



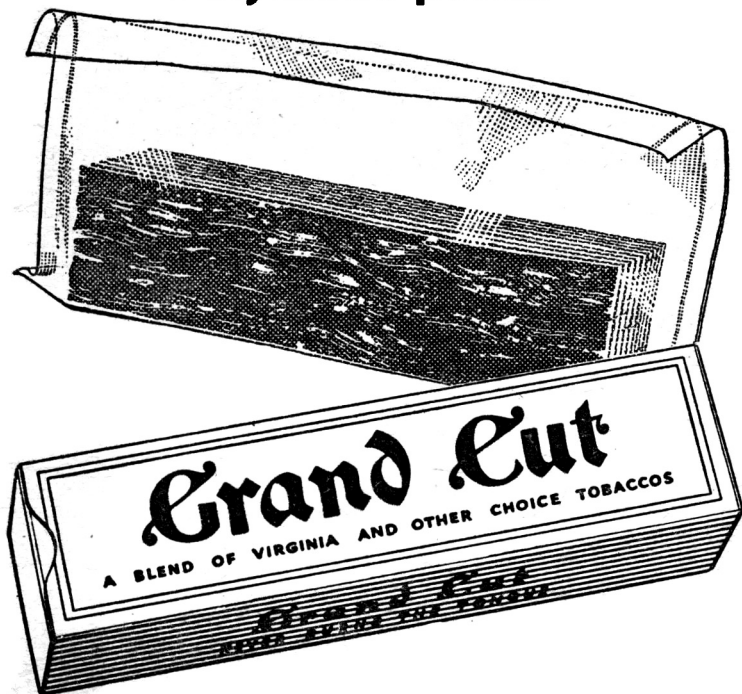
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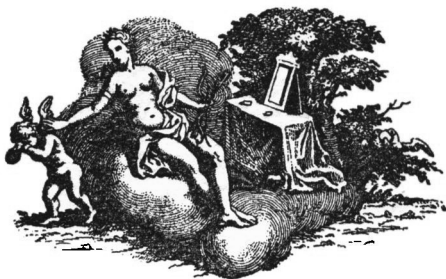
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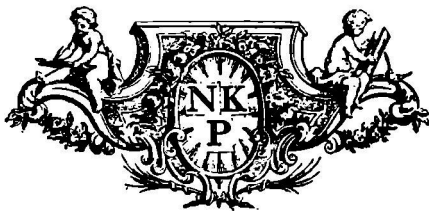
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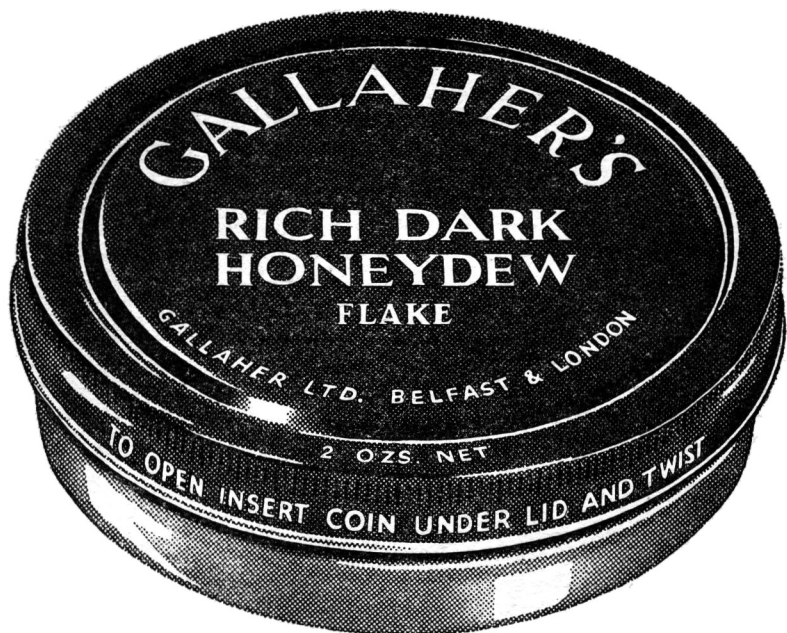
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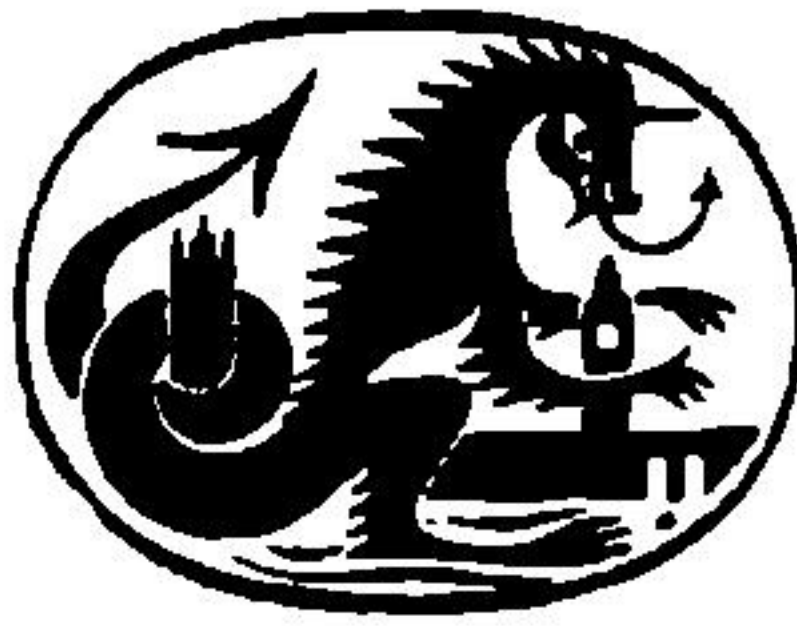
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# THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Murmurs of autumn and shrieks of winter, we have been hearing them. Many walks in London preceded our festive season. Doings of violence, places of death and apparitions, they did not escape us. We have been motionless and watching in the unheeding city rush. In the mist today, in the snow tomorrow, there were preliminaries to horror. Yet so much that was terrible, both brutal and bestial, went quite unnoticed by dark eyes of London. We gathered the best stories for our Christmas collection and we know they will please you and chill you by the fire.

In "Twelfth Night" is the glimpse of a beloved Christmas story-teller. But this bearded figure in Staple Inn, he too was sated in the monstrous. A murder trial at the Old Bailey evokes "The Wicked Boys" of long ago, the seeds in them of evil that did not disperse, their relentless tobogganing down the hill of perdition.

The disposing of bodies is always so tiresome. Even an oozy quagmire might fail to do the trick. From the fund of useful stories about this we chose "The Mayfair Corpse," with its sophisticated setting, and the gruesome "Rehearsal." "The Knife in the Mirror" is a revealing inside study of the labyrinthine criminal mind that is so prone to deceive itself within walls of innocence, so that we ourselves may be Jack the Ripper.

But we think not at Christmas when at rest and self-satisfied. We sip contentedly at fall of night and will not let the Siberian terrors in. Assuredly we have done our editorial stuff. We have changelings and monsters for you, truly corporeal forms of evil for those who still won't shudder before the things that prowl in the darkness.

Nor have we relied entirely on the gleanings of winter walks. From the ends of the earth our devoted authors came with their monsters: Captain Villiers with his piece of cobra madness, Sir Laurence Grafftey-Smith with a most fearful desert monster, not to mention that Hecate the dear innocents saw in the great chimney.

Certain to sit here to mesmerize and gall you with our horrors for another year, we happily renew to all our readers our ever-faithful season's greetings, expecting you to bring many new devotees to our cult of the mysterious by kindly recommending to them THE LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE.

EDITOR.



