

“Very well, and thank you so much for all your trouble. I know that you will do all in your power to help me. But I can't bear to think of my mother shut up in one of those places.” She held out her hand. The pale sunshine of the early spring morning fell pleasantly on her honey-coloured hair.

Doctor Burleigh smiled at her with admiration. He felt sorry for this girl, still in her twenties, and left a widow the previous year, her husband having been killed in an aeroplane crash. And now this fresh trouble with her mother. He was afraid that she would have to be sent to an institution in the near future. However, as long as there was ample supervision there could be no harm in trying this other plan first.

He pressed the self-starter, turning to wave his hand as the car slid forward. Mrs Willoughby walked slowly up the steps to the door. She was certain that she was doing the best thing. She glanced at the clock in the drawingroom. Eleven o'clock. It was time to do the marketing for the house. She wondered where Mary could be. Her school did not re-open until the following Monday, and she knew that the child enjoyed going with her to the shops. She crossed to the door that led into the garden.

"Mary! Mar-y!"

The door from the kitchen quarters opened, and the parlour-maid, carrying a tray laden with silver, paused to say: "I think Miss Mary is up with Nurse and Mrs Hinton, madam."

Mrs Willoughby thanked her, and ran up the staircase that led to her mother's room. Softly she opened the door. The old lady was sitting on a sofa in the sun-flooded bay window, a half-finished scarf of brilliant orange flowing from her lap. Her face was fat and of an unhealthy pallor. At her feet lay Mary, poring over a much tattered and dogeared photograph album.

"Oh, Granny - did you *really* wear clothes like that?" she asked incredulously, pointing a grubby finger at a photograph of a woman heavily protected against the terrors of motoring in the 'nineties.

"Yes, dear child."

Mrs Hinton looked up as her daughter came in. "You haven't come to take Mary away from me already, have you, dear?"

"It's time to do the shopping. Is there anything you want, darling?"

"No, I don't think so. Unless you can think of anything, Nurse?" she added, turning to Nurse Charteris, who sat in a chair by her side, reading the paper.

"No, Mrs Hinton, I don't think there's anything you require this morning."

"Run and get your coat on, Mary," Mrs Willoughby said, "and meet me in the hall. I'll be ready as soon as you are. And wash your hands," she called, after the retreating figure of her eight-year-old daughter.

Mrs Hinton glanced up at her. Her eyes narrowed, and a cunning smile played at the corners of her mouth.

"And what did that young doctor say to you today? That I'm worse, eh? A mad old woman, I suppose he called me. That young man wants to shut me up. Go on - tell me."

"Don't be silly, Mother. Of course he doesn't. Doctor Burleigh's very fond of you. If you want to know, he said that you were getting on very nicely; but that you need rest and quiet and feeding up to get back your strength. He's going to order you a special diet; and we're going to have a night nurse so that Nurse Charteris will have more time to go out."

"So he's afraid to leave me alone. Is that it?" Mrs Hinton threw her knitting angrily on to the floor. "I won't stand it, do you hear? I won't stand it. Treating me as if I were a criminal or a maniac!"

She was working herself up into a rage; her face became suffused with colour, and little flecks of foam escaped from her mouth and ran down her chin.

"Now, Mrs Hinton, there's nothing to be excited about," soothed Nurse Charteris, giving Mrs Willoughby a look that said: "You'd better go. I can manage her better by myself."

"You want to put me away. You're all in league against me. That's what it is!"

"No, Mother, we're not. You mustn't get ideas like that into your head. I must go now. Mary will be waiting for me."

"Mary's the only one of you that loves me at all," the old woman whimpered, rocking her heavy body backwards and forwards in an agony of self-pity. "So the doctor ordered me a special diet, eh? What's it to be? But I suppose I'm not fit to be told?"

"Of course you are, darling. He ordered you plenty of milk, soups, and very lightly cooked meat, as nearly raw as you can eat. And not too much strong tea," she finished laughingly.

"So I'm even to be deprived of my tea," Mrs Hinton grumbled. Her daughter took this opportunity to tiptoe quietly out of the room and downstairs to where Mary waited for her: her little face aglow with health under the jaunty red beret; her long thin legs coltishly graceful in their prosaic black woollen stockings.

"Come on, Mummy. You have been a long time!"

Together they walked down the street to the shopping district of the town. Joan Willoughby, youthful in her simple jersey and skirt; Mary laughing and chattering beside her.

In Mrs Hinton's room Nurse Charteris was having difficulty in calming her patient, who was, in her private opinion, a nasty spiteful old woman, and one who would be far better in a Home. No one knew her sly, cruel little ways like she did. Mrs Willoughby was a lot too soft hearted. And it wasn't right that the child should be allowed to run in and out of the old woman's room. She'd speak to the doctor about it the next time that he called. Wicked it would be, if Mrs Hinton had one of her spasms when Mary was there!

Nurse Charteris looked with satisfaction at her well-developed body. *She* could take care of herself. But a child was different. She was glad that a night nurse was coming to help her. They should have had one long since.

Nurse Charteris sniffed.

"One more word from you, Mrs Hinton," she snapped, "and I won't let you have an egg for your tea."

She often made use of the old woman's greed for disciplinarian purposes. She had discovered at a very early stage that this was the easiest way to control her. Mrs Hinton shot her a venomous look: a look of hatred. Then, bending down, she picked up her knitting; and soon the only sounds that disturbed the silence of the room were the occasional rustle of Nurse Charteris turning a page of her paper and the incessant clicking of Mrs Hinton's knitting needles.

A week had gone by since the arrival of the night nurse, a big-boned cockney of Scotch extraction, who rejoiced in the name of Flora McBride. In appearance more masculine than feminine, when off duty she dressed herself incongruously in

pale pinks and blues, and told endless stories in which her friends constantly addressed her as 'Flossy' or 'Flo'; and in which she narrowly avoided the persistent and perilous advances of 'men'.

After their first meeting Mrs Hinton appeared to have accepted her presence and, apart from being rather more silent and morose than was usual, her progress appeared to suffer no serious setback. She seemed, however, very nervous concerning her own health, and ceaselessly bombarded both Joan and the two nurses with questions about the doctor's report on her condition; and whether her new diet was proving adequate. For long periods, too, she would sit, her hands folded on her knees, staring in silence into the glowing heart of the fire, paying no attention when spoken to, but occasionally shaping words with her mouth as if she was whispering secrets to herself.

Nurse Charteris had spoken to Doctor Burleigh regarding Mary's visits to her grandmother, and the doctor had agreed that the sooner they ceased the better it would be for the child. He had explained to Joan that it would upset the old lady if Mary stopped seeing her altogether. "But," he added, "let a greater time elapse between each visit. As yet your daughter doesn't realize that your mother is, shall we say, unhinged; and she is at a very impressionable age. It would be a terrible thing if she were frightened in any way." He stood leaning against the mantelpiece, one hand thrust deep into his trousers pocket, the other playing idly with the long links of his watch-chain. "I must tell you," he continued, "that this present arrangement cannot last more than a few months. I see no sign of improvement in your mother's condition. I'm afraid that you will have to reconcile yourself to sending her away."

In the evening when Joan went to say goodnight to Mrs Hinton, the old woman said: "I know what you're going to tell me. 'The doctor said he was very satisfied.' Well! I don't believe it. I want more feeding up - more meat. I'm not given enough to keep a canary alive!" She shivered. "My old bones can't stand these March winds."

A few days after this Nurse Charteris came to Joan in a state

of considerable excitement. "Mrs Willoughby, I think the time has come when you *must* make some other arrangement for your mother. I don't feel I can be responsible for her any longer. Why, I'd never have believed it of her! It makes me shudder even now, when I think of it!" She paused for breath.

"But what is it, Nurse? What's happened?"

"When we came into breakfast this morning we saw that there was a mouse in the trap; and I thought that it could stay there until we'd finished, when I'd give it to Thompson to give to the cat. Well, would you believe it, after we'd finished I left the room for a moment to call him, and when I came back, there was Mrs Hinton cutting the beast's head off with a table-knife. I called to her to stop, and asked what she was doing, and what do you think she replied?" Nurse Charteris paused impressively. "She replied that she wanted to drink its blood to get back her own strength. 'Disgusting,' I said. Can you *imagine* it?" She wagged her head with meaning. "I must go back now, or goodness knows what she'll be up to next."

When Joan repeated the story to Doctor Burleigh, he looked very grave. "That settles it," he said. "I'm sorry; but I have no alternative. Your mother must go to a home; and as soon as possible. I'll try to arrange for her to be received early in the week."

Joan had cried, but he had sat by her side and held her hands in his own, and had told her of other cases where the same strain of cruelty had developed, and where there had been nothing else to be done.

And so at length Joan was convinced, and all arrangements were made for Mrs Hinton to go to the 'Parkside Home for Mental Cases' on the following Tuesday. It had been decided to say nothing to the old lady; and once the decision had been reached that there was no other course to take, Joan felt as if a load had been taken off her mind.

Nurse Charteris said, "High time, too," when she heard the news; while McBride tossed her head coyly, and boomed in her deep voice: "Such goings on make a girl feel quite creepy. I never could take much to mentals."

Monday came; and suitcases and trunks spilled tissue and

newspaper in the nurses' rooms, and grazed the legs of the unwary on the landing. Great care was taken that the old woman should gain no inkling of its true purpose. When she questioned the hurried comings and goings of the nurses and Joan, she was told that Nurse McBride was leaving, a statement that both satisfied and pleased her. She sat on her sofa, and watched with triumph and malignancy her awkward movements as she busied herself with the tea-table. The ambulance with its white-coated attendants was due at nine o'clock on the following day, so that there would be little time in the morning to do much.

During tea Nurse McBride, who officially did not come on duty until ten o'clock, but who had been unable to sleep during the afternoon owing to the bustle that pervaded the house, said to Nurse Charteris: "I think I'll just slip round to Boots', dear. I won't be long. I've run out of perfume."

Nurse Charteris looked at her colleague in surprise. She was always bewildered by this gaunt woman's coquettish airs.

"If it wouldn't be a trouble would you get me a bottle of aspirin?"

"Certainly, dear." Nurse McBride got up. "Well, I think I'll run along now. Ta-ta!" She hurried from the room.

Mrs Hinton's voice broke the silence. It had that harsh impersonal sound that is so often found among deaf persons.

"Thank God that terrible woman is going tomorrow. She's as common as dirt, and a conceited fool into the bargain."

Nurse Charteris smiled a little grimly. Although she shared the opinion of her patient, she thought it a wiser policy to say nothing. She was spared the necessity of answering for at that moment the door opened and Thompson, the butler, entered. He crossed to Nurse Charteris.

"If you please, Nurse, you are wanted on the telephone."

"Who is it?"

"I didn't catch the name." He knew perfectly well that it was the doctor's voice, but had been warned not to mention his name in front of 'the old looney.'

"Please say I'm just coming."

He went out, and left the two women alone. Mrs Hinton gave her a glance of suspicious inquiry.

"I won't be long, my dear," said Nurse Charteris; and she

bustled down the stairs after Thompson, wondering who it could be.

Left by herself Mrs Hinton wandered to the window; and as she looked into the drive she saw Mary dashing up it on her bicycle. She knocked on the glass, trying to attract her attention. She was too far off for the little girl to hear, but at that instant she happened to look up and saw her grandmother smiling at her and beckoning to her to come up. "Poor old thing," she reflected, "stuck up there in her room all the time." The child nodded her head in assent and ran into the house.

Mrs Hinton smiled to herself; Nurse would be away longer than she had said – the interfering chatterbox!

A minute more and she heard light steps running along the passage.

"Granny!" Mary called through the half-opened door.

"Hush, child! Don't make so much noise. I've got rather a headache – but come in, my dear, come in!" Mary ran to the sofa and held up her face to be kissed. She thought her grandmother looked strange; her eyes were fixed on her face; on her throat . . . with an odd expression of . . . Mary tried to describe it – of almost hungry yearning.

"Sit here, child. I haven't got much time. They never will leave me alone. But I want to talk to you. I'm an ill old woman, you know. Very ill. And Doctor Burleigh wants to shut me up in an asylum. Do you know what an asylum is, child? It's where they put mad people. Yes, Doctor Burleigh wants to send me to a mad-house. He thinks I'm a maniac. But I'm not! Oh dear, no! I'm only ill . . . under-nourished. I must have a special diet, dear child."

While she was speaking the old woman had slithered her great body along the sofa until she sat next to her granddaughter. She stroked her hair, ran her hands over the girl's shoulders, caressed her neck.

"You love your old grandmother, don't you, Mary?"

"Yes." Mary felt uncomfortable. Granny looked so strange – almost as if she *were* mad.

Mrs Hinton got up and went over to the door. The key was in the lock. She turned it, and, slipping it into her work-bag, returned to the sofa.

"We must be quick, my dear, if you really wish to help your granny. They'll be back soon - Charteris and that McBride."

"What is it you want me to do?"

"Just give me a little present . . . something I need, something . . ." she almost spat out the words, "... something I must have."

"Don't, Granny," Mary laughed nervously, "you're frightening me."

"There's no need to be frightened. I don't want much. Just a cupful. One teacupful of your young healthy blood. You'd give that to make your Granny well again, wouldn't you, Mary?"

"Don't say things like that . . . I'm going. Let me out."

"Don't be a silly little girl. I'm not going to hurt you. I'll let you out when you've given me your little present."

The child started to cry.

"Now there's no need to cry, dear. Come along, there's no time to waste."

With incredible speed for her bulk, Mrs Hinton lumbered to the tea-table and picked up a table-knife that lay there. Wide-eyed with terror Mary watched her. Then she screamed. Like a tigress the woman turned, her face distorted with rage and fear.

"Stop it, you silly child. Stop it or I'll cut your throat."

Blinded by her tears, and half choked by sobs and fear, the little girl ran to the door, rattling the knob and shaking it with all the sum of her small strength. But in a flash the old woman was after her. Mary felt her grandmother's hand on her neck, wrenching her from her hold. Propelled by a last powerful push the child staggered back to the sofa. With deadly purpose Mrs Hinton was upon her, the knife in her hand.

"Mummy! . . . Mummy! . . . Nurse Charteris . . . help. . ."

She pushed the child's head back, until the throat was taut.

Meanwhile Nurse Charteris picked up the telephone.

"Yes?"

"Is that Nurse Charteris?"

"Speaking."

"This is Doctor Burleigh. I rang you up to tell you that . . ."

Suddenly the line was disconnected. Nurse Charteris

bounced the hook on the instrument up and down. She felt very vexed. Really the operators were getting worse and worse.

"Exchange! . . . Exchange! I've been cut off!"

"Kaindly replace your receiver and I'll call you again," came the refined tones of the operator.

Nurse Charteris obeyed these instructions with bad grace, and stood waiting, impatiently tapping the floor with her shoe. She wondered uneasily, if she had done wrong in leaving Mrs Hinton – but she could hardly get into any trouble in the short time she would be away.

She looked with displeasure at the telephone. After three minutes the bell rang again. Nurse Charteris picked it up, clucking with annoyance.

"Nurse Charteris? We were cut off. I rang you up to tell you to give Mrs Hinton a sedative so that she will have a good night before her move. You'd better give medinol. What? Yes, the same as before. I'll come round in the morning before she leaves. Goodbye."

Nurse Charteris heard the click of the receiver as the line went dead.

The telephone was on a table that stood in a corner under the staircase. Nurse Charteris thought that since she was downstairs she might as well have a word with Mrs Willoughby about the final preparations. She found her employer in the drawingroom, sunk in a deep chair, a book in her hand. Nurse Charteris glanced at the room with appreciation. So quiet and restful, with its discreet lighting and crackling wood fire!

"You want me, Nurse?"

"I just looked in to ask if there was anything you wished to see me about."

"No. I think everything is arranged. Doctor Burleigh is coming in the morning, half an hour before the ambulance." She laid down her book. "Oh, Nurse, I know we are doing the right thing; but somehow it seems awful!"

"You've done all you can for your mother," she answered, trim and capable in her severe uniform.

Joan smiled sadly in agreement, and then added:

"I suppose we all have. Will you ask Thompson to come here, on your way up."

Nurse Charteris walked briskly to the pantry, delivered her message, and preceded him down the passage to the hall. As they passed the drawingroom, they heard Mary's scream; stifled and far away. There was terror in that cry – and it came from above, from Mrs Hinton's room. And why had it ended so abruptly? She put her hand on Thompson's arm – "Good God! That child's gone up there . . . it's Mrs Hinton! I may need your help."

She ran up the stairs, the man following. As she turned the corner she caught a glimpse of Joan's face of startled inquiry below her. She ran to Mrs Hinton's room, her arm outstretched for the handle. It was locked. She realized that she must keep calm.

"Mrs Hinton! Open the door, please. It's Nurse Charteris."

There was no answer. The silence in the room was intense, unnatural . . . and someone waited and listened.

"Mrs Hinton! Open the door at once. I know you're there." Impatiently she rattled the knob.

From inside the room she heard a low groan. Her eyes narrowed. Mary was hurt. God only knew what that old devil had done to her. She looked at Thompson's broad shoulders. Yes, he would make short work of the door.

"Mrs Hinton, if you don't open the door I shall break it down."

This time she heard stealthy movements from the locked room.

Nurse Charteris nodded to Thompson. He threw his weight against the door, which held firm. Again he lunged against it; this time he was rewarded by a protesting creak. Mrs Willoughby and the parlour-maid, attracted by the noise, hurried down the passage. Thompson stepped back a few paces from the door and then flung himself forward with all his force. There was a sound of splintering wood and it swung open. As they surged into the room Mrs Hinton twisted round from the object on the sofa that engaged her attention.

While she hesitated on the threshold of the room, Joan's first dazed impression was that the lower half of her mother's face was coloured red, and that she wore red gloves on her hands.

UNBURIED BANE

By N. Dennett

IT ALL began (said Frances Windthrop) when I was led by my husband excitedly over three-and-a-half miles of wet moor to inspect the old farm he had recently discovered. It was not only the fact that it was incredibly lonely, was at least two hundred years old, and probably possessed, as he explained with enthusiasm, Lord knew what queer history, but it was – though dilapidated to a degree – occupied by an old scrag of a woman whom he declared gave him the shivers.

Beyond demurring mildly that neither could possibly interest me to the extent it did himself, I consented to tramp along to see the farmhouse and its grim-sounding occupant. I had discovered long ago, in the early days of my marriage, that it was not everything to be the wife of a popular playwright; one, moreover, who specialized in those of a sensational character, and was, consequently ever on the look out for likely material.

I realized that for some months now his pen had been idle; that, possibly through overwork or lack of change, no themes had come to his harassed brain except those which had been used countless times before. Here in the old farm he had found the necessary impetus: he declared the very look of the place inspired him; that, if he could only obtain admission, he was sure he would find his plot already made within its four walls. Further, so better to soak in its atmosphere, he suggested that we occupied the place ourselves until such time as the play was written, providing, of course the old woman now living there was agreeable. There was a village of a sort half-a-mile away, and probably she would be only too glad to move there, he said; unless, as an alternative, she agreed to stay and 'do' for us while letting us have a room or two for a consideration.

I was against it from the first; but seeing him so eager and hopeful, and dreading a continuance of his moody irritability,

the restless pacing and sleepless nights while he vainly pursued the illusive idea, I forebore to mention how much I disliked the project. For myself I foresaw many hours of loneliness and boredom.

One afternoon in late September, then, we set off; not, from my point of view, what one might call a promising beginning. Oliver strode on rapidly, impatient to be there, scarcely noticing how I stumbled over the heathery ground. At length, after what seemed hours, we climbed a rise of the moor where beyond, in a shallow basin of desolate land, showed the shale roof of a building, its lines half obliterated in the failing light.

"Is that the place?" I asked, my heart sinking inexplicably.

Oliver ran down the curve and stopped before a broken-down gate covered with lichen.

Out of the shadows the farm arose in a chaos of neglect and decay. Hideous fungus was growing everywhere, between the chinks of the cobblestones, on the rotten and broken fences – even the walls of the farmhouse itself were smeared with curious green vegetation, while the rock moss flourished on its roof. Trunks of old apple trees in an orchard beyond were grey with lichen and twisted by age into fantastic shapes. In the moor twilight which was creeping up cold and cheerless, with strange ominous streaks of colour where the sun had gone down, it was a dreary, desolate place.

I drew back; an indefinable fear possessed me. "I won't go in," I said, in a rather shaking voice.

"Rubbish, Frances; why on earth not?" demanded my husband.

He climbed determinedly over a tumbled-down wall, and stood in what had once been the farmyard, now a rat-infested wilderness. A pool to one side was green with slime, and sodden straw lay littered about in heaps. The farmhouse, a low, squat building whose ancient roof sagged and humped crazily in a last effort to avoid slipping off bodily, with its close shut door and secretive-looking window, appeared dead and deserted amid its army of strange and hideous weeds.

I could see, as Oliver stood staring, that he was frankly revelling in it all, in its possibilities for the production of a real

'thriller.' And indeed, what with its dismal and forsaken appearance, its air of sinister and brooding quiet, its very situation, hidden away there in the fastnesses of the moor, with only the owls and the conies for any signs of life – even I, who am no dramatist, could understand the attraction it held for Oliver. Meanwhile I stood beside him, protest in every line of my body. A chilly wind sighed and whispered about our ears, and stirred the few stunted bushes growing against the crumbling walls. It was unbelievably lonely.

"There's that old harridan who's living in the place at present – what about knocking her up and getting her to show us over tonight?" Oliver proposed enthusiastically.

It was with, I knew, a mental picture of the posters outside a well-known London theatre announcing Oliver Windthrop's new success that he raised his hand and knocked loudly on the door, set so deep in a porch as to be almost invisible in the growing darkness.

The echo died away in a series of muffled responses. We waited, and five minutes passed away – ten, and still no one came. Then, just as Oliver was going away disappointed, the door silently opened the width of an inch or two. Someone made a mumbling inquiry as to what we wanted. Oliver asked, might he and his wife step in and rest for a moment, as both were tired with walking over the moors? There was no reply, but a face, white and curiously vacant, appeared round the narrow opening and peered closely into ours. Apparently satisfied with what it saw there, the door was opened a fraction wider and we were motioned to come in. We bent our heads low and entered a dark, flagged passage, then into another door which led into a black-raftered kitchen, dimly illuminated by the waning daylight that came in through a window covered with dirt and cobwebs.

Two chairs were pushed out ungraciously. We seated ourselves. I looked around uneasily, with a creeping aversion. The misshapen old creature who lived there was surely the most silent thing I had ever seen, and also the most repulsive. So bloodless, so emaciated was her face, with one shoulder held higher than the other so that her body was awry, and her gait a twisted see-sawing motion, there was something supernatural

about her – something quasi-human that went with the brooding house, the lonely moor, and the night winds that swept blackly about it. She stood with a pallid watchfulness, silently waiting for us to speak.

“Do you not find life here very lonely?” I observed at length, unable to bear longer the heavy silence, the shadowy room, and the odour of damp and decay that hung clammy about it.

Her voice, a thin, bodiless whisper, replied she was never lonesome, she was one that preferred her own company.

“You live here, then, quite alone?” said my husband, rising as he spoke to put a match to the old-fashioned lamp that stood on the table, having received a nodded permission.

“Eh ? Iss, quite alone, except for my thoughts – and my gert old black cat.”

She gave him a strange, unfathomable look from her sightless-looking eyes, and as she moved, so the figure of the cat sitting motionless in the gloom behind her came into view, its eyes glittering greenly. Their shadows grotesquely outlined against the wall, on a sudden rose up till they touched and spread along the ceiling, and appeared to crouch menacingly over our heads.

Nervously, I averted my gaze, but found it riveted instead on the face of the attenuated old creature standing opposite us. It was with a shock that I really saw that countenance for the first time: so fleshless the bones showed beneath its covering of skin – an expression both fixed and mask-like, a wide and lipless mouth, no eyebrows, eyes sunken in discoloured sockets, a nose with the left nostril black and closed, and one or two crooked and pointed teeth.

A tremor of repugnance shook me from head to foot. She was horrible, unnatural. It took all my will-power not to rise from my seat and run from the house there and then.

“Might I inquire why the farmhouse has been allowed to fall into its present neglected condition, which obviously is a matter of some time?” Oliver inquired at this point.

“Eh ?” mumbled the old hag vaguely, as if she were a little hard of hearing. Her speech, a sequence of inarticulate sounds, was faint and difficult to understand. “Eh, but a power o’ years

ago it were a proper fine farm, but they do say as how it were the scene o' turrible deeds; and now neither man nor maid will come a-nigh en after the dimpse; and if it warn't for me nobody'd a-live in en."

An eerie sound moved in her throat, which faintly resembled a chuckle. An amusement not shared by Oliver and myself; it was a sound that seemed full of a hidden meaning, and sent a cold shiver down my spine.

" 'Witch's Bane' they calls the farm round these yur parts, or mebbe tes 'Wolfsbane' – I disremember now – on account o' they weeds, I reckon," she gibbered, with a silent person's garrulity; "but, for certain sure, thy'm mortal afeard to come down-along because o' thicky – but come 'long up over, and then I'll show it 'ee."

There was something almost frightful in her smooth, noiseless movements as she twisted from side to side in ceaseless contortion. So unsubstantial was she, she seemed merely the envelope that covered a thing of skin and bones. She led us upstairs first, up a rickety staircase, impossibly steep and damp, into several empty bedrooms, all with low and sloping ceilings crossed by heavy black beams, and with the tiniest of windows that had the appearance of being sealed, so long unopened did they look. The floors, too, had a downward tilt, and sagged as one stepped upon them.

With our shadows now weirdly elongated to an exaggerated height, and now dwindling down to nothing as we wandered through the musty-smelling house – the eerie old woman like a distorted shadow herself – it was daunting to a degree. I followed shrinkingly, with a fear none the less real for being non-susceptible to definition. I could see, however, that it would be useless to appeal to Oliver: by the excited way his eyes shone he was resolved more than ever to put his crazy plan into execution. To imagine living in this ghostly place even for a day filled me with horror.

Down the stairs we creaked again, and into what once had been the farmhouse parlour. A room rather long and low, the smell of damp and mouldiness which pervaded it was made more apparent by the wooden window shutters that were tightly shut on the outside. The ceiling, bisected by heavy oak

beams, was discoloured and dropping off in places with mildew, while ancient paper hung and rotted from the walls. There was a broad window seat, with low wide windows which, when opened, gave on to a stretch of moorland extending as far as the eye could reach; and there on the sill, grinning at me, was—

I started back all at once, uttering a startled exclamation. It was an object so unexpected to see there, and yet so in keeping with this room, with the strange house that lodged it.

I rubbed my hands, the slim white fingers that had touched it, with fastidious distaste. I have ever hated touching anything that is not fresh and sweet and clean – not that this thing on the window-sill was not clean: it was as clean as age and decay could make it. Yellow and smooth, it shone almost as if polished with oil: a broken, weather-beaten skull. Extremely old, it was certainly human, the forehead being very low and badly proportioned.

“O-ha-ha; her’s nothin’ to be afeard of – now.” Again that unpleasant sound agitated the ancient creature’s throat. “Eh, but a famous witch she were. There’s folks what do mind even now how pigs and cattle died quick and mysterious-like if her were offended, and no amount o’ salt round the stys and barns would avert it, neither.”

Oliver pricked up his ears; I, too, listened with a half-willing, half-fascinated interest. This story of witchcraft of a less matter-of-fact age was strangely compelling. The odious old creature appeared to delight in it – liked to dwell on all the things that were ghoulish and horrible. The influence of the ‘evil eye,’ the propitiating of the powers of darkness; and so forth.

“Eh, Mally Ry were her name, and her were done to death – drowned alive or sommat – in the days o’ King George. But arter her were dead her wouldn’t remain quiet; the most scarifying groans and screeches was heerd: her had died cursin’ anyone what should berry en, and sworn that, if en warn’t kep’ wi’in the walls o’ the house where her had lived in life, her sperrit should make it uninhabitable like fer human beings. . . . Wull, in course o’ time her weared away, and on’y the skull were left. But mind ’ee,” she went on with a kind of eldritch enjoyment, “but mind ’ee, *it must never be disturbed*, for if tes,

turrible sounds are a-said to be heard, and accidents, storms, fires, and calamity has followed as nat'rally as sun arter rain. There were some new tenants here to once, they berried en . . . for three days. And here it has ree-mained, as tes like to do, for several more centuries."

Delighted with this macabre recital, and more excited over his discovery of the old farm than ever, Oliver now eagerly voiced the plan he had had in view from the moment we entered the place. The ghastly old creature proving more amenable than he had hoped for (possibly the amount of the sum he offered having something to do with it), arrangements for our occupying one or two rooms were very soon completed, with satisfaction on all sides but mine. This suggested staying at the farm was a thing I dreaded beyond words. Something outside myself warned me that it was the direst folly we were contemplating. "It is madness; nothing but disaster will come of it," I told Oliver with the conviction of a presentiment. He, however, merely reiterated his belief that here in the old farm lay the nucleus of one of the best 'thrillers' he had yet done, that he had an idea already even, and was all impatience to be settled in and the play begun.

As the broken and lichen-grown gate closed behind us once more and we started on our homeward tramp over the now dark moors, something made me look back. The rain had ceased, and in the light of a yellow half-moon I saw the wizened figure of the old woman, the cat beside her, standing in the doorway looking after us, an evil and peculiarly malign grin twisting her lipless mouth.

At first the presence of the skull on the window-sill did not trouble me to the extent I had feared, for after all what harm could an old broken skull do anyone? To be sure, it was not particularly pleasant; but since it was the custom, I endeavoured to conquer my nervous fears of it.

Oliver, busily at work behind a closed door, and surrounded by sheets of manuscript, was absorbed and abstracted; however, from his look of satisfaction I knew the play was shaping well. Judging from its title - 'The Death-Dealing Skull' - it promised to be all that the lovers of thrills desired.

I was almost as much startled as relieved to discover no presence of Ann Skegg (that strange personality) anywhere about; the house was left entirely to ourselves. It occurred to me that possibly she had thought better of her original intention, and had after all repaired to the village – if such it could be termed – until we should have departed, and her home once more be left to its former undisturbed quiet and solitude. I did, indeed, make a tentative inquiry from one or two of the cottagers there, but I was stared at so queerly with such startled attention that I didn't pursue the subject further. Beyond eliciting the information that Witchesbane Farm hadn't been lived in for years as far as any of them knew – that the last tenant had committed suicide – and that neither love nor money would induce any of them to put so much as their noses inside it, I returned on the whole rather more perplexed than before. . . .

Came russet October: the bare moorlands, sprent with gold and purple, bloomed anew under the spell of air crisped with the first frosts. I walked for miles each day, delighting in the exercise and the new-born beauty around me. However, the days passed; and November brought with it chill, sobbing rain and empty hours. Now I was confined to the house, and the doors were shut to the wind's will, the open sunshiny air, and the blessed freedom of the moors; dank and miserable, they stretched before the farm in an endless, pool-sodden waste. . . . How dark it was now in the house always; even what little sun there was had no entrance; and the owls, always the owls to haunt me with a mournful crying. . . .

Immersed in his work, Oliver noticed nothing of this; did not notice how slowly and imperceptibly, as I passed hour upon lonely hour in the musty-smelling parlour, the sight of the skull lying there in its accustomed place began to be more than I could stand, so that I could view it only with a sense of rather absurd horror. . . . How its eyeholes, inky and horrible, bored into my own, its mouth grim and awry . . . the broken, irregular teeth, the low, criminal-looking forehead. . . . I both feared and loathed it. Always it appeared to grin evilly and maliciously at me, as though at some obscene jest. . . .

A night came that had set in early. I was alone as if no one

were in the house, so silent was the room, the farm. Outside, the wind pressed against the windows; an old tree in the yard adjoining creaked and groaned with a straining of leafless boughs, and tapped on the black panes with phantom fingers. The old parlour, seeming dingier and even more gloomy, was a place of shadows. The only light was that cast dimly by a hurricane lamp; beyond its narrow circle, into the dark corners of the room, I dared not look lest nameless things should stir and leap upon me. I trembled at every creak; awaiting with a dreadful anticipation for the very door to open silently towards me and disclose who knew what shocking spectacle; and when the long-drawn-out hoot of an owl echoed in a tree outside I sprang to my feet, shuddering violently.

In the jumping flame of the lamp, a shaft of light danced now here, now there, over the gruesome skull, lighting up the eyeholes and heightening the effect of sinister and sardonic amusement. . . . I must have partially lost control of myself, or at least of my better judgment. . . . Before I quite realized what I was doing, despite its alarming reputation for resenting either its removal or any indignity done to it, I had seized the loathsome thing quickly and thrust it out of sight in a dark cupboard.

That night Oliver and I were awakened by a sound of weird, unearthly screaming, that droned on and on, low, unceasing, and maddeningly monotonous. There was something terrible, something mysteriously awful in the sound, as if dead hopes and utter despair were being voiced, as if numberless souls in torment were circling in the black air above the farm and were wailing and crying their anguish through the keyholes. I listened quailing in my bed, not daring to confess what I had done. Oliver declared it was wind, for such a storm was raging, of wind and thunder, as set all the doors banging and the windows rattling. Sleep was made impossible. A little towards dawn, secretly, I restored the skull to its place. Ann Skegg, whom – strangely and unexpectedly – I encountered in one of the flagged passages, gave me a look from which I fled; there was such malevolent amusement in it.

And now, from this time, Ann Skegg never left the house. It was as though she mistrusted me – as if she feared for the safety

of the skull and constituted herself its guardian. She appeared even more vague, more attenuated than before, and even more silent. A subtle difference in her both perplexed and intimidated me: her jaw was never still, her whole person shook from either old age or extreme cold, and up the front of her gown, of an outmoded fashion with which I was familiar and yet could not place, extended a curious green stain. . . .

The mere sight of that twisted, contorted figure with its sideways-dripping walk, its long, lanky hands, creeping – drifting, rather – about the passages and up the stairs, sent a shuddering dread through every nerve of my body. At this time, so great was the peculiar revulsion she inspired in me, in an effort to avoid her I tramped for miles over the soaked and desolate moors. I began to entertain the most appalling notions: to question whether, like Lazarus, one who has once been dead could return alive from the grave. . . . The touch of her fingers was cold and slimy, while I feared her smile more than anything in the world. . . . I tried to voice my nightmare horrors to Oliver, but unfortunately, alas, he could not, or would not, understand, regarding them merely as the fancies of hysteria.

The play was almost finished. . . . Triumphantly the last scene was completed. He announced his intention of going up to London with a view to its early production.

I heard him with a thrill of unreasoning terror. "Let me come with you," I begged. "I cannot, and will not, stay here in this dreadful house alone!"

He demurred. "I shan't be gone more than a few days: a week at the most," he said. "Now be sensible: what on earth are you so alarmed about?"

I could only stammer out something inadequate like, "A big lonely house, the moors, and the owls, and – and Ann Skegg."

"What has poor misshapen Ann Skegg done?" he scoffed. "She can't help her peculiarities; the old thing is perfectly harmless, though I must admit rather a fearsome-looking object. No, no, Frances; you stay here. I'll be back in no time, and then we'll clear off – have a holiday – Switzerland, the Riviera: how about it? I feel in my bones the play will create a sensation."

He went. In the evening a few hesitating flakes of snow

hovered in the air, which before long thickened into a blizzard, continuing all night. I awoke to find the farmhouse as a beleaguered town: snowdrifts standing halfway up the doors and up to the windowledges, the rooms filled with a strange unreal light, and the house encompassed about by that unearthly hush which snow inevitably brings. Roads – even hedges – had vanished, so that there was no means of getting out, and no possibility of holding communication with the outside world. There was only Ann Skegg for company . . . and the skull grinning eternally in its place on the window-sill.

The time went by. I became aware of a sense of evil in the farmhouse; an atmosphere so particularly strong in the dismal, mouldy-smelling parlour that I could not only feel it but almost see it, and against which I struggled vainly and ineffectually. Dreams haunted me day and night; I grew perceptibly haggard and wild-eyed, jumping at every sound. Each day I became more terrified of the awful thing that was Ann Skegg; an aura of unspeakable malfeasance hung about her like a black cloud. I became convinced that whatever it was that animated that old wizened troll of a creature it was some unhallowed thing. A cold sweat would break upon my skin and my bones turn to water whenever she turned upon me her peculiar, flaccid-looking eyes in which gleamed a terrible and implacable hate. It was as if she resented my presence, as if she wished to be left alone with the ill-omened skull for which she appeared to cherish a ghastly affection. I would see her croon and gibber to it as if it could understand, and pass her scraggy fingers over its shiny surface almost with a caressing movement. Impossible and fantastic as it may be, it was as though there existed a secret understanding between them, an affinity. . . . It made my flesh creep to watch.

Presently a horrible fascination took possession of me. I could not tear myself away from looking; I would creep along stealthily, to hold my breath in disgust and aversion.

Ann Skegg caught me thus spying upon her one night of bitter cold. She turned suddenly, the cat beside her, and saw me standing there in the doorway. The cat, its fur rising, drew back its lips and snarled hideously and noiselessly. Ann Skegg began to move and came slowly towards me with that terrible

see-saw movement, her chin mim-mumbling, her head thrust forward, her baleful eyes transfixing mine – the grimmest, most ghastly thing I had ever beheld. I stood like one turned to stone, rooted there as by some strange power, incapable of moving a hand, of uttering a cry. The blood ran cold in my veins, my teeth chattered, my heart stopped beating.

Then, all at once, I shrieked. Control slipped from me. As she came slowly on, so I edged round the wall; my desperate fingers searched and found a weapon. . . . Screaming wildly, with all my strength I flung the sinister skull full at the oncoming thing and its snarling beast. It fell at their feet with a dull thud and broke into several pieces.

Ann Skegg suddenly laughed – the vilest, loathsome sound.

Then, and then only, I realized what I had done. Fear held me in a remorseless grip, while a hundred and one superstitious terrors marshalled themselves before me. Instances of other happenings when the skull had been disturbed, or been made to suffer any indignity, shocking enough, rose to my mind; but I, with incredible folly, had reduced it to nothing but a heap of splintered bone. Since it had never been known to fail to punish anyone who mistreated it, I awaited in shuddering anticipation for what was coming.

That night I stayed awake, too frightened either to sleep or lie down; but inexplicably enough, there was no repetition of that low unnerving screaming for which I was waiting: only an ominous silence. (It was now I enacted that scene all over again: saw myself throw the window wide and with unnatural strength send the remains of the skull hurtling through the darkness, to fall into the frozen pond that lay beyond. I heard, and shall never cease to hear, the small sound of splintering cat-ice cut the still air.)

Yet another night passed; and on the third an indescribably dreadful shrieking and wailing began, as if maddened fiends were howling aloud in pain and derision, and were trying to force a way in from the cold and darkness outside. The terrifying noises, shrieks and groans dwindled, died down, then rose again with tenfold velocity: there was in them this time a malevolence not present upon the first occasion.