# Salud Amigos!

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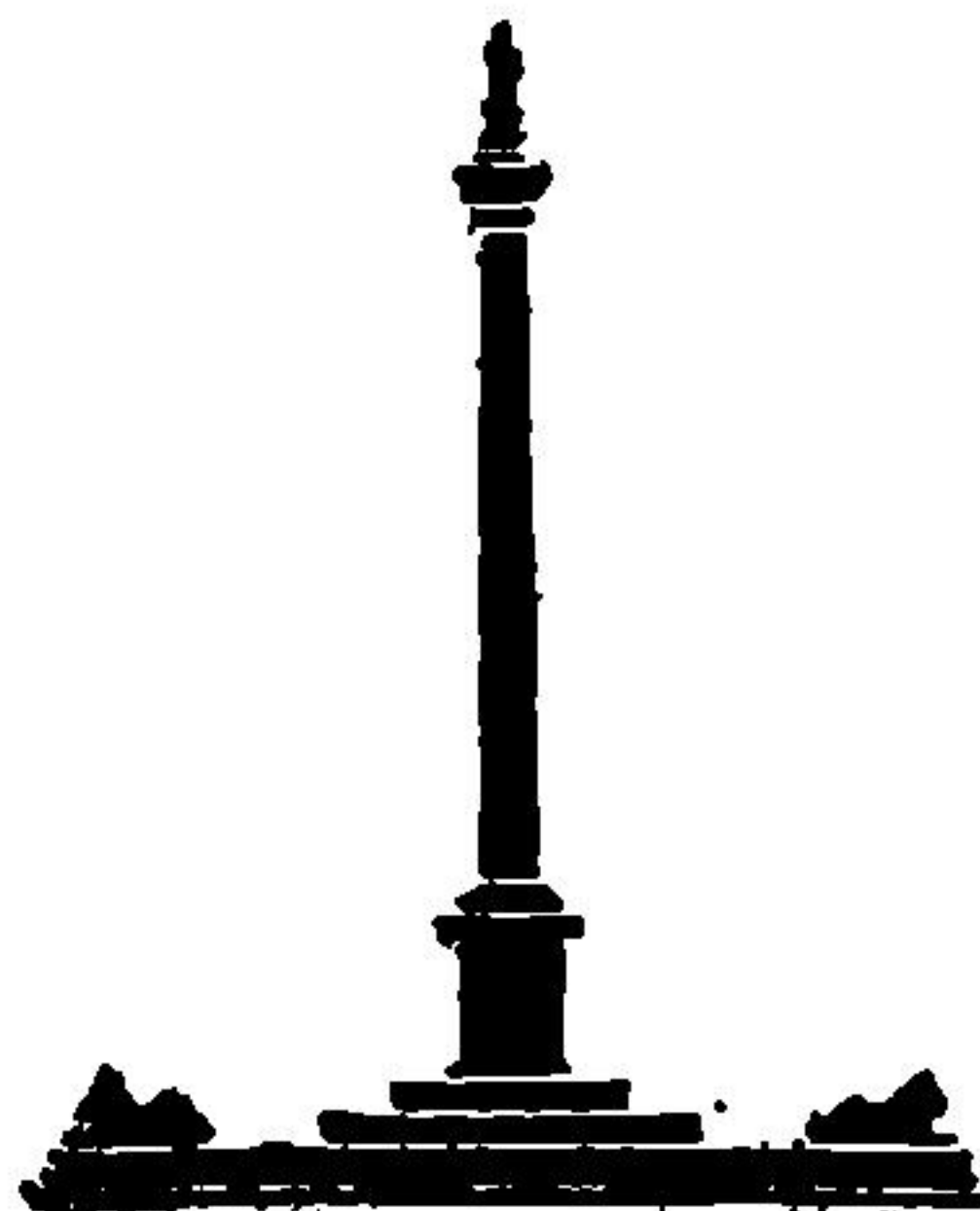


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NUMBER TWENTY-SEVEN

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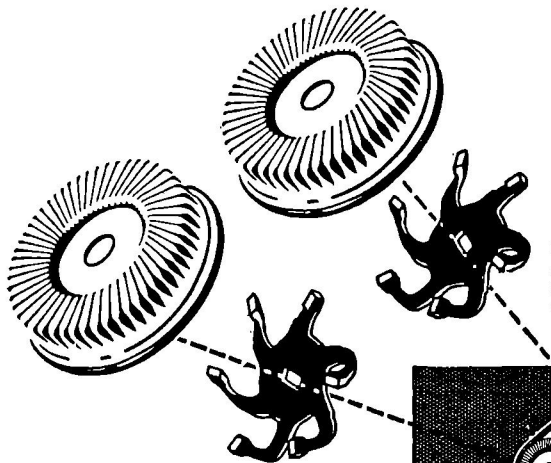
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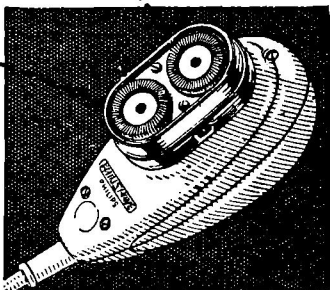
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# TWELFTH NIGHT

MICHAEL HARRISON

*Illustrated by John Wood*

*This is the second story that LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE has been privileged to publish by this distinguished novelist and historian whose study of Charles Dickens has taken its place among the standard works of biographical literary criticism. Mr. Harrison tells us that he prefers to write on London, and in this oddly moving tale of a strange nocturnal encounter he ingeniously fuses the London of yesterday with the London of the present.*



AS NIGHT FALLS ON London, the City does not empty itself as water runs from a stopperless basin, but as it were in patches, so that solitude and silence fall more quickly upon some parts of the City than upon others. And the quiet of after-office-hours seems—has always seemed to me—to fall more quickly upon the streets round about Holborn Circus than even upon the streets around the Bank.

I had been away from London for twenty years. The war had not missed me, nor had I missed the war. But my service had brought me, in all that twenty years, no nearer to London than Italy; and now, a few days after Christmas—which had been spent in Paris—I was back again, in the City that I still knew best of all; but feeling something of a stranger, full of a stranger's curiosity, aware that I was troubled with a stranger's restlessness.

The train had brought me to Waterloo in the afternoon, and I had spent

the few hours until dinner-time in doing some long-overdue business. I had dined at my club; a little saddened that I had to identify myself to the hall-porter; and now, an hour after that solitary dinner, I found myself strolling along the wide, deserted street which runs west from Kingsway.

For all the signs of damage and the signs of repair, it was still the Holborn that I had known as a young man, and in the quiet lighting of this part of London—so different from the garish blaze of the West End—the street looked familiar in a way which both warmed and chilled my heart. Warmed my heart, because it is pleasant to revisit the scenes of other days; chilled it, because of a certain wrongness in this survival. One expects, even where one cannot welcome, the signs of the years; and where those signs are missing, one is aware of an inward protest. I kept asking myself: what is *wrong* in all this rightness . . . ?

As I passed the top of Chancery Lane, I saw that a tavern where I had



once eaten many an excellent snack-meal was closed, its plaster peeling after years of neglect; and I saw, too, that the Underground station was shuttered, obviously no longer in use.

Somehow, though it saddened me to see these changes, I was conscious that the very ordinariness of the changes had eased, for a moment, an odd sense of—I suppose I can call it foreboding — foreboding, then — which had grown upon me with every step that I had taken on my way from the lights of the West End.

I know now why the sight of that empty tavern, that shuttered Underground Station, had the power momentarily to fill me with a sort of perverse contentment. Because they were different from what they had been, they had not the power, as the unaltered sights had, to remind me of the past.

But it was when I came to the crest of that gentle slope which runs from Holborn Bars down to Holborn Circus that a tugging sense of the familiar made itself most acutely felt.

Against the sky—the violet night-sky of London—were the quaint peaked gables of the old black-and-white houses that I had first seen as a boy. The old black-and-white Elizabethan houses which were now nearly all that remained of the tiny London of Drake and Raleigh, of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

My heart was caught for a moment, not only by the simple beauty of those old houses, but by the fact that, in a holocaust of destruction, they had survived. Lath and plaster, I thought,

had stood firm where steel and concrete had shattered to dust. . . .

On a sudden impulse, I walked back on to the pavement, and so up to the round-headed arch of worn stone which seemed too frail to support the weight of the houses which overhang the street. The right-hand leaf of the green-painted wooden gates was ajar, and I pushed it aside as I went into the quiet of Staple Inn.

The cobbles were a little slippery with the night dew and some late leaves which had fallen after the sweeper had packed up for the day, and the one old bracket-lamp still shed the yellow gleam that I remembered. The trees—bare now, of course—looked, I thought, with a half-sad pleasure, sturdy enough to outlast a dozen life-times, and though I could not read the inscriptions in that dim light, I could see that the plaster panels over the seventeenth-century porches were still intact.

So I stood, much as Sir Bedivere must have stood on that Cornish headland, “revolving many memories”; and it was not until I had taken out one of the cheroots that I had learned to smoke in my years abroad that I became aware that I had company in that silent backwater.

A voice—a man’s voice, though rather high-pitched, and with a curiously clipped utterance, as though his speech were too quick for his tongue and had had to have a brake upon it—said courteously:

“I wonder if you would object to my joining you in a cigar, sir?”