My heart thump-thumping, I sat up in bed clutching the clothes, anathematizing the wicked stupidity that had thus released this horror upon my head. Somewhere about midnight, thinking perhaps the rush of cold air might alleviate the fever of terror that alternately chilled and heated my body, I got out of bed to open the window.

I shut it with a slam, near to fainting. There in the blackness, not twenty yards above me, I heard a strange, unholy commotion going on. Wind was racketing round the four quarters of the house: owls screeched; thunder pealed. Trees, opaque shadows, swayed and groaned; a dog, far off, howled mournfully as if someone were dead; the whole world of night unusually awake and agitated. A waning moon (until then obscured) suddenly showed a wan face behind the clouds as they scurried panic-stricken across the sky, and upon this dark shadows met and parted again with an awful riot of nocturnal clamour; finally, sweeping downwards to the ebon surface of the pond which glimmered a faint silver where the moon-glints touched it, they rose with what looked like jagged pieces of bone in their hands, which they let fall again with maleficent laughter, shrieks and groans.

Suddenly, as I watched, one of the shadows that danced round and about the pool and reeled to the blattering wind and the thunder peals, detached itself and rose slowly out of the pond and, dripping, passed through the door of the farmhouse. . . . With my hair rising upon my scalp, my face bedewed with cold sweat, I recognized it for the fearsome creature I had known as Ann Skegg.

I knew now with a hideous certitude that she was dead; had always been dead: that she was the terrible Mally Ry herself, who by some devilish power still walked the earth - drowned, but living. Beyond question I knew, too, that I was there alone, to pit my puny strength against the powers of darkness which my action of destroying the skull had released. Those powers which had been in abeyance so long as the sinister relic was neither moved nor harmed, now manifested themselves with tenfold force.

Nightly the uncanny shrieks and groans went on, making sleep impossible. Abating during the day, the din was merely a

low monotone that droned ceaselessly and monotonously in my ears, rising to howl and batter round the house on the approach of the dusk hours. Nightly the unholy play with the broken pieces of the skull was enacted over the dark water of the pool, and ever again that old twisted corpse, which was animated by the vengeful spirit of Mally Ry, rose dripping out of the pond, and vanished into the shut door of the farmhouse.

Meanwhile the snows still held, coming in foot after foot of unbroken whiteness; the lines of the farm were obliterated, the roads impassable. There was no sun, and no ceasing of the biting chill. With every hour my soul became more benumbed by fear, the scarlet thread of my brain stretched to breaking point.

The climax came suddenly, following on the heels of Oliver's return (the snow having at length melted sufficiently to allow him to cross the moors, with great difficulty). Upon seeing him ploughing toilsomely towards the farm I tottered to the door, overcome with relief. He exclaimed aloud in shocked surprise upon seeing my altered looks, the shadow of myself that I had become; the next moment I crumpled up in a heap at his feet.

"For God's sake, what is it? What has been happening here while I have been away?" he demanded, as once more consciousness returned, and I sat up weak and shaking.

The tale was soon gasped out; he listened in growing consternation, his face paling in spite of himself. "Perhaps it is not too late even now," he said at length, with an uncontrollable shiver. "The pond is not deep; I will fetch a lantern—"

He went to the door and threw it open. "What - what are you going to do?" I started up, full of a nameless apprehension.

"Do? Why, fish the skull up again, of course! We must restore it, bind the pieces together, propitiate the powers of darkness, at once, now—"

His tongue clove to his mouth, his body stiffened as slowly, step by step, through the door came drifting the horror that had once been Ann Skegg. There IT stood, its face a cadaverous blue, its long fingers cold with the cold of death, its eyes grown empty hollows, the rank odour of stagnant water

about its clothes – and on its thumb a long black hook like the hook of a bat. . . .

Oliver shrieked aloud in an agony of fear. The thing smiled – the most hideous, diabolical smile, and moved soundlessly on. Upon the floor, where its feet passed, were patches of green slime. . . .

As we retreated, so the thing followed, advancing with a fearful malignity on its skull-like face. Hard pressed, stark with terror, and the icy cold that radiated from it, I knew now the last scene was to be played to its appointed end.

Slowly, foot by foot, we fell before it. Oliver, lamp in hand, his expression one of frozen steadfastness, holding that terrible and basilisk gaze, was the last thing I saw before I sank down insensible for the second time. . . . When I came to, the room was empty; but a rush of cold air was blowing in through the open window. I ran out into the deepening night, crying, “Oliver! Oliver!” but there was no reply. The yard was deserted and empty; already that eldritch drone was rising and skirling round the house. Slowly I re-entered, and sat in horrible suspense awaiting his return. Several times I went to the window and gazed into the darkness; once I fancied I heard a faint cry, but attributed it to overwrought nerves. . . . I moved restlessly about the room, too frightened either to stay in that haunted house or brave the unknown perils without. At last, finding the suspense unendurable, and clutching at all the remnants of my courage, I went out in search of him.

Wind, like water, swept cold and black; lightning, although it was mid-winter, cut the inky darkness of the heavens; the night was full of sound. Thunder peal upon thunder peal rumbled and rolled along the tors; the air was close and unnaturally oppressive. I called repeatedly, with a sense of impending calamity, “Oliver! Oh, Oliver, answer me, answer me!” but no sound of a replying voice came to my straining ears. I went on, fearful, stumbling. And then there came, borne on the wind, a piercing cry, as if someone were in deadly danger.

“OLIVER! OLIVER!” I cried again, and then I saw—

I saw a sight that has seared itself indelibly upon my eyeballs. In the eerie light of the hurricane lamp that lay fallen on

its side on the snowy brink of the pond, the great curtain of the night beyond, I saw Oliver – beaten back till he stood in its very water, still keeping at bay that thing of ghastly horror. My heart hammered against my ribs, my breath came and went in great gasps as I stood there staring – so fearful was the sight, so dire my foreboding. In the waving, fluttering light of the lamp I saw with dread the Thing, advancing and receding, but always coming nearer, draw close with deadly purpose, one gaunt arm outstretched; I saw Oliver's white face thrown back, his eyes almost starting out of his head with fear and loathing, staring into the eyeholes where hers had been; finally, with a despairing gesture, he threw up his arms, covered his eyes, shrieked out: "Drown, witch, fiend, whatever you are; in the name of the Devil, drown!"

On a sudden there sprang up a moaning gust of wind; the eldritch skirling rose to a howl, the heavens opened – there came a flash of lightning, intense, blue. I saw the Horror shiver, bend, and sink down, the black water of the pool quiver. Then, even as I looked, above his head hovered something foul, something unspeakably awful, with vast leathery bat-pinions and hooked feet. Even as a cry of terror broke from me, struggling helplessly and unavailingly, he was enveloped in the shadow of the dark wings, caught up, and finally disappeared from sight into the black and howling vault above. With that, thunder crashed peal upon peal; there was a sound as of the world wailing in anguish, a sound as of demoniac laughter, triumphant and utterly vile. . . .

Something shrieked – shrieked and shrieked again above the clangour. I heard it, hear it still – then blindly, I turned and ran on and on, mile upon mile over the snow-bound moors. . . .

Notice having been brought to the doctor of an out-of-the-way village of a woman seen wandering about whose actions and strange appearance excited the suspicions of the villagers, I was certified and confined to an asylum as hopelessly mad. There are people who think I am still; are afraid to let me out, after having spent thirty years of my life behind high, imprisoning walls. . . .

Oliver? He was found – inexplicably burnt, and almost

unrecognizable, his face scarred and scarred again as with great claws. . . . Well, goodbye, goodbye, if you must go, thank you for coming to see an old woman like me. I'm quite sane, quite normal; only I behave strangely if I see a bat; I've forgotten why now, it's all going again. . . .

THE SHIFTING GROWTH

By Edgar Jepson and John Galsworthy

“COME AT once. Must operate for me. Great chance probably. Race special, Lincoln, King’s Cross 9.30. Don’t fail. Clavering.”

That was the wire, plus punctuation, I read for the second time, as that special carried me out of London.

It was a bit puzzling. I knew that Clavering would put himself out more than a little to help me, for we had been close pals all the five years we walked St Thomas’s, and he knew that the fee for an operation in Lincoln would be very useful to a recent settler in Harley Street. But what did he mean by ‘Great chance probably’? Was the patient a county swell, who would be the beginning of a valuable connection in the North? Hardly likely: the North has its own surgeons. But if it didn’t mean that, what on earth could it mean?

I cudgelled my brains for an explanation, and then it struck me that since I should know at twelve o’clock, I was rather wasting my time bothering about it at nine-thirty, and I turned to my *Times* and the conversation of the five racing enthusiasts in the carriage with me.

Everything gives way to a race special, and we ran into Lincoln three minutes after the hour. Clavering was there, and directly we had struggled to one another through the jostling stream of racegoers, I saw that he was under the weather – badly under the weather.

“Talk when we get to the house,” he said, and we shoved through the crowd to his car.

The house, the perfect house for the country doctor, early nineteenth century, and in the main street, had belonged to his father and grandfather, both doctors before him, and it was about as old-world inside as it was out. He was in such a state that he took me straight to the surgery – a bit old-fashioned,

but with all the fittings of the newest, and plunged into the case, but mixing a whisky-and-soda for me as he did so.

"It's my girl," he said, and there was a bit of a choke in his voice which impressed me, for there had never been anything soft about him that I had noticed, "Sylvia Bard, swimming champion of the South of France, the girl I'm engaged to – and that won't be for long – unless the operation works out all right. It's beaten us, the case has, and there isn't a good man in the North who hasn't seen her."

And then he pulled himself together and gave me the details clearly enough. Miss Bard had always been healthy, scarcely had a day's illness since the measles of her childhood, played a good game of golf and tennis, and even played hockey for the county. At the end of the last hockey season she had gone with her people to the Riviera to train, and about six weeks after her return the trouble had begun.

It was abdominal.

She had been all the quicker to notice it, because she had always enjoyed such good health. The trouble had been slight enough at first, and it had grown serious slowly. But neither he nor the men he had called into consultation had been able to diagnose it. They had, of course, tried every treatment they could think of. It had yielded to none of them.

Then he said: "Did you ever see or hear of a growth that shifted?" It was almost a cry of anguish.

"I did not. A growth couldn't shift," I said, with absolute certainty.

"But this one does. Just look at these X-ray photographs."

He pulled open a drawer and took out a whole packet of them, and we looked through them together.

They were incredible.

There was the growth all right – in the colon – a growth with what looked like adhesions, and as Clavering said, rather like the blob in the advertisement of Stephens' blue-black ink, and like no other growth ever X-rayed: at any rate, none I had ever seen. But in hardly any two of the photographs was it in the same place!

It was unbelievable; in some of the photographs it looked to have moved a good eight inches.

"But hang it all! Why didn't you operate?" I cried.

"Operate! We did operate! Dowling operated, and there isn't a better man in the North. But when he opened up the gut – the growth wasn't there, and he couldn't find it!"

I looked at him.

"And that's why I sent for you – to operate again. And I'm afraid we've let it go too long – that she won't stand it – the first time was bad enough. But you're the quickest hand with a knife I've ever seen, and you may just get it done in time."

"Well – well," I said softly. "And you wired: 'Great chance probably.'"

"You're made in the North if you bring it off," he said dully.

"It sounds as if I ought to be. Lead me to it!"

"She's all ready to move straight into the theatre – at the hospital," he said. "No use not having the best conditions."

"Right. And I should like a sandwich. Hurried over my breakfast. It's steadying, you know."

"And that's ready, too," said Clavering.

I ate the sandwich, and in ten minutes I was drawing on my steaming rubber gloves in the operating theatre of the hospital, and they wheeled the patient in, as dismal a wreck of a pretty girl as I have ever set eyes on.

"But this is a case of starvation!" I said.

"I know, that's what it looks like," said Clavering dully. "But it can't be."

"Then you'd better try a blood transfusion the moment I've finished," I snapped, and I began my examination.

The growth jumped at your eyes in that emaciated abdomen, and I pressed it. The response to the pressure was odd, a kind of twisting, muscular response. I had never known a growth respond like that before. I nodded to the anæsthetist, and he got to work, and devilish little anæsthetic he had to use before the poor girl was under.

It was my turn, and I had made up my mind about one thing: I was going to find that growth when I opened up. I ran a needle through it and moored it to the spot. It was sensitive: the surface of the abdomen above it fairly rippled.

I picked up my instruments – as a rule I start with three, the one I'm using and a couple between my fingers, for speed's

sake – and got to work. I made a longer incision than I usually do, nearly the whole length of the growth, for it still seemed to be rippling, and opened up the colon on to a black-and-red spongy mass, dragging at the needle which held it fast.

And from the middle of that seething sponge there stared up at me two set, unwinking eyes.

An octopus!

In an operation one is prepared for anything; but I admit that those eyes – for a second I thought they were a devil's – jarred me badly. But at the same moment it flashed on me that the brute was tugging away at the needle with the full tension of all its suckers set against the walls of the gut, and if the needle gave, it would not be much use my having found the growth. In the next ten seconds I must have ploughed the knife through and through that writhing sponge fifty times.

The writhing stopped.

I took forceps and drew it out. It came smoothly and easily: not a sucker held. I never thought you could kill the brutes so quickly.

"There's your growth!" I said, and I dropped it into the basin.

Uncompressed, it looked as if it would have filled a drain-pipe, and split the colon of an ox. And the eyes were still staring, stupidly.

Clavering retched. But then he was under the weather, and it did look nasty.

I had the gut washed out and sewn up inside of ten minutes – the quickest abdominal I ever did – or anybody else.

Sylvia Bard recovered – a long job. But I should say that she is about as strong as ever she was. At any rate, she is married to Clavering.

"Great chance probably?" I should think so! The octopus was in every big paper in England next morning and all over the world before night, and of course I have never looked back.

But oh, if it hadn't occurred to me to moor the growth to the gut before I began to operate!

THE TWO BOTTLES OF RELISH

By Lord Dunsany

SMITHERS IS my name. I'm what you might call a small man and in a small way of business.

I travel for Num-numo, a relish for meats and savouries – the world-famous relish I ought to say. It's really quite good, no deleterious acids in it, and does not affect the heart; so it is quite easy to push. I wouldn't have got the job if it weren't. But I hope some day to get something that's harder to push, as of course the harder they are to push, the better the pay. At present I can just make my way, with nothing at all over; but then I live in a very expensive flat. It happened like this, and that brings me to my story. And it isn't the story you'd expect from a small man like me, yet there's nobody else to tell it. Those that know anything of it besides me are all for hushing it up. Well, I was looking for a room to live in in London when first I got my job. It had to be in London, to be central; and I went to a block of buildings, very gloomy they looked, and saw the man that ran them and asked him for what I wanted. Flats they called them; just a bedroom and a sort of a cupboard. Well, he was showing a man round at the time who was a gent, in fact more than that, so he didn't take much notice of me – the man that ran all those flats didn't, I mean. So I just ran behind for a bit, seeing all sorts of rooms and waiting till I could be shown my class of thing. We came to a very nice flat, a sitting-room, bedroom and bathroom, and a sort of little place that they called a hall. And that's how I came to know Linley. He was the bloke that was being shown round.

“Bit expensive,” he said.

And the man that ran the flats turned away to the window and picked his teeth. It's funny how much you can show by a simple thing like. What he meant to say was that he'd hundreds

of flats like that, and thousands of people looking for them, and he didn't care who had them or whether they all went on looking. There was no mistaking him, somehow. And yet he never said a word, only looked away out of the window and picked his teeth. And I ventured to speak to Mr Linley then; and I said, "How about it, sir, if I paid half, and shared it? I wouldn't be in the way, and I'm out all day, and whatever you said would go, and really I wouldn't be no more in your way than a cat."

You may be surprised at my doing it; and you'll be much more surprised at him accepting it – at least, you would if you knew me, just a small man in a small way of business. And yet I could see at once that he was taking to me more than he was taking to the man at the window.

"But there's only one bedroom," he said.

"I could make up my bed easy in that little room there," I said.

"The Hall," said the man, looking round from the window, without taking his toothpick out.

"And I'd have the bed out of the way and hid in the cupboard by any hour you like," I said.

He looked thoughtful, and the other man looked out over London; and in the end, do you know, he accepted.

"Friend of yours?" said the flat man.

"Yes," answered Mr Linley.

It was really very nice of him.

"I'll tell you why I did it. Able to afford it? Of course not. But I heard him tell the flat man that he had just come down from Oxford and wanted to live for a few months in London. It turned out he wanted just to be comfortable and do nothing for a bit while he looked things over and chose a job, or probably just as long as he could afford it. Well, I said to myself, what's the Oxford manner worth in business, especially a business like mine? Why, simply everything you've got. If I picked up only a quarter of it from this Mr Linley I'd be able to double my sales, and that would soon mean I'd be given something a lot harder to push, with perhaps treble the pay. Worth it every time. And you can make a quarter of an education go twice as far again if you're careful with it. I mean you

don't have to quote the whole of the *Inferno* to show that you've read Milton; half a line may do it.

Well, about that story I have to tell. And you mightn't think that a little man like me could make you shudder. Well, I soon forgot about the Oxford manner when we settled down in our flat. I forgot it in the sheer wonder of the man himself. He had a mind like an acrobat's body, like a bird's body. It didn't want education. You didn't notice whether he was educated or not. Ideas were always leaping up in him, things you'd never have thought of. And not only that, but if any ideas were about, he'd sort of catch them. Time and again I've found him knowing just what I was going to say. Not thought-reading, but what they call intuition. I used to try to learn a bit about chess, just to take my thoughts off Num-numo in the evening, when I'd done with it. But problems I never could do. Yet he'd come along and glance at my problem and say, "You probably move that piece first," and I'd say, "But where?" and he'd say, "Oh, one of those three squares." And I'd say, "But it will be taken on all of them." And the piece a queen all the time, mind you. And he'd say, "Yes, it's doing no good there: you're probably meant to lose it."

And, do you know, he'd be right.

You see, he'd been following out what the other man had been thinking. That's what he'd been doing.

Well, one day there was that ghastly murder at Unge. I don't know if you remember it. But Steeger had gone down to live with a girl in a bungalow on the North Downs, and that was the first we had heard of him.

The girl had £200, and he got every penny of it, and she utterly disappeared. And Scotland Yard couldn't find her.

Well, I'd happened to read that Steeger had bought two bottles of Num-numo; for the Otherthorpe police had found out everything about him, except what he did with the girl; and that of course attracted my attention, or I should have never thought again about the case or said a word of it to Linley. Num-numo was always on my mind, as I always spent every day pushing it, and that kept me from forgetting the other thing. And so one day I said to Linley, "I wonder with all that

knack you have for seeing through a chess problem, and thinking of one thing and another, that you don't have a go at that Otherthorpe mystery. It's a problem as much as chess," I said.

"There's not the mystery in ten murders that there is in one game of chess," he answered.

"It's beaten Scotland Yard," I said.

"Has it?" he asked.

"Knocked them end-wise," I said.

"It shouldn't have done that," he said. And almost immediately after he said, "What are the facts?"

We were both sitting at supper, and I told him the facts, as I had them straight from the papers. She was a pretty blonde, she was small, she was called Nancy Elth, she had £200, they lived at the bungalow for five days. After that he stayed there for another fortnight, but nobody ever saw her alive again. Steeger said she had gone to South America, but later said he had never said South America, but South Africa. None of her money remained in the Bank where she had kept it, and Steeger was shown to have come by at least £150 just at that time. Then Steeger turned out to be a vegetarian, getting all his food from the greengrocer, and that made the constable in the village of Unge suspicious of him, for a vegetarian was something new to the constable. He watched Steeger after that, and it's well he did, for there was nothing that Scotland Yard asked him that he couldn't tell them about him, except of course the one thing. And he told the police at Otherthorpe five or six miles away, and they came and took a hand at it too. They were able to say for one thing that he never went outside the bungalow and its tidy garden ever since she disappeared. You see, the more they watched him the more suspicious they got, as you naturally do if you're watching a man; so that very soon they were watching every move he made, but if it hadn't been for his being a vegetarian they'd never have started to suspect him, and there wouldn't have been enough evidence even for Linley. Not that they found out anything much against him, except that £150 dropping in from nowhere, and it was Scotland Yard that found that, not the police of Otherthorpe. No, what the constable of Unge found out was about the larch-trees, and that beat Scotland Yard utterly, and beat Linley up

to the very last, and of course it beat me. There were ten larch-trees in the bit of a garden, and he'd made some sort of an arrangement with the landlord, Steeger had, before he took the bungalow, by which he could do what he liked with the larch-trees. And then from about the time that little Nancy Elth must have died he cut every one of them down. Three times a day he went at it for nearly a week, and when they were all down he cut them all up into logs no more than two foot long and laid them all in neat heaps. You never saw such work. And what for? To give an excuse for the axe was one theory. But the excuse was bigger than the axe; it took him a fortnight, hard work every day. And he could have killed a little thing like Nancy Elth without an axe, and cut her up too. Another theory was that he wanted firewood, to make away with the body. But he never used it. He left it all standing there in those neat stacks. It fairly beat everybody.

Well, those are the facts I told Linley. Oh yes, and he bought a big butcher's knife. Funny thing, they all do. And yet it isn't so funny after all; if you've got to cut a woman up, you've got to cut her up; and you can't do that without a knife. Then, there were some negative facts. He hadn't burned her. Only had a fire in the small stove now and then, and only used it for cooking. They got on to that pretty smartly, the Unge constable did, and the men that were lending him a hand from Otherthorpe. There were some little woody places lying round, shaws they call them in that part of the country, the country people do, and they could climb a tree handy and unobserved and get a sniff at the smoke in almost any direction it might be blowing. They did that now and then, and there was no smell of flesh burning, just ordinary cooking. Pretty smart of the Otherthorpe police that was, though of course it didn't help to hang Steeger. Then later on the Scotland Yard men went down and got another fact - negative, but narrowing things down all the while. And that was that the chalk under the bungalow and under the little garden had none of it been disturbed. And he'd never been outside it since Nancy disappeared. Oh yes, and he had a big file besides the knife. But there was no sign of any ground bones found on the file, or any blood on the knife. He'd washed them of course. I told all that to Linley.

Now I ought to warn you before I go any further. I am a small man myself and you probably don't expect anything horrible from me. But I ought to warn you this man was a murderer, or at any rate somebody was; the woman had been made away with, a nice pretty little girl too, and the man that had done that wasn't necessarily going to stop at things you might think he'd stop at. With the mind to do a thing like that, and with the long thin shadow of the rope to drive him further, you can't say what he'll stop at. Murder tales seem nice things sometimes for a lady to sit and read all by herself by the fire. But murder isn't a nice thing, and when a murderer's desperate and trying to hide his tracks he isn't even as nice as he was before. I'll ask you to bear that in mind. Well, I've warned you.

So I says to Linley, "And what do you make of it?"

"Drains?" said Linley.

"No," I says, "you're wrong there. Scotland Yard has been into that. And the Otherthorpe people before them. They've had a look in the drains, such as they are, a little thing running into a cesspool beyond the garden; and nothing has gone down it - nothing that oughtn't to have, I mean."

He made one or two other suggestions, but Scotland Yard had been before him in every case. That's really the crab of my story, if you'll excuse the expression. You want a man who sets out to be a detective to take his magnifying glass and go down to the spot; to go to the spot before everything; and then to measure the footmarks and pick up the clues and find the knife that the police have overlooked. But Linley never even went near the place, and he hadn't got a magnifying glass, not as I ever saw, and Scotland Yard were before him every time.

In fact they had more clues than anybody could make head or tail of. Every kind of clue to show that he'd murdered the poor little girl; every kind of clue to show that he hadn't disposed of the body; and yet the body wasn't there. It wasn't in South America either, and not much more likely in South Africa. And all the time, mind you, that enormous bunch of chopped larch-wood, a clue that was staring everyone in the face and leading nowhere. No, we didn't seem to want any more clues, and Linley never went near the place. The trouble was to deal with the clues we'd got. I was completely mystified;

so was Scotland Yard; and Linley seemed to be getting no forwarder; and all the while the mystery was hanging on me. I mean if it were not for the trifle I'd chanced to remember, and if it were not for one chance word I said to Linley, that mystery would have gone the way of all the other mysteries that men have made nothing of, a darkness, a little patch of night in history.

Well, the fact was Linley didn't take much interest in it at first, but I was so absolutely sure that he could do it, that I kept him to the idea. "You can do chess problems," I said.

"That's ten times harder," he said, sticking to his point.

"Then why don't you do this?" I said.

"Then go and take a look at the board for me," said Linley.

That was his way of talking. We'd been a fortnight together, and I knew it by now. He meant to go down to the bungalow at Unge. I know you'll say why didn't he go himself; but the plain truth of it is, that if he'd been tearing about the countryside he'd never have been thinking, whereas sitting there in his chair by the fire in our flat there was no limit to the ground he could cover, if you follow my meaning. So down I went by train next day, and got out at Unge station. And there were the North Downs rising up before me, somehow like music.

"It's up there, isn't it?" I said to the porter.

"That's right," he said. "Up there by the lane; and mind to turn to your right when you get to the old yew-tree, a very big tree, you can't mistake it, and then . . ." and he told me the way so that I couldn't go wrong. I found them all like that, very nice and helpful. You see, it was Unge's day at last. Everyone had heard of Unge now; you could have got a letter there any time just then without putting the county or post town; and this was what Unge had to show. I dare say if you tried to find Unge now . . . well, anyway, they were making hay while the sun shone.

Well, there the hill was, going up into sunlight, going up like a song. You don't want to hear about the spring, and all the may rioting, and the colour that came down over everything later on in the day, and all those birds; but I thought, "What a nice place to bring a girl to." And then when I thought that he'd killed her there, well I'm only a small man, as I said, but

when I thought of her on that hill with all the birds singing, I said to myself, "Wouldn't it be odd if it turned out to be me after all that got that man killed, if he did murder her." So I soon found my way up to the bungalow and began prying about, looking over the hedge into the garden. And I didn't find much, and I found nothing at all that the police hadn't found already, but there were those heaps of larch logs staring me in the face and looking very queer.

I did a lot of thinking, leaning against the hedge, breathing the smell of the may, and looking over the top of it at the larch logs, and the neat little bungalow the other side of the garden. Lots of theories I thought of, till I came to the best thought of all; and that was that if I left the thinking to Linley, with his Oxford-and-Cambridge education, and only brought him the facts, as he had told me, I should be doing more good in my way than if I tried to do any big thinking. I forgot to tell you that I had gone to Scotland Yard in the morning. Well, there wasn't really much to tell. What they asked me was, what I wanted. And, not having an answer exactly ready, I didn't find out very much from them. But it was quite different at Unge; everyone was most obliging; it was their day there, as I said. The constable let me go indoors, so long as I didn't touch anything, and he gave me a look at the garden from the inside. And I saw the stumps of the ten larch-trees, and I noticed one thing that Linley said was very observant of me, not that it turned out to be any use, but any way I was doing my best: I noticed that the stumps had been all chopped anyhow. And from that I thought that the man that did it didn't know much about chopping. The constable said that was a deduction. So then I said that the axe was blunt when he used it; and that certainly made the constable think, though he didn't actually say I was right this time. Did I tell you that Steeger never went outdoors, except to the little garden to chop wood, ever since Nancy disappeared? I think I did. Well, it was perfectly true. They'd watched him night and day, one or another of them, and the Unge constable told me that himself. That limited things a good deal. The only thing I didn't like about it was that I felt Linley ought to have found all that out instead of ordinary policemen, and I felt that he could have too.

There'd have been romance in a story like that. And they'd never have done it if the news hadn't gone round that the man was a vegetarian and only dealt at the greengrocers. Likely as not even that was only started out of pique by the butcher. It's queer what little things may trip a man up. Best to keep straight is my motto. But perhaps I'm straying a bit away from my story. I should like to do that for ever – forget that it ever was; but I can't.

Well, I picked up all sorts of information; clues I suppose I should call it in a story like this, though they none of them seemed to lead anywhere. For instance, I found out everything he ever bought at the village, I could even tell you the kind of salt he bought, quite plain with no phosphates in it, that they sometimes put in to make it tidy. And then he got ice from the fishmongers, and plenty of vegetables, as I said, from the greengrocer, Mergin & Sons. And I had a bit of a talk over it all with the constable. Slugger he said his name was. I wondered why he hadn't come in and searched the place as soon as the girl was missing. "Well, you can't do that," he said. "And besides, we didn't suspect at once, not about the girl, that is. We only suspected there was something wrong about him on account of him being a vegetarian. He stayed a good fortnight after the last that was seen of her. And then we slipped in like a knife. But, you see, no one had been inquiring about her, there was no warrant out."

"And what did you find?" I asked Slugger, "when you went in?"

"Just a big file," he said, "and the knife and the axe that he must have got to chop her up with."

"But he got the axe to chop trees with," I said.

"Well, yes," he said, but rather grudgingly.

"And what did he chop them for?" I asked.

"Well, of course my superiors has theories about that," he said, "that they mightn't tell to everybody."

You see, it was those logs that were beating them.

"But did he cut her up at all?" I asked.

"Well, he said that she was going to South America," he answered. Which was really very fair-minded of him.

I don't remember now much else that he told me. Steeger

left the plates and dishes all washed up and very neat, he said.

Well, I brought all this back to Linley, going up by the train that started just about sunset. I'd like to tell you about the late spring evening, so calm over that grim bungalow, closing in with a glory all round it as though it were blessing it; but you'll want to hear of the murder. Well, I told Linley everything, though much of it didn't seem to me to be worth the telling. The trouble was that the moment I began to leave anything out, he'd know it, and make me drag it in. "You can't tell what may be vital," he'd say. "A tin-tack swept away by a house-maid might hang a man."

All very well, but be consistent, even if you are educated at Eton and Harrow, and whenever I mentioned Num-numo, which after all was the beginning of the whole story, because he wouldn't have heard of it if it hadn't been for me, and my noticing that Steeger had bought two bottles of it, why then he said that things like that were trivial and we should keep to the main issues. I naturally talked a bit about Num-numo, because only that day I had pushed close on fifty bottles of it in Unge. A murder certainly stimulates people's minds, and Steeger's two bottles gave me an opportunity that only a fool could have failed to make something of. But of course all that was nothing at all to Linley.

You can't see a man's thoughts, and you can't look into his mind, so that all the most exciting things in the world can never be told of. But what I think happened all that evening with Linley, while I talked to him before supper, and all through supper, and sitting smoking afterwards in front of our fire, was that his thoughts were stuck at a barrier there was no getting over. And the barrier wasn't the difficulty of finding ways and means by which Steeger might have made away with the body, but the impossibility of finding why he chopped those masses of wood every day for a fortnight, and paid, as I'd just found out, £25 to his landlord to be allowed to do it. That's what was beating Linley. As for the ways by which Steeger might have hidden the body, it seemed to me that every way was blocked by the police. If you said he buried it, they said the chalk was undisturbed; if you said he carried it away, they said he never left the place; if you said he burned it, they said no smell of

burning was ever noticed when the smoke blew low, and when it didn't they climbed trees after it. I'd taken to Linley wonderfully, and I didn't have to be educated to see there was something big in a mind like his, and I thought that he could have done it. When I saw the police getting in before him like that, and no way that I could see of getting past them, I felt real sorry.

Did anyone come to the house, he asked me once or twice. Did anyone take anything away from it? But we couldn't account for it that way. Then perhaps I made some suggestion that was no good, or perhaps I started talking of Num-numo again, and he interrupted me rather sharply.

"But what would you do, Smithers?" he said. "What would you do yourself?"

"If I'd murdered poor Nancy Elth?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

"I can't ever imagine doing such a thing," I told him.

He sighed at that, as though it were something against me.

"I suppose I should never be a detective," I said. And he just shook his head.

Then he looked broodingly into the fire for what seemed an hour. And then he shook his head again. We both went to bed after that.

I shall remember the next day all my life. I was till evening, as usual, pushing Num-numo. And we sat down to supper about nine. You couldn't get things cooked at those flats, so of course we had it cold. And Linley began with a salad. I can see it now, every bit of it. Well, I was still a bit full of what I'd done in Unge, pushing Num-numo. Only a fool, I know, would have been unable to push it there; but still, I *had* pushed it; and about fifty bottles, forty-eight to be exact, are something in a small village, whatever the circumstances. So I was talking about it a bit; and then all of a sudden I realized that Num-numo was nothing to Linley, and I pulled myself up with a jerk. It was really very kind of him; do you know what he did? He must have known at once why I stopped talking, and he just stretched out a hand and said, "Would you give me a little of your Num-numo for my salad."

I was so touched I nearly gave it him. But of course you

don't take Num-numo with salad. Only for meats and savouries. That's on the bottle.

So I just said to him, "Only for meats and savouries." Though I don't know what savouries are. Never had any.

I never saw a man's face go like that before.

He seemed still for a whole minute. And nothing speaking about him but that expression. Like a man that's seen a ghost, one is tempted to write. But it wasn't really at all. I'll tell you what he looked like. Like a man that's seen something that no one has ever looked at before, something he thought couldn't be.

And then he said in a voice that was all quite changed, more low and gentle and quiet it seemed, "No good for vegetables, eh?"

"Not a bit," I said.

And at that he gave a kind of sob in his throat. I hadn't thought he could feel things like that. Of course I didn't know what it was all about; but, whatever it was, I thought all that sort of thing would have been knocked out of him at Eton and Harrow, an educated man like that. There were no tears in his eyes, but he was feeling something horribly.

And then he began to speak with big spaces between his words, saying, "A man might make a mistake perhaps, and use Num-numo with vegetables."

"Not twice," I said. What else could I say?

And he repeated that after me as though I had told of the end of the world, and adding an awful emphasis to my words, till they seemed all clammy with some frightful significance, and shaking his head as he said it

Then he was quite silent.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Smithers," he said.

"Yes," I said.

"Smithers," said he.

And I said, "Well?"

"Look here, Smithers," he said, "you must phone down to the grocer at Unge and find out from him this."

"Yes?" I said.

"Whether Steeger bought those two bottles, as I expect he

did, on the same day, and not a few days apart. He couldn't have done that."

I waited to see if any more was coming, and then I ran out and did what I was told. It took me some time, being after nine o'clock, and only then with the help of the police. About six days apart they said; and so I came back and told Linley. He looked up at me so hopefully when I came in, but I saw that it was the wrong answer by his eyes.

You can't take things to heart like that without being ill, and when he didn't speak I said, "What you want is a good brandy, and go to bed early."

And he said, "No. I must see someone from Scotland Yard. Phone round to them. Say here at once."

But I said, "I can't get an inspector from Scotland Yard to call on us at this hour."

His eyes were all lit up. He was all there all right.

"Then tell them," he said, "they'll never find Nancy Elth. Tell one of them to come here, and I'll tell him why." And he added, I think only for me, "They must watch Steeger, till one day they get him over something else."

And, do you know, he came. Inspector Ulton; he came himself.

While we were waiting I tried to talk to Linley. Partly curiosity, I admit. But I didn't want to leave him to those thoughts of his, brooding away by the fire. I tried to ask him what it was all about. But he wouldn't tell me. "Murder is horrible," is all he would say. "And as a man covers his tracks up it only gets worse."

He wouldn't tell me. "There are tales," he said, "that one never wants to hear."

That's true enough. I wish I'd never heard this one. I never did actually. But I guessed it from Linley's last words to Inspector Ulton, the only ones that I overheard. And perhaps this is the point at which to stop reading my story, so that you don't guess it too; even if you think you want murder stories. For don't you rather want a murder story with a bit of a romantic twist, and not a story about real foul murder? Well, just as you like.

In came Inspector Ulton, and Linley shook hands in silence,

and pointed the way to his bedroom; and they went in there and talked in low voices, and I never heard a word.

A fairly hearty-looking man was the inspector when they went into that room.

They walked through our sitting-room in silence when they came out, and together they went into the hall, and there I heard the only words they said to each other. It was the Inspector that first broke that silence.

"But why," he said, "did he cut down the trees?"

"Solely," said Linley, "in order to get an appetite."

A ROSE FOR EMILY

By William Faulkner

WHEN Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant – a combined gardener and cook – had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighbourhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the petrol pumps – an eyesore among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor – he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron – remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris's generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas,

became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply. They wrote her a formal letter asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse – a close, dank smell. The Negro led them into the parlour. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow notes in the single sunray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.

They rose when she entered – a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist, and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the doorway and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

Her voice was dry and cold. "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves."

"But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?"

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff. . . . I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by the—"

"See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But, Miss Emily—"

"See Colonel Sartoris." (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!" The Negro appeared. "Show these gentlemen out."

II

So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell. That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart — the one we believed would marry her — had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man — a young man then — going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man — any man — could keep a kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbour, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty years old.

"But what will you have me to do about it, madam?" he said.

"Why, send her word to stop it," the woman said. "Isn't there a law?"

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," Judge Stevens said. "It's probably just a snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I'll speak to him about it."

The next day he received two more complaints, one from a man who came in diffident deprecation. "We really must do

something about it, Judge. I'd be the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily, but we've got to do something." That night the Board of Aldermen met – three greybeards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation.

"It's simple enough," he said. "Send her word to have her place cleaned up. Give her a certain time to do it in, and if she don't . . ."

"Dammit, sir," Judge Stevens said, "will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?"

So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings, while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the out-buildings. As they recrossed the lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol. They crept quietly across the lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. After a week or two the smell went away.

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how Old Lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men was quite good enough to Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them as a tableau: Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door. So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the

house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom. Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that, with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

III

She was sick for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in coloured church windows – sort of tragic and serene.

The town had just let the contracts for paving the sidewalks, and in the summer after her father's death they began the work. The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a Yankee – a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers, and the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks. Pretty soon he knew everybody in town. Whenever you heard a lot of laughing anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the centre of the group. Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable.

At first we were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest, because the ladies all said, "Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day labourer." But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige* – without calling it *noblesse oblige*. They just said, "Poor Emily. Her kinsfolk should come to her." She had some kin in Alabama; but years ago her father had fallen out with them over the estate of Old

Lady Wyatt, the crazy woman, and there was no communication between the two families. They had not even been represented at the funeral.

And as soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" they said to one another.

"Of course it is. What else could . . ." This behind their hands; rustling of craned silk and satin behind jealousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."

She carried her head high enough – even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness. Like when she bought the rat poison, the arsenic. That was over a year after they had begun to say "Poor Emily", and while the two female cousins were visiting her.

"I want some poison," she said to the druggist. She was over thirty then, still a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eye-sockets as you imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look. "I want some poison," she said.

"Yes, Miss Emily. What kind? For rats and such? I'd recom—"

"I want the best you have. I don't care what kind."