I realized, after a momentary



collecting of my wits, that what the stranger was asking—though in rather a roundabout way—was that I should give him a light. I said hurriedly:

"Not a bit! Delighted. . . ."

The flame of my match, as I handed it to him, showed me a lean, somewhat haggard face whose mouth was shadowed by a ragged moustache and whose chin was adorned with a beard which grew independently of the moustache, though a little more fully than an "imperial" does.

I could not see the stranger's eyes, for they were too deeply shadowed by the brim of his hat, but I could see that the man's forehead was unusually high and white, and that his haggard appearance was not to be associated with poverty. What I could see of his dark clothes—and it was not much—inclined me to think that the stranger was comfortably off, and as he put up his cigar to take a light, I caught the gleam of a diamond ring. A real diamond. I remember noticing the gleam and thinking that no imitation ever caught the light as his was catching it. . . .

I said, more for want of something to say than because I really cared one way or the other:

"Is your cigar properly lit, sir?" —

He seemed to ponder both the end of his cigar and the question itself before he answered, quietly:

"Indeed, sir, thank you. May I—you will forgive me, but I am notoriously inquisitive by nature, and my profession has encouraged me in the vice—may I ask what brings you here on this night?" And before I could

reply he had added, to explain his question: "I wondered if, perhaps, you had known Staple Inn as a young person?"

"I served my articles here," I said. Which was not really answering his question—it was not the reason why I had come back on this night.

"Ah . . . I might have guessed." There was a long pause before he said, reflectively, "I was never articulated, though I was a clerk in the employ of two excellent firms—*excellent* firms." He gave a high, rather





whinnying laugh. "I must admit that neither firm failed when I withdrew my services—which, perhaps, is yet one more endorsement of the wisdom of my choice when I went into a different—a *quite* different profession. You, I take it, sir, remained?"

"Well . . ." I said, wondering for the life of me why I should answer his question, but aware that I was going to do so, all the same, "well, yes. That is, I qualified all right, and I was admitted. I haven't exactly left the Law, you understand; but I act now as legal adviser, rather than practise on my own."

The stranger said, drawing hard at his cigar so that his lean, lined, yellowish face was lit up for a moment in the red glow:

"I should apologize for being so inquisitive, but I must explain that I am a writer. In our search for information, we are, I know, sometimes forgetfully inclined to overstep the limits prescribed by social convention and good breeding. Forgive me, please. . . ."

"Oh," I said, "please don't apologize! I rather think that convention permits fuller confidences between the chance-met than between established friends."

The stranger laughed.

"Permitted by convention or not, that is what usually happens. So . . . you are indulging a little sentimentality tonight, my dear sir, in revisiting Staple Inn? This is the pleasantest little square in London, don't you think, sir?"

I sighed.

"Yes . . . yes, I do. The little chapel

looks so peaceful, and . . . they haven't relaid the cobblestones. Nothing has altered. I came through the gate half-afraid that it would all have been swept away. And yet . . ."

"And yet," said the stranger gently, "there's something not altogether comforting in the sight of it as it has always been?"

"Perhaps . . ." I said.

"Well," said the stranger, rubbing his hands so briskly that I could hear the dry papery sound, "this is the very night for remembering, for going back, for reliving old days. . . ." And as though struck by some quality in my silence, "Why, my dear sir, don't tell me that you've forgotten what night this is?"

"I'm afraid I have, sir. What . . . what night is it? We lost a day crossing the date line, and I've rather lost track of the days. . . ."

"Of course," he said courteously. "That's it! Well, my dear sir, tonight is Twelfth Night, when the children are shouting as they risk burning their mouths at snapdragon, and Twelfth Cake will be cut, and young girls will wrap a piece in their handkerchiefs and hope to dream what fate will send them in the shape of a pleasant young fellow. . . ."

"If they still do those things," I said, conscious of a curious chill as I said it.

"They still do them at the house where. . . . Well," said the stranger, "I was going to say, where I called in. But, as it happened, I merely looked in at the window, just to see how they were all getting along." And now it was he who sighed; but he added,



"Oh, everything going along excellently . . . excellently."

"I suppose," I said, though my mind was full of quite a different matter, "that you stumble across your plots almost anywhere? I mean, you must constantly be on the look-out for fresh ideas? Or do they just come upon you unawares—without your seeking them?"

He appeared to ponder the questions. At last he said:

"Both, really. But yes, I do seek out my plots. Or, at least, I keep my eyes and my ears and . . . and my heart open, to see what is to be seen."

"And do you think," I asked, "that you miss much?"

The answer astonished me, for I had formed the opinion that my chance-met acquaintance was not lacking in self-esteem in whatever other qualities he might be deficient. He said quietly:

"I have missed so much that, reading over what I have written, I find that I have missed almost everything; but what wasn't important. Certainly I have missed most of what was true. Although," he added, as much to himself as to me, "I have some reputation as a man who has seen more than others. . . ."

"I suppose," I said hesitantly, "that you couldn't . . . Well, I don't know much about the writer's craft, but . . . well, isn't it possible, as the writer gets older, acquires more experience, to make some revisions of earlier work?"

Even in the darkness I saw the man's eyes shine. Yes . . . and I saw him smile. He clasped my hand,

reaching out for it eagerly in the dim light, and I was aware of a curious, feverish tension in the small, hard, almost claw-like hands.

"My dear sir! And I have sometimes represented members of your profession as lacking in observation—even in common sense. Do forgive me, please!"

I laughed.

"Don't mention it! I'm afraid we do figure rather badly in literature. But we have traditionally thick skins, as well as thick heads. Not another word, sir! You didn't answer my question, though."

"Your question, sir? Ah yes yes, indeed! Revision, eh?"

"Yes. Isn't it possible? Or is a writer always too busy with new work to be able to afford time to revise the old?"

A thin, strong, vibrant hand gripped my upper arm. The stranger bent his head so close to my ear that I could feel his beard brush my cheek. He whispered, rather than spoke, as he said, in a decidedly conspiratorial way (or so it seemed to me):

"My dear sir, my *very* dear sir, what you have confessed yourself as ignorant of, a great many authors don't know either. You are to be forgiven. Your ignorance is not culpable. *Theirs is.* They are not to be forgiven such ignorance. And what is more," he added, drawing away, "every author who has been guilty of either putting the wrong thing into his writings or even of leaving the right thing out, must get things into order. . . ."

"A long task for some authors," I



said, with what I trust was only a gentle sarcasm. "There was one man mentioned in the evening paper the other day who writes fifty books a year. . . ."

"But," said the stranger, "though they are obviously rather *hurried*, shall we say?—they need not be untruthful. The style doesn't matter (though I confess I once thought it did); what matters is that what is written shall be true. And until what is written is true or has been made true, the author can know no peace. . . ."

I suppose my solicitor's training got the better of what I now realize was my common sense. I said:

"But who on earth is to make the authors revise their imperfect work? I mean, unless it's downright libellous . . . who's going to make them?"

The stranger said quietly:

"The Law. . . ."

And I didn't ask him which Law he meant. I knew. . . .

The stranger said:

"It seems very peaceful here tonight. But one mustn't mistake quiet for peace; certainly not for repose. I remember a most tumultuous time in my life, when I used to come through this small garden every night. And I assure you, my dear sir, it looked just as peaceful then as it does now, for all that my heart was a very Etna of youthful emotions. I dare say, as I think of that time, that I can guess what brings you back here?"

"I dare say you could," I said with a smile.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, and,

so it seemed to me, not a little regretfully, "there is only one thing which brings a man—or a woman—back to this little garden. And that, sir, is not so much the memory of an old affection—an old love—as an undeniable need to put something right." He said, with so strong an air of authority that it never occurred to me to question his right to say it, "That's what's brought you back tonight, eh? Of course. And——"

I filled in the pause.

"And that's what's brought you back, too, sir?"

He said quietly:

"It has brought me back a        a number of times. . . ."

The moon had risen, though heavy clouds obscured its light. But the lantern of the little chapel showed now quite clearly in silhouette against the gently lightening sky; though, understandably enough, the rising moon only plunged our garden into deeper shadow. I was puzzled at the time to account for a feeling of satisfaction that this should have been so.

My companion had taken out his cigar-case and offered me a cigar. When I had declined, assuring him that I now smoked—old habit, eh?—nothing but my favourite cheroots, he had taken a cigar himself, and again I had given him a light.

I was waiting for him to break the silence which had fallen upon us, and I did not try to make conversation. At last, with a sighing sort of breath, he said:

"I have sometimes been a man justly accused of reticence. At other times I have confided, perhaps, too



much. But, as I shall never see you again, I shall tell you something which has so far been a closely guarded secret of mine."

I said, a little uncomfortably:

"Do you think you . . . I mean, we *could* meet again. It's not beyond the bounds of possibility. . . ."

"It is *quite* beyond the bounds of possibility," said the stranger, again with that air of undeniable authority; and there was something, not so much in the tone with which the words were said as in the implication of that authority, which ran small icy fingers up and down my spine. "We shall never meet again, my friend. We *cannot*. . . ."

I said, feebly:

"Very well, then. . . ."

It seemed a foolish thing to say, but for the life of me I could think of nothing else to say.

"I told you," said the stranger, almost as though he were speaking to himself, "that I had known this garden a long time. I have success now—fame, if you like. But there was a time when I was a very poor, a very neglected youth; and when I grew up, the shame that I felt at having been poor and neglected made the poverty and neglect seem so very much worse than they had been. It took a long time," the stranger said reflectively, "to see that it was so, but I did see it at last. And, of course, I see it ever more clearly——"

"Oh, that's nothing," I said. "No one minds about those things nowadays."

"I dare say," he said briefly. "But it was in this very garden that I suf-

fered some of my worst pangs. I used to come here from . . . from the place where I was employed. (Very menial, very degrading work I felt it, too, to be sure!) And here I would try to read some book of adventure, to take my mind off my troubles and shame; and mostly, I remember, I cried too much to be able to see the printed page.

"Ah, well. . . . That was a long time ago, and I've seen things a little more clearly since. I got out of my troubles—the financial ones, anyhow. And I thought I was happy for a little while. And then. . . . Is that; good heavens, it's eleven o'clock!"

I looked at the luminous dial of my wrist-watch.

"Yes . . . just eleven."

"Bless us! The last hour of Twelfth Night. Did I say that it was a very special, a very *particular* sort of night, sir?"

"You did mention something of the sort, I remember."

My companion said, in a musing sort of tone:

"Tell me, have you ever pondered on the particular significance of Twelfth Night? Have you ever thought what it was about the first Twelfth Night of all which sanctified it and should make us reverence it?"

"No, I . . . I can't say that I have."

The stranger said, with an air of solemnity that I might have found ludicrous, false even, in other surroundings, but that I did not so find now:

"Kings from the ends of the earth came to *give*. That's all. To *give*. On other feast-days we celebrate other



things. But on Twelfth Night we celebrate *giving*. That's all. Just *giving*."

"Yes," I said, remembering all the times when I had taken instead. Remembering a night in this same garden. . . .

"So," said my companion, "if there are any debts to be paid—and be sure we must pay them, all of them!—it's on Twelfth Night we must settle up our accounts. . . ."

"You spoke of revision," I said gently, to break the silence.

"Revision . . . yes. I'll tell you the story I had in mind."

"A true story?"

"Oh yes. Not one that I wrote. But one that I . . . well, which happened to . . . to a man I know.

"This man, when he was still very young and wasn't a bit overstocked with self-confidence, achieved a very great success. He not only found himself with more money than he'd ever dreamt of possessing—at least, before

he was sixty, say; he found himself a person of world-wide renown. He had wealth and fame . . . and he was not yet twenty-eight. And

almost up to the time when he was eighteen he had lived more or less in poverty. What do you imagine this did to that young man, sir?"

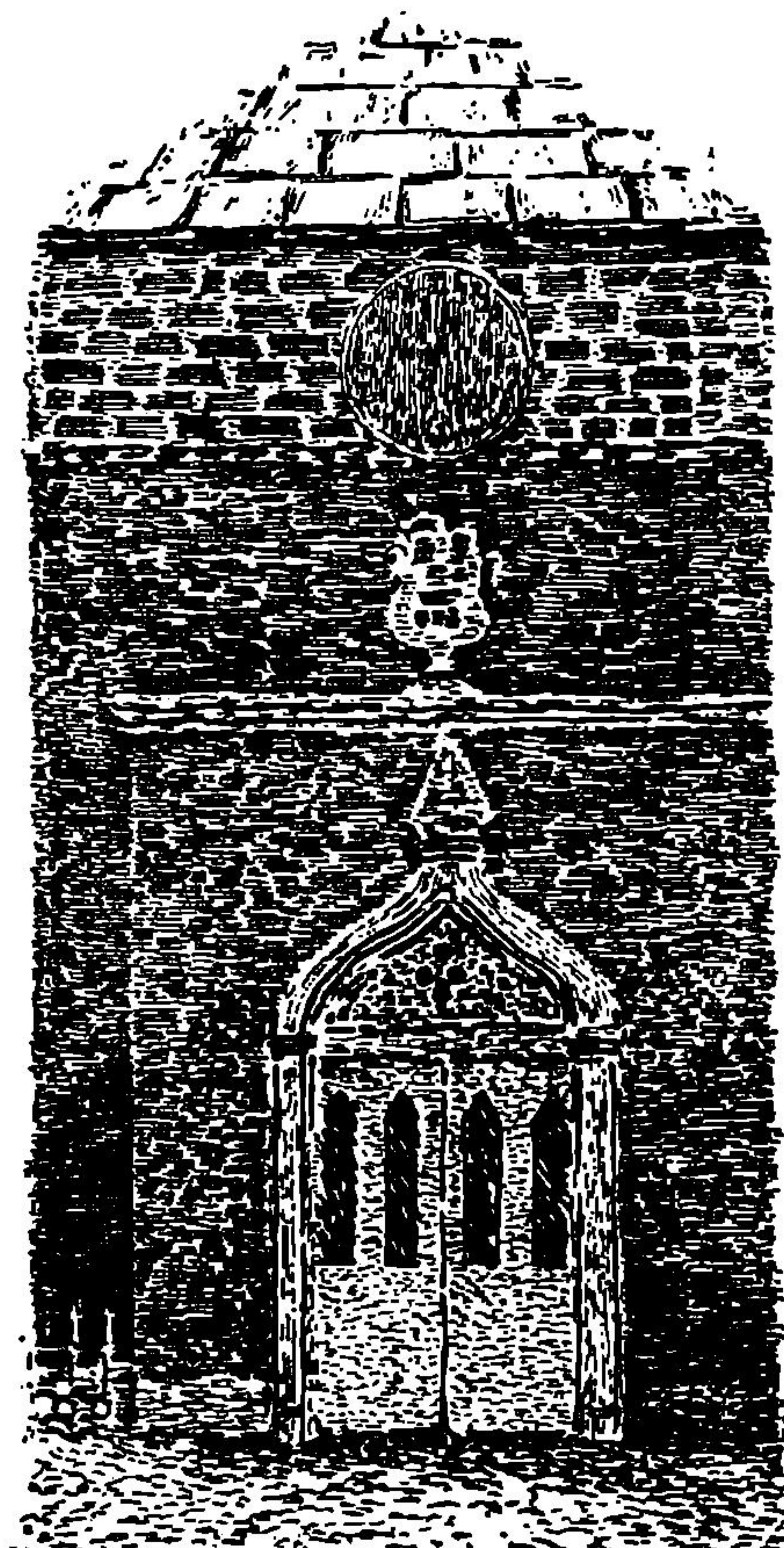
"It turned his silly young head," I said promptly.

There was a laugh in my companion's voice as he said:

"Right you are! It turned his—what did you say, sir?—his silly young head. Well turned it, poor fellow!

"Still, young heads are made to be turned, and no great harm would have come of it had this . . . this man I know . . . not

been thirsting to revenge himself for a fancied—no, it was not fancied, it was a *real* slight, that he had taken of a young female to whom he was much attached. Did you say something, sir?"





"I said, Was he madly in love with her?"

The stranger coughed.

"Well yes. Perhaps that is truer. He was madly in love with her, and . . . well, her parents considered him an unsuitable match."

"He hadn't come into his great fortune then, I take it?"

"No, sir. A few short months *after* he had had his letters returned (though the young lady prudently took copies) his name was on everyone's lips. But the parents of the young lady could not see the promise; all they saw was a rather insecure youth, full of social faults, and . . . well, no match, as I said, for their daughter."

"I see. Tell me, sir: you say you knew this . . . this friend well. Did you see the promise?"

There was a long pause. And at last he said with a sigh:

"No, sir. No, I did not. So, as you are thinking, the parents may hardly be blamed."