The druggist named several. "They'll kill anything up to an elephant. But what you want is—"

"Arsenic," Miss Emily said. "Is that a good one?"

"Is . . . arsenic? Yes, ma'am. But what you want—"

"I want arsenic."

The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag. "Why, of course," the druggist said. "If that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for."

Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The Negro delivery boy brought her the package; the druggist didn't come back. When she

opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: "For rats."

IV

So the next day we all said, "She will kill herself"; and we said it would be the best thing. When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet," because Homer himself had remarked - he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club - that he was not a marrying man. Later we said, "Poor Emily" behind the jealousies as they passed on Sunday afternoon in the glittering buggy, Miss Emily with her head high and Homer Barron with his hat cocked and a cigar in his teeth, reins and whip in a yellow glove.

Then some of the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people. The men did not want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister - Miss Emily's people were Episcopal - to call upon her. He would never divulge what happened during that interview, but he refused to go back again. The next Sunday they again drove about the streets, and the following day the minister's wife wrote to Miss Emily's relations in Alabama.

So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments. At first nothing happened. Then we were sure that they were to be married. We learned that Miss Emily had been to the jeweller's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H.B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing including a night-shirt, and we said, "They are married." We were really glad. We were glad because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.

So we were not surprised when Homer Barron - the streets had been finished some time since - was gone. We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off, but we believed that he had gone on to prepare for Miss Emily's coming, or to give her a chance to get rid of the cousins. (By that time it was a cabal, and we were all Miss Emily's allies to

help circumvent the cousins.) Sure enough, after another week they departed. And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbour saw the Negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening.

And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets. Then we knew that this was to be expected too; as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die.

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning grey. During the next few years it grew greyer and greyer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-grey, when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-grey, like the hair of an active man.

From that time on her front door remained closed, save for a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and grand-daughters of Colonel Sartoris's contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent to church on Sundays with a twenty-five cent piece for the collection plate. Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted.

Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of colour and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery, Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mail-box to it. She would not listen to them.

Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the Negro grow greyer and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be

returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows – she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house – like the carved torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from generation to generation – dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro. He talked to no one, probably not even to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse.

She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her grey head propped on a pillow yellow and mouldy with age and lack of sunlight.

V

The Negro met the first of the ladies at the front door and let them in, with their hushed, sibilant voices, and their quick, curious glances, and then he disappeared. He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.

The two female cousins came at once. They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bough flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old men – some in their brushed Confederate uniforms – on the porch and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottle-neck of the most recent decade of the years.

Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which

would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose colour, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing-table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie, as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks.

The man himself lay in the bed.

For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the night-shirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-grey hair.

A POEM AND A BUNCH OF ROSES

By Charles Lloyd

“**W**HY – did – I come, why – did – I come? why – did – I come?” The regular beating of the engine beat the words into Sally Russell’s mind as the dingy train rattled past the few stations that lay between Natombre and the little village of Civennes.

She could not understand what could have prompted Madame de Civennes to ask her to the Chateau. *Why* didn’t she hate her? She sighed and tried to put the question out of her head. Margaret de Civennes was Spanish, and perhaps she could look at life from a more detached angle. Still, Sally could not imagine any Englishwoman that she knew asking her dead husband’s mistress to stay with her.

She got up and started to collect her luggage . . . the next station *must* be her destination. The man in the ticket office at Natombre had told her it was the third stop after changing at Treves.

Sally shivered as she climbed stiffly from the train on to the small country platform. There were few passengers for the little village of Civennes; and, as might have been expected in a lonely hamlet of its size, there was no porter. A disagreeable old man carried out the duties of ticket collector and station-master; nor was his task an arduous one. She looked up and down the platform. An old peasant woman, blurred by the dusk, was clambering from her third-class carriage, her form rendered shapeless by many bundles and baskets. A bitterly cold wind blustered down the narrow valley.

Sally shivered and drew her coat more closely about her. She looked past the cluster of wooden sheds to the road. No sign of a car to meet her. Really it was very inconsiderate of Madame de Civennes. With a sigh, she climbed back into her compartment and started to tug out her suitcases and golf clubs. The

little train gave a warning whistle; and panic-stricken, the girl found herself in a cascade of small luggage on the now deserted platform. At the same moment the welcome beams of a motor-car's headlights cut the gathering gloom.

Sally gave a sigh of relief. The discomfort of the journey in the small local trains, the interminable dallyings at the dull stations, the dirt and smuts, all were forgotten by the prospect of dinner and a hot bath – especially a hot bath – at the Chateau.

And now the owner of the car walked towards her, followed by the ticket collector, roused from his lethargy by a few well-chosen phrases. He was extremely deferential. "The lady from the Chateau – a thousand pardons. Would Mademoiselle permit him to carry her luggage?" Mademoiselle most certainly would!

Margaret de Civennes shook hands with her guest. She was strikingly handsome in her well-cut tweeds. The severe fashion in which she wore her dark hair enhanced the beauty of her face – the small mouth, the large sorrow-haunted eyes. Hers was a masculine, rather hard beauty that most men found intimidating. This flashed through Sally's mind as she protested that she hadn't been kept waiting at all; that the train had only just left.

Together they walked from the station and superintended the disposal of the luggage in the capacious dickey of the Bentley. Sally drew her coat more tightly round her and turned up the fur collar as a protection against the wind. She shivered.

"How far is it to the Chateau?"

"Five miles. You poor thing; you must be frozen."

Margaret pressed the self-starter, and they started their drive through the valley, its bleak beauty softened by the twilight, to the Chateau Montnegre, a relic of the glory that was mediaeval France.

Sally gasped with appreciation at her first glimpse of the Chateau. Situated on a hill, its strong harsh outline black against the cloud-ridden sky, it dominated the valley through which the road wound.

The car pulled up before great gates of wrought iron. Margaret pressed the horn. The harsh metallic cry sounded

oddly out of place. A light showed in the cottage of the gate-keeper, and a bent old man tottered uncertainly into the glare of their lights. He carried a lantern of a pattern in use many years ago. His purblind rheumy eyes peered at his hands as he fumbled with the fastenings. He touched his cap as the car slid past and breasted the steep slope of the drive.

The vast building loomed before them; a solid mass of darkness, save where one room lighted by candles pierced its flank with eerie radiance.

"I'll leave you here," Margaret said. "Pierre will take your luggage. I'm afraid that you'll find it very uncomfortable. You see, I just live in one wing with an old woman to cook for me; and her son to do the heavy work. All other help comes from the village; so I must garage the car myself. The bell is on the right of the door," she added as she let in the clutch.

Sally pulled the bell. Faintly she heard the jangle of its ringing. She felt dwarfed by the gigantic size of the door. The trees tossed their branches, tortured by the wind; on such a night, she thought, witches straddled their broomsticks, riding the gale to their Sabbath. She listened. No sound disturbed the quiet of the Chateau. She pulled the bell a second time. She thought how brave it was of Margaret de Civennes to live here by herself! Then came the sound of footsteps on a stone floor, heavy and purposeful. And then silence; whoever was there was waiting, listening. She wrapped on the wood with her knuckles.

The rasping of heavy bolts promised that soon she would be in welcome shelter. With a last protest the massive door swung open. Sally stepped forward; and then paused in amazement. Before her stood the biggest man that she had ever seen. He towered above her, nearly seven feet in height, his tremendous shoulders almost filling the narrow stone passage. But it was his face that startled the girl. From a forest of beard the mouth hung half open; the small pig eyes were bleared with lack of understanding. She glanced at his hands, huge and hairy, with prominent knotted veins. The man looked at her, motionless, and without speaking.

"My luggage is outside. Could you bring it in, please." Sally's French was perfect.

He made no move; but stared at her in dumb stupidity. She

repeated her order; and then added: "Madame de Civennes is garaging the car. She will be here in a minute."

The servant shambled past her and picked up her suitcases. With a jerk of his head he motioned her to proceed him.

Sally walked down the passage until she came to a lofty central hall. A few candles served to lessen its gloom. She could just see a wide staircase that mounted into the darkness above. Armour and the glimmer of marble gave back their cold outlines.

The man put down her luggage and threw open a door on the right, showing the warm welcome of a log fire. Sally decided that she was meant to wait there for her hostess. Was the creature dumb? she wondered. She hurried to the blaze, gratefully stretching out her numbed hands to the fire.

Taking off her hat and coat she threw them on to a chair covered with wonderful tapestry, its rich colours mellowed by the use of many centuries. The door opened and Margaret hurried in, her face glowing from the cold night air.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting. But I see that you've made yourself comfortable."

"Yes . . . Madame de Civennes, who is that extraordinary man who let me in?"

"You mean Pierre? Oh, he's not as intimidating as he looks, child. He's dumb, poor fellow, and not quite right in the head. But he's a marvellous servant. I did his mother a service once, and they're both devoted to me. I hope he didn't frighten you."

"No. Not - exactly. But he was a little . . . unexpected."

"I should have warned you." She walked towards the hall. "But I'm sure that you'll be wanting a bath and a change. I'll show you your room. We dine, or rather sup, at nine."

Dinner helped to dispel somewhat the atmosphere of gloom. The food was simple, but well cooked. A delicious omelette, cold ham and a salad, and fresh fruit followed by excellent coffee. The meal was prepared by Marie, Pierre's mother, a wizened old woman of incredible age, who also waited upon them. Afterwards, they went back to the cheerful sittingroom for liqueurs and cigarettes. Sally was struck by the pale sad loveliness of her hostess, ten years her senior, who, a Russian

cigarette between her slim fingers, sat on a low stool gazing into the fire. She is very beautiful, Sally thought, with a hard brittle beauty. Soon Margaret rose, glancing at the clock.

"Well, my dear, it's half past ten. There's no reason to sit up late in Civennes. I want to get some colour into your cheeks before you go back to London. If there's anything you want, I hope that you'll let me know."

Sally followed her up to her room. The wind had dropped and, the moon being obscured by clouds, the night crept close to the walls of the Chateau. Sally had never experienced a feeling of such solitude. It seemed that only four people remained in the world: Margaret de Civennes, herself, Pierre and the wizened Marie.

Well, here was her room. She yawned, stretching luxuriously. A profound fatigue swept over her. Sleep and rest were what she longed for; and let tomorrow take care of itself.

The next day she and Margaret walked to the village, a pathetic straggle of cottages, dominated by the Chateau, behind which the Montnegre reared its sinister bulk. It was dusk when they returned. Sally was tired and hungry, but her day in the open air had given her a feeling of well-being. Her hostess smiled at her. "You see, I was right in asking you to come to visit me. You needed a change."

"I can't thank you enough. But I want to talk to you about it all. I don't quite understand why you're doing all this for me. . . ."

Margaret shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Why bring up old stories? The past is dead – it is dangerous to resurrect it." Her voice held an odd note.

Later that evening after their dinner, when the two women sat smoking, Sally determined to talk the whole situation out with Margaret. She was deeply touched by her kindness, and wished sincerely that it could have happened otherwise. But at the time she had not known Margaret; and so had violated no sense of loyalty. Sally lay curled up on a sofa. They had been discussing books; the quality of courage – abstract questions that could hold no personal element. Margaret studiously avoided all but abstract discussions. And now Sally felt the

time had come to try and justify herself in the eyes of this woman. She threw away her cigarette, quickly swung her feet to the floor, and brushed back her thick fair hair.

"Madame de Civennes; - or Margaret - I may call you Margaret?"

"But of course."

"I want to explain to you about André and I."

"My dear!" Margaret looked at her without expression; the tone of her voice showed only unutterable boredom.

"But I must. You've been so charming to me, that I feel such a . . ." she groped for a word, "such a cad."

"Who can help their feelings?"

"You see, it wasn't as if I knew you. I met André at a night club. I knew he was married, but thought, God knows why, that he was living apart from his wife." She broke off. "You loved him terribly, didn't you?"

"He was all I had."

"I loved him too. That's why it was so dreadful when it all happened. Oh, it was horrible. And the newspapers - they didn't spare me, you know. I suppose that you read that he died in my bedroom. Well, it's finished my life, if that's any consolation."

"That is why I asked you here - so that you could get away from London, until . . . your pride heals."

Sally got up and walked over to the fire, leaning against the carved stone of the fireplace. She found it easier to talk where she could not see the eyes of her hostess.

"It seems strange telling all this to his wife, doesn't it?"

"Is anything stranger than Life itself?"

"Margaret! I loved André. I loved him, and he loved me. We couldn't help it, really we couldn't. I remember the last time I saw him, the evening before he died. I was waiting for him to call for me to take me out to dinner. The bell of my flat rang; and I panicked because I wasn't nearly ready. I thought it was André; but it wasn't. It was a messenger boy with a great bunch of red roses and a note. And the note was a poem. It said:

*Time was when I loved not,
And loving not, rejoiced in love.*

That's all. But I shall never forget it." Sally spoke with difficulty. "And now I've met you," she continued. "At first I thought I wouldn't come here; that you must hate me. You've made me look so small and petty. You're a great woman, my dear." She slumped to the floor, her shoulders wracked with sobs.

Margaret crossed to her, smoothing her hair with her hands.

"Don't cry, child. We both loved André. It's finished now; there's nothing left that either of us can do."

But the expression on her face was one of bitter hatred of the girl to whom she spoke: the hatred of a fanatic, overpowering and insane.

As she undressed that night, Margaret felt that her heart was dead within her. Nothing mattered any longer. André had betrayed her more than she had realized. She felt that she could have forgiven any infidelity but that. He had given *her* poem, her most treasured memory of their early marriage to that silly little . . . tart.

*Time was when I loved not,
And loving not, rejoiced in love.*

Margaret's face was set in a mask of misery as she climbed into bed. Well, she should pay for it; the common little fool with her cheap sentiment. She, Margaret, had wanted to see what it had been that had so fascinated André. There must have been *something* in the girl!

And she lay sleepless through the night, her brain working feverishly through the still hours. That girl, she should pay for stealing her memories. "We both loved him." How squalid it made everything seem.

On the Saturday, as they were walking up the drive that led up to the Chateau, Sally said:

"I've been here a week. I suppose I must go back soon. I can't just mark time for ever, can I? I think I'll go on Tuesday, if that will be all right for you."

"If you must go, there is no more to be said. You know that you can stay as long as you feel you care to. What is the hurry? Future engagements?"

"Oh no. Nothing like that. None of my friends know when I am coming back, or where I am, as a matter of fact. It's a queer feeling that no one knows what's happened to me. It cuts this visit off from the rest of my life entirely. An isolated interlude."

They walked on. The night was very still. Only a gentle wind whispered in the branches of the trees that bordered the avenue.

"An isolated interlude," Margaret repeated softly.

Monday was a glorious day, one of those brilliant April mornings that come all too rarely. Sally sat in a cane chair on the terrace, overlooking the panorama of the valley, washed in wan yellow by the weak spring sun. She was sorry, in a way, that she was leaving so soon, and yet glad; for the Chateau frightened her with its forbidding aspect. And that nightmare couple! That evil old Marie! Several times during the last two days she had noticed the old woman giving her a venomous glance as if she were gloating over some obscene secret, she supposed it was because she was unable to conceal the horror she felt for her son. Pierre! He was no better than an idiot brute. Yes, on the whole she was glad she was leaving. She looked up as she heard someone approaching. It was Margaret, with a bundle of magazines and newspapers under her arm.

"These have just come from England. I thought you might like to see them. By the way, if you are still determined to leave tomorrow, perhaps you might like to go over the Chateau. You've only seen the wing I live in. It's rather interesting. Parts of it go back to the year nine hundred and something."

"I'd love to." Sally walked to the french window that led into the library.

"Of course it's in a frightful state," Margaret went on, "but you can get an idea of what it has been."

They spent the morning in going through endless rooms and passages, majestic still in their partial decay. Heavy Chinese curtains of painted leather, ragged as the binding of an old book; wonderful brocade-covered chairs; glowing tapestries; torturous winding stairs; carved wooden galleries. Sally was bewildered by the impressions that crowded on her brain. At

last they returned to the hall. Under the great staircase a narrow arched door was let into the stone.

"Where does that go to?" she asked.

"To the cellars and dungeons. The rock is honeycombed with passages. I don't know them very well myself. Old Marie is the only living being who does, I believe. It's cold down there; and there's no lighting. They were put to nasty uses in days gone by!"

She laughed and led the way back into the library.

During luncheon Sally again felt the malignant presence of old Marie. She shivered. The old woman must be slightly mad. How Margaret could bear to live here by herself . . .

Margaret de Civennes stood in the huge stone kitchen of the Chateau. Before her was Pierre, his face strained in the effort to understand what his employer was saying. Behind him old Marie sat hunched in her rocking chair, knitting, the regular clicking of her needles as insistent as the ticking of a clock.

"You have been a good servant, Pierre. It is time you were rewarded, is it not so? See, I have for you a present. Some brandy." Margaret pointed to a bottle, shrouded in cobwebs that stood on a table. "And that is not all. Drink, my friend. Make merry tonight, and perhaps there will be something more for you."

The old woman glanced up at Margaret, her eyes bright with evil understanding. Pierre's thick lips parted in a grin. He was repulsive in his ugliness.

"Marie. Come with me."

The woman followed Margaret into the passage.

"It is arranged. It will be tonight. See that he drinks well. We can manage it between us. She is not heavy."

The Harridan made a clucking noise of acquiescence. Her poor Pierre! Well, it was time he had some fun. He was human, wasn't he?

Sally was sleepy. She couldn't understand why she was so exhausted. It must have been the liqueur that Margaret had insisted on her drinking after dinner. The room was blurred.

Bed . . . she must get to bed. She was too tired to undress. Too tired . . .

Pierre was sitting by the table in the kitchen. A glass was in his hand; the bottle of brandy, half empty, stood on the table at his elbow. His old mother was talking to him, slowly, distinctly.

"You understand, Pierre. The English girl. . . . You love her, eh? Then show it. Do *what you like*, do you hear? *What you like*. And afterwards, when you have finished with her, you will put your hands round her neck . . . tightly, like you kill a chicken. That will be good, eh?" She peered into his face anxiously. The man looked up at her, his eyes narrowed.

"You understand, Pierre?"

His great head nodded.

When Sally awoke she felt cold; bitterly cold. She opened her eyes. She had been dreaming that she was being carried somewhere. Where was she? She lifted her head and looked around her. She was lying on a heap of straw on a stone floor in a circular room, hewn apparently from the rock, and with no outlet but a heavy wooden door. She raised herself on her elbow. What had happened, where was she? She must be dreaming. A torch flamed in a bracket on the wall opposite to her.

Suddenly she saw that the door was opening . . . somebody was coming in. Who was it? God! it was Pierre. . . . She gave a cry . . . staggered to her feet.

At six o'clock the next morning Marie knocked on the bedroom door of Madame de Civennes.

"Well?"

"It is finished, Madame."

"Pierre has killed her?"

"Yes. But not at once. In fact, not for a long time." The old woman laughed. "It is lucky that no one could hear. She screamed like a pig. My Pierre is strong and very determined." She chuckled and went quietly out of the room.

"That is good. I will not forget you, Marie."

Margaret lay on her bed, fully dressed; it was early yet, and the dawn glimmered behind the stunted trees that feathered the mountains. She crossed to the window and parted the curtains. The sky was faintly pink. Margaret spoke to herself, her lips barely whispering the words "... *and loving not, rejoiced in love.*"

André had always been bitter-sweet in his emotions.

THE EXECUTION OF DAMIENS

By H. H. Ewers

(Translated from his original German by the author)

SPRAWLED IN leather chairs they sat in the lobby of the Spa Hotel and smoked. Music drifted to them from the ball-room.

Erhardt drew out his watch and yawned. "Late enough," he said. "They could stop now."

At this moment the young Baron Grödel walked up. "I have become engaged, gentlemen!" he yapped.

"To Evelyn Ketschendorff?" asked fat Dr Handl. "It took long enough."

"Congratulations, Cousin," cried Attems. "Wire Mother."

But Brinken said: "Take care, my boy! She has pinched, set, English lips."

The handsome Grödel nodded: "Her mother was an Englishwoman."

"I thought so," said Brinken. "Take care, my boy!"

But the Baron did not listen; he placed his glass on the table, and ran back to the ballroom.

"You don't like Englishwomen?" asked Erdhardt.

Dr Handl laughed; "Don't you know that? He hates all women with a bit of race and class; especially if they're English! Only fat, dumb, silly women find favour in his eyes – geese and cows."

"*Aimer une femme intelligente est un plaisir de pédèraste!*" cited Count Attems.

Brinken shrugged his shoulders. "Whether it is just that, I don't know. Besides, it is not quite right to say that I hate intelligent women; if they have nothing else, they can appeal to me, too. It is those who have soul, feeling, fantasy that I fear in the affairs of love. Cows and geese are respectable animals: they eat corn and hay, and not their fellows."

The others were silent, so he continued:

"I can explain further, if you like. Early this morning I went for a walk through the morning sun; there, in Val Madonna, I saw a pair of lovesick snakes: two steel-blue fat adders; each a metre and a half long. It was a pretty game. They glided between the stones, went back and forth, hissed at each other. At length they intertwined, and stood rocking on their tails, upright, closely embraced. The heads pressed against each other, the jaws opened wide, the forked tongues darted through the air. Oh, nothing is more beautiful than such nuptial play! The golden eyes shone – it seemed to me as if they both carried scintillating crowns on their heads!

"Then they fell away from each other, exhausted by their wild play; lay there in the sun. The female soon recovered; slowly she moved towards the dead-tired bridegroom, seized him by the head, and devoured him, powerless as he was. Choked, choked, millimetre by millimetre, infinitely slowly she devoured the body of her mate. It was a frightful work; one saw how all her muscles worked to swallow the animal which was larger than herself. The jaws jerked almost from their sockets; she bent herself back and forth, drew her husband even deeper within. At last only his tail stuck out a hand's length from her mouth – farther he could not go. She lay plump, ugly, unable to stir."

"Was there no stick or stone?" cried Dr Handl.

"What for?" said Brinken. "Should I punish her? Nature, after all, is the devil's work, not God's – Aristotle already said that. No, I seized the tail sticking out of the mouth and drew the miserable lover out of his too gluttonous idol. They lay then half an hour next to each other in the sun: I would like to know what they thought the while. Then they crept into the bushes, he to the left, she to the right; for even a snake-lady cannot eat her spouse twice. But perhaps the poor fellow, after this experience, will take care when he wanders again awooing."

"That was nothing out of the ordinary," said Erhardt; "every female spider devours her male after the mating."

Brinken continued, "The mantis *religiosa*, the Worshipper-of-God, doesn't wait first for the end. You can observe this here on the Adriatic island every day. She skilfully turns her

neck round, seizes with her terrible pincers the head of the lover seated upon her, and calmly begins to consume him – in the midst of the mating. Nowhere, gentlemen, will you find more atavism in mankind than in sexual life. I, for my part, have no use for the soulful paroxysms of the most beautiful houri, who suddenly discloses herself as a snake, spider, or Worshipper-of-God.”

“I have never met one!” remarked Dr Handl.

“That doesn’t mean that you may not meet her tomorrow,” answered Brinken. “Have a look at the anatomy collection of any university: there you will find crazier combinations of atavistic monstrosities than the fantasy of the average man could picture. You can find in human shape the entire animal kingdom. Many such creatures live seven years, twelve years, and still longer. Children with a hare-lip, with a split palate, with tusks, and those with pigs’ heads; children with webs between all their fingers, between their arms and their legs, with a frog’s mouth, or frog’s head, or frog’s eyes; children with horns on their heads, not only stag’s horns, but with the pincer horns of a stag-beetle. If you can see such monstrous atavisms everywhere, is it to be wondered at that a few singular characteristics of this or that animal be repeated in human soul life?

“When you see such wild atavism everywhere, is it astonishing that some peculiar qualities of this or that animal should also be found in human souls? It is only remarkable that we don’t stumble over them more often; but the reason may lie in that no one speaks willingly about them. You can associate intimately with a family for years without learning that one of the sons is a complete cretin put away in some institution.”

“Granted!” said Erhardt. “But still you haven’t explained your grudge against dangerous women. Tell us, who was your Worshipper-of-God?”

“My Worshipper-of-God,” said Brinken, “prayed to God every morning and every evening, and even succeeded in getting me to pray with her. Don’t laugh, Count, it is literally as I say. My Worshipper-of-God went twice every Sunday to church, and to chapel every day. Three days a week she visited the poor. My Worshipper-of-God—”

He interrupted himself, mixed a whisky, and drank. Then he continued:

"I was just eighteen years old, an undergraduate on my first vacation. During my years at school and at university my mother always sent me abroad for my holidays – she believed it good for my education. This time I was staying in England with a schoolmaster in Dover, where I was thoroughly bored. By chance I made the acquaintance of Sir Oliver Bingham, a man of forty, who invited me to visit him at his place in Devonshire. I accepted at once, and departed with him a few days later.

"Bingham Castle was a magnificent country seat, four hundred years or more in the possession of the family. There was a large and well-cultivated park with golf-links and tennis-courts; a little river, where row-boats lay, flowed through the grounds. Two dozen hunters in the stables. And all this at the disposal of the guests. It was the first time I had enjoyed English hospitality with its liberality; my youthful joy was boundless.

"Lady Cynthia was the second wife of Sir Oliver. He had two sons by the first marriage; both were at Eton. I perceived at once that this wife was a wife only in name. Sir Oliver and Lady Cynthia lived side by side as two complete strangers; between them there was nothing but an extremely careful and often somewhat unnatural politeness, which, nevertheless, was scarcely forced. Inborn and acquired convention helped both easily over all stiles.

"Not until much later did I understand that Sir Oliver, before he presented me to his wife, had intended to warn me. At that time I did not notice it. He said: 'Look here, my boy! Lady Cynthia, now see – well, take care of yourself!' He could not quite speak openly what he thought; and, as I said, I did not understand him.

"Sir Oliver was a real country gentleman of the old style, as you may find in a hundred English novels: Eton, Oxford, sport and a little politics. He took pleasure in his estate and was a capable farmer. Everybody at Bingham Castle loved him – men, women and animals. He was a powerful blond, brown and healthy, large and open-hearted. For his part he loved no less

those around him, and demonstrated this kind of rural love more especially and rather indiscriminately to the younger female servants. This happened without the slightest hypocrisy and quite obviously: Lady Cynthia alone seemed not to notice it.

"It was this unconcealed faithlessness to his wife which deeply grieved me. If ever a woman, it seemed to me, had earned the full and implicit love of a man, she was this Lady Cynthia; if ever adultery was a treacherous and repulsive crime, so it was against this woman.

"She must have been about twenty-seven years old. If she had lived during the Renaissance in Rome, or Venice, one would see her portrait today in many a church. I never saw another woman who was so like a Madonna. She wore her gold-shimmering brown hair parted in the middle. Her features were of perfect regularity. Her eyes seemed to me like seas of amethyst dreams; her long, narrow hands were of an almost transparent whiteness; her throat, her neck – ah, it seemed to me as if this woman were scarcely earthly. You never heard her step. It was as though she floated through the rooms.

"No wonder I fell in love. At this time I wrote sonnets by the dozen; at first in German, then in English. They were probably extremely poor – but if you could read them now, gentlemen, you would certainly be able to picture, from their minute descriptions, Lady Cynthia's unusual beauty and at the same time my state of soul.

"And this woman was deceived by Sir Oliver, who did not even give himself the trouble to conceal the fact. I couldn't prevent it, I had to hate him. He noticed that: once or twice he attempted to speak to me about it, but he could not find the right opening.

"I never saw Lady Cynthia laugh – nor weep. She was unusually silent; like a shadow she glided through the park and the house. She did not ride, nor play golf, nor did she indulge in any sport. Neither did she ever trouble herself with the household; this was left entirely to the old butler. But, as I have said, she was very religious – attended church regularly and visited the poor of three villages. She said grace before every meal. Every morning and every evening she went into the castle

chapel and knelt down to prayers. Never did I see her read a paper, and seldom a book. On the other hand, she embroidered a great deal, made laces, rosepoint and edging. At times she sat at the piano in the music-room, played also the organ in the chapel. While she plied her needle she would often sing softly, almost always a simple folk-tune. Only many years later did it occur to me how absurd it was that this woman, who had never had a child, should prefer to sing cradle-songs. At the time I took it for dreamy wistfulness, which I found fascinating.

"Our relationship was determined from the first day: she was the mistress, and I was her obedient page, hopelessly enamoured, but very well behaved. At times she let me read to her - Walter Scott's novels. She suffered me about her while she played or sewed, and she often sang for me. At meal-times I sat next to her. As Sir Oliver was often away, we were frequently alone. Her sentimentality had taken possession of me: she seemed to be sorrowing silently over something; and I held it to be my duty to sorrow with her.

"Often late in the afternoon she stood at the narrow window of the tower room. I could see her from the park: sometimes I went into the room at this hour. A boyish shyness kept me from speaking; I crept on tiptoes down the stairs into the garden, hid myself behind a tree, and sent longing glances to the window from the distance. She would stand there a long time, not moving. Often she would clench her hands, and a quiver would fly over her face; but the deep, amethyst eyes would stare out motionless. She seemed to see nothing, her glance sped over trees and bushes strangely possessed.

"Once, I know, I dined alone with her at night. We talked long after the meal, then went into the music room. She played for me. It was not the music which made me flush; I stared at those white hands, those fingers which were not human. As she finished, she half turned to me. I seized her hand, bent over it, and kissed her finger-tips. At this moment Sir Oliver walked in. Lady Cynthia, polite as always, wished him good evening. Then she went out.

"Sir Oliver had seen my movement, he also saw my excited eyes, which cried aloud how it stood with me. He strode up and down the room once or twice with long strides, suppressing

with difficulty a few good curses. Then he came to me, clapped me on the shoulder, said: 'For Heaven's sake, my boy, take care! I tell you - no, I beg you, beseech you - take care. You—'

"Here Lady Cynthia returned to the room to fetch her rings, which she had left on the piano. Sir Oliver broke off abruptly, squeezed my hand strongly, bowed to his wife and went out. Lady Cynthia came to me, slipped, one after another, her rings on her fingers. Then she held out both her hands to me for a goodnight kiss. She said not a word, but I felt what she commanded. I bent down and covered her hands with hot kisses. She let me hold them long, finally she freed herself and left.

"I had a feeling that I had committed a grievous wrong to Sir Oliver, as if I were in honour bound to tell him about it. It seemed to be easier to do it in writing; so I went into my room and sat down at the desk. I wrote one letter, two letters, three letters; each seemed more stupid than the other. At length I decided to speak to him, so I went out to look for him. To avoid losing my courage again, I ran up the steps as fast as I could; before the door of his smoking-room, which was wide open, I suddenly stopped. I heard voices in there: first the jovial, somewhat broad laugh of Sir Oliver, then a woman's voice.

" 'But, Sir Oliver. . . ' said the voice.

" 'Go on, don't be a little fool,' laughed Sir Oliver, 'don't take on so.'

"I turned on the spot, crept down the steps. It was Millicent's voice - that of one of the parlourmaids.

"Two days later, Sir Oliver went to London. I remained alone at Bingham Castle with Lady Cynthia.

"At this time I was in wonderland, in an Eden that the Deity created for me alone. It is difficult to describe the witchery of the dream in which I lived. I tried to describe it in a letter to my mother. When I visited her, a few months ago, she showed me the old letter, which she had faithfully preserved. The envelope bore on the back the words 'I am very happy!' The letter itself contained this astonishing gush of feeling; 'Dear mother: you ask how I feel, what I do? Oh, mother! Oh, mother, mother!' And a dozen times more, 'Oh, mother!' Nothing more.

"With these words, of course, one might express the deepest pain, the wildest despair, as well as the extremest delight; but something superlative it must be!

"I remarked early in the morning when Lady Cynthia went into chapel, which lay a short distance from the castle by the side of a stream. Then I waited until she came out, and accompanied her to breakfast. One morning she made a sign; I understood it, without her having to speak. I followed her, therefore, into the chapel; she knelt to pray, and I knelt behind her. From that time I always went with her into the chapel. At first I did nothing but stare at her; but, gradually, I did what she did – prayed. Just imagine, gentlemen, I praying – a German student! And surely a heathen! I don't know what or to whom I prayed; but it was some sort of thanksgiving for so much happiness and a shower of burning wishes for this woman.

"I rode a good deal; somehow or other my foaming blood had to calm down. Once I had ridden out fairly early, lost myself in the country, and was in the saddle for many hours. When at last I found my way back to the castle a raging thunderstorm broke, a regular cloud-burst. I came back to the stream and found the wooden bridge washed away; to get to the nearest stone bridge I would have had to make a considerable detour. I was wet through as it was, so I jumped into the swollen stream. I got across, though I had considerably overestimated the strength of my worn-out mare, and was carried downstream a good way.

"Lady Cynthia awaited me in her sitting-room. I hurried, therefore, to my room, bathed and changed. Perhaps I looked a little tired; at all events, she insisted that I should lie on the couch. Then she sat beside me, stroked my forehead, and sang:

*Rockaby, Baby, on the tree-top—
When the wind blows, the cradle will rock,
When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall,
Down will come baby, cradle and all!*

"She stroked my forehead and sang; it was as though I lay in a magic cradle, which hung on the high bough of a tree. The

wind blew and sang, and my cradle rocked in the breezes. If only the bough does not break! I thought.

"Well, gentlemen, my bough broke; and I fell down, hard enough. At any time Lady Cynthia would give me her hands – but only her hands. I trembled for her shoulders, her forehead – oh! of her lips I dared not think. I never spoke about it, but my glances offered her my heart and my soul – everything, every day and every hour. She took everything, and gave me her hands.

"Sometimes on late afternoons when I had sat for hours at a time with her, when my blood screamed from all my pores, she would stand up and say quietly: 'Now go riding.' She went to her tower room, and softly I followed her, peered through the hangings. She took a little book bound in old brocade, then she sat down, read only for a few minutes, then stood up again, went to the window, stared out. I went into the stables, saddled my horse, rode through the park, then out into the fields. Like a madman I galloped through the dusk. A cold bath when I returned; thus I found a little rest before supper.

"Once I had ridden out earlier and came back at tea-time. I met her in the hall, as I was going to my bath.

"'Come,' she said, 'when you are ready! Hurry; tea awaits in the tower.' I was in my kimono.

"'I must dress myself,' I answered.

"'Come as you are,' she said.

"I jumped into the tub, turned on the shower; in a few minutes I was ready. I went into the tower room. She sat on the couch, her little book in her hand; she laid it aside as I entered. She was, like myself, in a dressing-gown – a wonderful kimono, purple, with flowers of dull gold. She poured my tea, buttered my toast. Not a word did we say. I gulped down the toast, poured down the hot tea. I trembled in every limb. At length tears ran to my eyes. I knelt before her, took her hands, buried my head in her lap. She let me do it.

"At length she stood up. 'You may do everything – everything. But you must not utter a word. Not a word, not a word!'

"I did not understand what she meant: but I got up and nodded. Slowly she went to the narrow window. I hesitated,

did not quite know what I should do. Finally I followed her, stood behind her. I knew I must not speak.

"I stood undecided, motionless like her. I heard her light breathing. Then I bent down, very slowly; I touched her neck with my lips. Oh, so tenderly: no butterfly could kiss more tenderly. Then I felt she felt this kiss. A gentle shiver ran over her skin.

"I kissed her shoulder, her scented hair, her sweet ear – only gently, very softly, page-like, embarrassed. My fingers sought, found her arms, caressed them up and down. A sigh escaped her lips, floated far out into the evening.

"I saw the high trees without, heard the song of a late nightingale.

"I shut my eyes. Nothing was between us but a little silk. I breathed deeply and heard her breathing. My body thrilled down to the toes, and I felt how she trembled in my arms. Faster went her breath, and faster; a hot quivering seized her body. Then she seized my hands, pressed them against her breast.

"I embraced her, clasped her tightly, held her, I don't know how long. Then her hands dropped, she threatened to swoon, and hung for a while in my arms. Then she pulled herself together.

" 'Go,' she said softly.

"I loosened my hands as she commanded; left her, crept outside on tiptoe.

"That evening I did not see her again, I was alone for supper. Something had happened, but I did not know what it was. I was rather young in those days.

"Next morning I waited before the chapel. Lady Cynthia nodded to me as she went in. She knelt down and prayed as she did every morning.

"A few days later – and then again and yet again – she said, 'Come tonight!' But she did not forget to add, 'Not a word must you speak, not a word!'

"Eighteen years old I was, and very gauche and inexperienced. But Lady Cynthia was very wise, and all happened as she wished. Her mouth spoke no word and my mouth spoke no word – only her blood spoke to my blood.

"Then Sir Oliver returned. We sat at supper, Lady Cynthia and I: I heard Sir Oliver's voice in the hall. I let my fork drop; I believe I was whiter than the damask table-cloth. Not fear – it was certainly not that! But I had, by this time, completely forgotten that this man was still in the world – Sir Oliver!

"Sir Oliver was in a good humour this evening. He certainly noticed my embarrassment; but he did not betray this knowledge by the slightest gesture. He ate, drank, talked of London, spoke of theatres and horses. He excused himself immediately after the meal, clapped me on the shoulder, bade his wife, in a chosen phrase, goodnight. Yet he waited a moment or so as if he were observing me. I did not know what to do, so I stammered that I was tired, kissed Lady Cynthia's hands, and went.

"That night I didn't sleep a wink. I had a continuous feeling that Sir Oliver would come to me: I listened for every step in the castle, certain that he would come. But he did not come. At length I undressed and went to bed. I contemplated what now must happen – what had happened during his absence.

"One thing seemed to be clear: I must tell Sir Oliver everything, must place myself at his disposal. But, to what end? I knew that there was no more duelling in England, that he would laugh at me if I just mentioned such a thing. But – what else? Would he drag me before a Court of Justice? He – me? That was even more laughable, and quite certainly no satisfaction for him. Fisticuffs? He was much bigger, much broader and stronger than I, one of the best amateur boxers in the country. I hadn't the slightest idea of this sport: the little I knew he, himself, had taught me. Nevertheless, I ought to let him challenge me, come what might.

"But then, if I spoke, wasn't it an infamous betrayal of Lady Cynthia? If he crippled me, what did it matter! But she – sweet, holy woman, she— What would become of her? For she was not guilty. All the guilt was mine, mine alone; I felt that in every fibre of my being. I had come into her house. I had loved her from the first moment. I had stalked her, lain in wait for her, followed her wherever she went. Not content that she gave me her white hands, I had desired her more and more, more ardently every day – until—

"True, I had not spoken. But had not my blood cried for her every hour? What use were words, when my eyes sang, when my body trembled at the very sight of her? She, brutally flung aside by her husband, betrayed every day and insulted before all eyes, tortured and bearing these tortures and insults like a saint – oh, not a shadow of guilt fell upon her! Small wonder that she had finally fallen to the temptations of a seducer, who followed her step after step—

"And even then, even then she remained the saint she was. She gave her body more out of goodness of heart, out of pure pity for the youth who was devoured by longing for her. She gave herself to me as she gave to the poor she visited, and, in spite of it, remained pure. And so great was her sweet shame that she forbade me to speak in those hours, that she did not once turn around, did not once look in my eyes—

"I understood everything now. I alone bore all the guilt. I was the seducer, the wretched scoundrel. And I was now to crown this work, stand before Sir Oliver and tell him— No, no! Then, again, something had to be done! I did not know what. The night passed – I found no way!