"Except that y—, that your friend did blame them?"

"He was very young, sir; and his pride had been sorely hurt."

"And he sought revenge? Upon the parents or upon the young lady?"

"Upon both. Now comes the very sad part of this story," said my friend.

"The young man had already made the acquaintance of a family whom he greatly respected. He thought that, if he might ally himself in marriage with this family, he would be rising in the world, and would, at the same time, show both the young lady who had jilted him, *and* her parents, how

little they had hurt him. I think I may shorten the story by saying that he did, in fact, marry one of the daughters of his newer friends."

"Well. . .?" But I knew what had been wrong.

"It was a wicked thing to do," said my companion, "even for the giddy young, who have a very special talent for ruining lives by acts of sudden, spontaneous selfishness. A very wicked thing to do—for he did not love the young person. He loved the girl who had jilted him, and, at the time, he believed that he would never love another. . . ."

"Did he, then?"

"Later; a lot later. Yes. But . . . that was not to be for many years. In the meantime," he sighed, "he was in love—and was destined for many years to be in love—with the girl whom he had not married. . . ."

"A common enough situation, all the same?"

"Ah yes. Indeed yes. Sadly enough, to be sure; but—as you say, sir—common enough, in all conscience. And . . . a situation that more sensible people, altogether kinder, decidedly *more honest people*"—he brought out the last phrase in a sort of angry rush—"finding themselves in, make into something decent."

"There are few men, indeed—or women either, for that matter—who are not pestered with regrets soon after the first excitement of marriage has died down. Few indeed who do not feel, at some time—though it may be for only a moment—that they have made a mistake."

"But the majority put the thought



aside. They not only do not let the thought poison their lives; they act the better, they try the harder, in the realization that they may well have made a mistake. They are determined not to let the mistake continue as such. . . .”

“And your young friend could not do this?”

“He is no longer young,” said my companion, with the gentlest of sighs. “But . . . no. And it would be dishonest of me to accept the implication of your remark, your question. It would be fairer—even to him, *particularly* to him—to say that he *did not* make the best of a bad situation, not that he *could not*. . . . If he had tried, if he had wished to try. If, in short, his heart had been one half as sound as his head. . . .”

I don’t know what prompted me to ask:

“Have you ever used this in a novel? This situation, I mean?”

“Frequently,” he said, in an off-hand manner. “But to use pieces of life in a novel is not to present life in anything but a distorted form. Two or three pieces of a jig-saw puzzle don’t show the picture. And I have never used the whole, the true story.

“For this . . . this man began to hate his wife. His life with her was one persistent regret—for him; and there was nothing in this regret which wasn’t mean. There are some vices which, by their very greatness, may ennoble a man even as they are damning him to eternal perdition. There was nothing of the sort about this man’s vice. It was based on selfishness, and pretty soon that unlovely

seeding-ground had sprouted a fine crop of petty meannesses. Fame came to him, with wealth . . . and all the time—with each new access of money, with each new honour paid to him by a world grateful for his undoubted talents—he would say to himself . . . If only I had waited! If only I had waited a little longer! If only I had had someone to advise me that the So-and-So’s were not the aristocratic family that I had imagined!

“So”—and now my companion took a deep breath, as though indeed he had come to the very heart of the matter—“his poor, self-besotted mind caused him to act with something of the fearful mock-logic of the lunatic. He said, My wife has cheated me of my marriage rights, bringing me no love where I should have had love. Very well then (says the fool, and worse than fool!), I shall take away any satisfaction she and her family may feel in having trapped such a catch!

“So—dear me!—he tried, and admirably succeeded, in making their first home”—the stranger nodded over his shoulder, in the direction of the gate—“as un-homelike as possible. He was already living with his good-for-nothing brother—of whose coarse ways and feckless, shifty mode of living he was heartily ashamed. He kept the brother on, when he brought the young wife home. That was a temporary convenience to the brother; but, to revenge himself upon the wife, the young man deliberately retained the brother. More, he invited the wife’s plain, mischief-



making younger sister to share the home as well; and, by and large, the man could take a perverse satisfaction in the thought that, if he had done nothing else, he had contrived to rob his wife of that domestic privacy which is the first expected gift of marriage."

"And what about her?" I asked. "Where does she come in?"

"I shall tell you. She was a difficult woman to live with, and this campaign against her happiness did not make her the easier to live with, as you may imagine. But she was intelligent, and she did love her husband (for all that she despised his faults as honestly as she admired his virtues). And—this is the supreme tragedy—he could have made her happy. What was more, he knew it—and the knowledge maddened him. He could make *her* happy, whom he resented; while she whom he craved had rejected him!"

"And then . . . and then, something really serious happened. There was an even younger sister of his wife's. A mere child; not pretty, but with winning ways—one of the most winning of which was her uncritical admiration of all that the young man did.

"The young man invited his wife to ask this sister to join the household, and, in the wife's despair, she did so. For she had pride . . . pride.

. . . She would not let her husband see how deeply he was wounding her. She did not, for one thing, wish to let him know that she knew how much he wished to hurt her, for she hoped that, one day, his view would change, and the knowledge that she had ever known would stand between them.

So she did what he suggested, and asked her young sister to join them.

"You may have read of this elsewhere," said my companion, in a musing tone of voice. "But . . . well, there it was. The young girl—a mere child then—came. Delighted to be the guest of so famous, so good-looking, so *kind* a young man. Delighted to be able to leave home in the proper circumstances; not to run away, but to be invited to spend what, to the young girl, must have appeared to be an endless holiday.

"This young girl loved the young man with that sort of romantic affection which is proper to a maiden's heart. There was no more guilt in her affection than there was wrong. She was as open in her affection as she had been open in her admiration.

"But he. . . . Ah!"

"Of course, he loved her."

"Inevitably. She was like her sister—his wife. But younger, fresher, guiltless (this was how he put it) of any crime against him. Oh yes, he loved her well enough, and, as she grew up in his home, her childish love took on something of the womanly. If she . . . if she hadn't died. . . .!"

"Was that the best thing?"

My companion sighed.

"It is what happened. That is all that's to be said.

"But in its effect upon the young man, the death was disastrous. Save in his work, in his dealings with the world, the tragedy deprived him, not only of all his honesty but of almost all his sanity. He acted like a man deprived of all reason, and in his frenzy he paraded his unworthy love for this



innocent young creature abroad. He made the world party, not only to his unworthy desires but to his firm intention to remain in his madness."

"Unworthy? But he may have loved her truly?"

"In a way," said my companion softly, "he did. But it took more years than he had to spare to redeem the crime that he committed, not only against the young girl but against Love itself.

"You see, sir, the young girl did love him truly. Truly, purely—with such a love as he could never give to anyone—not so long, that is to say, as he so loved himself.

"And the crime that he committed against her, and against Love was this: that in spreading his story about, in parading his 'broken heart,' he humiliated his wife, and so made the young girl's love for him only an instrument of his own revenge. Thus, sir, he made love the servant of his own selfishness; and he used the loved dead to hurt the hated living.

"Would you not call this a crime?"

I said gently:

"What . . . what happened to him?"

"What happens to all of us. He was made to pay his debts. To make reparation. To"—he seemed to hesitate a little—"to make revisions. . . .

"The time's drawing on. Twelfth Night is nearly over. . . .

"Ah yes . . . you were asking about the revision? It's . . . well, that's what we have to do. Go over our badly written work; alter a phrase here, a sentence there. Cut out a chapter here, give a chapter a different ending there. Remove an unnecessary or an

unpleasant character . . . and so forth. It can be done, of course, you understand; but it all takes time. . . ."

The clock in the chapel-lantern struck the three-quarters.

"Yes," he said, "it takes time. But when the revision has been made, the revision is as true (whatever the word means) as the original. And"—again he jerked his head over his shoulder—"in the revision, the young girl did not die. *He* died instead.

"He comes—only once a year, you know, that's all—to look up at the window behind which he knows she is laughing and growing more beautiful with every year that passes. Sometimes—as he did tonight—he goes up the wide stairs, and listens outside the door, to the noise of children burning their fingers at snap-dragon, to the shouts of delight with which they





watch the Twelfth Cake being cut. And there is music—the music of the pianoforte—and singing. He is glad,” said my companion, “that the revision has worked out like this. . . . And now, my dear sir,” he said, standing up, “I must be off. No, no”—putting his hands on my shoulders—“you stay. She will be here soon. . . .”

“But how did you . . . how do you know?” I gasped.

“I know,” the stranger smiled. “She has no more forgotten this garden than you have. Stay. She will be here. . . .”

I sat still and he walked off. But, as he reached the gate he stopped, turned and came back. He said:

“We shall never meet again. The revision is not complete, but you will have no need to come here again. And . . . and I would rather you didn’t. I can trust you not to come back, if I ask it. And I do ask it. And so . . . we shall not meet again.”

“I shall read your books again,” I said.

“Ah! You recognized me, then?”

“I knew the story,” I said. “The unrevised story. . . .”

“Good night, my friend,” said the stranger. “And remember that we all of us live unrevised stories. And that we have to revise, soon or late.”

She came as the stranger had said that she would.

“I don’t know what made me come,” she said; “it was just an impulse. . . .”

I have never gone back to the garden, nor has she; and though we both remember that night, when the clock

struck midnight in the bell-tower of the little chapel, I sometimes wonder if we were ever there, save in some strange dream-condition which can never again be experienced.

Of course, the porter could have forgotten to lock the gate, which is always closed, in the winter months, at sunset; and so we could have gone into the garden. And the man whom I met there certainly *appeared* to smoke two cigars. I smelt them, and I wish I had gone back, just once, to the garden, to see whether or not the stubs were as they had fallen.

But then there is the chapel that I saw, and the clock that we both heard strike as we came together after all the wasted years. And I know that the chapel was blown down in the blitz, and has never been rebuilt.

It is the chapel which can hardly be explained away. All the other things can. My companion might have been merely an elderly, harmless lunatic. Not even that; he might just have been pulling my leg. He might just have had a little too much to drink, and was amusing himself in his own way. If it weren’t for the chapel that I saw so clearly outlined against the rising moon, I could even explain the visiting-card that the stranger pressed into my hand; for any engraver can write:

MR. CHARLES DICKENS

Gad’s Hill House  
Shorne-by-Rochester  
Kent

The Garrick Club



# THE WICKED BOYS

JOAN HADFIELD

**R**OSIE SAT VERY still on the hard oak seat and waited. There was nothing else to do. The jury had been out for nearly an hour now; they might be out for another two hours yet. It was very difficult not to fidget; but no matter how you moved on this polished wooden bench, you never got comfortable. She stole a covert glance from under her long lashes at her brother sitting in equal discomfort. He, too, was waiting, waiting as she was, as this whole court waited, suspended in an agony of anticipation, as time itself seemed suspended, waiting for the ten men and two women to file back into the room, acknowledge the Bench, and then look, or not look as the case might be, at her brother perched up there so rigidly, high above them all, suspended, too, for this interval of time between life and death.

Did he know, Rosie wondered, that she was in court? Could he feel that she, his twin, was there, waiting with him, breathing this same stale, stuffy air? She had stared and stared at him, but he never looked round at her. She was trying to assess how he was changed, but he was, in fact, no different from when she had seen him last, during the war, despite all those dark years of desertion, crime and now murder which had separated them. He did not even look older; and

that was unfair, for Rosie herself looked older, though her life had flowed as tranquilly as a placid river through its water-meadows.

That he was quite unchanged made it all the harder to bear.

When had he drawn apart, then? Had the man he now was always lurked hidden under the ordinary exterior of the boy she had grown up with? She heard again the muster-roll of crimes of which he stood accused and, in her own mind, convicted. There seemed to her no possibility of his innocence.

It was then, as she sat on the hard bench and waited, that she remembered that long frozen winter when the snow fell.

The two children bounced into the kitchen, banging the door behind them.

"Shut them out!" they shouted. "Shut them out!"

Their mother, joining in their game, turned from her cooking and asked in an artificially sepulchral voice:

"Is that the Wicked Boys?"

"Yes," Rosie nodded vigorously. "We mustn't let them in, David, must we?"

He shook his head more slowly. He was paler, thinner, altogether less vivacious, than his more obviously charming sister.

"That's right," their mother agreed, wagging her head in her turn. "It wouldn't do to let them in the house.



Look at all the havoc they would cause!"

After lunch the snow began to fall. Down and down it came, steadily, on and on, great globules. David and Rosie watched it all afternoon, their noses pressed ecstatically to the window. Right from the beginning it lay. By tea-time the garden was all changed; the humpy lawn was a deserted, shimmering sea, its alluring whiteness beckoning, begging to be soiled.

"We won't get wet if we go out," Rosie cried rebelliously from time to time. "We can put on our boots and mackintoshes."

"Don't argue," their mother said in her no-nonsense voice with its edge of irritation. "The snow will still be here tomorrow. You can go out then, when it's stopped."

Rosie turned to her brother, excitement lighting her imagination.

"I bet the Wicked Boys are out there, though, enjoying themselves."

"Yes, of course, they are," he answered. "There they are, building a snowman." He pointed out across the unreal wilderness. "And look! They've taken Daddy's hat! His new best one."

"And his pipe! His nice briar! Oh, he will be cross!" Rosie jumped in glee. "Look! They're snowballing. They're chucking them at the greenhouse. Ah! Bang! They've broken one of the panes! Ooh! What a lovely fight they're having now. Mummy! Come and see the Wicked Boys having a simply tremendous snow-fight."

"And look! That one there, by him-

self," said David slowly. "He's put a stone in his snowball. He's thrown it now, and see! it's hit one of the others and cut his head open. It's bleeding."

He glanced furtively over his shoulder, back into the room, but his mother was not there, only Rosie looking away from the garden and frowning at him.

"Oh no," she said, distaste showing in her voice, "that's not fair. We don't do things like that."

"We don't." David nodded his head wisely. "But the Wicked Boys do. They can do anything. Anything at all."

It was still snowing when they went to bed, their excitement still mounting as they planned the next day. Clutching hot-water bottles, they shouted good night, still talking about toboggans and snowmen and whether the pond would freeze. They fell asleep at once to the soft pad of the snow.

David had no idea what time it was when he woke up. Dragging his bedclothes with him, he wriggled frantically down his bed until he could see out of the window. Ah yes! It was all right. The snow was still there.

Dazzling and lovely, a new unreal world glowed with a white crispness under a full moon. David stared out at it in fascination. It was more brilliant than in daytime. And there, shouting and shrieking as they danced in the moonlight, were the Wicked Boys. He saw them all plainly and heard the fun they were having with their toboggans on the hill. The night was theirs!



And then he saw the worst one, the most wicked of all the Wicked Boys, the one who put the stone in the snowball, start a new slide on the dangerous corner at the bottom of the hill, the treacherous bend where all the cars would skid.

David beat with his fists on the window-pane. His eyes glowed.

The snow stayed for nearly three weeks. It stayed too long. It over-stayed its welcome. A bitter, howling wind froze it hard. More snow fell and was frozen in its turn. Even the children had their fill of it. They began to grow bored and to stay indoors against the cold.

"When will the snow go, Mummy?" Rosie whined.

It must have been about the middle of the second week of this Siberian interlude that David woke up again in the loneliest time of the night. It was so cold in his room that his breath had frozen on the inside of the window-pane. He lay admiring the patterns in the glow of the night-light, warm and toasted in his comfortable bed. Only his nose showed above the bedclothes and the tip of one ear which had somehow got uncovered. He crawled down again underneath the blankets, thinking that the cold was becoming a little tiresome. The snow was too frozen now to be any fun, and the wind bit too hard for tobogganning.

He could hear the wind now, roaring out its fearsome message from the plains of Russia. It shrieked in a wailing rhythm, rising to a desperate crescendo as it hurtled round the corner of the house. David lay listen-

ing, and it seemed to him that words throbbed through the whine.

"Let me IN," the words shouted. "Let ME IN. LET ME IN."

Cautiously David wriggled his ears clear of their covering. It was no mistake. Lifting his head now, carefully, a few inches from the pillow, he saw the face at the frozen window, rattling the pane.

"Let me in," it wailed.

It was the worst of the Wicked Boys, David knew; the one who had put the stone in the snowball; the one who started the slide at the bend of the road. He, like David and Rosie, was getting tired of the snow. He wanted to come inside, to play by the fire, eat toast and hot soup and help with the jig-saw puzzles and the Meccano.

"Let me IN," he cried. "Let ME IN. LET ME IN."

David shrank down again into bed, willing himself not to hear.

Each night David woke. Each night he saw the hard, frozen face at the window; heard the banging of the pane as the Wicked Boy strove desperately to get in; shuddered at the demanding, urgent cry.

"Let me IN. Let ME IN. LET ME IN," he wailed through the wind.