"I breakfasted in my room. Then the butler came: Sir Oliver inquired whether I would play golf with him. I nodded, dressed myself, went down, met him outside.

"I have never played good golf. But this time I dug holes in the turf instead of hitting the ball.

"Sir Oliver laughed. 'What's the matter?' he said.

"I said something. But as my shots became worse, he grew serious.

"Suddenly he came to me and asked, 'Is it— Were you – at the window, young man?'

"Now it had gone too far. I let my golf club fall; he might as well kill me with his iron.

"I nodded. 'Yes,' I said, tonelessly.

"Sir Oliver whistled. He tried to talk – but said nothing. He whistled again. Then he turned, went slowly to the castle. I followed him at some distance.

"I did not see Lady Cynthia that morning. When the gong rang for lunch, I forced myself to go down.

"Before the dining-room I met Sir Oliver; he came to me

and said, 'I would rather you did not speak alone with Lady Cynthia today.' Then he waved me through the door.

"During the meal I spoke scarcely a word to Lady Cynthia. Sir Oliver led the conversation, what there was of it. Afterwards, Lady Cynthia ordered the carriage: she was going to visit her poor.

"She gave me her hand, which I kissed, and said: 'Tea at five o'clock!'

"She did not return until six: I stood at my window as her carriage drew up. She looked up to me. 'Come,' said her glance. At the door I met Sir Oliver.

" 'My wife is back,' he said; 'we'll have tea with her.'

" 'Now it's coming,' I thought.

"Only two cups stood on the little table. It was obvious that Lady Cynthia awaited me only, and not her spouse. But she rang at once and had another cup brought. Again Sir Oliver endeavoured to carry on the conversation, but his efforts were even less successful than at luncheon. At length no one said a word.

Then Lady Cynthia went. Still Sir Oliver did not speak; silently he sat there, whistling lightly through his teeth. Finally he sprang up, as if he had a sudden idea. 'Please wait for me!' he cried, and hurried out.

"I did not have to wait long; after a few minutes he was back. He beckoned me to go with him. We went through a few rooms - to the tower room. Sir Oliver drew back the curtains, looked into the room; then he turned to me and said: 'Bring me the little book lying on that stool.'

"I obeyed. I slipped through the hangings. At the window stood Lady Cynthia. I felt I was committing treachery, but I could not grasp how or why. Very softly I went to the stool, took the tiny brocade-bound book, that I had so often seen in her hand, crept back again, and gave it to Sir Oliver. He took it, slipped his arm through mine, and whispered: 'Come along, my boy!'

"I followed him down the steps, across the courtyard, into the park.

"He seized my arm, his other hand gripping the red book. At length he began: 'You love her? Very much? Very much,

my boy?’ But he did not wait for an answer. ‘It is not necessary to speak! I also loved her – perhaps more than you; I was twice as old as you. Not for Lady Cynthia’s sake am I speaking to you: but for your own sake!’

“Again he was silent, led me through the avenue, then to the left up a small side-path. There stood a bench under the old elms, he sat down and motioned me to sit beside him. Then he raised his hand, pointed upwards: ‘Look! There she stands.’

“I looked up. There stood Lady Cynthia at her window. ‘She will see us,’ I said.

“Sir Oliver laughed aloud. ‘She won’t see us. Not if a hundred people sat here – she would see none, hear none! This book she sees, this she feels – and nothing else!’

“He gripped the little volume in his strong fingers, as if he would crush it; pressed it into my hands. ‘It is cruel to show it to you, my poor youth – very cruel, I know. But it must be for your own sake. Then – read!’

“I opened the book. It only held a few pages of strong hand-made paper. It was not printed, but written, and it was in Lady Cynthia’s handwriting.

“I read:

‘THE EXECUTION OF ROBERT FRANÇOIS DAMIENS
ON THE PLACE DE GRÊVE IN PARIS
MAY 28TH, 1757
ACCORDING TO THE TESTIMONY OF AN EYE-WITNESS
THE DUKE OF CROY’

“The letters flickered before my eyes; what, what had that to do with the woman who stood at the window? I stuttered. I could not recognize the words; I let the book fall.

“Sir Oliver picked it up, and began to read in a loud voice:

“‘According to an eye-witness, the Duke of Croy—’

“I rose. Something drove me. I had a feeling I must fly, hide myself in the thickest bushes like a wounded animal. But the strong hand of Sir Oliver seized my arm. And his inexorable voice went on:

“‘Robert Damiens, who on January 5th, 1757, attempted to

assassinate His Sacred Majesty King Louis XV of France, and on that day at Versailles wounded him in the left side with a dagger thrust, was compelled to expiate his guilt on May 28th, 1757.

“The same sentence was executed upon him as upon the murderer of King Henri IV, François Ravallac, on May 17th, 1610.

“On the morning of the day of execution, Damiens was stretched on the rack; his arms, thighs and calves were ripped open with red-hot hooks, and into the wounds was poured molten lead, boiling oil and burning pitch, mixed with wax and sulphur. At three in the afternoon, the muscular delinquent was led to the Cathedral of Notre Dame and thence to the Place de Grève. The streets were filled with a mob which took sides neither for nor against the criminal. The aristocratic world, ornamented and dressed as for a festival, elegant ladies and gentlemen of nobility, crowded the windows, playing with their fans and holding their smelling salts in case of fainting. At half past four the great spectacle began. In the middle of the square a stage had been erected, to which Damiens was brought. With him, the executioners and two father confessors ascended the platform. This huge man betrayed neither surprise nor fear, but merely expressed a wish to die quickly.

“Six assistant executioners now bound his trunk to the boards with iron chains and rings, so that he could not move his body. Then his right hand was seized and burned slowly in a fire of sulphur, while Damiens gave voice to a horrible shrieking. It was seen that the hair on his head stood up stiffly, while his hand was being burnt. The iron hooks were made glowing hot, and with them large pieces of flesh were ripped out of arms, legs and breast. In the fresh wounds were poured liquid lead and boiling oil. The atmosphere on the whole square was befouled by the stench of burning.

“Now, strong ropes were bound round the upper arm and upper thigh, the wrists and ankles, to which were harnessed four strong horses, one at each of the four corners of the stage. The horses were then whipped forward, with the intention of tearing the wretch apart. For a full hour the horses were

spurred and whipped, yet they did not succeed in wrenching off either an arm or a leg. Above the blows of the whips and the shouting of the executioners could be heard the terrible yells of pain of the man in his sickening torment.

“Then six more horses were harnessed on, and all the horses were whipped up together. The cries of Damiens increased to mad bellowing. At length the executioners obtained permission from the judges present to make incisions in the joints, in order to lighten the work of the horses. Damiens raised his head to see what was being done to him, but he did not cry out while they cut through his joints. He turned his head to the crucifix held before him and kissed it while two confessors exhorted him to repent. Then blows once more rained on all the horses at once, and at last, after one and a half hours, they succeeded in pulling off the left leg.

“The people in the square and the aristocrats in the windows clapped their hands. The work was continued.

“When the right leg was torn off, Damiens once more began to scream wildly. The shoulder-joints were then cut, and the horses were again whipped up. As the right arm was wrenched off, the cries of the wretch grew weaker. His head began to droop, but only when the left arm was detached did his head fall right backward. Now only the palpitating trunk remained, with the head upon which the hair had turned white. But this trunk and this head lived yet.

“Now his hair was cut off and his limbs collected together, while the father confessors approached him once more. Henri Samson, the chief executioner, held them back, however, saying that Damiens had drawn his last breath. Thus was the believing criminal denied the last spiritual consolation, for the trunk could be seen turning itself here and there, while the lower jaw moved itself to speak. This trunk still breathed: the eyes turned upon the bystanders.

“What remained was burned upon a pyre and the ashes scattered to the winds.

“Thus was the end of a wretch who suffered the greatest torment that ever a man suffered; in Paris, before my own eyes and those of many thousands of people, including those of

many noble and beautiful women who stood at the windows."

"Do you wonder, gentlemen," Brinken concluded, "that since that evening I have been a little frightened of women who have feelings, souls, imagination? And especially if they are English?"

THE OCEAN LEECH

By Frank Belknap Long

I HEARD BOUCKE beating with his bare fists upon the cabin door and the wind whistling under the cracks. I objected to both and I opened the door wide. Boucke came in then, with a fierce rush of wind. He was a curious little man, with the sea and sky in his eyes, and he spoke in pantomime. He pointed towards the door and ran his fingers savagely through his reddish hair, and I knew that something had nearly finished him – I mean finished him spiritually, damaged his soul, his outlook.

I didn't know whether to be pleased or horrified. Boucke seemed more human with his queer, vivid gestures and flaming eyes, but I couldn't imagine what he had seen up on deck. Of course I found out soon enough.

The men were sitting about in idiotic groups of twos and threes and no one saluted me when I stepped out from the shadows of twisted cordage into a luminous stripe of moonlight.

"Where's the boatswain?" I asked.

Several of the men heard my question, and they turned and stared at me, and deliberately tittered.

"It took the boatswain!" said Oscar.

Oscar seldom spoke to anyone. He was tall and lean and his jaundiced scalp was fringed by yellow hair. I distinctly recall his dark, hungry eyes and his fringe of hair glistening in the moonlight. But the rest of Oscar I can no longer visualize. He has faded into an indefinite ghost of memory. It is curious, though, how clearly I remember every other shape and incident of that amazing night.

Oscar was standing by my elbow, and I turned suddenly and gripped his arm. It reassured me to grip his strong, muscular arm. But I knew that I had hurt him, for his shoulder jerked

and he looked at me reproachfully. I presume Oscar wanted me to stand upon my own feet. But he made a sweeping motion with his arm to assure me that it didn't matter. The wind whistled about our ears and the tattered sails flapped and wheezed. Sails can speak, you know. I have heard sails protest in chorus, each sail with a slightly different accent. You get to understand their conversation in time. On still mornings it is wonderful to come up on deck and hear the sails whispering among themselves. They make gestures, too, and when they are tired they sway pathetically against the sky.

I took a turn about the deck and bawled out to the men and told them to go to the devil. Then I got my pipe out and blew grotesque yellow effigies into the cold air. They danced in the moonlight and made the situation irredeemable. I came back to Oscar eventually and asked him pointblank what he meant by 'it'. But Oscar didn't answer me. He simply turned, and pointed.

Something white and gelatinous oozed over the rail and ran or slid for several feet along the deck. Then a larger bulk seethed out of the darkness and stood poised above the black stern-post. A second object descended upon the deck, coming down with a thud and running at a tangent with the first over the smooth, polished boards. I saw two of the men get quickly to their feet, with wildish, jerky motions, and I heard Oscar shout out a curt command.

The thing upon the deck spread out and became broader at its base. It reared into the air a livid appendage encircled with monstrous pink suckers. We could see the suckers loathsomely at work in the moonlight, opening and closing and opening again. We were affected by a queer aromatic stench and we felt an overpowering sense of physical nausea. I saw one of the men reel backward and collapse upon the boards. Then a second idiot keeled over, and a third – a third actually advanced toward the loathsome object on his hands and knees, as if fascinated.

At that moment the moon seemed to draw nearer, to actually careen down the sky and hang above the cordage. Then suddenly the amorphous tentacles shot forward, like released hawsers, and struck against the nearest mast, and I heard a

splintering, and a noise like thunder. The arms quivered and seemed to fly in all directions. Then they flopped back over the side.

I fastened my eyes upon our black topsail mastheads, and questioned Oscar in a very low voice. "Did *that* take the boatswain?"

Oscar nodded and shuffled his feet. The men on the deck whispered among themselves, and I knew intuitively that a spirit of rebellion was rife among them. And yet even Oscar exonerated me!

"Where would we have been if you hadn't brought us in here? A-drifting, probably – rudderless and sailless. Our sails may look like the skin on a waterlogged corpse, but we can use 'em – when we can get the masts into shape. The lagoon looked innocent enough, and most of us were for coming in here. But now they whine like yellow puppies – and blame it on you. The idiots! If you just say the word—"

I stopped him, for I didn't want the men to take his proposal seriously, and he spoke loud enough for them to hear. The men, I felt, were scarcely to blame – under the circumstances! "How many times has the *thing* crawled over the sides?" I asked.

"Eight times!" said Oscar. "It took the boatswain on the third trip. He shrieked and threw up his arms, and turned yellow! It twined itself about his leg, and set its great pink suckers to work on him; and the rest of us could do nothing – nothing! We tried to get him away, but you cannot imagine the sheer pull of that white arm. It oozed slime all over him, and all over the deck. Then it flopped back into the water, and carried him with it!

"After that we were more careful. I told the men to go below, but they only glowered at me. The thing fascinates them. They sit there and deliberately wait for it to return. You saw what happened just now. The thing can strike like a cobra, and it sticks closer than a lamprey; but the idiots won't be warned. And when I think of those quivering pink suckers I feel sorry for them – and for myself! He didn't utter a sound, you understand, but he turned livid under the gills and his tongue stuck out horribly, and just before he disappeared over the side I

noticed that his lips were all black and swollen. But as I told you, he was immersed in yellowish slime, in ooze, and the life must have gone out of him almost at once. I'm sure that he didn't really suffer. With God's help, it's we who have to suffer!"

"Oscar," I said, "I want you to be quite frank, and if necessary, even brutal. Do you think that you can explain that thing? I don't want any wretched theories, Oscar. I want you to fashion a prop for me, Oscar, something for me to lean upon. I'm so very tired, and I haven't much authority here. Oh, yes, I'm supposed to be in command, but when there is nothing to go upon, Oscar, what can I say to them? How can I get them down into the cabin? I pity them so. What do you think it is, my friend?"

"The thing is obviously a cephalopod," said Oscar, quite simply, but there was a look of shame and horror in his eyes, which I didn't like.

"An octopus, Oscar?"

"Perhaps. Or a monstrous squid! Or some hideous unclassified species!"

A fabric of greenish cloud covered the face of the moon, and I saw one of the men crawling on his hands and knees along the deck. Then he gave a sudden, defiant scream, ran to the rail and held out his arms. A white exudation ran the entire length of the rail. It rose up and quivered amidst illimitable shadows, and then it poured in an abominable stream over the scuppers and enveloped the hectic form of the wretch, and it made no sound. The poor fool tried to get away. He screamed, made shocking grimaces, fell down upon the deck and tried to draw himself along by his hands. He pawed at the smooth slippery surface, but the thing had wound its tenebrous tentacles about his leg, and it pulled him. It pulled him slowly and hideously.

His head struck against the scuppers, and a crimson stream, no wider than a hawser rope, ran down the deck and formed a miniature pool at Oscar's feet. A sucker fastened upon his right temple, and another got in under his shirt and set to work upon his bare chest. I tried to get to him, but Oscar held fast to my arm, and would not tell me why. The body became white,

slimy, changed before our eyes. And not one man stepped forward to prevent it. Suddenly, while we watched, the dead man, whose eyes had already glazed, was jerked forcefully towards the scuppers, again and again.

But he wouldn't go through. His head was soon pounded into an unimaginable resemblance of something we didn't care to think about, and we became deadly sick. But we watched, strangely fascinated, even perhaps more than a little resentful. We were watching something brutal and incredibly alive, and we beheld it in an unrestrained exercise of all its faculties. There, under a shrouded moon, in the phosphorescent wilderness of exotic waters, we saw the law of man outraged by something mute, misshapen, blasphemous, and we saw industrious retching matter, brainless and self-sufficient, obeying a law older than man, older than morality, older than sin. Here was life absorbing another life, and doing it forcefully, and without conscience, and becoming stronger and more exultant through the doing of it.

But it couldn't get the body through the scuppers. It pulled and pulled, and finally let go. The wind had gone down, and oddly enough, as it let go and fell back into the dead calm of water, we heard an ominous splash. We rushed forward, and surrounded the body. It seemed to swim in a river of white jelly. Oscar called for something which had become necessary, and we wrapped it up decently and threw it overboard. But Oscar repeated a few words mechanically out of the little black prayer-book, which he imagined were appropriate. I stood and stared at the dark opening in the forecastle.

I don't know to this day how I got the men through that dark opening. But I did it — with Oscar's aid. I can see Oscar standing with his glistening head against a voiceless wilderness of stars. I can see him shaking his fists at the slinking cowards on the deck, and shrieking out commands. Or were they insults? I know that I stepped forward and helped him, and later on I discovered that my knuckles were bruised and discoloured, and Oscar had to bandage them. It is queer how Oscar has faded in my memory, for I thought a great deal of him, in spite of his queer ways, and his large hungry eyes, and his fringe of yellow hair. He helped me get the men into the forecastle, and so did

Boucke. Boucke, with perfectly horrified face, and with lips quivering and struggling with a vicious inarticulateness!

We drove them in like sheep, but sheep often rebel and are troublesome. But we got them in, and then we turned and looked back at the gaunt masts, swaying soullessly against the lifeless, sombre regularity of calm sea and sky, at the hanging ropes and frizzled sails, and at the long, moon-washed rails, and the encrimsoned scuppers. We heard Boucke inside, blubbering idiotically to the men. Then something made a dreadful guggling sound in the water, and we heard a loud splash.

"It's risen again," said Oscar, in a tone of despair.

II

I sat in my cabin, reading a book. Oscar had bandaged up my hands, and left, and he had promised not to disturb me.

I endeavoured to follow the little printed signs on the white page before me, but they called up no images, stimulated me to no response. The words did not take shape in my mind, and I did not know whether the stupid phrases that I sought to understand formed part of an essay or a short story. The title of the book itself I cannot now recall, although I think that it had something to do with ships and the sea, and derelicts, and the pitfalls of over-imaginative skippers. I fancied that I could hear the water lapping against the side of the ship, and now and then a great splash.

But I knew that a portion of my brain hotly repudiated both the lapping and the splash, and I assured myself that the nervous excitement under which I laboured was but physical and momentary, and in no sense psychic or due to outside causes. My senses had been appalled, and I now suffered a natural reaction from the shock; but no new danger threatened me.

Something pounded upon the door. I got quickly to my feet, and it did not occur to me at that moment that Oscar had promised that no one should disturb me.

"What is it you want?" I asked.

There was no direct or satisfactory answer, but a queer

guggling noise came to me through the door, and I fancied that I could hear a quick intake of breath. A horrible, intense fear took grim possession of me.

I looked at the door in white horror. It shook like broad-yards in a gale. It bent inward under a terrific impact.

Thud followed thud, as if some monstrous body had hurled itself forward only to withdraw and to come back with additional momentum. I quelled an impulse to cry out, and I opened my mouth and shut it, and opened it again. I ran forward to assure myself that I had really bolted the door. I fingered the bolt caressingly, and then I retreated until my back was against an opposite beam.

The door bulged inward hideously, and immediately afterwards there followed a great crash, and a splintering and a sundering of wood and a retching of hinges. The door gave, fell inward and was lifted up on the back of something white and unspeakable. Then the panel was hurled violently against the wall, and the thing under it rolled forward, with terrible and increasing velocity. It was a long, gelatinous arm, an amorphous tentacle with pink suckers that slid or oozed towards me across the smooth floor.

I stood with my back pressed against the beam, with only my harsh, stertorous breathing to keep it at bay. I could see that it did not fear me, that arm, and I could do nothing. It was long and white and it *slid* towards me. Can I make you understand? And Oscar had bandaged my hands, and they were but feeble, fumbling instruments. And that thing was utterly intent upon its purpose, and it did not need eyes to guide it across the floor.

An ungodly, aromatic odour had entered the cabin with the thing, and it overpowered me almost before the tentacles seized upon me. I endeavoured to slough off the great, loathsome folds with my bandaged hands, but my crippled fingers sank into the jelly-like tissue as in soft mud. It was palpitating, living tissue, but it seemed to lack substantial body, and it gave horribly. It *gave*! My hands went right through it, and yet when it gripped me it was elastic and it could tighten its grip. It strangled me. I felt that I could not breathe. I bent and twisted but it had wound itself about me, and it held me, and I could do nothing.

I remember that I called for Oscar. I shouted myself hoarse, and then I think I was dragged ruthlessly across the floor, through the smashed-in door, and up the stairs. I remember now how my head pounded upon the stairs as we ascended, I and the thing, and I think that my scalp bled, and I know that I lost three teeth. I received dreadful blows, cuffs, from the corners of stairs, from the edges of doors, and from the smooth, hard boards of the deck itself.

The thing dragged me out across the deck, and I remember that I saw the moon through folds upon folds of obscenely bloating jelly. I was buried deep down within fatty, obscene folds that shivered and shook and palpitated in the moonlight!

I no longer felt any desire to protest or to cry out, and the thought of Oscar and a possible rescue did not fill me with elation. I began to experience sensations of pleasure. How am I to describe them? A peculiar warmth pulsed through me; my limbs quivered with a weird expectancy. I saw through the folds of animate jelly a great reddish sucker, or disc, lined with silver teeth. I saw it descend rapidly through the folds. It fastened upon my chest, and a momentary revulsion made me claw ludicrously at the nauseous tissue surrounding me. There was a kind of cruelty in the refusal of the flimsy stuff to offer any resistance. One could go on that way forever, clawing and tearing at the fatty folds, and feeling them give, and yet knowing that nothing could possibly come of it. For one thing, it was utterly impossible to get a hold on the stuff, to get it between your hands and squeeze it. It simply flipped away from you and then it rushed back and solidified. It could condense and dilate at will.

My feeling of horror and antipathy disappeared, and a new tide of exaltation, of warmth, of vigour surged over me. I could have wept or screamed with pleasure and genuine ecstasy.

I knew that the monster was actually drawing up my blood through its fumbling, convulsive suckers. I knew that in a moment I should be drained as dry as a grilled carbonado, but I actually welcomed my inevitable dissolution. I made no effort to conceal my glee. I was frankly hilarious, although it seemed unjust to me that Oscar should have to explain to the men. Poor Oscar! He tied up the loosened ends of things,

smoothed over vulgar and disagreeable realities, made the raw, ungarnished facts almost acceptable, almost romantic. He was a precious stoic and gloriously self-reliant. That I knew, and I pitied him. I distinctly recalled my last conversation with him. He was slouching along the docks, with his hands in his pockets, and a cigarette between his teeth. "Oscar," I said, "I didn't really suffer when that thing fastened upon me! I didn't, really. I enjoyed it!" He scowled, and scratched his ridiculous fringe of hair. "Then I saved you from yourself!" he cried. His eyes blazed, and I saw that he wanted to knock me down. That was the last I saw of Oscar. He faded into the shadows after that, but had I kept him with me I might have been wiser.

The jelly about me seemed to increase in volume. It must have been three feet thick about my head, and I am sure that I saw the moon and the swaying mastheads through a prism of varying colours. Waves of blue and scarlet and purple would pass before my eyes, and a taste of salt came into my mouth. For a moment I thought, not without a certain resentment and hurt pride, that the thing had really absorbed me, that I was a portion and parcel of that quivering, gelatinous mass – and then I saw Oscar!

I saw him looming above my obscene prison house with a lighted torch in his hand. The torch, viewed through the magnifying folds of jelly, was a thing of flawless beauty. The flames shot out and appeared to cover the entire deck, and to go flying up against the darkness. The cordage and the luminous rails seemed afire, and a red and ravening serpent lengthened parallel with the scuppers. I saw Oscar clearly, and I saw the great spiral of smoke that streamed from the tails of flame, and I saw the swaying, encrimsoned masts, and the black sinister opening in the forecastle. The darkness seemed to part to let Oscar through with his torch and his stoicism. He swayed in the darkness above me, that silent, quixotic man, and I knew that Oscar could be trusted to put an end to things. I had no clear idea of what Oscar would do, but I knew that he would make some sort of brilliant and satisfying end.

I was not disappointed, and when I saw Oscar bend and touch the folds of jelly with his great, flaming torch I wanted to sing or shout. The folds quivered, and changed colour. A

maddening kaleidoscope of colour passed before my eyes - flaming scarlet and yellow and silver and green and gold. The sucker released its hold upon my chest and shot upward through the voluminous folds. A terrific stench assailed my nostrils. The odour was unbearable: I threw out my arms and fought savagely to break through to reach the air and light and Oscar.

Then I felt the heat of Oscar's torch upon my cheek, and I knew that the tissue about me was falling away and burning to shreds. I saw that it was dissolving also, turning into oil, into grease, and I felt it hotly trickling down my knees and arms and thighs. I closed my lips tight to keep from swallowing large quantities of the nauseous fluid, and I turned my face to the deck to protect my eyes from the falling fragments of sizzling tissue. The creature was literally being burnt alive, and in my heart of hearts I pitied it!

When Oscar at length helped me to my feet I saw the last of the thing disappear over the side. Its arms were horribly charred and the suckers were gone, and I caught a momentary glimpse of dangling, frayed ends and reddish knobs and bulging protuberances. Then we heard a splash and a queer guggling sound. We looked at the deck, and saw that it was covered with greenish oil, and here and there great solid chunks of burnt tissue swam in the hideous porridge. Oscar bent and picked up one of the fragments. He turned it right side up in his hand, so that the moonlight fell upon it. It contained in its five-inch expanse a four-inch sucker. And the sucker opened and closed while Oscar held the thing in his hand. It fell from Oscar's hand like a leaden weight and bounded into the air. Oscar kicked it overboard and looked at me. I looked away towards the black topsail masthead.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

By Charles Birkin

THE DINING-ROOM was lit by the shaded glow of four candles set in old glass candlesticks, leaving the corners of the room indistinct with wavering shadows.

Jimmy Clinton looked at his guests. On his right sat Miss Geraldine Victor. She was a distinguished looking woman dressed in deep wine-coloured velvet, that set off the raven beauty of her hair, parted severely in the middle, and drawn into a knot on her neck. She had reached the middle thirties, and was one of the most successful of the 'precious' novelists.

Next to her was Jimmy's wife, Naomi. Fair and tiny, she made a perfect foil to the other's dark beauty. She leaned forward in her chair, the fingers of her left hand drumming on the highly-polished surface of the table.

"But, Jimmy – if the police *know* who's done it, why can't they arrest the man?"

"Because, darling, the evidence is inconclusive."

"You see, Mrs Clinton," Sir Henry Mathews broke in, "a man can only be tried once for any murder, and the police are reasonably certain that sooner or later he will give himself away."

"Or that the missing link in the chain will be filled in," Jimmy concluded.

"Exactly." Sir Henry poured himself a second glass of port.

"Anyway, I'm sure the chauffeur did it, and I think it is scandalous that he should get off scot free," Naomi repeated obstinately.

"Of course he did it. I wish I had the power of deciding the sentence," Geraldine added with malice.

Sir Henry smiled at Jimmy. "And they say that women are the gentler sex. . . ."

"But it was a ghastly crime. That poor girl. I was told that

the details were too horrible to be printed. She was only sixteen, you know. Such men should be killed in some frightful way. Hanging is too good for them," Geraldine insisted.

"As it happens I've known Dr Peters for many years," Sir Henry's quiet words were all the more arresting in contrast to Geraldine's vehemence.

"Did you know him well? And the girl? Oh, how thrilling!" Naomi was flushed with excitement.

"I knew Angela, yes. No, I shouldn't say very well. She was one of the loveliest little things I ever saw. I could hardly believe when I saw in the paper the dreadful thing that had happened. But when you get to my age, my dear young lady, you will be surprised at nothing."

"And don't you think the chauffeur – Yarrow, wasn't that his name? – did it?"

"Undoubtedly," Mathews replied. "But if the proof isn't conclusive, there's nothing you can do, my boy."

"I think it's criminal to let him go free. He'll only do it again. Those people always do," Naomi said. "Somebody ought to put him away and no questions asked."

"You may be certain that the next time they will get him."

"I should hope so – but by then one more human life will have been sacrificed needlessly."

"Well, Naomi, what do you suggest I should do?"

"I don't suggest that *you* should do anything, but somebody should. The girl's father, or brother or somebody."

"Angela was an only child."

"I say, Sir Henry, this fellow Peters isn't *the* Doctor Peters, is he?" asked Jimmy.

"He is."

"Not the man who has done such wonders with the thyroid experiments? Then why," questioned Geraldine dramatically, "does he choose to live in Wimbledon?"

Sir Henry laughed. "Because," he said, "when one gets older one appreciates a little rest and quiet, Miss Victor."

"Yet it's rather strange when one considers that if he hadn't lived so near the Common his daughter might be alive today."

"As to that, there are many lonelier places within half the distance of Hyde Park Corner."

"Don't let's talk any more about murders," Naomi shuddered. "If you're ready, Geraldine, we'll leave them to gloat over the ghastly details."

Jimmy rose to open the door for them. In the doorway Naomi turned back to fling a parting admonition, "And don't be too long, Jimmy, with your ghoulish chatter – or we'll be late for the play."

Left alone the two men sat silent for a moment, each thinking of the horrible tragedy that had held the public interest for the last few days.

"Brandy?"

"No, thanks – a little more of this excellent port if I may."

Jimmy poured himself a stiff brandy, and then turned to his guest.

"And what do you think will happen to this man Yarrow, now? It'll be damned difficult for him to get a job, won't it?"

"Extremely. He'll most probably try for a new start in the colonies."

"Or change his name?"

"It may not be necessary. If he really has done it, he won't get off. Few murderers do, you know, when they have once been suspected. He'll make a slip sometime."

"It was a filthy business."

"More filthy than you know, Jimmy. As Miss Victor said, the details were too disgusting for the public to know. And she was only sixteen. . . ."

"Jimmy!" Naomi could be heard calling in the hall.

"All right. Coming, darling!" Clinton called back. "Frightfully sorry to hurry you like this," he continued to Sir Henry, "but I think Naomi's anxious to see the curtain go up."

George Yarrow sat on the edge of the bed in the little room he rented at No. 77, Elderton Road, Wimbledon. It was small and dreary, but the rent he paid was only eight shillings a week, and his landlady kept it tolerably clean. His brain still felt stunned after the ordeal he had just been through. The court had been hostile; and it was obvious that everyone had thought that he was guilty. And he was – it had been that fact that had given him such desperate courage. And his defence had been so

weak. He had been for a walk in Hyde Park he had maintained – and yet they couldn't disprove it. And an accused man was innocent until proved guilty in an English court. He had good reason to be glad of that. But at one moment things had looked pretty black. In the thirty years of his life Yarrow had never endured such hidden fear as he had felt as, one by one, damning items of evidence against him had been piled up.

It had been that atmosphere of antagonism and unrelenting hostility that had put the wind up him, that and the pitiless eyes that had searched his face, and the jeers of the crowd who had waited to see him leave the building.

Two hysterical girls had called out "Bravo, George!" – he hadn't known them. He wondered who they were – they had liked his looks perhaps. He smiled as he looked at his wide shoulders and athlete's chest. He'd never lack for girls, that was quite certain.

But he was still worried. He frowned as he remembered the hoots of the crowd.

"Murderer."

"Dirty Swine."

"Lynch the—"

He had been hurried into the waiting motor-car.

There was one thing that surprised him. Old Peters taking him back. He wasn't so sure that he wanted to go; he thought the best thing was to get right away, Canada or Australia – but again, that might look suspicious. No – he'd made up his mind to stay with the old man for a time at any rate. It would certainly be hard to get a job under his own name, and if he changed it some blasted busybody would be sure to make it his business to bring it to the notice 'of whom it might concern.'

He took off his shoes and swung his legs on to the bed and lay down, his hand fumbling for a packet of cigarettes. He lit one. He must think all this out – see what fresh danger, if any, must be thought of. God – but it had been a close thing. The gallows had seemed uncomfortably near. He looked at the window with narrowed eyes, through the cloud of cigarette smoke, his mind probing ceaselessly the events of that fatal evening.

All through the questioning he had stood with his big red

hands clenched, saying as little as possible, repeating his statement that he could throw no light on the case, that he had taken a walk in Hyde Park as it was his evening off, and that it wasn't his fault if no one had seen him. He broke out into a sweat as he remembered how he had searched the crowded courtroom for Nelly's face. But she hadn't been there. He found that difficult to understand. Still, she was a good sort, Nelly, and had loved him once.

After 'it' had happened, his brain had cleared, and his one thought had been to get away. He had made for the nearest road on which the buses ran. As he was waiting in a small knot of people, he had seen Nelly coming. Hastily he had looked away. Nelly's step quickened as she had seen George. It had been some weeks since they had met, and she wanted to talk to him – dreadfully. She went up to him, and put her hand on his sleeve. She thought how handsome he looked. He appeared startled to see her – anxious to get away.

"George, I must speak to you."

"Well, what is it?" He was sullen, and there was panic in his heart.

"Why are you so cruel to me?" She pronounced it 'crool'. "Is it because you've got another girl? Because if that's it, I've got the right to you, George." Her eyes sharpened with suspicion.

And then he had seen a bus coming; he didn't care where it was going, brutally he shook her hand off his arm and jumped on to the platform.

Nelly had stood looking after him as the bus gathered speed. No – he shouldn't get away from her like that. She'd show him. She ran a few steps into the road – heedless of the warning cry of a woman behind her. Then something hit her with the force of a battering ram – and she knew no more.

Having gained the bus George gave no backward glance. Hell! Just his luck to have met Nelly at that time when he might want to prove he had been far away. He guessed he'd have to square her if any suspicion fell on him. Take her out of nights. He smiled as he anticipated her ready acceptance; she wasn't a bad little thing really, with her big dark eyes and soft

fluffy hair. And he reckoned now that she had done the square thing by him, saying nothing when all the newspapers had been publishing his description.

Yarrow crushed out his cigarette. Yes – he'd have to see her and fix things – he thought he knew how.

Old Peters had told him to report the following morning, but he thought it would look better if he went this evening. To show he was keen and appreciative like. Appreciative! If the old codger only knew. And he must change into his uniform.

He rolled off the bed and unbuttoned his coat. Five minutes later, back in the dark blue coat and breeches of his service, he was bending down and fastening the shiny black gaiters round his thick legs – muscular as a footballer's. He picked up his cap. Whew! It had been a near thing. He straightened his tie and with a final glance in the mirror swaggered out of the room.

Dr Peters sat in a deep armchair in front of the blazing fire in his study. He looked tired, and there was pathos in the stoop of his shoulders. The events of the last few weeks had aged him. Angela had been his only child. Even now he could scarcely realize that this horror had happened to him. Yarrow was guilty, of that he had no doubt. Therefore, he reasoned, it was best to have him under observation, where he could keep an eye on him. If only somebody could be found who had seen him near the scene of the crime, but reliable witnesses are wary of swearing away another's life. His eyes dilated as he gazed into the glowing core of the fire.

Yarrow's life! He would crush it out with as little compunction as he would that of a poisonous insect. He had tried hard in the court to keep the hatred out of his face when he saw the brutal hulk of his chauffeur in front of him. Sometime, from someone, that missing link of evidence must come. Until that time he could only wait – and while waiting observe . . . and ponder.

He got up and pressed a bell by the fireplace. A few moments later Smith, his butler for many years, entered.

"You rang, sir?"

"Yes. Bring me a whisky and soda, will you? And, Smith! Yarrow is returning to my service tomorrow."

"Yarrow, sir? But . . ."

"The verdict was murder against a person or persons unknown, Smith. In that case Yarrow is innocent. That is all."

"Very good, sir."

The butler's face was impassive as he made his way back to the servants' quarters. Whatever his own thoughts may have been, the lower servants would respect their master's wishes. He would see to that.

Dr Peters smiled a little grimly into the fire. Here he was, perhaps the most miserable and pain-wracked of men, and yet he was envied by thousands of his fellow-beings. He was 'a successful man'; he had reached the topmost peak of his profession. He knew perhaps more about the secrets of the human body – the intricate workings of the brain, and the functioning of the glands, than any other man living. His word was law to his admiring colleagues, his opinions were unquestioned, and he had had the opportunity of turning down a baronetage. For why should he want one? He had no son – only Angela. A flicker of pain crossed his face. He must not think of Angela.

Nelly Torr opened her eyes. Where was she? Her head ached and she was unable to turn on her pillow to see where the sound of muffled voices came from, or who it was that was talking. She saw in front of her a strip of wall, white-washed, and without ornamentation, and she was lying in a narrow white bed. And then another blinding flash of pain seemed to cleave her head in two, and once more she relapsed into unconsciousness.

It was dark when next she woke up, and there was silence in the room. Again she tried to turn her head, and again something impeded her. Then she heard a faint rustle by her bedside, and a nurse in a stiffly starched cap spoke to her.

"Yes, my dear? And how are you feeling now?"

"My head. It hurts something terrible! What happened? Where am I?"

"Now don't you worry, and don't ask questions. Drink this and then have another nice sleep." She held a glass containing some pinkish fluid to Nelly's lips.

Nelly suddenly found that she was very thirsty, and drank

it gratefully. The last thing she remembered was the nurse's efficient hand gently smoothing her pillow and arranging the sheets.

She awoke the next morning feeling considerably refreshed in spirit, but extremely sore in body. She learnt that she had been knocked down by a motor car and had been brought to the hospital, where she had lain unconscious for two days. If she kept quiet and did what she was told, the nurse added, there was no reason why, in a week or two, she shouldn't be as right as rain.

"But it was a very nasty knock, dear, and more haste less speed, you know."

She smiled brightly and hurried from the room to a case in the next ward.

Nelly occupied a private room, since she needed perfect rest and quiet. She found it very peaceful, and lay looking in front of her and thinking of what had happened. She remembered her meeting with George, his coldness to her and her jealousy. Well, she'd just show him – the big rotter.

"Like a look at a paper, dear?" the nurse asked kindly one morning a few days later.

"I don't think so, thank you. What's the news?"

"Nothing very much. There's a new Chevalier film coming on this week, some trouble in Bulgaria or some outlandish place – oh, and a horrible murder at Wimbledon."

"Wimbledon? – that's where I come from. Who was it?" A guilty thrill of the possibility of knowing the murderer or the victim stirred in Nelly.

"Some girl. The body was terribly injured, so it says."

"Have they got the chap what did it?"

"Not yet. But they suspect a chauffeur, I think it was. Or a footman. Anyhow it was somebody in service."

"Wonder if I know him. I've several boys in service. It's awful what they do nowadays, isn't it? Why, I'll never feel safe again." She giggled inanely.

"I've some more news for you," the nurse went on. "The doctor says you can get up for a little while this afternoon – and if you continue to improve at this rate you'll be leaving us next week, probably on Monday." She fussed around the room,

lowering the blind, and moving the glasses on the bedside table. "And your landlady sent some more of your things this morning," she concluded.

In a way Nelly was sorry to be leaving the Hospital. She had been very comfortable there, and the return to her work in the stuffy tea-shop was, at that moment, extremely uninviting.

Her thoughts returned to George. She'd get even with him somehow – see if she didn't.

On the Sunday afternoon, the day previous to her departure, Nelly sat on her bed gossiping to the nurse, who had brought in a copy of a Sunday paper of a popular nature, that enjoyed a circulation of several millions. One of its features was a weekly competition for those who deemed themselves judges of dress, and there are very few women who do not see themselves in that guise. Also she carried a copy of the last week's number, to show Nelly the choice she had made. Together they inspected the occasionally fantastic garments, arranging them in their order of merit. At length, a decision having at last been reached, nurse bustled off in search of pen and ink to fill in the fateful form.

Left by herself Nelly idly turned the pages of the week-old journal. From the printed page her eyes were held by the poorly printed photograph of a handsome smiling face. Underneath she read:

‘GEORGE YARROW, THE MAN THE POLICE
QUESTIONED’.

Laboriously but intently she read of the man's explanation of his being in Hyde Park at the time of the crime, and of his flat denial that he was anywhere near the Common.

Nelly held the paper in her hand and stared at the report. She thought of his hurry to leave her . . . and of his jilting her. Should she go to the police? She wanted time to think.

The next day Nelly left the Hospital, but her mind was restless. What had she better do? The police? No – there was no knowing where going to the police would get you, in her opinion, and it didn't do a girl any good getting mixed up with the law. Who then could she tell? . . . Dr Peters?

It was half past ten as she hurried that evening towards Dr Peters' house. It was quite a long walk, and Nelly's resolution was weakening as she threaded her way through the crowded and brightly lighted streets. Suppose George should meet her going in . . . find out that she had told on him! She was approaching the garish entrance to the 'Splendide' Cinema, and people were drifting out from the show. *Throbbing Hearts*, the posters proclaimed, was being featured that week.

There were mostly couples coming out, she noticed, with a pang. One of them had halted in the entrance. The girl was smiling up into the face of her companion. She was highly made-up, and not at all 'classy', Nelly considered. She seemed to be arguing with the tall young man. Suddenly he turned and stood facing towards Nelly, but with his face bent to his companion, as if urging her. His hands were thrust deep into his trouser pockets.

It was George. Nelly paused and pretended to look into a shop window, slyly watching him from the corner of her eye. His soft hat was tipped rakishly at an angle, his purple tie boasted a flashy tie-pin that she had given him, a thick gold albert stretched across his broad chest between the upper pockets of his waistcoat. His shoes, extravagantly pointed, were of gleaming yellow leather. Nelly recognized that he was dressed to impress.

"Oh, I couldn't *reely*," the blonde was protesting coyly, "whatever would people say? Oh, you are a one!"

They turned away, her arm tucked through that of her companion; still half-heartedly expostulating.

If anything had been needed to strengthen Nelly in her purpose she now had it. She walked quickly on her errand. She'd show him! She'd show him - and that fancy piece of his!

She reached the entrance to the drive of Dr Peters' house, and started up the tree-darkened gravel.

Dr Peters sucked at his pipe. He turned to Nelly.

"And you are quite certain, Miss Torr, that it was Yarrow you saw. You could not have been mistaken?"

"Mistaken, I should say not." She laughed shrilly. "If any-

body ought to know George Yarrow, I should. I knew him most intimate . . . at one time."

"And you would be prepared to sign a sworn statement to this effect?"

"If you say so, Dr Peters, of course. But I don't want no trouble with the police, mind."

"You won't have any, I can promise you that. For the present you must tell nobody. The matter is perfectly safe in my hands. I have your word for it?"

"Righto, Dr Peters. Well, I'll be going now. And remember you've promised that George shan't know as how I've let on."

"I have already given you my word, Miss Torr." He rang for Smith to show her out. The butler conducted the visitor to the door with a haughty and condescending air.

When he had closed the door he returned to the study. "Is there anything I can get you, sir?"

"No, Smith. I want to talk to you. How long is it you have been with me. Fifteen years?"

"Sixteen, sir."

"And you were fond of Miss Angela, were you not?"

"You know how I felt, sir. If she'd been my own daughter . . ."

"Very well. Now listen to me."

For half an hour the two men talked earnestly. At the conclusion of the interview Peters stood up.

Solemnly they shook hands.

"And, Smith . . . ring up Mr Carter and say that I would be pleased if he would dine with me tomorrow. Say that it is very important. That is all. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, sir."

Peters sat for a long time in his study, the fire light gleaming on his white shirt-front. Yes - Tony Carter must be in on this. Tony, who had been the heavyweight champion at Cambridge last year. He and Tony and Smith should manage it between them. An eye for an eye . . .

Smith knocked on the surgery door. Behind him stood Yarrow carrying a small bag of tools.

"What is it?" the doctor's voice called.

"Yarrow is here, sir, to see to the lights."

"All right. One minute."

Yarrow was annoyed. He considered that eleven o'clock at night was an extremely inconvenient and inconsiderate hour to be called out. He had had a 'date', which he had been forced to break, and had had no opportunity of putting off the lady. Also he had just changed from his livery and had to put it on again, knowing how fussy the old bastard was!

The door opened, and the butler stood aside to let him enter. Yarrow looked around him with interest – he had never visited the surgery before.

Dr Peters was dressed in his white 'working' clothes. Yarrow stood before him, his cap in one hand, the bag in the other. The door shut behind him.

"Put up your hands."

A man's voice barked the order. Instinctively Yarrow wheeled round, and found himself looking down the barrel of a revolver, behind which was the steady gaze of Tony Carter.

"What's the meaning of this? What's the game?" Yarrow spoke gruffly.

"That we know you for a murderer," Peters said quietly. "Some days ago the missing piece of evidence came into my hands. If I felt so inclined I could hand you over to the police – to hang by the neck until you were dead. But hanging is too good for swine like you. The sworn statement that you were seen near the scene of the crime by one who knew you well, is in my possession."

Smith stepped forward and snapped a pair of steel handcuffs on Yarrow's wrists.

"What are you going to do to me?" He was frightened now, deadly frightened. The set faces of the three men were merciless. Peters came towards him, a pad in his hand. Yarrow smelt a sweet sickly odour. He started to kick, but was thrown to the floor by Carter . . . he was stifling . . . choking . . . he could hear low grunts and curses as a chance kick got home, but the sounds seemed very faint, a long way off.

When he came to himself Yarrow found that he was lying on a long white table. He tried to move his arm, but something held it in a vice. His legs were confined in a similar manner by thick leather straps. He lay there, stark naked and powerless underneath a brilliant glare from the light that hung above the operating table. As far as he could see, he was alone. He felt sick, his body wracked with nausea. He strained at the straps, the muscles of his arms standing out in knots. He turned his head and saw on his right his clothes huddled in a heap on the floor. His coat and waistcoat, the breeches, the thick boots and leggings, and the peaked cap of his uniform.

He mustn't be frightened, he told himself; old Peters was trying to bluff him, that was all. He thought he'd panic him into confessing his guilt — well, he'd show the old bastard who was the better bluffer of the two. He didn't believe the old— had a statement at all. He'd have the law on him for this, see if he didn't.

The straps were chafing his arms, and angrily irritating the skin round his ankles. He wondered where the old man was, and what fresh devilry he was planning. He wished he'd come back, this waiting was getting on his nerves. He pulled at the straps, but only hurt himself the more. His face grew red, and sweat broke out on his forehead and hairy chest; his breathing became uneven with the physical efforts of his struggles.

He heard a door open, and soft footsteps cross to where he lay. Dr Peters still wore his white coat, and he was wheeling a table on which lay gleaming rows of knives and forceps and queer, contorted probes.

"You bloody— you can't do this to me. I'll have the police on you." Yarrow was terrified.

"I do not think you will, my friend. I am not going to kill you — and if you go to the police they will assuredly hang you."

"But I tell you I didn't do it. I swear I didn't."

Peters paid no attention. Again Yarrow felt the sickening pad pressed on to his mouth.

During the hours that followed Yarrow suffered hell. Never entirely conscious, yet never unconscious, his body endured blinding, rending pain. At intervals he fainted, only to recover to endure more agony. He lost all sense of time, the world had

become for him a place of unbelievable torture, his nerves cried out for respite, his brain shrieked that he could stand no more. From time to time there were periods of near oblivion, periods of bliss it seemed to Yarrow – but these were succeeded by more spasms of pain each surmounting in intensity the previous ordeal. Wave after wave of blinding agony.

Dr Peters worked as one possessed. All his vast knowledge of the human body was called to play a part. No one was permitted to come near the laboratory save Smith. The servants were told that he was engaged in vital experiments and must on no account be disturbed.

During the months that followed Dr Peters spent many hours in his surgery. Separated from the main body of the house, with which it was only connected by a covered corridor, the doctor had complete privacy. After a time, even the butler was forbidden to enter the room itself, although he frequently brought his employer's meals on a tray to the door, where he left them.

It was June when Yarrow had disappeared; and now January held London in its frigid grip.

One day Smith came down the passage to collect the luncheon tray. The door was open a few inches, and the sound of the cracking of a whip echoed between the bare walls. He could see Peters standing over a figure that crouched on the floor chained to a staple driven into the wall. The creature snarled and twisted to avoid the cruel leather thong that slashed mercilessly at its unprotected body. Smith could hardly believe his eyes. What could this travesty be, this monster that grovelled at Dr Peters' feet? Its hands were bound together – its legs bent and calloused. The arms, in contrast to the fore-shortened thighs, hung ape-like with simian looseness from the wasted body, whose giant bones were starting through the skin. The face was the face of an old man, wrinkled with age and fear, but with a sly cunning lurking behind the rheumy eyes. A thing of horror – of pity.

Yarrow's disappearance was accepted as a guilty man's flight, for none of his fellow-servants believed him innocent; in fact,

'below stairs' they had none of them doubted that he would make his getaway at the earliest opportunity.

Jimmy and Naomi Clinton sat impatiently in their motor-car – a long low Invicta – they were late for lunch; and the block of traffic in the Tottenham Court Road was very exasperating. Naomi gazed idly at the passers-by.

"Jimmy, look! What a disgusting sight – what do you think it is?"

"From the show at Olympia, perhaps." He looked at the grotesque figure ambling along the pavement. The jostling lunch-hour crowds giving it as wide a berth as the pavement permitted.

"Isn't it pathetic? Why are things like that allowed to live?"

"The Lord knows!" He was irritated by the delay. "We're going to be awfully late, darling."

The traffic block broke and the Invicta slid forward. Naomi turned to look after the bizarre ape-like figure, alone in the crowd, an outcast for ever from its fellow creatures. She thought how terrible it was that it would never know human relationships – at the best, only pity and commiseration – or laughter and curiosity.

Naomi was puzzled by the decrees of a blind fate. Why were such abortions permitted to exist – to live? Inconsequently she remembered the terrible murder at Wimbledon, and wondered if the man had ever been caught. She turned to Jimmy.

"Darling, did they ever find the Wimbledon murderer?"

"He got off scot free." His eyes were fixed on the traffic ahead of him. "Lord knows what happened to him. Probably found it difficult to get a job – but apart from that slight inconvenience – yes."

The car drew up in front of the Ritz Hotel.

"Come on, darling – we're very late; so don't be too long doing your face."

Their life went on . . . and Yarrow, shambling down the Tottenham Court Road, suffered – from 'a slight inconvenience.'

THE WHISTLING ROOM

By William Hope Hodgson

CARNACKI SHOOK a friendly fist at me as I entered late. Then he opened the door into the dining-room, and ushered the four of us – Jessop, Arkright, Taylor and myself – in to dinner.

We dined well, as usual, and, equally as usual, Carnacki was pretty silent during the meal. At the end, we took our wine and cigars to our accustomed positions, and Carnacki – having got himself comfortable in his big chair – began without any preliminary:

“I have just got back from Ireland again,” he said. “And I thought you chaps would be interested to hear my news. Besides, I fancy I shall see the thing clearer, after I have told it all out straight. I must tell you this, though, at the beginning – up to the present moment, I have been utterly and completely ‘stumped.’ I have tumbled upon one of the most peculiar cases of ‘haunting’ – or devilment of some sort – that I have come against. Now listen.

“I have been spending the last few weeks at Iastrae Castle, about twenty miles north-east of Galway. I got a letter about a month ago from a Mr Sid K. Tassoc, who it seemed had bought the place lately, and moved in, only to find that he had got a very peculiar piece of property.

“When I reached there, he met me at the station, driving a jaunting-car, and drove me up to the castle, which, by the way, he called a ‘house-shanty.’ I found that he was ‘pigging it’ there with his boy brother and another American, who seemed to be half servant and half companion. It appears that all the servants had left the place, in a body, as you might say; and now they were managing among themselves, assisted by some day-help.

“The three of them got together a scratch feed, and Tassoc told me all about the trouble, whilst we were at table. It is

most extraordinary, and different from anything that I have had to do with; though that Buzzing Case was very queer, too.

"Tassoc began right in the middle of his story. 'We've got a room in this shanty,' he said, 'which has got a most infernal whistling in it; sort of haunting it. The thing starts any time: you never know when, and it goes on until it frightens you. All the servants have gone, as I've told you. It's not ordinary whistling, and it isn't the wind. Wait till you hear it.'

" 'We're all carrying guns,' said the boy; and slapped his coat pocket.

" 'As bad as that?' I said; and the older brother nodded. 'I may be soft,' he replied; 'but wait till you've heard it. Sometimes I think it's some infernal thing, and the next moment, I'm just as sure that someone's playing a trick on us.'

" 'Why?' I asked. 'What is to be gained?'

" 'You mean,' he said, 'that people usually have some good reason for playing tricks as elaborate as this. Well, I'll tell you. There's a lady in this province, by the name of Miss Donnehue, who's going to be my wife, this day two months. She's more beautiful than they make them, and so far as I can see, I've just stuck my head into an Irish hornet's nest. There's about a score of hot young Irishmen been courting her these two years gone, and now that I've come along and cut them out, they feel raw against me. Do you begin to understand the possibilities?'

" 'Yes,' I said. 'Perhaps I do in a vague sort of way; but I don't see how all this affects the room?'

" 'Like this,' he said. 'When I'd fixed it up with Miss Donnehue, I looked out for a place, and bought this little house-shanty. Afterwards, I told her – one evening during dinner, that I'd decided to tie up here. And then she asked me whether I wasn't afraid of the whistling room. I told her it must have been thrown in gratis, as I'd heard nothing about it. There were some of her men friends present, and I saw a smile go round. I found out, after a bit of questioning, that several people have bought this place during the last twenty odd years. And it was always on the market again, after a trial.'

" 'Well, the chaps started to bait me a bit, and offered to take bets after dinner that I'd not stay six months in this shanty. I looked once or twice to Miss Donnehue, so as to be sure I was "getting the note" of the talkee-talkee; but I could see that she didn't take it as a joke, at all. Partly, I think, because there was a bit of a sneer in the way the men were tackling me, and partly because she really believes there is something in this yarn of the whistling room.

" 'However, after dinner, I did what I could to even things up with the others. I nailed all their bets, and screwed them down good and safe. I guess some of them are going to be hard hit, unless I lose; which I don't mean to. Well, there you have practically the whole yarn.'

" 'Not quite,' I told him. 'All that I know, is that you have bought a castle, with a room in it that is in some way "queer," and that you've been doing some betting. Also, I know that your servants have got frightened, and run away. Tell me something about the whistling?'

" 'Oh, that!' said Tassoc; 'that started the second night we were in. I'd had a good look round the room in the day-time, as you can understand; for the talk up at Arlestrae - Miss Donnehue's place - had made me wonder a bit. But it seems just as usual as some of the other rooms in the old wing, only perhaps a bit more lonesome feeling. But that may be only because of the talk about it, you know.

" 'The whistling started about ten o'clock, on the second night, as I said. Tom and I were in the library, when we heard an awfully queer whistling, coming along the East Corridor - The room is in the East Wing, you know.

" 'That blessed ghost!' I said to Tom, and we collared the lamps off the table, and went up to have a look. I tell you, even as we dug along the corridor, it took me a bit in the throat, it was so beastly queer. It was a sort of tune, in a way; but more as if a devil or some rotten thing were laughing at you, and going to get round at your back. That's how it makes you feel.

" 'When we got to the door, we didn't wait; but rushed it open; and then I tell you the sound of the thing fairly hit me in the face. Tom said he got it the same way - Sort of felt

stunned and bewildered. We looked all round, and soon got so nervous, we just cleared out, and I locked the door.

“We came down here, and had a stiff peg each. Then we landed fit again, and began to feel we'd been nicely had. So we took sticks, and went out into the grounds, thinking after all it must be some of these confounded Irishmen working the ghost-trick on us. But there was not a leg stirring.

“We went back into the house, and walked over it, and then paid another visit to the room. But we simply couldn't stand it. We fairly ran out, and locked the door again. I don't know how to put it into words; but I had a feeling of being up against something that was rottenly dangerous. You know! We've carried our guns ever since.

“Of course, we had a real turn-out of the room next day, and the whole house-place; and we even hunted the grounds; but there was nothing queer. And now I don't know what to think; except that the sensible part of me tells me that it's some plan of these Wild Irishmen to try to take a rise out of me.’

“Done anything since?’ I asked him.

“Yes,’ he said. ‘Watched outside of the door of the room at nights, and chased round the grounds, and sounded the walls and floor of the room. We've done everything we could think of; and it's beginning to get on our nerves; so we sent for you.’

“By this, we had finished eating. As we rose from the table, Tassoc suddenly called out: ‘Ssh! Hark!’

“We were instantly silent, listening. Then I heard it, an extraordinary hooning whistle, monstrous and inhuman, coming from far away through corridors to my right.

“‘By God!’ said Tassoc; ‘and it's scarcely dark yet! Collar those candles, both of you, and come along.’

“In a few moments, we were all out of the door and racing up the stairs. Tassoc turned into a long corridor, and we followed, shielding our candles as we ran. The sound seemed to fill all the passage as we drew near, until I had the feeling that the whole air throbbed under the power of some wanton Immense Force – a sense of an actual taint, as you might say, of monstrosity all about us.

"Tassoc unlocked the door; then, giving it a push with his foot, jumped back, and drew his revolver. As the door flew open, the sound beat out at us, with an effect impossible to explain to one who has not heard it – with a certain, horrible personal note in it; as if in there in the darkness you could picture the room rocking and creaking in a mad, vile glee to its own filthy piping and whistling and hooning; and yet all the time aware of you in particular. To stand there and listen, was to be stunned by Realization. It was as if someone showed you the mouth of a vast pit suddenly, and said: That's Hell. And you *knew* that they had spoken the truth. Do you get it, even a little bit?

"I stepped a pace into the room, and held the candle over my head, and looked quickly round. Tassoc and his brother joined me, and the man came up at the back, and we all held our candles high. I was deafened with the shrill, piping hoon of the whistling; and then, clear in my ear, something seemed to be saying to me: 'Get out of here – quick! Quick! Quick!'

"As you chaps know, I never neglect that sort of thing. Sometimes it may be nothing but nerves; but as you will remember, it was just such a warning that saved me in the 'Grey Dog' Case, and in the 'Yellow Finger' Experiments; as well as other times. Well, I turned sharp round to the others: 'Out!' I said. 'For God's sake, *out* quick!' And in an instant I had them into the passage.

"There came an extraordinary yelling scream into the hideous whistling, and then, like a clap of thunder, an utter silence. I slammed the door, and locked it. Then, taking the key, I looked round at the others. They were pretty white, and I imagine I must have looked that way too. And there we stood a moment, silent.

"'Come down out of this, and have some whisky,' said Tassoc, at last, in a voice he tried to make ordinary; and he led the way. I was the back man, and I knew we all kept looking over our shoulders. When we got downstairs, Tassoc passed the bottle round. He took a drink himself, and slapped his glass on to the table. Then sat down with a thud.

"'That's a lovely thing to have in the house with you,

isn't it!' he said. And directly afterwards: 'What on earth made you hustle us all out like that, Carnacki?'

" 'Something seemed to be telling me to get out, *quick*,' I said. 'Sounds a bit silly superstitious, I know; but when you are meddling with this sort of thing, you've got to take notice of queer fancies, and risk being laughed at.'

"I told him then about the 'Grey Dog' business, and he nodded a lot to that. 'Of course,' I said, 'this may be nothing more than those would-be rivals of yours playing some funny game; but, personally, though I'm going to keep an open mind, I feel that there is something beastly and dangerous about this thing.'

"We talked for a while longer; and then Tassoc suggested billiards, which we played in a pretty half-hearted fashion, and all the time cocking an ear to the door, as you might say, for sounds; but none came, and later, after coffee, he suggested early bed, and a thorough overhaul of the room on the morrow.

"My bedroom was in the newer part of the castle, and the door opened into the picture gallery. At the east end of the gallery was the entrance to the corridor of the east wing; this was shut off from the gallery by two old and heavy oak doors, which looked rather odd and quaint beside the more modern doors of the various rooms.

"When I reached my room, I did not go to bed; but began to unpack my instrument trunk, of which I had retained the key. I intended to take one or two preliminary steps at once, in my investigation of the extraordinary whistling.

"Presently, when the castle had settled into quietness, I slipped out of my room, and across to the entrance of the great corridor. I opened one of the low, squat doors, and threw the beam of my pocket searchlight down the passage. It was empty, and I went through the doorway, and pushed-to the oak behind me. Then along the great passageway, throwing my light before and behind, and keeping my revolver handy.

"I had hung a 'protection belt' of garlic round my neck, and the smell of it seemed to fill the corridor and give me assurance; for, as you all know, it is a wonderful 'protection' against the more usual Aeiirii forms of semi-materialization,

by which I supposed the whistling might be produced; though, at that period of my investigation, I was still quite prepared to find it due to some perfectly natural cause; for it is astonishing the enormous number of cases that prove to have nothing abnormal in them.

"In addition to wearing the necklet, I had plugged my ears loosely with garlic, and as I did not intend to stay more than a few minutes in the room, I hoped to be safe.

"When I reached the door, and put my hand into my pocket for the key, I had a sudden feeling of sickening funk. But I was not going to back out, if I could help it. I unlocked the door and turned the handle. Then I gave the door a sharp push with my foot, as Tassoc had done, and drew my revolver, though I did not expect to have any use for it, really.

"I shone the searchlight all round the room, and then stepped inside, with a disgustingly horrible feeling of walking slap into a waiting Danger. I stood a few seconds, expectant, and nothing happened, and the empty room showed bare from corner to corner. And then, you know, I realized that the room was full of an abominable silence; can you understand that? A sort of purposeful silence, just as sickening as any of the filthy noises the Things have power to make. Do you remember what I told you about that 'Silent Garden' business? Well, this room had just that same *malevolent* silence – the beastly quietness of a thing that is looking at you and not seeable itself, and thinks that it has got you. Oh, I recognized it instantly, and I whipped the top off my lantern, so as to have light over the *whole* room.

"Then I set to, working like fury, and keeping my glance all about me. I sealed the two windows with lengths of human hair, right across, and sealed them at every frame. As I worked, a queer, scarcely perceptible tenseness stole into the air of the place, and the silence seemed, if you can understand me, to grow more solid. I knew then that I had no business there without 'full protection'; for I was practically certain that this was no mere Aeiirii development; but one of the worst forms, as the Saiitii; like that 'Grunting Man' case – you know.

"I finished the window, and hurried over to the great fire-

place. This is a huge affair, and has a queer gallows-iron, I think they are called, projecting from back of the arch. I sealed the opening with seven human hairs – the seventh crossing the six others.

“Then, just as I was making an end, a low, mocking whistle grew in the room. A cold, nervous prickling went up my spine, and round my forehead from the back. The hideous sound filled all the room with an extraordinary, grotesque parody of human whistling, too gigantic to be human – as if something gargantuan and monstrous made the sounds softly. As I stood there a last moment, pressing down the final seal, I had little doubt but that I had come across one of those rare and horrible cases of the *Inanimate* reproducing the functions of the *Animate*. I made a grab for my lamp and went quickly to the door, looking over my shoulder, and listening for the thing that I expected. It came, just as I got my hand upon the handle – a squeal of incredible, malevolent anger, piercing through the low hooning of the whistling. I dashed out, slamming the door and locking it.

“I leant a little against the opposite wall of the corridor, feeling rather funny; for it had been a hideously narrow squeak. . . . ‘Theyr be noe sayfetic to be gained bye gayrds of holieness when the monyster hath pow’r to speak throe woode and stoene.’ So runs the passage in the Sigsand MS., and I proved it in that ‘Nodding Door’ business. There is no protection against this particular form of monster, except, possibly, for a fractional period of time; for it can reproduce itself in, or take to its purpose, the very protective material which you may use, and has power to ‘*forme wythine the pentycle*’; though not immediately. There is, of course, the possibility of the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual being uttered; but it is too uncertain to count upon, and the danger is too hideous; and even then it has no power to protect for more than ‘maybee fyve beats of the harte,’ as the Sigsand has it.

“Inside of the room, there was now a constant, meditative, hooning whistling; but presently this ceased, and the silence seemed worse; for there is such a sense of hidden mischief in a silence.

"After a little, I sealed the door with crossed hairs, and then cleared off down the great passage, and so to bed.

"For a long time I lay awake; but managed eventually to get some sleep. Yet, about two o'clock I was waked by the hooning whistling of the room coming to me, even through the closed doors. The sound was tremendous, and seemed to beat through the whole house with a presiding sense of terror. As if (I remember thinking) some monstrous giant had been holding mad carnival with itself at the end of that great passage.

"I got up and sat on the edge of the bed, wondering whether to go along and have a look at the seal; and suddenly there came a thump on my door, and Tassoc walked in, with his dressing-gown over his pyjamas.

" 'I thought it would have waked you, so I came along to have a talk,' he said. '*I* can't sleep. Beautiful! Isn't it?'

" 'Extraordinary!' I said, and tossed him my case.

"He lit a cigarette, and we sat and talked for about an hour; and all the time that noise went on, down at the end of the big corridor.

"Suddenly Tassoc stood up:

" 'Let's take our guns, and go and examine the brute,' he said, and turned towards the door.

" 'No!' I said. 'By Jove - NO! I can't say anything definite yet; but I believe that room is about as dangerous as it well can be.'

" 'Haunted - *really* haunted?' he asked, keenly and without any of his frequent banter.

"I told him, of course, that I could not say a definite *yes* or *no* to such a question; but that I hoped to be able to make a statement, soon. Then I gave him a little lecture on the False Re-materialization of the Animate Force through the Inanimate Inert. He began then to understand the particular way in which the room might be dangerous, if it were really the subject of a manifestation.

"About an hour later, the whistling ceased quite suddenly and Tassoc went off again to bed. I went back to mine, also, and eventually got another spell of sleep.

"In the morning, I walked along to the room. I found the

seals on the door intact. Then I went in. The window seals and the hair were all right; but the seventh hair across the great fireplace was broken. This set me thinking. I knew that it might, very possibly, have snapped, through my having tensioned it too highly; but then, again, it might have been broken by something else. Yet it was scarcely possible that a man, for instance, could have passed between the six unbroken hairs; for no one would ever have noticed them, entering the room that way, you see; but just walked through them, ignorant of their very existence.

"I removed the other hairs, and the seals. Then I looked up the chimney. It went up straight, and I could see blue sky at the top. It was a big open flue, and free from any suggestion of hiding-places or corners. Yet, of course, I did not trust to any such casual examination, and after breakfast, I put on my overalls, and climbed to the very top, sounding all the way; but I found nothing.

"Then I came down, and went over the whole of the room - floor, ceiling, and walls, mapping them out in six-inch squares, and sounding with both hammer and probe. But there was nothing unusual.

"Afterwards, I made a three-weeks' search of the whole castle, in the same thorough way; but found nothing. I went even further then; for at night, when the whistling commenced, I made a microphone test. You see, if the whistling were mechanically produced, this test would have made evident to me the working of the machinery, if there were any such concealed within the walls. It certainly was an up-to-date method of examination, as you must allow.

"Of course, I did not think that any of Tassoc's rivals had fixed up any mechanical contrivance; but I thought it just possible that there had been some such thing for producing the whistling, made away back in the years, perhaps with the intention of giving the room a reputation that would ensure its being free of inquisitive folk. You see what I mean? Well, of course, it was just possible, if this were the case, that someone knew the secret of the machinery, and was utilizing the knowledge to play this devil of a prank on Tassoc. The microphone test of the walls would certainly have made this known

to me, as I have said; but there was nothing of the sort in the castle; so that I had practically no doubt at all now, but that it was a genuine case of what is popularly termed 'haunting'.

"All this time, every night, and sometimes most of each night, the hooning whistling of the room was intolerable. It was as if an Intelligence there knew that steps were being taken against it, and piped and hooned in a sort of mad mocking contempt. I tell you, it was as extraordinary as it was horrible. Time after time I went along – tiptoeing noiselessly on stockinged feet – to the sealed door (for I always kept the room sealed). I went at all hours of the night, and often the whistling, inside, would seem to change to a brutally jeering note, as though the half-animate monster saw me plainly through the shut door. And all the time, as I would stand watching, the hooning of the whistling would seem to fill the whole corridor, so that I used to feel a precious lonely chap, messing about there with one of Hell's mysteries.

"And every morning I would enter the room, and examine the different hairs and seals. You see, after the first week I had stretched parallel hairs all along the walls of the room, and along the ceiling; but over the floor, which was of polished stone, I had set out little colourless wafers, tacky-side uppermost. Each wafer was numbered, and they were arranged after a definite plan, so that I should be able to trace the exact movements of any living thing that went across.

"You will see that no material being or creature could possibly have entered that room, without leaving many signs to tell me about it. But nothing was ever disturbed, and I began to think that I should have to risk an attempt to stay a night in the room, in the Electric Pentacle. Mind you, I *knew* that it would be a crazy thing to do; but I was getting stumped, and ready to try anything.

"Once, about midnight, I did break the seal on the door and have a quick look in; but, I tell you, the whole room gave one mad yell, and seemed to come towards me in a great belly of shadows, as if the walls had bellied in towards me. Of course, that must have been fancy. Anyway, the yell was sufficient, and I slammed the door, and locked it, feeling a bit weak down my spine. I wonder whether you know the feeling.

"And then, when I had got to that state of readiness for anything, I made what, at first, I thought was something of a discovery.

"It was about one in the morning, and I was walking slowly round the castle, keeping in the soft grass. I had come under the shadow of the east front, and far above me, I could hear the vile hooning whistling of the room, up in the darkness of the unlit wing. Then, suddenly, a little in front of me, I heard a man's voice, speaking low, but evidently in glee:

"'By George! You chaps; but I wouldn't care to bring a wife home to that!' it said, in the tone of the cultured Irish.

"Someone started to reply; but there came a sharp exclamation, and then a rush, and I heard footsteps running in all directions. Evidently, the men had spotted me.

"For a few seconds I stood there, feeling an awful ass. After all, *they* were at the bottom of the haunting! Do you see what a big fool it made me seem? I had no doubt but that they were some of Tassoc's rivals; and here I had been feeling in every bone that I had hit a genuine Case! And then, you know, there came the memory of hundreds of details, that made me just as much in doubt, again. Anyway, whether it was natural, or ab-natural, there was a great deal yet to be cleared up.

"I told Tassoc, next morning, what I had discovered, and through the whole of every night, for five nights, we kept a close watch round the east wing; but there was never a sign of anyone prowling about; and all the time, almost from evening to dawn, that grotesque whistling would hoon incredibly, far above us in the darkness.

"On the morning after the fifth night, I received a wire from here, which brought me home by the next boat. I explained to Tassoc that I was simply bound to come away for a few days; but I told him to keep up the watch round the castle. One thing I was very careful to do, and that was to make him absolutely promise never to go into the Room between sunset and sunrise. I made it clear to him that we knew nothing definite yet, one way or the other; and if the room were what I had first thought it to be, it might be a lot better for him to die first, than enter it after dark.

"When I got here, and had finished my business, I thought you chaps would be interested; and also I wanted to get it all spread out clear in my mind; so I rang you up. I am going over again tomorrow, and when I get back I ought to have something pretty extraordinary to tell you. By the way, there is a curious thing I forgot to tell you. I tried to get a phonographic record of the whistling; but it simply produced no impression on the wax at all. That is one of the things that has made me feel queer.

"Another extraordinary thing is that the microphone will not magnify the sound – will not even transmit it; seems to take no account of it, and acts as if it were non-existent. I am absolutely and utterly stumped, up to the present. I am a wee bit curious to see whether any of your dear clever heads can make daylight of it. *I cannot – not yet.*"

He rose to his feet.

"Goodnight, all," he said, and began to usher us out abruptly, but without offence, into the night.

A fortnight later, he dropped us each a card, and you can imagine that I was not late this time. When we arrived, Carnacki took us straight into dinner, and when we had finished, and all made ourselves comfortable, he began again, where he had left off:

"Now just listen quietly; for I have got something very queer to tell you. I got back late at night, and I had to walk up to the castle, as I had not warned them that I was coming. It was bright moonlight; so that the walk was rather a pleasure than otherwise. When I got there, the whole place was in darkness, and I thought I would go round outside, to see whether Tassoc or his brother was keeping watch. But I could not find them anywhere, and concluded that they had got tired of it, and gone off to bed.

"As I returned across the lawn that lies below the front of the east wing, I caught the hooning whistling of the room, coming down strangely clear through the stillness of the night. It had a peculiar note in it, I remember – low and constant, queerly meditative. I looked up at the window, bright in the moonlight, and got a sudden thought to bring a ladder from

the stable-yard, and try to get a look into the room, from the outside.

"With this notion, I hunted round at the back of the castle, among the straggle of offices, and presently found a long, fairly light ladder; though it was heavy enough for one, goodness knows! I thought at first that I should never get it reared. I managed at last, and let the ends rest very quietly against the wall, a little below the sill of the larger window. Then, going silently, I went up the ladder. Presently, I had my face above the sill, and was looking in, alone with the moonlight.

"Of course, the queer whistling sounded louder up there; but it still conveyed that peculiar sense of something whistling quietly to itself – can you understand? Though, for all the meditative lowness of the note, the horrible, gargantuan quality was distinct – a mighty parody of the human; as if I stood there and listened to the whistling from the lips of a monster with a man's soul.

"And then, you know, I saw something. The floor in the middle of the huge, empty room, was puckered upwards in the centre into a strange, soft-looking mound, parted at the top into an ever-changing hole, that pulsed to that great, gentle hooning. At times, as I watched, I saw the heaving of the indented mound gap across with a queer inward suction, as with the drawing of an enormous breath; then the thing would dilate and pout once more to the incredible melody. And suddenly, as I stared, dumb, it came to me that the thing was living. I was looking at two enormous, blackened lips, blistered and brutal, there in the pale moonlight. . . .

"Abruptly, they bulged out to a vast, pouting mound of force and sound, stiffened and swollen, and hugely massive and clean-cut in the moonbeams. And a great sweat lay heavy on the vast upper lip. In the same moment of time, the whistling had burst into a mad screaming note, that seemed to stun me, even where I stood, outside of the window. And then, the following moment, I was staring blankly at the solid, undisturbed floor of the room – smooth, polished stone flooring, from wall to wall. And there was an absolute silence.

"You can picture me staring into the quiet room, and knowing what I knew. I felt like a sick, frightened child, and I

wanted to slide *quietly* down the ladder, and run away. But in that very instant, I heard Tassoc's voice calling to me from within the room, for help, *help*. My God! but I got such an awful dazed feeling; and I had a vague bewildered notion that, after all, it was the Irishmen who had got him in there, and were taking it out of him. And then the call came again, and I burst the window, and jumped in to help him. I had a confused idea that the call had come from within the shadow of the great fireplace, and I raced across to it; but there was no one there.

"'Tassoc!' I shouted, and my voice went empty-sounding round the great apartment; and then, in a flash, *I knew that Tassoc had never called*. I whirled round, sick with fear, towards the window, and as I did so a frightful, exultant whistling scream burst through the room. On my left, the end wall had bellied in towards me, in a pair of gargantuan lips, black and utterly monstrous, to within a yard of my face. I fumbled for a mad instant at my revolver; not for *it*, but myself; for the danger was a thousand times worse than death. And then, suddenly, the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual was whispered quite audibly in the room. Instantly, the thing happened that I have known once before. There came a sense as of dust falling continually and monotonously, and I knew that my life hung uncertain and suspended for a flash, in a brief reeling vertigo of unseeable things. Then *that* ended, and I knew that I might live. My soul and body blended again, and life and power came to me. I dashed furiously at the window, and hurled myself out head foremost; for I can tell you that I had stopped being afraid of death. I crashed down on to the ladder, and slithered, grabbing and grabbing; and so came some way or other alive to the bottom. And there I sat in the soft, wet grass, with the moonlight all about me; and far above, through the broken window of the room, there was a low whistling.

"That is the chief of it. I was not hurt, and I went round to the front, and knocked Tassoc up. When they let me in, we had a long yarn, over some good whisky – for I was shaken to pieces – and I explained things as much as I could. I told Tassoc that the room would have to come down, and every

fragment of it be burned in a blast-furnace, erected within a pentacle. He nodded. There was nothing to say. Then I went to bed.

"We turned a small army on to the work, and within ten days, that lovely thing had gone up in smoke, and what was left was calcined and clean.

"It was when the workmen were stripping the panelling, that I got hold of a sound notion of the beginnings of that beastly development. Over the great fireplace, after the great oak panels had been torn down, I found that there was let into the masonry a scrollwork of stone, with on it an old inscription, in ancient Celtic, that here in this room was burned Dian Tiansay, Jester of King Alzof, who made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore of the Seventh Castle.

"When I got the translation clear, I gave it to Tassoc. He was tremendously excited; for he knew the old tale, and took me down to the library to look at an old parchment that gave the story in detail. Afterwards, I found that the incident was well known about the countryside; but always regarded more as a legend than as history. And no one seemed ever to have dreamt that the old east wing of Iastrae Castle was the remains of the ancient Seventh Castle.

"From the old parchment, I gathered that there had been a pretty dirty job done, away back in the years. It seems that King Alzof and King Ernore had been enemies by birth-right, as you might say truly; but that nothing more than a little raiding had occurred on either side for years, until Dian Tiansay made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore, and sang it before King Alzof; and so greatly was it appreciated that King Alzof gave the jester one of his ladies to wife.