Each night David shrugged himself lower into his bed, shutting his ears angrily against the pleading. But into the little cocoon of shelter worried the voice, stirring the boy to action. On the first night he had lifted his head from the pillow; on the second night he sat up; then, slowly, night by night he was roused up a little more till, one night, when the



voice was harsher, more threatening than ever, he found himself kneeling on the bed, his own face pressed, too, to the frozen window, looking out into the cruel, wicked eyes on the other side of the pane. He felt the other's heart beat with an insistent anger.

"I am cold. I am hungry. LET ME IN."

With a terrified cry David dashed back to bed, and buried himself deep down under the bedclothes.

On the next day, his mother watched him anxiously. He was blue and pinched, and he glanced, too frequently, out through the window at the white, cruel shroud.

"How long will the snow last, Mummy?" he asked too often.

"Not very much longer, darling," she said comfortingly.

But he shook his head, too used to the easy, adult answers.

"Are the birds very cold, Mummy? Out there?"

"No, no," she answered, tired and puzzled. "They have their nests."

"As we have this room," he said slowly, gazing apprehensively at the blazing fire.

"It's going to snow again," Rosie called from the window, not excited any more but fretful. "Perhaps it's never going to thaw. Not ever again. Always snow from now on."

"Oh no," David shrieked. "No. No. No."

"Don't be silly," their mother said. "Don't be silly."

David dragged his feet up the stairs slowly that night, unwilling to face the glowing bars of the electric-fire

and the warm comfort of his cosy bed. There was no frost on the inside of the pane now, but it would come. It would be there in the early morning when he woke, while the wind howled. And through the frost would peer the face, his face, the eyes and mouth of the most wicked of the Wicked Boys, and in the wind he would whine, growing angrier and more desperate, more tormented and more enraged.

"I am COLD. I AM HUNGRY. LET ME IN."

David was kneeling again on the bed. There was no moon now. He could not see beyond the frost, beyond that face. His ears rang with the stormy cry. More was demanded of him that night. He had to go farther. Tentatively he put his hand on the latch of the window, lifted up the bar and pushed. He pushed and pushed against the fast-stuck frame, till, with a jerk it opened, and the wind roared in.

It was only a few seconds later that he crawled back into his bed again, the room closed and secure and tight against the night. But already the Wicked Boy lay between the sheets, freezing David to the soul.

When his mother came in in the morning to switch on his fire, he was still lying there, his face flushed on the pillow.

"Why, Davey," she called brightly, "are you a sleepyhead this morning?"

"I've let him in," he told her, his eyes round with horror, "and he's chilled me. 'To the bare bone.'"

"Who?" she asked jestingly. "Who has come in? You've been dreaming."



"The Wicked Boy," he said. "I've let him in and he's frozen me. 'To the bare bone.'"

"Oh dear, you shouldn't have done that. We can't have them in the house!" Laughing, she pulled back the sheets. "Why! Davey, look! No wonder you are cold. Your hot-water bottle! It's burst during the night and your bed is soaking."

He stared at the wet sheets and shook his puzzled head.

"That's how he'll repay me," he said sadly. "All my life, when I do his will."

"He's caught a chill," his mother thought, agitatedly putting her hand on his burning forehead. "He's delirious."

Rosie rushed in. "Come on, David. Lazybones. Get up. Daddy's going to teach us to skate today."

David turned to her. His eyes were frost-bitten.

"I've let him in. You know. The Wicked Boy, the one who put the stone in the snowball."

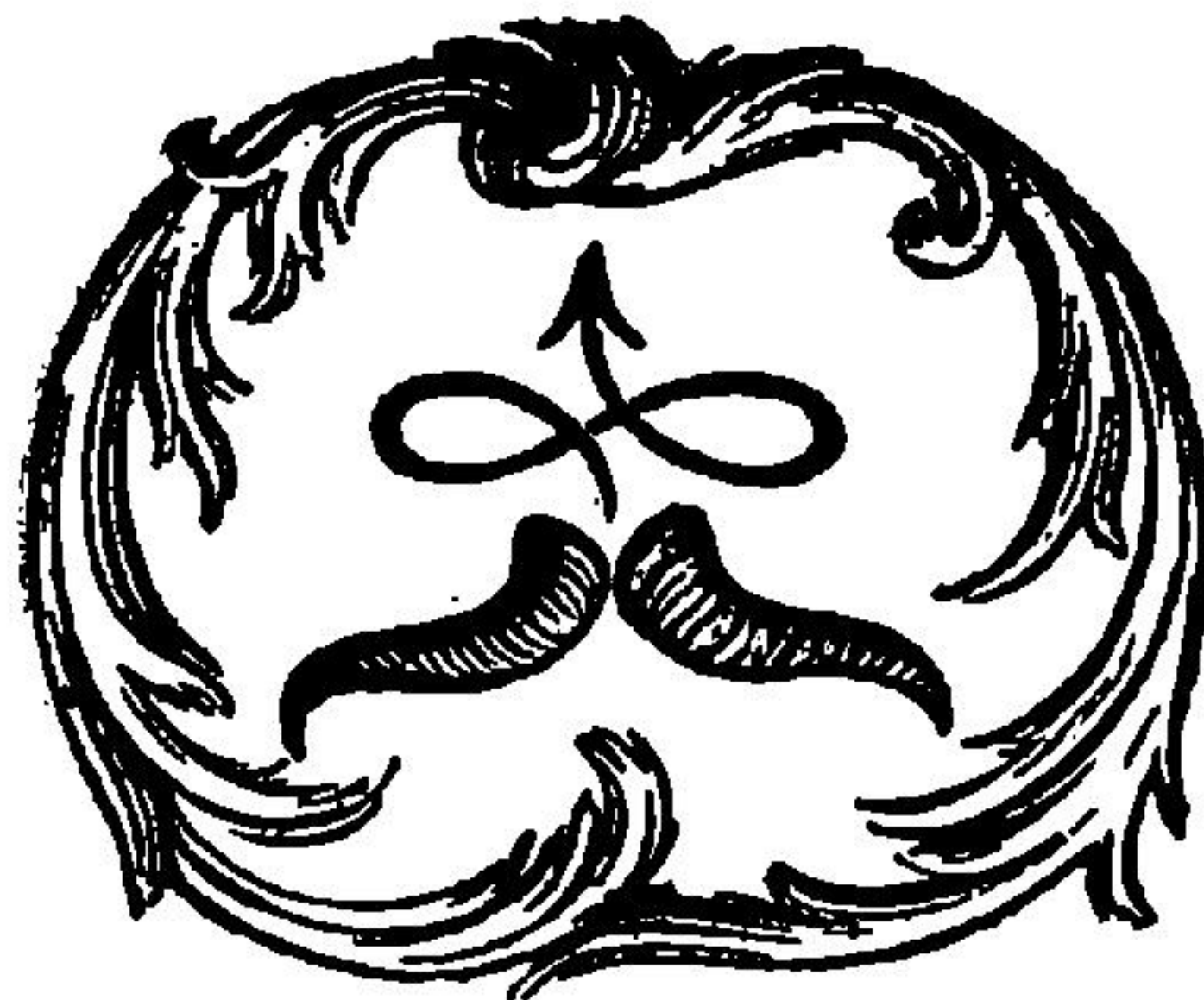
She shrank away from him.

Now, after twenty years of shrinking, she watched the jury file in; she listened while they delivered their verdict, the verdict of us all, and she stared at her brother as he stood stiffly to attention, his fists clenched at his side while the judge pronounced sentence in an expressionless voice.

"And may God have mercy on your soul."

While the echoes still hung in the quiet court-room, David turned towards his sister for the first time those same frost-bitten eyes and called out to her across the crowd:

"You see, Rosie. I let him in. I let in the most wicked of the Wicked Boys. And this is how he's repaid me."



So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,  
Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost;  
Evil be thou my Good.

JOHN MILTON: *Paradise Lost*.



# THE MAYFAIR CORPSE

ROLAND HERVEY

*Illustrated by Rolf Harris*



THE CAB TORE into Berkeley Square from the wrong direction, scraped the bumpers of a row of parked cars, and shot down Berkeley Street.

Almost stripping an elderly gentleman of his moustache as it did so, it ricocheted dangerously down Hay Hill and hurtled along, via Dover Street and Grafton Street, to the top of Old Bond Street.