"Presently, all the people of the land had come to know the song, and so it came at last to King Ernore, who was so angered that he made war upon his old enemy, and took and burned him and his castle; but Dian Tiansay, the jester, he brought with him to his own place, and having torn his tongue out because of the song which he had made and sung he imprisoned him in the room in the east wing (which was evidently used for unpleasant purposes), and the jester's wife he kept for himself, having a fancy for her prettiness.

"But one night Dian Tiansay's wife was not to be found, and in the morning they discovered her lying dead in her husband's arms, and he sitting, whistling the Song of Foolishness, for he had no longer the power to sing it.

"Then they roasted Dian Tiansay in the great fireplace - probably from that selfsame 'gallows-iron' which I have already mentioned. And until he died, Dian Tiansay 'ceased not to whistle' the Song of Foolishness, which he could no longer sing. But afterwards, 'in that room' there was often heard at night the sound of something whistling; and there 'grew a power in that room', so that none dared to sleep in it. And presently, it would seem, the King went to another castle; for the whistling troubled him.

"There you have it all. Of course, that is only a rough rendering of the translation from the parchment. It's a bit quaint! Don't you think so?"

"Yes," I said, answering for the lot. "But how did the thing grow to such a tremendous manifestation?"

"One of those cases of continuity of thought producing a positive action upon the immediate surrounding material," replied Carnacki. "The development must have been going forward through centuries, to have produced such a monstrosity. It was a true instance of Saitii manifestation, which I can best explain by likening it to a living spiritual fungus, which involves the very structure of the aether-fibre itself, and, of course, in so doing, acquires an essential control over the 'material-substance' involved in it. It is impossible to make it plainer in a few words."

"What broke the seventh hair?" asked Taylor.

But Carnacki did not know. He thought it was probably nothing but being too severely tensioned. He also explained that they found out that the men who had run away had not been up to mischief; but had come over secretly merely to hear the whistling, which, indeed, had suddenly become the talk of the whole countryside.

"One other thing," said Arkright, "have you any idea what governs the use of the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual? I know, of course, that it was used by the Ab-human

Priests in the Incantation of Raaee; but what used it on your behalf, and what made it?"

"You had better read Harzam's Monograph, and my Addenda to it, on 'Astral and Astaral Co-ordination and Interference', said Carnacki. "It is an extraordinary subject, and I can only say here that the human vibration may not be insulated from the 'astarral' (as is always believed to be the case, in interferences by the Ab-human) without immediate action being taken by those Forces which govern the spinning of the outer circle. In other words, it is being proved, time after time, that there is some inscrutable Protective Force constantly intervening between the human soul (not the body, mind you) and the Outer Monstrosities. Am I clear?"

"Yes, I think so," I replied. "And you believe that the room had become the material expression of the ancient jester – that his soul, rotted with hatred, had bred into a monster – eh?" I asked.

"Yes," said Carnacki, nodding. "I think you've put my thought rather neatly. It is a queer coincidence that Miss Donnehue is supposed to be descended (so I have heard since) from the same King Ernore. It makes one think some rather curious thoughts, doesn't it? The marriage coming on, and the room waking to fresh life. If she had gone into that room, ever . . . eh? IT had waited a long time. Sins of the fathers. Yes, I've thought of that. They're to be married next week, and I am to be best man, which is a thing I hate. And he won his bets, rather! Just think *if* ever she had gone into that room. Pretty horrible, eh?"

He nodded his head grimly, and we four nodded back. Then he rose and took us collectively to the door, and presently thrust us forth in friendly fashion on to the Embankment, and into the fresh night air.

"Goodnight," we all called back, and went to our various homes.

If she had, eh? If she had? That is what I kept thinking.

A NOTE FOR THE MILKMAN

By Sidney Carroll

I SAT IN the parlour and waited until my wife was deeply and firmly in bed. I waited until I could hear the sound of her snoring, so rhythmic and so blissful. To myself I counted ten, as I always do when my heart is pounding. Then I got up from my casual chair and went into the kitchen.

Four little packets of white powder I took from my vest pocket while I hummed a happy song. There was no need for silence. Once my wife would bluster her way into slumberland nothing in the world could awaken her – except, perhaps, a dinner bell. I placed the little packets of powder side by side on the kitchen table. From another pocket I extracted the piece of paper from which I had copied my instructions.

For the hundredth time, with my head slightly to one side, my chin cupped in my free hand (it is a kittenish pose for a small man, I admit – but I can't help it) I read the words I had copied from the old book:

‘This Essence, impervious to Heat, Ray of Sun, Ravage of Life or Time, can be devis'd, if with a true Deliberation, if the steps hereunto affix'd, are follow'd with a Physik's care ...’

That part I knew by heart, as indeed I knew most of what followed. But I am an academic man. For the hundredth time I read every word on the paper, every step of the way:

‘... utterly clean Vials and Flaggons are the first Neccesity ...’

Then I, who had gone over these motions time and time again in my mind's eye, finally went to work with my fingers.

I took bottles and glasses and two spoons. I took three test tubes I had purchased the week before at the Five and Ten. I cleaned all of these under the hottest water from the tap. I rinsed them over and over again and wiped them ferociously with a fresh towel. I held them under the naked light bulb overhead, wiped them again, held them under the light bulb again, wiped them until they dazzled. I have a slightly myopic eye, but when I was through cleaning those bottles and glasses they dazzled.

I took my white powders next, and my instructions, and I mixed the powders one with the other, and then over again with each other. In a brand new saucepan I had hidden for weeks at the back of one of the top shelves in the kitchen cabinet I cooked liquids made from the powders. I let the liquids simmer and cool and I poured them one into the other. I have steady hands. Only my eyes blinked needlessly and a tear would shimmy in the corner of the left one from time to time. An occupational disease. I dispose of these tears easily enough: I flick my head sharply; the tear is torn from the eye. You might say I have learned to expectorate with my eye. You might say it if you thought about it long enough.

Anyway:

I hummed my little song and I had certain little thoughts while I worked.

I was thinking of the time I had poisoned the pigeons in the park.

Why had I never been caught? I asked myself, to tease myself. Of course I had the answer. Simple answer – so simple. I had never been caught because they could never guess where I would strike next. I had spread corn in an uptown park on a Monday morning. On Monday evening there were pictures in the papers of the scores of dead pigeons, like bodies on a beach-head. On Tuesday morning I would scatter peanuts in front of the library downtown, and that evening there would be more pictures of dead pigeons . . . downtown.

And what could the police do? How can the infantry know where the General is going to strike next? I had deployed, thrust, parried – tantalized them with my hitting and running. How could they capture such an enemy? When you leave

tracks going in one direction they can follow you. But when one footprint falls here today, another ten miles away tomorrow, and on the third day the track falls behind your back, how can you follow – how can anybody follow? That was why they'd never caught me the time I'd had such fun poisoning the pigeons. *That* was my theory. That kind of track . . .

And so ran my thoughts (a few of them) when I mixed my powders and bitumens in the small yellow kitchen under the one bright bulb, with the shades tightly drawn, with the sounds of my wife's snoring coming from the bedroom.

At last I was finished. All of it was contained in the one test tube. I held it up to the light. The liquid in the test tube shone crystal clear. I smiled. One tear shimmied in the eye for joy. I flicked it. I knew I had kept faith with the old book in the library: I had made no mistakes.

' . . . one, only one common Deviation from our Ingredient, our Liquid will turn a brackish Hue. The final Sauce must be clear as the fresh rain Water . . . '

My hand did not tremble though my poor heart was exulting. I had it. I stoppered the tube tightly with a cork, rested the vial full of my liquid clear as rain water in a glass, and went to work to clean up the kitchen. In five minutes the job was done, for – *ha!* – I am an old hand at the routine.

I wiped my hands. When they were bone dry I blew on them. A man who works in the stacks of a public library gets into the habit of blowing on his fingertips.

Now I read my secret paper once more:

' . . . no Thing on earth can blunt its Sting, no Thing can rend its Heart, nothing can still its corruptive Pulse; not Fire, not Water, not Air, not Earth. It is like Lucifer, unconquerable. Burn it, it will glow. Drown it, it will drink. Bury it, it will grow. When it touches, Doom. Skin will rot before its Stain dissolves . . . '

I presented myself with one of my rare little jokes. 'It reads like old Bunyan writing an ad for varnish,' I told myself. I

have my own sense of humour. Sly but fly, that's Henry Peters. And now I come to the vital part of the evening's entertainment.

Mrs Peters and I always used one bottle of milk and one of cream per day. Now, at night, the two clean and empty bottles, big and little brothers of vim, vigour and vitality, stood side by side on the sink. I regarded them. I cocked my head, as is my failing. I hesitated for just a second.

The milk bottle? The cream bottle? Both?

I thought about it, then I shrugged my shoulders. What difference did it make . . . really? I picked up the milk bottle. I sniffed from the open neck of its lingering clean lactic fragrance. Then I poured one drop, exactly one drop (like a teardrop) of my fresh-as-rain-water liquid into the milk bottle. I swirled it around a bit, watched the drop run in circles at the bottom of the milk bottle until it spread and flattened and exhausted itself. 'It's alive,' I assured myself. I put the milk bottle and the cream bottle in the hallway just outside our front door, in the usual place, where the milkman would pick it up in the morning.

Two days later it happened. Of course it happened. Down on the lower west side of town. A family of five – father, mother, three children. Found dead at the breakfast table. Poisoned.

I read about it in the morning paper. After I read about it I folded the paper, ever so neatly, and allowed myself my chuckle for the morning. Golly whiskers! – this was going to be so easy! As easy as poisoning pigeons.

That night when the snores from the bedroom had begun to fill me with a sense of safety and assurance once more, I went back to the kitchen. I took the day's empty milk bottle and poured one drop of my liquid into it. The old book in the library had *told* me that nothing could kill this incredible thing, and the old book had not lied. Nothing *could* kill it – not heat, or light, or water, or fire – or Pasteurization. It would conquer any antidote. I dropped a new drop into the milk bottle and I put the bottle in its familiar place outside the front door.

I had results in two days. It was in the papers again in that fine bold type. A man in the Burbank district this time. Situation identical. Found at the breakfast table. Poisoned. He was slumped over and his face was in a bowl of cereal and he was stone cold dead.

That night I felt – well, restless. Like a spendthrift with a bulging wallet. Why play with pennies? I was in need of some sort of extravagant indulgence, so I poured *two* drops of my liquid into the milk bottle. In some manner (how explain these little fulfilments of the heart?) the extra drop gave me the extra tingle of the flesh I yearned for. Like giving a decapitated turkey an extra little whack with the axe – it's not necessary, but it's *so* satisfying! Educated people will know what I am talking about.

The next day it was an elderly couple in the North suburbs who got it. They were found dead over the coffee cups. The papers didn't say so, and certainly the police wouldn't say so, but *I* knew the one vital fact: Viz: that elderly couple took milk with their coffee.

Oh dear, oh dear! Why will people mix coffee with milk?

I had only one twinge of remorse. I knew in my heart of hearts I wasn't going to keep this up for ever. I could, you know, if I felt like it. Fun's fun and all that, but business is business and I had to keep the main piece of business uppermost in mind. It was getting time to close in. So I did it once more, just once more, for fun.

The clear drop falls into the milk bottle, the milk bottle is placed outside the door, the milkman picks it up in the morning, he takes it to the plant (or the dairy, or whatever they call it) and he drops it with the million other milk bottles into the chute, or the vat, or whatever it is, and all the bottles are boiled and cleansed with all the latest scientific methods, and all the bottles come out clear and fresh as fresh air. All but one. That one has a forgotten fluid in it that cannot be destroyed by fire or flame or heart or light. And the day after that two ladies who live in the heart of town drop dead at the breakfast table.

Simple, wasn't it? Sly, wasn't it?

Perhaps others before me had toyed with the idea of a willy-nilly sort of slaughter, hitting hither and yon to confuse the

police, then winding up with the one truly intended victim, so that the police would assume that the real victim was just another poor innocent selected on a willy-nilly basis. Maybe others before me had had that idea. Maybe. But one thing was certain: none before me had ever discovered the perfect weapon for such a campaign.

The milk bottle. The innocent milk bottle, which enters the homes of the rich and poor alike, uptown, downtown, midtown and in the suburbs. Can *you*, dear heart, think of a lethal weapon with such a democratic soul?

So far, the trail of my indiscriminate slaying was exactly to my liking. In succession the deaths had occurred once uptown, once downtown, once in Burbank and once in the North suburbs. A perfect scattering of hits. Far and roundabout. On the maps in the police stations they were undoubtedly putting pins into a map of the city, endeavouring to make some kind of a pattern out of the design of these killings.

Let them go on looking for patterns! Let them go on breaking their heads questioning the neighbours for miles around about motives, and purported enemies of the deceased, and who in the name of God would be doing this thing. Let them look. Henry Peters had a design far above and beyond the little patterns that pins can make on a map. My design was in my head.

I drew the final stroke on the 18th of December, two weeks after I had commenced the campaign and the city was in a state of panic.

But first, on the night of the 17th, I sat down to dinner with Mrs Peters.

I did the serving. Mrs Peters' contribution to the evening ritual always ended with the cooking, if cooking it can be called. From then on the effort was all mine. I served the soup and the fish and the hot custard. When she finished each course she shoved the empty dish towards me, out from under the newspaper she was reading. When she was finished with the paper she let it drop to the floor.

"Well," she asked, spooning the custard into her mouth with quick strokes.

"Well what, Rita?"

"What happened today?"

"Today? Oh, the usual. Nothing exciting. Old Mrs Canfield in the music stacks thinks she's got a tumour in her nose."

"Long as she's got her health."

Oh dear, I thought. In my youth I always thought she had such a pretty wit. I was ashamed for my youth.

"What else?" she asked.

"Nothing."

Mrs Peters leaned back in her chair and looked at me with amusement. "Mrs Canfield, Mrs Canfield . . . you know, I got her up to here." She drew one finger across her throat. Then – the danger signal: she smiled. "Just how old is this Mrs Canfield?"

The tone of her voice was unmistakable; the leer in it; the filthy imputations. I dared not reply at once, for the old ailment suddenly creeping in – the choking sensation in my throat. But I did get it out, finally:

"Mrs Canfield is . . . I should judge . . . about seventy years old. She is . . . a grandmother . . . several times over . . ." My small voice (I admit, it is a small voice) was almost boyish now because of the choking I could not prevent.

But how could she know the choking was my hatred for her? She was never aware of my more obvious emotions; she was sensitive only to the substrata of my thoughts. The *sewers* in me, she used to call them, mistaking my secrets for sewage. Uncanny she was about my hidden thoughts, always, but blind to the facts in my face staring into her face. She never understood how much I hated her.

She went on: "So what? They're never too old for you, are they, Bunny? I've seen the looks you give some grandmothers I know."

"Please . . . Rita . . ."

"Ha!" She pushed herself back from the table. I always found it hard to camouflage my disgust at this gross, unfeminine climax to her table manners – this shoving back from the table, this squeaking revolt of chair against floor. Her manners had not always been so utterly masculine. I thought: and in the springtime of her youth she was so graceful!

What had changed her so? What turned her into a man-woman?

"Coffee," she said. She put two fingers to her lips as her cheeks puffed out.

"Right away."

I got up from the dining alcove and went back to the kitchen.

I have recorded the dinner conversation for your sake, to give you some notion of what strength of will it took not to kill her that night. She deserved it then and there – you agree? Well, you are more impetuous than I. I am an academic man and I did not kill her that night. Of course I was tempted. Two blue cups in two blue saucers were waiting for me. I filled them with the steaming coffee. In the hidden topmost shelf of the kitchen cabinet was the test tube . . . all I had to do was reach upward. But I shook myself all over and gritted my teeth. Prudence . . . *prudence!* I dared not upset my perfect plan with any impetuous improvisation that night. I brought her uncontaminated coffee, fresh and steaming and pure. She drank it and liked it and was at peace with the evening paper again. It was not until the following morning that I did it, the way I planned it.

I took my early breakfast alone, as usual. Then, as usual, I prepared the makings of breakfast for Rita. The batter for the waffles, the bread in the toaster, the spoonful of jam in the little pot. I filled the percolator and placed it on the gas range. When she would wake up at her usual hour and come shuffling into the kitchen, all she would have to do was to push pedals and levers. That was the sum total of her morning chores.

Then carefully, carefully, I removed the cap from the milk bottle, dropped three clear drops from the test tube into the milk, and carefully replaced the bottle cap. Rita, you see, always had a glass of milk *and* a cup of coffee for breakfast. Good for the digestion, she always said. I suppose it was; ailments aplenty she always had but alimentary congestion was never one of them. After the business with the milk bottle I left the apartment and went to work.

That was at 9:00 in the morning.

At 12:07 I came back to the apartment, as usual, for lunch. I came, as always, bearing gifts for myself – bundles of groceries for lunch under my arms. Any attentive neighbour could see that I was living up to my daily routine in every way. I walked the three flights up the hall stairway, put the key into the lock, opened the door, entered the apartment, and saw her. I closed the door carefully behind me before I took a good look. She lay in a heap beside the table. She must have grabbed the tablecloth as she fell. It covered her like a shroud up to the neck. Pieces of crockery were all over the floor. Good. All very good.

I set my bundles on the floor, as if I had dropped them at the awful sight that greeted me as I had come home for lunch. I walked into the kitchen, took the test tube from the topmost shelf and emptied the liquid down the sink. (I remember thinking that it would kill a lot of little fishes before it would dissolve in the unconquerable ocean.) I dropped all the paraphernalia, powders and test tubes, down the incinerator door. Then I walked seven steps to the telephone, dialled the operator, and when the usual soulless female voice whinnied “Yes, pleeyuz?” into my ear, I said, as politely as possible, “I want a policeman.”

So they came, and they performed their duties. They examined everything, asked many questions, kept the neighbours at bay, took pictures, measured things, and in a final burst of efficiency carried the body of the deceased away. I sat in a corner of the sofa in the parlour with a handkerchief to my nose.

To the questions, to the endlessly pointless questions, I merely nodded. Obviously, I was in a torpor of grief and bewilderment. I was in no condition to be intelligently interrogated. Two of the police detectives looked at one another, shook their heads in sympathetic vibration: *Better let the old guy alone . . .* they seemed to nod to one another. *This is too much of a shock to him . . .* the nod seemed to say. I caught it all over the rim of the handkerchief.

There was one detective, name of Delaney, who came over and sat next to me on the sofa. He put one hand on my knee.

"Look, Mr Peters," he said, "this is no time to go into details. That I know. We'll get outa here and leave you alone. But first I want to explain one thing. You been reading the papers. You know we got a maniac loose somewheres - poisoning people all over the city. We don't know why - we don't know *what* the hell he's up to. All we know is he poisons people and he don't care *where* he does it. He done it here today. He's liable to do it on the west side tomorrow, or on the east side, or over on the island maybe - we don't know. We got no defence against this kind of thing - not yet, we haven't."

I did not look at him as I removed the handkerchief from my mouth. "But how," I whispered. "How did he get in? - and . . . poor Rita. . ."

"Look now," said Mr Delaney. "Listen to me carefully. Maybe I'll make you understand a thing or two. The guy's crazy - whoever he is. He's got the finger on some of the citizens, and we don't know why. We got no connecting link. He picked your wife today. We don't know who he'll pick tomorrow. It's that kind of a deal, shows you why we got no defence against the guy. Against somebody with a system, we can fight. Against a guy who just *kills*, anywhere, anytime, just to kill - where do we stand? You heard of Jack the Ripper? Same thing. Never know where he's gonna hit next - 'cause - well, you see - this guy, whoever he is - he thought up the damndest murder weapon you ever heard of in your whole life. I'm sorry I can't tell you what it is, Mr Peters. But I'll tell you this—!"

He stood up then and looked down at me with fire in his eye, with a set jaw in which there was all the omnipotence, all the majesty of the law. "*We* know what it is! And that's a good head start. We'll catch him, Mr Peters. You understand me?"

"I - I think so."

"Just - please - keep what I'm telling you under your hat. Today, your wife. Tomorrow, somebody else's wife. Or kids. It's tough it had to be your wife this time, Mr Peters. Outa three million available people, he had to pick your wife. Well, that's life. We'll be goin' now."

He patted me on the shoulder.

In my infinite grief then, they left me to the consolation of solitude.

So there it is, dear friends and gentle hearts. Seems there's a poisoner somewhere loose in the city and he strikes willy-nilly. Like lightning. Like a madman. He must be mad. Why else would he kill so many different people in so many different places? People who have nothing, but nothing at all, to do with one another. It makes no sense. The police say they don't even know how he gets in. Well then, citizens, lock your doors. Look under the beds at night. Don't forget to bar your windows – for who guarantees that madmen and lightning always use the front door?

My neighbours, in their passion for consolation, tell me that it's all the fault of the stupid police. All that bluster out of them all the time, so high and mighty with their parking tickets and their loud mouths when a man is minding his own business. But can you ever find one when you need one? Are they ever any good when it comes to an emergency, a real emergency?

I tell the neighbours that the police are not entirely to blame. Maybe they *do* know something. They can't tell *everything* they know.

To myself I say that they don't dare tell the public about the milk. They don't dare. Just picture to yourself what would happen. Nothing less than a calamity; everybody in town would stop drinking milk! All those babies would suffer! And the poor milk companies would surely go out of business. And all those milkmen would be out of work. And all those farmers who milk the cows . . . and the poor cows too, what would happen to them? No siree, you can't start *that* kind of a panic. No telling where that would lead to. It's much better if the police let a few people die every day until they can find the fiend who's responsible. Then they can tell the public everything. But not until then.

Mr Delaney told me to keep what he told me under my hat. I will, of course. I know how to keep a secret. I really do. I've kept the secret of my little book, haven't I? – I mean the old one in the library that contains the formula.

Formula, did I say ? Let me tell *you* a secret. My little book contains *formulae*. Plural. There is one, for example, on page 137, the fifteenth chapter if you please. It tells how to make gold out of garbage. A simple process involving a few hours' work. Then on page 192 there is a perfume very easy to prepare. If a man anoints himself with a drop of it every morning he becomes irresistible to every female within an area of thirty square miles.

I propose to make the gold first, then the perfume.

I propose to have a lot of fun.

THE FACTS IN THE CASE OF M. VALDEMAR

By Edgar Allan Poe

OF COURSE I shall not pretend to consider it any matter for wonder that the extraordinary case of M. Valdemar has excited discussion. It would have been a miracle had it not – especially under the circumstances. Through the desire of all parties concerned to keep the affair from the public, at least for the present, or until we had further opportunities for investigation – through our endeavours to effect this – a garbled or exaggerated account made its way into society and became the source of many unpleasant misrepresentations; and, very naturally, of a great deal of disbelief.

It is now rendered necessary that I give the *facts* – as far as I can comprehend them myself. They are, succinctly, these:

My attention for the last three years had been repeatedly drawn to the subject of Mesmerism; and about nine months ago it occurred to me, quite suddenly, that in the series of experiments made hitherto there had been a very remarkable and most unaccountable omission: no person had as yet been mesmerized *in articulo mortis*. It remained to be seen, first, whether, in such condition, there existed in the patient any susceptibility to the magnetic influence: secondly, whether, if any existed, it was impaired or increased by the condition; thirdly, to what extent, or for how long a period, the encroachments of Death might be arrested by the process. There were other points to be ascertained but these most excited my curiosity – the last in especial, from the immensely important character of its consequences.

In looking around me for some subject by whose means I might test these particulars, I was brought to think of my friend, M. Ernest Valdemar, the well-known compiler of the ‘*Bibliotheca Forensica*’, and author (under the *nom de plume* of ‘Issachar Marx’) of the Polish versions of *Wallenstein* and *Gargantua*. M. Valdemar, who has resided principally at

Harlem, N.Y., since the year 1839, is (or was) particularly noticeable for the extreme sparseness of his person — his lower limbs much resembling those of John Randolph; and also for the whiteness of his whiskers, in violent contrast to the blackness of his hair — the latter, in consequence, being very generally mistaken for a wig. His temperament was markedly nervous, and rendered him a good subject for mesmeric experiment. On two or three occasions I had put him to sleep with little difficulty, but was disappointed in other results which his peculiar constitution had naturally led me to anticipate. His will was at no period positively or thoroughly under my control, and in regard to *clairvoyance*, I could accomplish with him nothing to be relied upon. I always attributed my failure at these points to the disordered state of his health. For some months previous to my becoming acquainted with him his physicians had declared him in a confirmed phthisis. It was his custom, indeed, to speak calmly of his approaching dissolution as of a matter neither to be avoided nor regretted.

When the ideas to which I have alluded first occurred to me, it was of course very natural that I should think of M. Valdemar. I knew the steady philosophy of the man too well to apprehend any scruples from *him*; and he had no relatives in America who would be likely to interfere. I spoke to him frankly upon the subject, and to my surprise his interest seemed vividly excited. I say to my surprise; for, although he had always yielded his person freely to my experiments, he had never before given me any tokens of sympathy with what I did. His disease was of that character which would admit of exact calculation in respect to the epoch of its termination in death; and it was finally arranged between us that he would send for me about twenty-four hours before the period announced by his physicians as that of his decease.

It is now rather more than seven months since I received, from M. Valdemar himself, the subjoined note:

‘My dear P—,

You may as well come *now*. D— and F— are agreed that I cannot hold out beyond tomorrow midnight; and I think they have hit the time very nearly.

Valdemar.’

I received this note within half an hour after it was written, and in fifteen minutes more I was in the dying man's chamber. I had not seen him for ten days, and was appalled by the fearful alteration which the brief interval had wrought in him. His face wore a leaden hue; the eyes were utterly lustreless; and the emaciation was so extreme that the skin had been broken through by the cheek-bones. His expectoration was excessive. The pulse was barely perceptible. He retained, nevertheless, in a very remarkable manner, both his mental power and a certain degree of physical strength. He spoke with distinctness – took some palliative medicines without aid – and, when I entered the room, was occupied in pencilling memoranda in a pocket-book. He was propped up in the bed by pillows. Doctors D—and F—were in attendance.

After pressing Valdemar's hand, I took these gentlemen aside, and obtained from them a minute account of the patient's condition. The left lung had been for eighteen months in a semiosseous or cartilaginous state, and was, of course, entirely useless for all purposes of vitality. The right, in its upper portion, was also partially if not thoroughly ossified, while the lower region was merely a mass of purulent tubercles running one into another. Several extensive perforations existed, and at one point permanent adhesion to the ribs had taken place. These appearances in the right lobe were of comparatively recent date. The ossification had proceeded with very unusual rapidity; no sign of it had been discovered a month before, and the adhesion had only been observed during the three previous days. Independently of the phthisis, the patient was suspected of aneurism of the aorta; but on this point the osseous symptoms rendered an exact diagnosis impossible. It was the opinion of both physicians that M. Valdemar would die about midnight on the morrow (Sunday). It was then seven o'clock on Saturday evening.

On quitting the invalid's bedside to hold conversation with myself, Doctors D—and F— had bidden him a final farewell. It had not been their intention to return; but, at my request, they agreed to look in upon the patient about ten the next night.

When they had gone, I spoke freely with M. Valdemar on the

subject of his approaching dissolution, as well as, more particularly, of the experiment proposed. He still professed himself quite willing and even anxious to have it made, and urged me to commence it at once. A male and a female nurse were in attendance; but I did not feel myself altogether at liberty to engage in a task of this character with no more reliable witnesses than these people, in case of sudden accident, might prove. I therefore postponed operations until about eight the next night, when the arrival of a medical student, with whom I had some acquaintance (Mr Theodore L—l), relieved me from further embarrassment. It had been my design, originally, to wait for the physicians; but I was induced to proceed, first, by the urgent entreaties of M. Valdemar, and secondly, by my conviction that I had not a moment to lose, as he was evidently sinking fast.

Mr L—l was so kind as to accede to my desire that he would take notes of all that occurred; and it is from his memoranda that what I have to relate is, for the most part, either condensed or copied *verbatim*.

It wanted about five minutes of eight when, taking the patient's hand, I begged him to state, as distinctly as he could, to Mr L—l, whether he (M. Valdemar) was entirely willing that I should make the experiment of mesmerizing him in his then condition.

He replied feebly, yet quite audibly, "Yes, I wish to be mesmerized" — adding immediately afterwards, "I fear you have deferred it too long."

While he spoke thus, I commenced the passes which I had already found most effectual in subduing him. He was evidently influenced with the first lateral stroke of my hand across his forehead; but although I exerted all my powers, no further perceptible effect was induced until some minutes after ten o'clock, when Doctors D— and F— called, according to appointment. I explained to them in a few words what I designed, and as they opposed no objection, saying that the patient was already in the death agony, I proceeded without hesitation — exchanging, however, the lateral passes for downward ones, and directing my gaze entirely into the right eye of the sufferer.

By this time his pulse was imperceptible and his breathing was stertorous, and at intervals of half a minute.

This condition was nearly unaltered for a quarter of an hour. At the expiration of this period, however, a natural although a very deep sigh escaped the bosom of the dying man, and the stertorous breathing ceased – that is to say its stertorousness was no longer apparent; the intervals were undiminished. The patient's extremities were of an icy coldness.

At five minutes before eleven I perceived unequivocal signs of the mesmeric influence. The glassy roll of the eye was changed for that expression of uneasy *inward* examination which is never seen except in cases of sleep-walking, and which it is quite impossible to mistake. With a few rapid lateral passes I made the lids quiver, as in incipient sleep, and with a few more I closed them altogether. I was not satisfied, however, with this, but continued the manipulations vigorously, and with the fullest exertion of the will, until I had completely stiffened the limbs of the slumberer, after placing them in a seemingly easy position. The legs were at full length; the arms were nearly so, and reposed on the bed at a moderate distance from the loins. The head was very slightly elevated.

When I had accomplished this it was fully midnight, and I requested the gentlemen present to examine M. Valdemar's condition. After a few experiments, they admitted him to be in an unusually perfect state of mesmeric trance. The curiosity of both the physicians was greatly excited. Dr D— resolved at once to remain with the patient all night, while Dr F— took leave with a promise to return at daybreak. Mr L—I and the nurses remained.

We left M. Valdemar entirely undisturbed until about three o'clock in the morning, when I approached him and found him in precisely the same condition as when Dr F— went away – that is to say, he lay in the same position; the pulse was imperceptible; the breathing was gentle (scarcely noticeable, unless through the application of a mirror to the lips); the eyes were closed naturally; and the limbs were as rigid and as cold as marble. Still, the general appearance was certainly not that of death.

As I approached M. Valdemar I made a kind of half effort to

influence his right arm into pursuit of my own, as I passed the latter gently to and fro above his person. In such experiments with this patient, I had never perfectly succeeded before, and assuredly I had little thought of succeeding now; but, to my astonishment, his arm very readily, although feebly, followed every direction I assigned it with mine. I determined to hazard a few words of conversation.

"M. Valdemar," I said, "are you asleep?" He made no answer, but I perceived a tremor about the lips, and was thus induced to repeat the question, again and again. At this third repetition, his whole frame was agitated by a very slight shivering: the eyelids unclosed themselves so far as to display a white line of a ball; the lips moved sluggishly, and from between them, in a barely audible whisper, issued the words:

"Yes; asleep now. Do not wake me! – let me die so!"

I here felt the limbs, and found them as rigid as ever. The right arm, as before, obeyed the direction of my hand. I questioned the sleep-walker again:

"Do you still feel pain in the breast, M. Valdemar?"

The answer now was immediate, but even less audible than before:

"No pain – I am dying."

I did not think it advisable to disturb him farther just then, and nothing more was said or done until the arrival of Dr F—, who came a little before sunrise, and expressed unbounded astonishment at finding the patient still alive. After feeling the pulse and applying a mirror to the lips he requested me to speak to the sleep-walker again. I did so, saying:

"M. Valdemar, do you still sleep?"

As before, some minutes elapsed ere a reply was made; and during the interval the dying man seemed to be collecting his energies to speak. At my fourth repetition of the question, he said very faintly, almost inaudibly:

"Yes, still asleep – dying."

It was now the opinion, or rather the wish, of the physicians, that M. Valdemar should be suffered to remain undisturbed in his present apparently tranquil condition until death should supervene; and this, it was generally agreed, must now take

place within a few minutes. I concluded, however, to speak to him once more, and merely repeated my previous question.

While I spoke, there came a marked change over the countenance of the sleep-walker. The eyes rolled themselves slowly open, the pupils disappearing upwardly; the skin generally assumed a cadaverous hue, resembling not so much parchment as white paper; and the circular hectic spots, which hitherto had been strongly defined in the centre of each cheek, *went out* at once. I use this expression, because the suddenness of their departure put me in mind of nothing so much as the extinguishment of a candle by a puff of the breath. The upper lip, at the same time, writhed itself away from the teeth, which it had previously covered completely; while the lower jaw fell with an audible jerk, leaving the mouth widely extended, and disclosing in full view the swollen and blackened tongue. I presume that no member of the party then present had been unaccustomed to deathbed horrors; but so hideous beyond conception was the appearance of M. Valdemar at this moment, that there was a general shrinking back from the region of the bed.

I now feel that I have reached a point of this narrative at which every reader will be startled into positive disbelief. It is my business, however, simply to proceed.

There was no longer the faintest sign of vitality in M. Valdemar; and, concluding him to be dead, we were consigning him to the charge of the nurses, when a strong vibratory motion was observable in the tongue. This continued for perhaps a minute. At the expiration of this period, there issued from the distended and motionless jaws a voice – such as it would be madness in me to attempt describing. There are, indeed, two or three epithets which might be considered as applicable to it in part; I might say, for example, that the sound was harsh, and broken and hollow; but the hideous whole is indescribable, for the simple reason that no similar sounds have ever jarred upon the ear of humanity. There were two particulars, nevertheless, which I thought then, and still think, might fairly be stated as characteristic of the intonation – as well adapted to convey some idea of its unearthly peculiarity. In the first place, the voice seemed to reach our ears – at least mine – from a vast distance, or from some deep cavern within the earth. In the

second place, it impressed me (I fear, indeed, that it will be impossible to make myself comprehended) as gelatinous or glutinous matters impress the sense of touch.

I have spoken of 'sound' and of 'voice'. I mean to say that the sound was one of distinct – of even wonderfully thrillingly distinct syllabification. M. Valdemar *spoke* – obviously in reply to the question I had propounded to him a few minutes before. I had asked him it will be remembered, if he still slept. He now said:

“Yes; no; I *have been* sleeping – and now – now – *I am dead.*”

No person present even affected to deny, or attempted to repress, the unutterable, shuddering horror which these few words, thus uttered, were so well calculated to convey. Mr L—1 (the student) swooned. The nurses immediately left the chamber, and could not be induced to return. My own impressions I would not pretend to render intelligible to the reader. For nearly an hour we busied ourselves, silently – without the utterance of a word – in endeavours to revive Mr L—1. When he came to himself we addressed ourselves again to an investigation of M. Valdemar's condition.

It remained in all respects as I have last described it, with the exception that the mirror no longer afforded evidence of respiration. An attempt to draw blood from the arm failed. I should mention, too, that this limb was no further subject to my will. I endeavoured in vain to make it follow the direction of my hand. The only real indication, indeed, of the mesmeric influence was now found in the vibratory movement of the tongue, whenever I addressed M. Valdemar a question. He seemed to be making an effort to reply, but had no longer sufficient volition. To queries put to him by any other person than myself he seemed utterly insensible – although I endeavoured to place each member of the company in mesmeric *rapport* with him. I believe that I have now related all that is necessary to an understanding of the sleep-walker's state at this epoch. Other nurses were procured; and at ten o'clock I left the house in company with the two physicians and Mr L—1.

In the afternoon we all called again to see the patient. His

condition remained precisely the same. We had now some discussion as to the propriety and feasibility of awakening him; but we had little difficulty in agreeing that no good purpose would be served by so doing. It was evident, that, so far, death (or what is usually termed death) had been arrested by the mesmeric process. It seemed clear to us all that to awaken M. Valdemar would be merely to insure his instant, or at least his speedy dissolution.

From this period until the close of last week – *an interval of nearly seven months* – we continued to make daily calls at M. Valdemar's house, accompanied now and then by medical and other friends. All this time the sleep-walker remained *exactly* as I have last described him. The nurses' attentions were continual.

It was on Friday last that we finally resolved to make the experiment of awakening, or attempting to awaken him; and it is the (perhaps) unfortunate result of this latter experiment which has given rise to so much discussion in private circles – to so much of what I cannot help thinking unwarranted popular feeling.

For the purpose of relieving M. Valdemar from the mesmeric trance, I made use of the customary passes. These, for a time, were unsuccessful. The first indication of revival was afforded by a partial descent of the iris. It was observed, as especially remarkable, that this lowering of the pupil was accompanied by the profuse out-flowing of a yellowish ichor (from beneath the lids) of a pungent and highly offensive odour.

It was now suggested that I should attempt to influence the patient's arm, as heretofore. I made the attempt and failed. Dr F— then intimated a desire to have me put a question. I did so, as follows:

“M. Valdemar, can you explain to us what are your feelings or wishes now?”

There was an instant return of the hectic circles on the cheeks: the tongue quivered, or rather rolled violently in the mouth (although the jaws and lips remained rigid as before); and at length the same hideous voice which I have already described, broke forth:

“For God’s sake! – quick! – quick! – put me to sleep – or, quick! – waken me! quick! – *I say to you that I am dead!*”

I was thoroughly unnerved, and for an instant remained undecided what to do. At first I made an endeavour to recompose the patient; but, failing in this through total abeyance of the will, I retraced my steps and as earnestly struggled to awaken him. In this attempt I soon saw that I should be successful – or at least I soon fancied that my success would be complete; and I am sure that all in the room were prepared to see the patient awaken.

For what really occurred, however, it is quite impossible that any human being could have been prepared.

As I rapidly made the mesmeric passes, amid ejaculations of ‘dead! dead!’ absolutely *bursting* from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer, his whole frame at once – within the space of a single minute, or even less shrunk – crumbled – absolutely *rotted* away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome – of detestable putrescence.

THE MYSTERY OF THE LOCKED ROOM

By Elliott O'Donnell

ONLY ONE thing puzzled Amelia Jenkyns about Number 109, Bolsover Square. It was this: why was the room at the end of the passage on the first floor always kept locked? Being superinquisitive, which was only one of her many failings, Amelia meant to find out.

She came from a waif and stray home in Peckham, where girls are to be got cheap. It was because of her cheapness that Mrs Bishop took her. Mrs Bishop was a widow, a blonde, whose yellow hair showed unmistakable signs of peroxide, and somewhere in the region of forty. She had big, china-blue eyes with very artificial lashes, Greta Garbo eyebrows, and white hands, with tapering fingers and almond-shaped nails, of which she was, perhaps, justifiably proud. Amelia thought her beautiful, but was afraid of her. Once when Mrs Bishop had caught her helping herself to a spoonful of strawberry jam, she had threatened her with a beating, and her face had suddenly become so hard and severe that Amelia felt sure she meant what she said, and was terrified. This, however, did not prevent Amelia from going into Mrs Bishop's bedroom, when she was out, and admiring her very extensive wardrobe. One of Mrs Bishop's costumes, in particular, took Amelia's fancy. It was a tailor-made red, and in front the skirt was fastened all the way down with large, shiny bone buttons. Amelia thought it ultra-smart and went into raptures over it. She tried on most of the hats, looking approvingly at herself in the mirror as she did so, but she was always careful to put them back exactly where she had found them, for fear Mrs Bishop should find her out. Of course, she never missed a chance of talking to the tradesmen who came to the house. She asked them many questions about Mrs Bishop; but, much to her chagrin, she could derive little information from them. They told her that Mrs Bishop was

reputed to be very well off, and that she was very close; but she, Amelia, could have told them that. She had not been a day in the house before she had discovered it. Indeed, on such short commons was she kept, and so poor were her wages, that had she dared do so, she would have given Mrs Bishop notice to leave; but for the life of her she dare not. She feared too much she might see again that expression of awful ferocity that had so frightened her before. Also, the red dress and the locked-up room fascinated her. She felt she could not go away, she must stay on to be near them.

"Do you know what Mrs Bishop's husband was?" she enquired of the milkman, who seemed to have taken a fancy to her. Anyway, he used to bring her flowers.

"No," the milkman replied. "An independent gentleman, I believe. He died abroad, so it was said. Somewhere in the South of France, where the rich folk spent the winter. He had white hair and looked old enough to be her father."

"Was she fond of him, I wonder," Amelia said. "I can't imagine her being very fond of anyone."

The milkman laughed. "It isn't fashionable for women-folk to be fond of their husbands nowadays," he rejoined. "Aren't you happy here?"

Amelia shrugged her thin shoulders. "Not very," she said, "but I suppose, if I left, I might do worse."

"Then I advise you to remain where you are," the milkman responded. "Anyhow, till you can hear of a better place."

Amelia thanked him for his advice, and there it ended, at least for that day. It was soon after this conversation that she had a strange dream about the locked-up room. She thought she saw Mrs Bishop go to a board on the right-hand side of the drawingroom fireplace, and take a key from the cavity under it. Then, key in hand, Mrs Bishop went to the mysterious room at the end of the passage, unlocked it and entered it. Amelia dreamed she followed her as far as the door and tried to peep inside, but Mrs Bishop was too quick for her. The door slammed to in her face, and she saw nothing but a bedstead, a black oak four-poster, standing in the middle of the room. She stood outside and listened, and presently heard the clink of coins.

"It is as I have suspected all along," she said to herself; "there's money in there, heaps of it. Mrs Bishop's a miser." She thought she put her eye to the keyhole, and that something hot and burning ran into it. The pain was so acute she awoke. The dream was so vivid it made a great impression on her, and she became more curious than ever to see inside the room. "If I can only get hold of some of that money," she said to herself, "I'll run off. London is a big city. There must be plenty of good hiding-places in it, where the police would never find me. Besides, if I am caught, prison is not such a bad place, far better than the workhouse, and probably as good as this. It's worth trying anyhow."

She waited impatiently for an opportunity to see if the dream were true, but always, just as she had screwed up the courage to go into the drawingroom and try the boards by the fireplace, something happened to prevent her. Once she fancied she heard footsteps following her stealthily across the hall to the drawingroom. She turned round in terror, fully expecting to encounter the gaze of the awe-inspiring china-blue eyes, but, to her relief and astonishment, no one was there. On another occasion, when she stole downstairs in the dead of night, she fancied she could hear footsteps creeping down the stairs after her. She made up her mind, if it was Mrs Bishop, she would pretend she was walking in her sleep. The only time she had ever been to the pictures she had seen a girl walking in her sleep, and had been greatly impressed. "I'll play-act," she kept saying to herself, and when she arrived at the foot of the stairs, she turned slowly round and looked, but there was no one. An uncanny feeling now came over her, and it grew so strong that she ran to her room in a panic, and never ventured to leave it again in the dead of night. Then, one day, the long-looked-for opportunity occurred.

"I'm going out for the day, Amelia," Mrs Bishop said to her, "and shan't be back till about dinner-time. If anyone rings me up, be sure to take down their message." She then went off in her newest coat and skirt. Amelia watched her turn the corner of the street, and then ran to her bedroom, to have a look at her clothes and hats. There was one hat, in particular, that took Amelia's fancy. It was a black Parisian straw. Amelia had often

longed to try it on. She did so now in front of the mirror. She was not a bad-looking girl, and the hat, which she placed jauntily on the side of her head, in accordance with the prevailing fashion, which is essentially one for the young, really suited her better than it did her mistress. Pleased with the effect, Amelia now put on a smart blue dress with red collar and cuffs. Being thin, it hung loosely on her, but she liked herself in it all the same. There were lipsticks and nail polish on the dressing-table, and Amelia could not resist using a little of each. Then, when she had put on Madam's high-heeled, French, patent leather shoes, she felt she was indeed a lady, every whit as fine and far more attractive than Madam herself. As she stood looking at herself in the glass, the telephone bell rang, and, panicked, she scrambled out of the dress, and flung off the hat anyhow. The call answered, she grew calm again and replaced everything exactly as she had found it. She then determined to put her dream to the test. With a fastbeating heart and many a glance around her to see she was quite alone, for somehow in that house, she often got the impression she was being watched and followed, she made for the drawingroom.

Though she had seen Mrs Bishop go out, to make quite sure she had not returned unknown to her, she rapped at the drawingroom door. There was no reply. She rapped again, and on there being still no reply, she opened the door and entered. The sun pouring through the windows made the room so bright and cheery that Amelia quite forgot her fears and went boldly to the fireplace. She tried several boards, and then to her joyful surprise one appeared to be loose. She raised it up with one of the kitchen knives, and in the cavity under it was a key. Her dream then was true. "Oh, if only the money is there," she said to herself, "it's goodbye to this slavery. I shall be free. Free and rich."

Shaking with excitement, she ran off at once to the mystery room, and with feverish haste inserted the key in the lock. The door opened at last, and the interior of the room was exposed to Amelia's view. In the middle of it she saw, as in her dream, an antique four-poster bed of black oak, and in one corner of the room an iron safe. Apart from these two articles, the room contained only one or two chairs and a mirror. The mirror

fascinated Amelia; mirrors always did, and she was looking at herself in it, thinking that if only she had the money to dress nicely, she might go on the films and rival Greta Garbo or Constance Bennett, when she gave an involuntary start. The bed behind her was very clearly reflected in the mirror, and in it she saw an old man with white hair and a white moustache. He was lying on his back, apparently asleep. Suddenly, from out of the cupboard in the wall, by the fireplace, emerged a woman. It was Mrs Bishop, and yet not Mrs Bishop, for, like the man in the bed, there was something shadowy and indistinct about her. She was wearing a blue silk dressing-gown, with large pearl buttons, and what looked like woollen shoes. On one of her wrists was a plain gold bangle, and on her fingers several sparkling rings. Amelia noticed these in particular, for she loved anything in the nature of jewellery. Tiptoeing softly to the bed, the woman took up one of the pillows and, with the same dreadful look that had so frightened Amelia once before, she pressed the pillow down, with the whole weight of her body, on the sleeping man's face. With a cry of horror Amelia turned round. The bed was empty, so was the room. She was absolutely alone.

She was so shocked that it was some minutes before she ventured to move. She instinctively felt that what she had witnessed in the glass was a ghostly re-enactment of what had actually occurred. The old man with the white hair and moustache was Mr Bishop. She knew now why it was she disliked and feared Mrs Bishop so much. The woman was a murderess. There was murder in those large, glittering eyes of china blue. She had murdered her husband. "I'll get the money and be off," Amelia at last said to herself. She tried the safe, and after much fingering she accidentally pressed a spring and the door flew open. The inside was full of golden coins - Amelia had never seen sovereigns before - rings, watches, bangles, bracelets and necklaces. Amelia's eyes almost fell out of her head with awe and admiration. "My word," she said to herself, "here are treasures. These never came from Woolworths. They are real gold and real precious stones. I know. Mrs Bishop stole them. She's a thief as well as a murderess. That accounts for her always keeping this room locked. She's

afraid of anyone finding her out. I'll try some of them on. My, how smart I shall look!"

In her excitement she forgot her fear. She slipped first one bangle on her grimy little wrist, then another, then a bracelet, and after that another. Then covered with jewellery she looked at herself in the mirror, and went into ecstasies of delight. In the midst of her raptures, however, the door of the room opened, and Mrs Bishop in the flesh and blood, the real Mrs Bishop this time, wearing the smart tailor-made red dress with the shiny big bone buttons, entered. She had a long piece of wire in her hand, and in her face Amelia saw that same expression she had but just seen reflected in the mirror.

"So," Mrs Bishop exclaimed, in her usual cold, calm voice, "I've caught you at last. Prying into my secrets. Wearing my jewellery, too, as you have worn my clothes and hats. You wretched little drab. Come here."

The glittering blue eyes had an extraordinary effect on Amelia. They mesmerized her in the same manner the eyes of a snake often mesmerize their prey. She became limp and powerless to resist. Consequently she meekly obeyed.

"Kneel down," Mrs Bishop commanded.

Amelia knelt, her eyes riveted on Mrs Bishop's white hands and the smart red dress behind them.

Mrs Bishop then carefully closed the door, and turning to Amelia showed her the piece of wire.

"Do you know what this is for?" she asked.

Amelia shook her head. She tried to speak, but her voice dried in her throat. She could not utter a sound. "I'm going to put it so," Mrs Bishop went on, carefully coiling the wire round Amelia's neck and throat. "You've no friends, no parents, nobody to make any enquiries about you. So, you see . . ." and with those strong, white, pitiless fingers she drew the wire tighter and tighter.

DOCTOR FAWCETT'S EXPERIMENT

By Raymond Ferrers Broad

Foreword

NICHOLAS FAWCETT was not his real name. I have given him this alias for the same reason that disguises every other clue in his narrative. Read it, and you will not wonder why.

I knew him but slightly, and that before the scandal, now forgotten, that led to his disgrace. Of those years, and the scandal itself, it is needless to speak here. Why did he direct his posthumous manuscript to me, almost a stranger? As I see it, because he was utterly without friends at the end, and probably his urgent desire that the manuscript should one day be published prompted him to entrust it to me.

I saw him the second time after his name had been struck from the Rolls; and the only story he gave me he made me swear not to disclose. It instructed me how, when he died, to gain possession of this MS. Now he has been dead the five years that he stipulated as interval before its publication, and you can judge it for yourself.

Five years ago they found him dead in his hermitage. He had not died naturally – and he was not alone. In a large copper at the back of the house was . . . well, it had been a man, if the term fits an epileptic criminal lunatic.

Investigation at last petered helplessly out into an open verdict in both cases; neither was it able to find any connection with the peaceful death, in her bed a mile away, of an elderly woman. "Natural Causes," they said.

They never found the doctor's assailant.

They theorized vainly over his corpse – why was the throat so hideously mutilated? They said it looked exactly as if it had been gnawed and ripped from its living owner by some large rodent: a ferret, say, or a big rat.

And this is his manuscript, just as he wrote it, with the frantic deletions he made to cover his tracks, so that none might ever follow him.

Dec. 5th – So I am free – yes, free, for that is the way I must look at it. I know that sometimes I am going to feel that the price of freedom has been heavy; I have sacrificed fame, wealth, brilliance. All these things would have been mine had I been content to go on in what they call the ‘normal’ way. But one day my name will echo through the world as a pioneer, when the Work is complete. It deserves the capital.

I regret only the stigma which I have incurred; but perhaps even that is a blessing in its way. It means that I shall be forgotten, and that my researches will never incur the limelight. Here I can work on at them with never an interruption. My needs, too, will be simply supplied. In the country, one can live cheaply, and materials will be at hand. Drugs from the hedges and ditches. When I have finished my preparations, I can start to look for subjects, and they, too, are at hand with none to refuse me. Rabbits, little wild things from the fields, owls, rats. Even insects at first, perhaps. And then, after – but time enough to think of other matters when they are due.

This is forbidden ground on which I am going to trespass, I suppose. But who will know? What nonsense it is, anyway! Ridiculous anachronisms that hamper the work of progress! One would think we were not yet out of the Dark Ages. I am rather like a modern Galileo with his telescope – except that I do not propose to be martyred.

Tomorrow I shall be the country squire, and walk abroad. I have scarcely any neighbours within miles, but I must make a good impression. I ought to see about a charlady to do for me, as they say. How radiantly, childishly happy I feel!

Dec. 6th – My domestic arrangements are complete, and for a few shillings a week I am able to rid myself of these unnecessary details. I even had a further stroke of luck, for it occurred to me to mention to the good woman whom I now employ that I was interested in the cult of herbal remedies. (What a joke, I thought to myself!) She proved a perfect mine

of information as to the places where I was likely to find growing such plants as I shall require. Tomorrow I go and start searching.

Here I am completely anonymous, and there is very little chance of anyone meeting me, let alone recognizing—, the one-time famous specialist.

Jan. 4th – I do not propose to write up this diary regularly by the date, but rather according to the progress of the Work. Hence a gap of one month, which has been occupied with the preparation of a concoction embodying the first of my theories. (*At this point, the MS. has several lines cancelled, apparently to delete a formula.*)

... a potent drug, as is instantly appreciated. A subject for experiment provided itself in the form of a small mouse, which I succeeded in catching and injecting. It was two hours before the animal recovered consciousness, and then, before I could stop it – foolishly I had omitted to shut it up – it began to rush about the table frothing at the mouth. I tried to catch it; two minutes later I found myself minus the patient, and also with a retort smashed on the floor. This is very irritating, for I have only a limited stock of apparatus, and do not wish to have to buy more – apart from the expense, it means possibly attracting attention to myself.

Feb. 10th – I am very tired tonight, after days of ceaseless experiment, but I am now certain of one thing. It is useless to attempt the production of a cell from a *normal* animal. I have followed this out patiently and thoroughly, and the result is always negative. Unfortunately it has cost a good deal of life, and the severity of the winter renders replacement increasingly difficult. It is maddening to think that I may be held up at a definite stage in the Work through lack of material, and I am observing economy with the stock I have managed to collect. I find I have to be very careful on account of my amiable but brainless charwoman – some of the experiments are none too easy to conceal. She asked me yesterday “whatever I was wanting with all they rabbits,” and to allay her curiosity I was forced to waste one of them on a pie for dinner.

This depleted the stock to a mere four animals. They would have been six, but for my efforts to evolve a satisfactory

deviation from normal. With cumulative injections I certainly succeeded in making two of them insane; but it appears that this artificial, or cultivated, insanity is insufficient. After a few days I killed one of them, and as before treated the brain, liver and blood by distillation; but all my patience and care have not produced in the resultant colloid the faintest cellular tendency. I am rather at a loss to know what to do next. Dare I risk the total loss of the remainder of my animals by introducing the second insane rabbit into their hutch? I might, again, drug it to produce a lowering of type towards cannibalism, and later try to breed a mentally unfit litter from it.

April 27th – I am really in despair, for I cannot seem to hit on the right lines. Yet there must be a method, somehow. . . . I see my last entry was about the mad rabbit. I wasted the rest of the cold weather in various fruitless dabbings, and in keeping the brute alive, which has been a problem. Then I tried the breeding method. I got so far that I thought my brain would have given way when disaster overtook me. For I actually reached the point of the litter, and had just inspected it with great satisfaction. No sooner was my back turned than I heard a scream – the buck had bitten through the doe's throat. I dragged the beast off, and of course it bit me through the hand; compelling me to go off and hastily cauterize the injury. When I returned, the litter was destroyed and partly eaten, and the father sat glaring at me with its mouth all bloody. In passion I struck at it, and crushed its body under my feet. I staggered back to my room, sick with disappointment; and for the last month I have been tossing with fever, brought on by strain and the infection of the bite – my cauterization was too quick to be thorough.

Today I have touched the depths, and can hardly feel thankful that I am still alive. I almost wish that the woman – who, I must admit, has pulled me through and shown a surprising solicitude for my welfare – had let me go. I am beginning to be afraid about her. It was only with the utmost difficulty that I stopped her sending for a doctor. What a thought! In the night, when she had gone, I had to force myself out of bed, temperature or not, to see that my colloids were safe. I don't know how much she has found out, or what she may have blabbed. . . . I

sit here, weak and shaky from fever, and with my wretched hand still useless so that I cannot trust myself to handle apparatus. I wrestle with calculations, and cannot put them into effect. How strange it is, that no sooner am I incapacitated than new theories flood upon me, which I cannot yet try out!

It is enough to drive one mad to think that in medieval times they did succeed in producing life from dead animal matter, and that I, with all my long knowledge, am unable to emulate them. Sometimes a fierce longing comes over me – dangerous dreams, that have to be restrained. In my present state of health they might easily become an obsession that would lead me . . . no, no. I must not put it down. It must be crushed. What an end for me – to be executed for murder! And yet, after all, what foolery it is that I should have to work in this hide-and-corner fashion. My task has the highest of objects, is identified in the fullest way with biological progress, even if many of the means might appear to be distasteful.

Is it really to be, as it seems, that I am to fail because of the limit to my experiment imposed by the shortsighted laws of man? *Fail* – I can hardly bring myself to write the word. Surely there must be some road for me to travel. Let me restore this health of mine, heal my hand, and then I shall not be troubled with these morbid thoughts.

June 9th – What luck! What wonderful luck! To think that until a month ago I had sunk and sunk, even to the depth of meditating self-destruction! Just a heat-wave, that was what turned the scale.

I had nothing left but the cultures, and was thinking of throwing them away – when I found the dog.

A mangy, flea-ridden mongrel it was, too. The sudden heat drove it mad within a few yards of my gate – *natural* madness, the thing I had prayed for. I must have run a considerable risk in catching the little beast, but I was too excited to worry about that. Enough that I caught it. . . .

(Here follows a long period of obliteration in the MS.)

. . . mixed with the culture from the rabbit at a carefully adjusted temperature. The heat seems to have been the factor that made for success. After a week of testing with reagents, I detected under the microscope a distinct and mobile cell-

structure in the midst of the gelatinous colloid, upon which it appears to feed. My writing is shaky with excitement, and no wonder. I have made an *amoeba*, the first stage in Life! If only I can find an accelerator I may be able to assist the formation of a cell-system – surely, this time, I shall not be disappointed, with my dawn actually breaking on the horizon!

June 17th – I hardly know how to put this down, for I am beset by a terrible temptation. In some ways, when I look at the case, it is as if Nature has thrown a gift into my lap, and yet – and yet . . . dare I?

It was yesterday that I found him – a filthy, half-starved tramp, unconscious among the bushes in the garden. The story was obvious: lack of food, exposure. Even if my name is no longer on the Rolls, I am still a doctor, and the call of humanity made me take him in – though the state of his person rendered my actions somewhat unpleasant.

I forced brandy into him, but for a long time I could not bring him round. He is an undersized rat of a man, and the shape of his cranium suggests deficiency.

It took me two hours to rouse him, and as soon as I had done it, he had an epileptic fit and relapsed into a further coma.

In the night I had a terrible dream. Something stood by my bed and whispered: “You wanted *human* material. We have given it to you.”

Of course, I cannot do it. I must be rid of the fellow – send to the nearest town for an ambulance, see the last of him. That is the suggestion of my charwoman, from whom I could not try to conceal him. Damned interfering woman! “Oughter be locked up – not safe, him with his fits.” As to these, he has had two more, the second more violent than the first. Obviously, as I pointed out, he is in no fit state to be moved. All in good time.

I’d better get this settled, and then be rid of this woman, for she is going to be a nuisance. There was trouble enough over a few rabbits. I shall have to manage by myself.

Of course, I cannot do it. I have thought it all out very carefully. Even supposing the wretch had no one who was interested in him, I should be running an appalling risk. The police find everything out, and their only word for it would be

murder. And yet . . . curse these tempting thoughts! I'm over-tired, that's what it is! I must rest – with my visitor still here, fool that I am. If I had not been so undecided today he would have been out of it by now. But tomorrow – tomorrow he must go.

June 18th – It is late, and I know that I am tired. But I cannot rest, and the brandy I have drunk burns like fire inside me. *I have done it.* My hands are reddened – metaphorically, of course. I was far too careful for there to be any actual blood spilt.

My God! Am I mad, that I can write so calmly about it? Yet the sweat is running down my temples, and my nerves are all to hell. Really, I had no intention of doing it – none at all. It was an accident, a pure accident, in the struggle. After all, I had to defend myself, and the strength of these epileptics renders them highly dangerous. No jury could ever bring in a verdict. . . .

But that wasn't *really* why I did it, you know. I could have mastered him, if I had tried, when he staggered from his couch. I could have given him a needle and quietened him. But I didn't, you see. I wanted him – not alive, but dead. Dead. I wanted his rotten brain, and his slimy, foul blood. . . .

Are these my hands, that are writing these things? Yes, they must be. I must be careful. I – must – be – careful. I am saying that over to myself, very slowly. There is enough madness in this house, without adding this brain of mine to the total. I've burned my boats, now. I can't go back. It's all done, thanks to that great copper out there. That was a sheer inspiration. Even if she suspected, the top's too heavy for her to lift off.

That woman – what am I going to tell her? Steady, now, I must keep calm! I shall tell her that he's vanished. Vanished as he came. She'll believe that – she must.

How extraordinary it is that most people commit their murders so clumsily. I suppose it is because they get flurried, and haven't a knowledge of anatomy. How simple it was, after all – how clean. Just the steady pressure of two thumbs, one on each side of the windpipe, stopping the flow of blood to the brain through the carotid arteries. . . . I could see his face now, if I wanted to. But of course, I don't want to. There's no need

for me to see it if I don't want to – it's only a question of will-power. Besides, he hasn't got a face – now.

That woman – but never mind her now. It'll be dawn in an hour. I haven't any time to waste, and besides, it spells the difference between success and failure if one starts with the material *fresh*. . . .

(Here there is a complete page torn from the MS. It appears to describe certain preliminaries, if one may judge from the context, and indicates a time-gap of about three hours at a guess.)

. . . formation. I have had to transfer it very carefully to a much larger vessel, and placed this on the floor of a small unfurnished upper room, which I shall keep locked. Fortunately it is a stout door, and would bar all her curiosity. She must go today – it isn't safe. I am far from certain what the result will be; the mixture may defeat its own ends. There is sufficient for other trials if this happens, or would serve as nutriment if the cell-culture develops in its new form.

I feel that I am going to do it. I am at one with the alchemists of old, with their murky dens, toads, snakes, cat's blood. That wasn't such nonsense. There was a solid substratum of chemical truth overlaid with hobgoblins and devils. Sometimes they got the right blend.

How long – to wait?

June 18th – Or is it the 19th? I don't know – turning night into day and throwing away my sleep, I am confused. And terrified! No wonder – that infernal woman! She is suspicious – she won't accept my story.

I took the initiative when she arrived this morning, though I was so tired that the effort was terrific. I knew I could feel perfectly safe, in that no proof or hint of what has happened remains to betray me. That part of the tramp that is chemically useless lies packed under some rubbish in the great copper, and there is no sign of my having opened it. She could never raise the top – it is far too heavy. The essential human elements I extracted scientifically, and I would challenge anyone to find out that it has been done – save by analysis of certain fluids and colloids in my makeshift laboratory. Even the work of extraction I masked by the use of powerful deodorants. What could there be to cause this damned creature to stare so

strangely at me when I told her that the tramp had taken himself off in the night? She said something about "a nice thing for a lonely woman to hear," and the usual babble about being murdered in her bed. Why must she start talking about murder? She nearly threw me into a panic by telling me she was going to notify the authorities. I had the greatest difficulty to stop her, and it only made her more suspicious.

I am afraid she will have to be – extinguished.

What have I written? What are these thoughts that possess my brain? Am I – can I be – contemplating a second murder?

The first was no murder. It was a scientific act, necessary to the progress of my experiments. If I had not acted as I did, what would have been the consequence? This idiot, this epileptic nuisance, would have become a charge upon the public purse, expensively maintained at an institution. His useless life would have been pandered to, and petted – wasting money, thought, and skill. He was incurable – I'm a doctor – I ought to know. He was incurable – I say so. Damn it, I've performed a public service in – in using him the way I have. I am a benefactor. . . .

But the police wouldn't see it like that.

This woman – this fat, slobber-mouthed harridan. She is going to betray me. I shall have a crowd of officials – detectives, coming to the house. "Your name, sir . . . occupation? You took the missing man in . . . allowed him to escape . . . no notification. A degenerate epileptic, and you maintain that he is not dangerous? I have here a search warrant – I must request you to stand aside. . . . Jones, Brown – this copper. Lift the cover—"

No, no – no! Not that! I can't have that! The fools – the idiots – they are going to interfere with scientific Work of the greatest importance. . . .

She will have to be – extinguished.

I know of a rare drug. I have a little. There will be no trace – she will pass away in her sleep tonight, after she has left me. I must make a pretext to keep her here late, so that she will have no time when she leaves me – what is it they say? – to 'blow the gaff.' That's the way. If she is nervous at making her way home alone, I will myself offer her a courteous escort to her home. I

will ingratiate myself with her during the day – gain her confidence. I wish there was some other way – but there isn't. After all, it will be perfectly safe, and without trace.

Peaceful, in her sleep. Heart failure.

Oh, the curse of these distractions, when I want all my faculties for that little room upstairs.

June 20th – It is the 20th now, for it is long after midnight. I am almost light-headed with fatigue, not having slept at all last night. I must get to bed for a few hours, or I shall go to pieces.

Well, she's gone by now – long gone. It was the easiest thing in the world. Callous, to write like that. . . . I suppose one's *second* has a hardening effect. In a cup of tea – so simple. And her pathetic trust and gratitude when I escorted her home . . .

Enough of that. It's as bad as hysteria. Parts of this diary, that I have glanced at, are like the ravings of a madman. I must edit them, when I have time, and make this more as it is supposed to be – a scientific treatise. I am very careful with this writing. Every night it goes into its hiding-place, where my young friend on the newspaper will look for it when I die. You never know. It would be a tragedy if I died without the world ever becoming aware of my Work – even if it was incomplete. Another could go on. But they won't need to. I feel I am nearing the finish.

I have just realized with a shock that it is over twenty hours since I last examined the specimen. Admittedly, by my calculations, it will be some days before any result is apparent, but I must have a look now, before I turn in. In a few hours that woman . . . no, she won't, though. I'd forgotten. She can't come – she *mustn't*! I'm writing nonsense – my brain is nearly crazy with fatigue. . . .

June 22nd – After a final inspection last night, at which no change was apparent, I was utterly unprepared for what I found this morning. I stood in the door for some seconds, scarcely able to believe my eyes.

The mixture, as I wrote before, consisted of equal parts of human and animal ingredients, plus certain reagents whose composition has been previously set down in detail. When I left it last night, it was as it had been for some time – a dingy

paste of the consistency of thick mud. But this morning it had risen to an irregular globous form, not unlike a vast puff-ball fungus, or a mass of dough being cooked with an excess of leaven.

The glass dish in which it lies has vertical sides four inches in height, and this morning the mass was reared over an inch above the edge, whereas formerly it had occupied the dish to half its depth. Two hours later had increased it by a further three inches, and on my last visit a few minutes ago a greyish-brown fungoid structure towered fully a foot out of the vessel. In appearance I can only describe it as repulsive to the point of obscenity, while a faint acrid smell, dry and irritating to the throat, filled the room. I find I have omitted to mention that the room is sealed, and that I maintain it with great exactitude at a temperature, pre-calculated, of ninety degrees Fahrenheit.

Interest and curiosity rapidly overcoming my first kindling of disgust, I examined it closely on the last occasion, and was very interested to observe a regular, if slight, pulsation of the top of the mass, causing it to quiver with a just perceptible movement. I restrained myself from any tangible examination, as this might well have upset its delicate progress; but a thermometer held an inch away from the surface rose rapidly to a reading of a hundred and ten degrees. In the last hour (a gap which does not show in these notes, of course), it has not grown in size by any measurable amount, and I am definitely of the opinion that the structure which has formed is a species of egg. In a few hours, judging from the speed of its recent progress, it should complete its incubation. I have placed in the room a large supply of the special nourishment. . . .

(here follows a heavily scored-out passage.)

. . . am not free, it seems. It is extremely foolish of me to admit it, but I am putting it down on paper in order to clear my mind, which, under the stimulus of my Work, was clearing, and now troubles me again. The moment I try to rest, the wet face of the epileptic rises before me – and that grinning, fat gargoyle who has died so painlessly . . . she must have died, for she has not returned. Yet it is extraordinary that no one has been near me to say so. Why? They can't be waiting – waiting to pounce – I must overcome this stupid hysteria that sweeps

over me. Why should anyone come? Who is there to come? Her cottage was a mile away, and there are no others near. Things can happen in the country, and not a soul be the wiser. There is no reason why they should think she was mur – how my pen jibs at the word! Murdered. *Murdered*. I have written it twice, to prove to myself that I am under control. What a vile word it looks – a leering word. She had a weak heart. I could tell that from her laboured breathing. She was alone with her cottage and garden, her cow, her chickens. She often spoke of them, and once or twice cooked a fowl for me. They must be starving in their runs – rushing about squawking and crowing. Perhaps they are eating each other. . . . I ought to go and feed them; it is the least I can do. Go past that silent cottage, where her fat bulk lies still and rigid. The cow would be all right, for it could feed itself. Lowing to be milked as an accompaniment to a chorus of clucking, starving fowls. . . .

Does no one ever call at the cottage?

I can't leave and go. I have Work to do. A fine, healthy puff-ball, waiting to be delivered. . . .

I must have fallen asleep – from the look of it, I went on writing in my sleep. What woke me? I must really edit this script properly. . . . *What was that?* A thud, from upstairs, and another! I must put this away, and go and see. Damn the dark – I shall have to light a candle . . .

June 21st – Why didn't I get some sleep while I had the chance? I have nearly finished the brandy, to keep going, and I must have my brain clear, so that I can end this work.

The room upstairs is barricaded, and It can't get out. Not yet, anyway, however fast It grows. When I came down, my first idea was to destroy this manuscript, to prevent any living soul, as far as it is in my power, from doing the frightful thing that I have committed.

The frightful, horrible thing!

But now that I know what I have done, what I have evoked, I realize that the best way is to leave this script after all. Let it be a warning.

So for the last hour I have been going through all I have written, destroying every reference, every formula. It's as

much as my strength can do. I can't edit it – even if I wanted to. There must be no starting-point for another researcher.

And all the time I have been doing it, the Thing upstairs has been beating and flopping at the barricaded door.

When I have finished, I am going upstairs, to destroy it, the filthy, unnatural thing. Its spores are everywhere, thick on my desk, in the air – nauseating!

I cannot write much more, or I shall exhaust myself before the final effort. In that, I dare not fail. I know what I can do – I shall do it at any price – wipe out this *blasphemy* that I have called into being.

When I was roused from an uneasy sleep by the thud that came from above, I took a candle and went up. It was not till I was on the stairs that I faltered, at the thought that my experiment had reached some unthinkable conclusion. There was a dry and acrid odour drifting down the stairway, like that I had smelt before in the room, but much stronger – worse. The air was thick, and set me coughing – even the candle burned blue and spluttered. A slow-moving cloud of gas, as I thought, dark brown in colour, almost hid *the* door, and flowed sluggishly down the stairs. The landing was opaque with the thick fog of it – it reminded me of the smell and colour of bromine. I reeled, gasped for breath – seemed to have to fight through it to get to the door, while it rose in billowing waves round me.

I was moving the candle across to my left hand, to leave the right free for the door-handle, when I saw my sleeve, and my blood chilled. The 'gas' was settling thickly on it in a fine, dry powder. I thought of the obscene thing that had swelled in my glass dish like a huge puff-ball. To break a puff-ball is to liberate a cloud of spores – fine, powdery seed-particles. . . .

I stood there, icy and rigid, as it began to dawn on me. I listened, and Something flopped and thudded inside the room. So it had been both *fungus and egg*.

An awful terror seized me. What – WHAT – had I created?

The flame danced and guttered in my hand, warning me that, unless I were a craven, I had little time. I set my teeth, and my shaking hand rattled the knob of the door . . .

I heard the Thing inside flop away from the door, as if it drew away, and then sat waiting for me.

I flung the door open . . .

The brown dust, thick, lascivious, curled at me in a great gust, and in the waning light of the candle I had a vision of a whitish, slimy object, grotesque, malformed. It was about the size of a mongrel, and I swear it bared foam-flecked lips to snarl at me. It hesitated a second, and then began to hop across the floor in a series of broken jerks, as if in an *epileptic fit*.

I leapt back, slamming the door upon that eldritch creature of my making, but I could not shut back the frightful stench that rose from it. I leaned back against the woodwork, my breath a shriek in my throat, and retched with uncontrollable violence, while it clawed and bit to reach me.

At the moment I cannot bring myself to write more. I want all the power I possess, can summon, to force myself again to ascend those stairs; but I must do it. I dare not even wait for daylight – It might get loose.

Shall I ever walk down those stairs again? I do not know. I do not deserve to. There is blood on my hands, thick as these blood-coloured spores that dance round me . . .

My pen drops in a limp hand. I will put this manuscript where it will be found, and I must go – up the stairs . . .

THE CARETAKER'S STORY

By Edith Olivier

THE CARETAKER did not finish his story, but his last lines were written more indelibly before my eyes than if they had been inscribed by pen and ink.

When I advertised for a caretaker for my seaside cottage, I was delighted to get a reply from my most level-headed and reliable friend, Jem West. Anyone he recommended would be satisfactory.

Jem wrote that Horter, who applied for my post, had been for several years the skipper of his cutter, and he only got rid of him when he got rid of the boat itself.

'Since then,' the letter went on, 'he has had two long voyages, both of which ended tragically in shipwreck. Once he was the only man saved. It hit him very hard, and he lost his nerve and wants to give up the sea. He'll suit you perfectly, for he's as honest as the day, and a handy man in every way.'

When I saw Jem at the club a day or two later, I asked him whether he thought it wise to put a man who had lost his nerve into an absolutely empty house on a very lonely bit of coast. It would have been another thing if Horter had a wife, but, as it was, he would be day and night entirely alone in the house.

Jem didn't agree. He said that Horter's nerves were perfectly sound except for sea-going. That shipwreck had knocked him out because, it seemed, one of the crew had been his greatest friend, and Horter had got it into his head that he was in some way responsible for the man's death.

"He's got hold of some old seaman's superstition, and he's been reading *The Ancient Mariner* as well. He is a bit crazy on that one point, but otherwise he is a very steady old fellow, and I think a year or two on shore will put him right."

I interviewed Horter and liked the man, though he struck me as having lost his nerve rather badly. Not that he was at all

jumpy. On the contrary, his manner was quiet and calm, but throughout our conversation no shadow of a smile crossed his face. He wore an expression of unchanging melancholy, and his sad eyes seemed to look through without seeing me. He was rather a remarkable-looking man with about him something of the decayed dandy. For instance, he wore an old shirt made of very fine and expensive silk, the sleeves of which had been cut off an inch or two above the elbow, allowing the frayed ends to hang loosely upon his arm. Instead of a belt, he had knotted an old Free Forester tie around his waist, and his spotlessly clean white duck trousers must have cost a lot when he bought them. Horter had delicate, refined features, though a receding chin gave a weak look to the lower part of his face. But for that, he would have been a handsome man. The deep-set eyes were of a clear blue, and the aquiline nose was finely cut. But it had a beak-like appearance from being inadequately supported by the chin beneath it, and in fact the man looked altogether rather like a sorrowful and haunted seagull. I almost expected him to spread his wings and sail quietly away into the sky.

He was touchingly keen to be engaged by me, but I could not feel altogether happy at the thought of this gloomy old bird sitting alone through the winter nights in my wind-swept cottage so near the sea. I warned him that it was a lonely place.

He shook his head.

"I don't mind being alone," he said. "It won't make me any lonelier."

He spoke thoughtfully, and his voice, which was always melancholy, did not change.

"Well, if you feel like that—" I began.

"I do," he said, interrupting me, but not rudely. He merely gave the impression that he was thinking aloud.

I wondered about him, but I engaged him on the strength of Jem's recommendation.

The flat marshy bit of coast which lies between the New Forest and the sea was then far more desolate than it is today. My cottage was a tough little stone building which looked as if it had faced the sea for centuries, and had stood so long exposed to the wind and the waves that it had become an embodiment of the grey weather surging round it. It was a bit too bleak for

me in the winter, but I spent all my summer weekends there, and I loved the place. It really was the only house from which I have literally been able to bathe out of my bedroom window. At high tide the waves actually washed my walls.

I thought to myself that if the sea had got on to Horter's nerves, he had by no means escaped from it now; but that, after all, was his affair.

Horter was not a good correspondent, though I generally heard from him about once a fortnight. He wrote an educated hand, which was singularly legible, but his letters were always short, and they told me little beyond the facts that he had received my fortnightly cheque and that all was going well at the cottage.

It was in February that he failed to write. I had been abroad, and my letters had not been forwarded, so that only when I returned home did I observe that Horter's acknowledgment of my last cheque was nearly a fortnight late. Another was almost due, and I sent that off a day or two early, with a letter asking how things were going on. There was no reply.

I felt anxious. Also I had a longing to see the cottage, for I had not been in Hampshire for nearly three months, and that year, the 26th of February, was so soft and spring-like that I could not resist the thought of my little house by the sea. I telegraphed to Horter that I should arrive in time for a simple luncheon of sausages and mash.

The cottage looked completely deserted. No smoke came from the chimneys. Doors and windows were rigidly closed and shuttered against the sunlit air, and the only sign of life was given by the great flocks of seagulls which drifted around and over the house. Their soft, harsh, mournful cries floated in the air like little drifting clouds transposed into sounds.

I walked briskly down the narrow shingled path, and tried the door. It was locked. I felt nonplussed. Horter must have been out when my telegram came, and evidently the cottage contained neither fire nor food for me. Presumably he had gone away for the day, and I was at first annoyed with him for leaving the house thus unprotected. Then I realized that this was unreasonable. The man must go out sometimes, but as I walked round the cottage to the seafront I began to wonder

whether Horter had indeed only gone out for the day. The shuttered windows were ominous, and I remembered those unanswered letters. Could my caretaker have deserted his post weeks ago?

The kitchen door faced the sea, and as I approached it, I saw something very disquieting. A little stream of dried-up blood issued from under the door. I sensed foul play, and went quickly to the window, to be faced by blank shutters. I could not see into the house.

My cottage was strongly built, as I have already remarked, and my shoulder failed to break in a door made to withstand the south-west gales. I walked round, vainly trying every possible place of entry. Even if my caretaker had left it, it seemed that my cottage was still eminently able to take care of itself. There appeared to be no way in. I looked at the thick short chimney, with a wild idea of climbing on to the roof and getting in that way.

As I stood there, thinking what to do, one of the seagulls which had been flying round the house broadened the circle of his flight, and swooped suddenly down upon me. With an ugly screech he went straight for my eyes. The brute! He meant to pick them out. I struck at him with my stick and broke his wing. He fluttered, and dropped into the sea, where he rocked to and fro, a few feet from the shore. In a moment half a dozen of his fellows were upon him. They looked threatening, and I thought they meant to peck him to death. I turned away, revolted, wishing that I had not caught him with my stick, although he had looked an extremely ugly customer as he made for my face.

It was an extraordinary thing to happen. Never in all my sea experience had I been attacked by a gull. I began to feel eerie and uneasy, almost frightened. Again my eye fell upon the blood which had oozed out from under the door. That decided me. I must get in.

I broke a window on the other side of the house, cutting my hand rather badly as I did so. More blood. I felt sick and tied my handkerchief round the wound. My luck was out that day.

In spite of the gay sunshine outside, it was pitch dark in the hall, for all the shutters in the house were closed. I stumbled

against one of the hall chairs, barking my shin. Furiously I unbarred the shutters and let in some light. Then I threw open the window too, for the house was utterly airless, and a revolting smell permeated it. Horter had certainly failed as caretaker.

The sitting-room was dusty, dirty, and cold. I looked into it, opened its windows, and went to the kitchen. Just inside the door I caught my foot in something soft which lay upon the floor. It felt like a dilapidated feather bed, and I kicked the impediment aside and hastened to unshutter the window, for the stench was more than ever horrible. Then I turned and looked back into the room.

No wonder there was a smell. The place was crowded with dead birds. Eight or nine great seagulls lay piled up on one another in a state of complete decomposition. Their fallen feathers littered the floor. I stood there staring, aghast; and as I stared, I saw, protruding from beneath this heap of decaying corpses, a bone which was on another scale. It was a man's shinbone.

Feeling like some horrible ghoul I hurled the birds aside, and when I had done so, I had laid bare the skeleton of Horter. It lay upon the tattered fragments of his clothes.

A few hairs still clung to the skull, otherwise the bones had been picked completely bare. Feathers drifted over the face, disturbed by the wind which now blew from the open window into the room. The gusts disturbed too the pages of an old exercise book lying open upon the table. I had not observed it before, but the rustling roused my attention and I picked it up. I thought at first that the handwriting was quite unknown to me. It was very wild and untidy, the lines sprawling all ways. The pages were blotted with blood, and reminded me of those disgusting little bills which I had seen in butchers' shops, skewered on to joints of meat. I conquered my repulsion and forced myself to turn back a page or two. Earlier in the book, the writing was smaller, neater, and more legible. It also began to grow familiar, and when I reached the opening pages, I saw that they were in a hand which I had learnt to know during the past few months. Horter's careful script was unmistakable.

Then I forgot everything else, and I sat down at that kitchen table to read the story left behind by the caretaker.

'I have tried all ways to make atonement,' the manuscript began, 'and all ways seem blocked. They say that confession to a priest will ease the mind of any weighty matter, but priests don't often come my way, so here I leave this to any and all who after me shall enter this kitchen. I confess to them all. I keep no secret back. But when they read these words, who knows where I shall be? No ease of mind for me anywhere, but I swear that all you readers shall share this weight. It weighs too much for me, and it comes round and round, over and over again. There is no atonement, until I have told it all to someone. Yes, all. All. Everything. Did you know that I am Jonah born again? No, I did not say 'a' Jonah, but Jonah himself, the very man. Down, down he went to the bottom of the sea, but I could not get there. Poor Allan went, and I scrambled on shore. We were together, he and I, both in the same boat. It was but a little one, like the city of Zoar, and I was Lot and got there safely. Lot's wife was a pillar of salt. Ah, the taste of it! I can never forget it. When I was alone on that island, I kept looking for him. I didn't forget him, and then, when he came, I didn't know him. How could I know him, for he had wings, and dear old Allan never was an angel. Still I *should* have known him, if I could have gone on remembering him all the time. That's where I went wrong. I was hungry, and there were all those darned gulls about. They came so near that I thought they meant me to eat them. Manna from heaven, they seemed. Great white things coming down, and I couldn't help it. But oh! it was salt. Salt always in my mouth, in my belly, on my brain. A pillar of salt. That's me too. But I must get on with it. I've got to make it clear. You see I ate that gull because I'd stopped thinking of Allan, and when I had eaten it I knew what I had done. *The souls of dead sailors go to seagulls.* He flew so near because he wanted my help, and I ate him. Yes, I ate him. Now you know what I am – a cannibal. Can the priests cure that? That's why it all turned to salt – salt everlastingly. I can taste it now. It maddens me, and oh Lord! this thirst! I can't stop drinking whisky, though that's salt too. Salter than the blood of seagulls, and I know the taste of that.

'A ship came and took me off, but they didn't guess I was a cannibal, or they wouldn't have had me on board. I said

nothing, because I was afraid they would leave me behind again. But God knew. He knew me for old Jonah, and he wrecked that ship too. Jonah can't drown, and I couldn't go to the bottom that time either. Another ship lost and me washed up again. All my fault.

'But the gulls are around me here too. Dead sailors crying for their shipmate, and I have scrunched up his soul between my teeth. No wonder it tasted salt, but this whisky here is even saltier. I hate it and I can't stop drinking it.

'There. I have confessed. That's all.'

So far the writing had been unmistakably Horter's, but when I turned to the next page I saw that it had become wildly different, and now the page was streaked with mud and blood. There were fingermarks tinged with both.

'Those gulls are coming nearer and nearer. It's like that day on the island when they came all round me and I killed Allan's soul. Perhaps they're hungry too. I'll find 'em something to eat. But it's all too salt. They won't like it. It will make them thirsty, and then they'll go mad. Unless they like salt. Do you, gulls? Answer me, you devils. I believe you do. I can't make out what it is they are saying. Just calling and calling and coming round me with their huge wings, but they don't speak the King's English. It makes 'em very hard to understand.

'Now I've got them in the room. Ten or more. How they fill it, squawking round and round with their great wings like huge mill-wheels turning and turning. Shut the windows. Bar them. And I will confess to the gulls. Why can't they keep still and listen to what I say?

'Round and round and round and round, and the room too small to hold them. It's all wheels, and I shall be broken on them. They are coming so close and those wings are so wide. Wheels and wings. Wings and wheels. Flap, flap, out goes the candle, but it's not dark yet. The fire burns like hell tonight. I believe they know I ate him and they are telling me to make atonement. Look, all you gulls. That's just what I'm doing. It's all in this book. My atonement. My confession. It's all down here. But what's the good of showing them that when

they can't read it? Don't know the King's English. What language do they know? Words! Words! Words! Words mean nothing at all. Atonement is more than that. It's what you *do*, not what you *say*. And yet you can never begin to make atonement till the thing is done, and then it's too late. That's what it is with me. Too late. All turned to salt. I can't do anything more.

'They want food. So did I. Atonement. They want that soul I ate. Allan's soul, and they know where it is. They've come for it. I must give it back of my own accord. They shan't take it from me. It's salt blood they want. Life for life. Soul for soul. Food for food.

'Where's the knife. Hack it off. Hack it off. God. How it hurts! Now there's a gull gobbling it up. You liked that, didn't you? Now they're all coming at me. What a noise! What a crowd. And there's a crowd of knives too. Hack away, knives! There. I've got off another bit. It comes well off the thigh. I must get some more.

'These knives won't cut. So blunt. Now they are turning into beaks. Is that a beak or a knife? There's another, and another. Hundreds of them coming at me. Beaks without birds. They're clawing at me, biting me, tearing at me. It's Allan! When I ate him, I left the beak and I meet it again in the end. He's here. He's got me. Tearing, tearing, and, oh my God! it's hell! Torture! Allan! . . .'

The end was only blood.

LOVERS' MEETING

By John Ratho

"GOOD EVENING, my treasure."

"Good evening, dear," smiled his wife, rising from her chair by the fire and kissing him. "Haven't you worked rather late this evening?"

"Yes, a little. I've had a long afternoon in the laboratory. Dumba is such a fool – he has to be taught everything. . . ."

"Is that the new man?"

"Yes," answered the professor drily. "You don't take much interest in my work, do you, my dear?"

"Oh, Leo, that's not fair. I love hearing about your experiments. But you seem to change your assistants every week – I can never remember their names."

She was a pretty woman; fair, with the creamy skin of so many beautiful Viennese women; though her tone was bantering, she looked, and was, hurt by his sarcastic words.

"Never mind." Her husband smiled absentmindedly and turned away. "Such a lovely head should not be troubled with such boring things;" his caressing voice trailed off, and she knew that already his thoughts were far away from her, back in the white laboratory where glittered an endless array of test-tubes, instruments and glass retorts which were the weapons with which he combated disease.

"Won't you have your tea, Leo?" she called after him, as he moved towards the door. He looked older than his years, and stooped slightly. His hair was thinning. He turned back for a moment.

"No, thank you, dear. I have a lot to do before dinner – I shall be in the study, but would rather not be disturbed."

She sat down again in her chair, and took up the book she had been reading.

"All right, Leo, I won't disturb you. . . ."

He saw that he had spoken unkindly, and wishing to make amends said rather awkwardly: "You look very beautiful sitting there in the firelight, Greta. You must try to understand. . . ." Then, as if annoyed at what he had said: "The wife of a scientist *must* understand."

Greta smiled sadly as she heard the door shut behind him. The wife of a scientist. . . . And yet she supposed she had no right to be unhappy. Leo was a model husband, loving and indulgent. He never interfered with her life or friendships. But he had never been hers alone. She had always to share him with the work which had made his name famous. . . . The fire leapt and crackled its warm comfort. Soon she was deep in her novel.

It was half past seven when she raised her head, almost unwillingly, it seemed, thinking it was time to change for dinner. Dinner with Leo was not very exciting. She would recount her day – telling him of the friends she had met in the town, or the book she had been reading. He would listen gravely – with now and then a half sarcastic comment. Soon they would both relapse into silence, and so the meal would end.

As she crossed the hall the telephone rang, and she went herself to answer it.

"Hello?"

"Greta!"

"Who is it?"

"Franz!"

Franz. . . . She hadn't seen him for years – ten at least. She had thought him in America. It was ridiculous, she thought, but she was blushing. His voice sounded so thrilling and unfamiliar.

"My dear, how are you?" Her voice sounded stiff in spite of her words. "Since when are you in Vienna?"

"Got back this morning. I had a devil of a job finding your address. Greta, can I see you?"

"But of course – how long are you here?" She heard him laughing, mocking her.

"Don't be so formal – or I shall get frightened and ring off! Indefinitely, I hope, but I want to see you tonight—"

"Oh, it's imp—"

He was laughing again.

"Nonsense – when do you dine?"

"Half past eight . . . but my husband. . . ."

"I want to meet him – I'll be round for dinner." Again the laugh and a click as he rang off.

She put down the receiver agitatedly. What would Leo say? She could never be sure how he would receive men who had been her friends before marriage. But Franz was different – he must be nice to him. . . . It was strange, but no thought of her husband being jealous entered her head. Her fears were only that he might be annoyed at having his evening disturbed. Franz seemed quite unchanged – the same gay, impetuous Franz who wouldn't take 'no' for an answer, and could laugh away the most serious objection.

Her memory fled back over the years of marriage – and further – to a night when the famine in Austria had been at its worst. Bread was scarce – meat unheard of. But the Viennese refused to lose heart. The cafes were full, and if one couldn't eat one could dance, and a bottle of wine was cheaper than a loaf of bread. Bright-eyed, they drove to Grinzing in an open carriage. How cold and pale the moon seemed – how near the stars; the next day Franz was to leave for America. In a cafe surrounded by lilac trees they sat, laughing over jokes they had shared since childhood. She enjoyed herself madly, thought she was in love; light headed with wine and hunger they danced and danced . . . and said goodbye to the tune of a waltz. The next day he went away, and for a little her life seemed grey and empty. But that was all . . . nothing that Leo could mind. A gay friendship ending with a gallant, tearless farewell. Nothing more than that. But it was nervously that she knocked at her husband's door.

"Leo, dear, do you mind if I come in for a moment?"

Her husband looked up from his desk, a polite smile banishing the frown which had at first shown on his face.

"Of course, Greta."

She looked him straight in the face, as confidently as she could manage.

"Franz Arko is back – I asked him to dinner tonight."

The professor gave a slight start, and then recovering him-

self looked puzzled for a moment, as if he couldn't recall the name; at last he said: "Oh yes, now I remember – an old friend of yours. But is not tonight rather precipitate?"

She laughed – still not entirely at her ease.

"Yes, it seems so, doesn't it? But he was a great friend of mine."

"Then of course he must come," he replied, picking up his pen again. "I have heard so much about him I should like to make his acquaintance," and he went on writing.

Murmuring something about 'letting the servants know,' Greta left him.

Dinner on the whole was a success. Leo talked interestingly and with dry humour. Franz was boisterous – he had grown broader, older looking since Greta had seen him last. His stories about America were many and varied – and each was terminated by a great roar of laughter in which the Professor and Greta joined. Franz's brown face became flushed with the wine he had drunk. After a little Greta rose and left the two men together.

Alone in the drawingroom she looked perplexedly into the fire. Franz had changed. The soldier had given place to the business man, fond of stories of which he was the hero. She remembered Leo's hardly perceptible look of distaste at one of the broader jokes. Strange, but for once she did not criticize her husband. A few moments later the two men joined her.

"Greta, dear, I think I will leave you two alone – you must have such a lot to talk about."

"Don't go, Professor – I haven't told you what I said to the gangster in Chicago!"

"Alas, Arko, I have some pressing reports to go through. But Greta will look after you – and the brandy's at your elbow." With these words and a smile for his wife he left them.

Franz sat down on the sofa beside Greta, stretching his great legs towards the fire, and embarked on some more American anecdotes. An hour passed thus; he was drinking freely, and Greta noticed that his eyes had grown pinkish and protuberant. At last he laid a large hand on hers and asked, jocosely:

"Well, and how's my little Greta getting along?"

She shrugged her shoulders coldly.

"Not happy?"

"Of course," she answered, coldly in spite of herself.

"You aren't really."

"Yes – don't be foolish, Franz." She got up and leant against the mantelpiece. "You've no right to ask me that."

"Haven't I?" he asked truculently, getting rather unsteadily to his feet. "I had once, Greta!"

There was a new note in his voice. She moved away – but he caught her and held her tightly to him. She smelled his spirit-laden breath, and struggled to get away from him.

"Don't, don't." He was kissing her, and she tried to cry out but couldn't. Neither of them heard the door open and close again softly. At last she got free. Franz stood looking at her stupidly and swaying slightly.

"Go away, please," she said, as soon as she could master her voice. "I – I never want to see you again."

He laughed and turned to go. The door into the hall opened and the Professor came in smiling. Greta moved quickly towards him, taking his arm as if seeking for protection.

"Why, Greta, you seem upset – too many reminiscences of the old days?"

"No," she laughed nervously. "Franz has to go now. . . ."

"So soon? We can't allow that. Some more brandy before you go, Arko?"

Franz nodded – he had not spoken since the Professor had joined them. The two men drank in silence.

"Why are you so silent, Arko – aren't you well?"

"I'm all right, Professor, I guess I ought to be going."

"My dear chap, I won't hear of it – it's so early. Greta would be so disappointed."

"No, Leo, but perhaps Franz is tired after his journey. He may want to go."

"Yes, fact is, Professor, I've got a bit of a headache."

"A headache," put in the Professor quickly. "I can soon put that right – I'll be back in a moment, dear; on no account let our guest go."

"What are you going to do, Leo?" asked Greta, suddenly frightened.

"Just get a little medicine for your friend's headache," and he hurried from the room.

Left alone, Greta turned to Franz. "You must go at once, don't wait till he comes back - he looked so extraordinary."

The man chuckled drunkenly. "He looked a bit dippy to me!" Then, as his mind seemed to clear a little: "I'm awfully sorry, Greta, about . . ."

"That's all right," she answered, "but go now."

He turned towards the door; in it stood her husband.

He came forward, a deprecating smile on his face.

"It's too foolish of me, my dear Arko. I seem to have run out of perfectly ordinary aspirin."

"I have some upstairs," said Greta, staring at the instrument her husband held in his hand.

"Don't trouble to get it, my treasure; if Arko doesn't mind, a small injection of this will act far quicker and is quite painless."

They both stood silent; hypnotized it seemed by the voice of the Professor.

"Not afraid, Arko? Then give me your wrist."

"No, no, don't!" cried Greta.

"Don't be stupid, Greta - it is nothing at all - your wrist, Arko!"

Without a word he held it out. The Professor turned back the cuff. The arm revealed was muscular, covered with short black hairs. The instrument glinted - Greta looked away. Franz seemed to catch his breath. There was a pause while the syringe emptied itself into his arm.

"There," said the Professor gently, as if talking to an ailing child, "all over."

The sharp pain seemed to waken Franz from his dazed state. With mumbled thanks to the Professor and a stiff bow to Greta he took his departure. Something in his eyes as he said goodbye reminded her of the Franz she had lost. As the front door slammed she turned to her husband.

"I know you always have aspirin - why did you give him morphine?"

He was standing with his back to her, watching the leaping

flames of the fire; suddenly he whirled round, and the look on his face made her cower back in horror.

His face was dead white and his lips, drained of colour, were drawn back from his teeth in a wolfish grin.

"Morphine, you fool!" he hissed. "You think it was morphine? You thought you could cheat *me*, the greatest scientist of the world, who has been working for years to find a cure for the one incurable disease? In my laboratory I have serums of all the most horrifying. My collection is unique in the world. I am the greatest scientist – and this drunken clod made love to *my* wife. And you liked it, didn't you? you didn't repel him; I saw you in his arms."

His eyes shone madness and his voice rose to a shriek.

"I am old – yes – so you turn to him – whose arms are stronger – whose skin is browner than mine. But wait, wait and see what will happen to those strong arms – that brown skin."

He paused, out of breath, and she tried to speak; but with a cruel thrust he sent her reeling to the floor. He went on, panting.

"Two days ago, in the poorest quarter of Vienna, something died. It had long ceased to be human. No one knew how it had evaded the authorities for so long. Years ago it must have crept into that cellar – to die. But there were rats in the cellar and it had lived on those. One arm – no legs. The remains of the body shining sulphurescent in the darkness. Those who found it ran away in terror. I alone dared look at it. It lay on a pile of bones formed by a thousand dead rats. . . ."

"No face, but a human eye stared from the cavity where the face had been. No lips, but it mewed for the food that none dared give it."

His face was shining with sweat. Again he paused, fought to get his breath. When he spoke again his voice was quieter.

"It was the first case of a leper in Vienna for thirty years. Franz Arko will be the second."

THE CONE

H. G. Wells

THE NIGHT was hot and overcast, the sky red-rimmed with the lingering sunset of mid-summer. They sat at the open window, trying to fancy the air was fresher there. The trees and shrubs of the garden stood stiff and dark; beyond in the roadway a gas-lamp burnt, bright orange against the hazy blue of the evening. Farther were the three lights of the railway signal against the lowering sky. The man and woman spoke to one another in low tones.

"He does not suspect?" said the man, a little nervously.

"Not he," she said peevishly, as though that too irritated her. "He thinks of nothing but the works and the prices of fuel. He has no imagination, no poetry."

"None of these men of iron have," he said sententiously. "They have no hearts."

"*He* has not," she added. She turned her discontented face towards the window. The distant sound of a roaring and rushing drew nearer and grew in volume; the house quivered; one heard the metallic rattle of the tender. As the train passed, there was a glare of light above the cutting and a driving tumult of smoke; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight black oblongs – eight trucks – passed across the dim grey of the embankment, and were suddenly extinguished one by one in the throat of the tunnel, which, with the last, seemed to swallow down train, smoke, and sound in one abrupt gulp.

"This country was all fresh and beautiful once," he said; "and now – it is Gehenna. Down that way – nothing but pot-banks and chimneys belching fire and dust into the face of heaven. . . . But what does it matter? An end comes, an end to all this cruelty. . . . *Tomorrow*." He spoke the last word in a whisper.

"*Tomorrow*," she said, speaking in a whisper, too, and still staring out of the window.

"Dear!" he said, putting his hand on hers.

She turned with a start, and their eyes searched one another's. Hers softened to his gaze. "My dear one!" she said, and then: "It seems so strange – that you should have come into my life like this – to open" – She paused.

"To open?" he said.

"All this wonderful world" – she hesitated, and spoke still more softly – "this world of *love* to me."

Then suddenly the door clicked and closed. They turned their heads, and he started violently back. In the shadow of the room stood a great shadowy figure – silent. They saw the face dimly in the half-light, with unexpressive dark patches under the penthouse brows. Every muscle in Raut's body suddenly became tense. When could the door have opened? What had he heard. Had he heard all? What had he seen? A tumult of questions.

The newcomer's voice came at last, after a pause that seemed interminable. "Well?" he said.

"I was afraid I had missed you, Horrocks," said the man at the window, gripping the window-ledge with his hand. His voice was unsteady.

The clumsy figure of Horrocks came forward out of the shadow. He made no answer to Raut's remark. For a moment he stood above them.

The woman's heart was cold within her. "I told Mr Raut it was just possible you might come back," she said, in a voice that never quivered.

Horrocks, still silent, sat down abruptly in the chair by her little work-table. His big hands were clenched; one saw now the fire of his eyes under the shadow of his brows. He was trying to get his breath. His eyes went from the woman he had trusted to the friend he had trusted, and then back to the woman.

By this time and for the moment all three half understood one another. Yet none dared say a word to ease the pent-up things that choked them.

It was the husband's voice that broke the silence at last.

"You wanted to see me?" he said to Raut.

Raut started as he spoke. "I came to see you," he said, resolved to lie to the last.

"Yes," said Horrocks.

"You promised," said Raut, "to show me some fine effects of moonlight and smoke."

"I promised to show you some effects of moonlight and smoke," repeated Horrocks, in a colourless voice.

"And I thought I might catch you tonight before you went down to the works," proceeded Raut, "and come with you."

There was another pause. Did the man mean to take the thing coolly? Did he after all know? How long had he been in the room? Yet even at the moment when they heard the door, their attitudes . . . Horrocks glanced at the profile of the woman, shadowy pallid in the half-light. Then he glanced at Raut, and seemed to recover himself suddenly. "Of course," he said, "I promised to show you the works under their proper dramatic conditions. It's odd how I could have forgotten."

"If I am troubling you" - began Raut.

Horrocks started again. A new light had suddenly come into the sultry gloom of his eyes. "Not in the least," he said.

"Have you been telling Mr Raut of all these contrasts of flame and shadow you think so splendid?" said the woman, turning now to her husband for the first time, her confidence creeping back again, her voice just one half-note too high. "That dreadful theory of yours that machinery is beautiful, and everything else in the world ugly. I thought he would not spare you Mr Raut. It's his great theory, his one discovery in art."

"I am slow to make discoveries," said Horrocks grimly, damping her suddenly. "But what I discover . . ." He stopped.

"Well?" she said.

"Nothing," and suddenly he rose to his feet.

"I promised to show you the works," he said to Raut, and put his big, clumsy hand on his friend's shoulder. "And you are ready to go?"

"Quite," said Raut, and stood up also.

There was another pause. Each of them peered through the indistinctness of the dusk at the other two. Horrocks' hand still rested on Raut's shoulder. Raut half fancied still that the

incident was trivial after all. But Mrs Horrocks knew her husband better, knew that grim quiet in his voice, and the confusion in her mind took a vague shape of physical evil. "Very well," said Horrocks, and, dropping his hand, turned towards the door.

"My hat?" Raut looked round in the half-light.

"That's my workbasket," said Mrs Horrocks with a gust of hysterical laughter. Their hands came together on the back of the chair. "Here it is!" he said. She had an impulse to warn him in an undertone, but she could not frame a word. "Don't go!" and "Beware of him!" struggled in her mind, and the swift moment passed.

"Got it?" said Horrocks, standing with the door half open.

Raut stepped towards him. "Better say goodbye to Mrs Horrocks," said the ironmaster, even more grimly quiet in his tone than before.

Raut started and turned. "Good evening, Mrs Horrocks," he said, and their hands touched.

Horrocks held the door open with a ceremonial politeness unusual in him towards men. Raut went out, and then, after a wordless look at her, her husband followed. She stood motionless while Raut's light footfall and her husband's heavy tread, like bass and treble, passed down the passage together. The front door slammed heavily. She went to the window, moving slowly, and stood watching - leaning forward. The two men appeared for a moment at the gateway in the road, passed under the street lamp, and were hidden by the black masses of the shrubbery. The lamplight fell for a moment on their faces, showing only unmeaning pale patches, telling nothing of what she still feared, and doubted, and craved vainly to know. Then she sank down into a crouching attitude in the big armchair, her eyes wide open and staring out at the red lights from the furnaces that flickered in the sky. An hour after she was still there, her attitude scarcely changed.

The oppressive stillness of the evening weighed heavily upon Raut. They went side by side down the road in silence, and in silence turned into the cinder-made byway that presently opened out the prospect of the valley.

A blue haze, half dust, half mist, touched the long valley

with mystery. Beyond were Hanley and Etruria, grey and black masses, outlined thinly by the rare golden dots of the street-lamps, and here and there a gaslit window, or the yellow glare of some late-working factory or crowded publichouse. Out of the masses, clear and slender against the evening sky, rose a multitude of tall chimneys, many of them reeking, a few smokeless during the season of 'play'. Here and there a pallid patch and ghostly stunted beehive shapes showed the position of a pot-bank, or a wheel, black and sharp against the hot lower sky, marked some colliery where they raise the iridescent coal of the place. Nearer at hand was the broad stretch of railway, and half invisible trains shunted – a steady puffing and rumbling, with every now and then a ringing concussion and a series of impacts, and a passage of intermittent puffs of white steam across the further view. And to the left, between the railway and the dark mass of the low hill beyond, dominating the whole view, colossal, inky-black, and crowned with smoke and fitful flames, stood the great cylinders of the Jeddah Company Blast Furnaces, the central edifices of the big ironworks of which Horrocks was the manager. They stood heavy and threatening, full of an incessant turmoil of flames and seething molten iron, and about the feet of them rattled the rolling-mills, and the steam-hammer beat heavily and splashed the white iron sparks hither and thither. Even as they looked, a truckful of fuel was shot into one of the giants, and red flames gleamed out, and a confusion of smoke and black dust came boiling upwards towards the sky.

"Certainly you get some fine effects of colour with your furnaces," said Raut, breaking a silence that had become apprehensive.

Horrocks grunted. He stood with his hands in his pockets, frowning down at the dim steaming railway and the busy ironworks beyond, frowning as if he were thinking out some knotty problem.

Raut glanced at him and away again. "At present your moonlight effect is hardly ripe," he continued, looking upward; "the moon is still smothered by the vestiges of daylight."

Horrocks stared at him with the expression of a man who has suddenly awakened. "Vestiges of daylight? . . . Of course,

of course." He too looked up at the moon, pale still in the mid-summer sky. "Come along," he said suddenly, and, gripping Raut's arm in his hand, made a move towards the path that dropped from them to the railway.

Raut hung back. Their eyes met and saw a thousand things in a moment that their lips came near to say. Horrock's hand tightened and then relaxed. He let go, and before Raut was aware of it, they were arm in arm, and walking, one unwillingly enough, down the path.

"You see the fine effect of the railway signals towards Burslem," said Horrocks, suddenly breaking into loquacity, striding fast and tightening the grip of his elbow the while. "Little green lights and red and white lights, all against the haze. You have an eye for effect, Raut. It's a fine effect. And look at those furnaces of mine, how they rise upon us as we come down the hill. That to the right is my pet – seventy feet of him. I packed him myself, and he's boiled away cheerfully with iron in his guts for five long years. I've a particular fancy for *him*. That line of red there – a lovely bit of warm orange you'd call it, Raut – that's the puddlers' furnaces, and there, in the hot light, three black figures – did you see the white splash of the steam-hammer then? – that's the rolling-mills. Come along! Clang, clatter, how it goes rattling across the floor! Sheet tin, Raut, – amazing stuff. Glass mirrors are not in it when that stuff comes from the mill. And, squelch! – there goes the hammer again. Come along!"

He had to stop talking to catch at his breath. His arm twisted into Raut's with benumbing tightness. He had come striding down the black path towards the railway as though he was possessed. Raut had not spoken a word, had simply hung back against Horrocks' pull with all his strength.

"I say," he said now, laughing nervously, but with an undertone of snarl in his voice, "why on earth are you nipping my arm off, Horrocks, and dragging me along like this?"

At length Horrocks released him. His manner changed again. "Nipping your arm off?" he said. "Sorry. But it's you taught me the trick of walking in that friendly way."

"You haven't learnt the refinements of it yet then," said Raut, laughing artificially again. "By Jove! I'm black and

blue." Horrocks offered no apology. They stood now near the bottom of the hill, close to the fence that bordered the railway. The ironworks had grown larger and spread out with their approach. They looked up to the blast furnaces now instead of down; the further view of Etruria and Hanley had dropped out of sight with their descent. Before them, by the stile, rose a notice-board, bearing, still dimly visible, the words, 'BEWARE OF THE TRAINS', half hidden by splashes of coaly mud.

"Fine effects," said Horrocks, waving his arm. "Here comes a train. The puffs of smoke, the orange glare, the round eye of light in front of it, the melodious rattle. Fine effects! But these furnaces of mine used to be finer, before we shoved cones in their throats, and saved the gas."

"How?" said Raut. "Cones?"

"Cones, my man, cones. I'll show you one nearer. The flames used to flare out of the open throats, great – what is it? – pillars of cloud by day, red and black smoke, and pillars of fire by night. Now we run it off in pipes, and burn it to heat the blast, and the top is shut by a cone. You'll be interested in that cone."

"But every now and then," said Raut, "you get a burst of fire and smoke up there."

"The cone's not fixed, it's hung by a chain from a lever, and balanced by an equipoise. You shall see it nearer. Else, of course, there'd be no way of getting fuel into the thing. Every now and then the cone dips, and out comes the flare."

"I see," said Raut. He looked over his shoulder. "The moon gets brighter," he said.

"Come along," said Horrocks abruptly, gripping his shoulder again, and moving him suddenly towards the railway crossing. And then came one of those swift incidents, vivid, but so rapid that they leave one doubtful and reeling. Half way across, Horrocks' hand suddenly clenched upon him like a vice, and swung him backward and through a half-turn, so that he looked up the line. And there a chain of lamp-lit carriage-windows telescoped swiftly as it came towards them, and the red and yellow lights of an engine grew larger and larger, rushing down upon them. As he grasped what this meant, he turned his face to Horrocks, and pushed with all his strength against the arm

that held him back between the rails. The struggle did not last a moment. Just as certain as it was that Horrocks held him there, so certain was it that he had been violently lugged out of danger.

"Out of the way," said Horrocks, with a gasp, as the train came rattling by, and they stood panting by the gate into the ironworks.

"I did not see it coming," said Raut, still, even in spite of his own apprehensions, trying to keep up an appearance of ordinary intercourse.

Horrocks answered with a grunt. "The cone," he said, and then, as one who recovers himself, "I thought you did not hear."

"I didn't," said Raut.

"I wouldn't have had you run over then for the world," said Horrocks.

"For a moment I lost my nerve," said Raut.

Horrocks stood for a half a minute, then turned abruptly towards the ironworks again. "See how fine these great mounds of mine, these clinker-heaps, look in the night! That truck yonder, up above there! Up it goes, and out-tilts the slag. See the palpitating red stuff go sliding down the slope. As we get nearer, the heap rises up and cuts the blast furnaces. See the quiver up above the big one. Not that way! This way, between the heaps. That goes to the puddling furnaces, but I want to show you the canal first." He came and took Raut by the elbow, and so they went along side by side. Raut answered Horrocks vaguely. What, he asked himself, had really happened on the line? Was he deluding himself with his own fancies, or had Horrocks actually held him back in the way of the train? Had he just been within an ace of being murdered?

Suppose this slouching, scowling monster *did* know anything? For a minute or two then Raut was really afraid for his life, but the mood passed as he reasoned with himself. After all, Horrocks might have heard nothing. At any rate, he pulled him out of the way in time. His odd manner might be due to the mere vague jealousy he had shown once before. He was talking now of the ash-heaps and the canal. "Eigh?" said Horrocks.

"What?" said Raut. "Rather! The haze in the moonlight. Fine!"

"Our canal," said Horrocks, stopping suddenly. "Our canal by moonlight and firelight is an immense effect. You've never seen it? Fancy that! You've spent too many of your evenings philandering up in Newcastle there. I tell you, for real florid effects – But you shall see. Boiling water . . ."

As they came out of the labyrinth of clinker-heaps and mounds of coal and ore, the noises of the rolling-mill sprang upon them suddenly, loud, near, and distinct. Three shadowy workmen went by and touched their caps to Horrocks. Their faces were vague in the darkness. Raut felt a futile impulse to address them, and before he could frame his words, they passed into the shadows. Horrocks pointed to the canal close before them now: a weird-looking place it seemed, in the blood-red reflections of the furnaces. The hot water that cooled the tuyères came into it, some fifty yards up – a tumultuous, almost boiling affluent, and the steam rose up from the water in silent white wisps and streaks, wrapping damply about them, an incessant succession of ghosts coming up from the black and red eddies, a white uprising that made the head swim. The shining black tower of the larger blast-furnace rose overhead out of the mist, and its tumultuous riot filled their ears. Raut kept away from the edge of the water, and watched Horrocks.

"Here it is red," said Horrocks, "blood-red vapour as red and hot as sin; but yonder there, where the moonlight falls on it, and it drives across the clinker-heaps, it is as white as death."

Raut turned his head for a moment, and then came back hastily to his watch on Horrocks. "Come along to the rolling-mills," said Horrocks. The threatening hold was not so evident that time, and Raut felt a little reassured. But all the same, what on earth did Horrocks mean about "white as death" and "red as sin"? Coincidence, perhaps?

They went and stood behind the puddlers for a little while, and then through the rolling-mills, where amidst an incessant din the deliberate steam-hammer beat the juice out of the succulent iron, and black, half-naked Titans rushed the plastic bars, like hot sealing-wax, between the wheels. "Come

on," said Horrocks in Raut's ear, and they went and peeped through the little glass hole behind the tuyères, and saw the tumbled fire writhing in the pit of the blast-furnace. It left one eye blinded for a while. Then, with green and blue patches dancing across the dark, they went to the lift by which the trucks of ore and fuel and lime were raised to the top of the big cylinder.

And out upon the narrow rail that overhung the furnace, Raut's doubts came upon him again. Was it wise to be here? If Horrocks did know – everything! Do what he would, he could not resist a violent trembling. Right under foot was a sheer depth of seventy feet. It was a dangerous place. They pushed by a truck of fuel to get to the railing that crowned the place. The reek of the furnace, a sulphurous vapour streaked with pungent bitterness, seemed to make the distant hillside of Hanley quiver. The moon was riding out now from among a drift of clouds, half way up the sky above the undulating wooded outlines of Newcastle. The steaming canal ran away from below them under an indistinct bridge, and vanished into the dim haze of the flat fields towards Burslem.

"That's the cone I've been telling you of," shouted Horrocks; "and, below that, sixty feet of fire and molten metal, with the air of the blast frothing through it like gas in soda-water."

Raut gripped the hand-rail tightly, and stared down at the cone. The heat was intense. The boiling of the iron and the tumult of the blast made a thunderous accompaniment to Horrocks' voice. But the thing had to be gone through now. Perhaps, after all . . .

"In the middle," bawled Horrocks, "temperature near a thousand degrees. If *you* were dropped into it . . . flash into flame like a pinch of gunpowder in a candle. Put your hand out and feel the heat of his breath. Why, even up here I've seen the rain-water boiling off the trucks. And that cone there. It's a damned sight too hot for roasting cakes. The top side of it's three hundred degrees."

"Three hundred degrees!" said Raut.

"Three hundred centigrade, mind!" said Horrocks. "It will boil the blood out of you in no time."

"Eigh?" said Raut, and turned.

"Boil the blood out of you in . . . No, you don't!"

"Let me go!" screamed Raut. "Let go my arm!"

With one hand he clutched at the hand-rail, then with both. For a moment the two men stood swaying. Then suddenly, with a violent jerk, Horrocks had twisted him from his hold. He clutched at Horrocks and missed, his foot went back into empty air; in mid-air he twisted himself, and then cheek and shoulder and knee struck the hot cone together.

He clutched the chain by which the cone hung, and the thing sank an infinitesimal amount as he struck it. A circle of glowing red appeared about him, and a tongue of flame, released from the chaos within, flickered up towards him. An intense pain assailed him at the knees, and he could smell the singeing of his hands. He raised himself to his feet, and tried to climb up the chain, and then something struck his head. Black and shining with the moonlight, the throat of the furnace rose about him.

Horrocks, he saw, stood above him by one of the trucks of fuel on the rail. The gesticulating figure was bright and white in the moonlight, and shouting, "Fizz! you fool! Fizz! you hunter of women! You hot-blooded hound! Boil! boil! boil!"

Suddenly he caught up a handful of coal out of the truck, and flung it deliberately, lump after lump, at Raut.

"Horrocks!" cried Raut. "Horrocks!"

He clung crying to the chain, pulling himself up from the burning of the cone. Each missile Horrocks flung hit him. His clothes charred and glowed, and as he struggled the cone dropped, and a rush of hot suffocating gas whooped out and burned round him in a swift breath of flame.

His human likeness departed from him. When the momentary red had passed, Horrocks saw a charred, blackened figure, its head streaked with blood, still clutching and fumbling with the chain, and writhing in agony – a cindery animal, an inhuman, monstrous creature that began a sobbing intermittent shriek.

Abruptly, at the sight, the ironmaster's anger passed. A deadly sickness came upon him. The heavy odour of burning

flesh came drifting up to his nostrils. His sanity returned to him.

“God have mercy upon me!” he cried. “O God! what have I done?”

He knew the thing below him, save that it still moved and felt, was already a dead man – that the blood of the poor wretch must be boiling in his veins. An intense realization of that agony came to his mind, and overcame every other feeling. For a moment he stood irresolute, and then, turning to the truck, he hastily tilted its contents upon the struggling thing that had once been a man. The mass fell with a thud, and went radiating over the cone. With the thud the shriek ended, and a boiling confusion of smoke, dust, and flame came rushing up towards him. As it passed, he saw the cone clear again.

Then he staggered back, and stood trembling, clinging to the rail with both hands. His lips moved, but no words came to them.

Down below was the sound of voices and running steps. The clangour of rolling in the shed ceased abruptly.

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