So far he had been very quick, but he had been noticed—almost inevitably noticed. For this brief, dazzling career had removed a crate of milk from a milk-float, and the last corner swam with whiteness, the milk rapidly turning blue as it was gulped into gutters amid a complex network of broken glass. Perhaps with a bit of luck he could get through to the East End. Holborn would be the best way—the morning rush was at its height and the Strand would be impossible. He kept on telling himself to drive nonchalantly, they'd never look into his cab; a perfectly ordinary cab, after all. But the slightest opportunity and his nervousness pressed his foot harder on the accelerator. Burlington Gardens, Glasshouse Street, Brewer Street, that was his way. He misjudged it over Regent Street, snatched at the wheel to avoid a lad

on a bike, spun round twice in the centre of the road, and saw the boy collide with the pavement, land heavily on the seat of his trousers, his bicycle decorating him like a collar as he fell. A policeman dashed up, shouting indiscriminately to driver and fare to be careful. The constable poked his head in the rear window, and spoke to the impassive figure seated therein; a dark-faced, well-dressed man.

But the man did not answer.

It was the cabbie who spoke: "I give myself up. I give myself up, I tell you. I didn't do it. I found him there!"

As if assenting, the figure heeled over and fell to the floor.

It was as stiff as a board, and quite dead.

Nothing seems as contrived as a coincidence; yet sheer chance had decreed that Edmund Crape; usually neither an early riser nor a personal shopper, should awake with the lark, discover a bare spot in his larder, curse, and finally step out to get a bottle of milk. And when Inspector James Bantock, visiting the Glasshouse Street Police Station, encountered his friend on the corner, it was a matter of a few seconds only until the inexplicable taxi hurtled into the street.





Without a word Bantock strode straight across.

Crane, seeing something unusual in the offing, followed him. *En route* he recollected that he was carrying a bottle of milk, looked at it, baffled by its anomalous and somehow irritating appearance, and eventually placed it on a doorstep unusually well-endowed with such containers. Presumably there would be someone inside the house to consume it. Then he hurried across the street to join his friend.

"Honest, sir, cross my heart, he's never been a fare of mine. I never seen him before. I couldn't forget——"

"What's your name?" Bantock interjected firmly in the driver's ravings.

"Derek Moss, sir, but I don't——"

Crane missed the majority of the colloquy, but while it progressed he

focused his attention on the inside of the cab and particularly on the corpse that took the centre of the stage.

It was a man, as we have already stated, about forty years of age, heavily built, wearing good-quality, almost dandified clothes, yet in a slovenly manner. Rigor had set in completely, and as to the manner of death there could be little doubt—the imprint of a heavy rope chafed the neck, and all over the head were marks as of savage bruises.

So much anyone might have seen. Crane was privileged, however. He turned to Bantock and remarked, "I say, James, it's Cecil Curtis."

Both the Inspector and the uniformed constable had been engaged in trying to elicit information from the taxi-driver, but the man had been too agitated to be even coherent; and with this intelligence Bantock turned



suddenly, glared in at the cab window and snapped :

"Thank heaven for that, no need for elaborate identification. I seem to know that name vaguely," he concluded, trying to place it.

And of course, he did.

The Honourable Cecil Curtis, who had labyrinthine designs on a baronetcy, was one of those figures continually quoted in the evening papers as having perpetrated some banal witticism, or attended some gathering of similar figures the evening previously. He was distantly related to Crane, although Crane never boasted of the relationship, and lived his insecure life on a private income which was frankly insufficient to support it; insufficient because one of his tastes was for hearty, baronet-like gallantries which seemed out of place in this day and age. And now here he was in Regent Street, strangled, savagely beaten, and seated in an improvised, phrenetically driven hearse. Crane shook his head. He knew Cecil had offended many people, but surely not to that extent.

A crowd was collecting, so they all moved off to the police-station. There the taxi-driver was calmed somewhat and his full story elicited. Really, it didn't amount to much. He had been sitting that morning in a café kept by someone called Joe, the which café was in Charles Mews, at the back of Charles Street, and catered for taxi-drivers, domestic staff from the Charles Hotel, and anyone else who happened to drop in. He had walked out to his taxi and had seen a man in the back seat. He had jumped in and

driven towards Berkeley Square, and had then turned round to ask his fare where he wanted to go. Then he had seen his fare and lost his head (understandably, for Cecil was no handsome sight), and decided that he had to get rid of the evidence before it was too late. He hadn't seen the man before, didn't know who he was or how he had got into the cab; was, in fact, as much in ignorance as the investigators.

The driver was detained, of course, and Crane and Bantock went to see the Police Surgeon who had been examining Cecil's body. Cecil Curtis had been dead between thirty-six and forty-eight hours, death had been effected by strangling, and, judging by the marks round the neck, the instrument used had been a thick, coarse rope.

"One thing I don't understand," the surgeon remarked to Bantock, "is these bruises all over the upper part of the body. The head and shoulders are covered with them, literally covered, very little white flesh showing at all. They've been applied with extraordinary force, yet the skin isn't broken. What's more, they are definitely posthumous."

"Really?"

"Oh, I'd stake anything on it."

"But it seems incredible," Crane put in, "that anyone hated old Cecil enough to hang around after he was dead belabouring him furiously round the head and shoulders like this. There's some strength behind the blows, too, isn't there?"

"Considerable physical strength, I should say," the surgeon agreed.



Crane and Bantock digested this snippet, but did not have time to comment on it because the Station Sergeant had produced the known facts on Cecil Curtis after some inquiries. Most of it Crane knew, the only point of interest being the deceased's address — the Charles Hotel, Charles Street.

"Well, that ties up with the taxi-driver, anyway. Let's go along there," said Bantock, and they went.

The proprietor, Mr. Koussoulos, was delighted to see them, and showed them the register and the name, or rather names, still on it, with no departure date marked in: "Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Curtis."

"But he was single!" Bantock ejaculated.

"Unmarried, yes; single, no," Crane replied, and Mr. Koussoulos gave a meaning shrug, as if to say "If I studied everybody's marriage lines I would soon be out of business."

"Where's Mrs. Curtis now?" Bantock inquired, as if temporarily countenancing the irregularity.

Again Koussoulos treated them to an eloquent shrug, and explained that Mrs. Curtis had left after "a leetle deference, I tink" on the day before yesterday in the morning. Mr. Curtis had been there ever since, he supposed.

It came as a great shock to Koussoulos to learn that his guest was dead.

He called the chambermaid who attended to Curtis's room. She had cleaned out Mr. Curtis's room; yes, he had not been there; no, every morning when she did the room he

had been in the private bathroom adjacent. It had been locked yesterday morning and this morning.

They went up to the room. It was tidy enough, and sure enough the bathroom door was still locked. To Koussoulos's horror Bantock smashed it like matchwood and surveyed the little cubicle. There was nothing much to be seen. A wash-basin; a window; a bath, demurely screened from the window; and in the corner a severely laddered nylon stocking discarded carelessly. The window looked into Charles Mews, the beginning of the taxi-driver's dash an hour or so previously. Ban-





tock surveyed it interestedly through a nest of scaffolding—the rear of the hotel was being painted—but it seemed a quiet enough thoroughfare. “Joe’s Café” was proudly evident almost opposite.

A search through Curtis’s suit-case showed nothing of interest, and they left, warning Koussoulos to expect their imminent return.

“It’s the woman, of course,” said Bantock.

“No, James,” Crane replied, “it isn’t. I don’t expect you’ll find she was capable of those bruises.”

“That’s something we’ll see about when the time comes,” Bantock answered grimly.

“I’ll probably be able to find out, by inquiries round Cecil’s circle, who his latest girl-friend was,” Crane said. “Obviously she’s important, but I don’t see her as your criminal. There’s still the question of how he got into Moss’s taxi to be faced. And, talking of Moss, we might as well call in at ‘Joe’s Café.’ ”

They spoke to Joe in person, who knew Derek Moss well, so he said. Moss’s story was confirmed to the extent of both Joe and Joe’s assistant agreeing that Moss had come in that morning just after eight and had left at about ten to nine.

“He got in his taxi and drove away,” said Joe, “like he always does.”

As they left the snack-bar, Bantock, with a gleam in his eye that Crane distrusted, insisted that he go on to a certain pub nearby and he would follow him there. Mystified, but surmising Bantock to be so hot

on the trail that he must needs pursue it alone, Crane agreed, and, continuing on his way alone, took time off to phone a friend to whom he posed a question.

“Oh, Lucy Mather, you’ll be wanting,” was the answer.

“Lucy Mather,” Crane repeated, writing it out.

“Yes, lives in Pimlico; Gervase Court, I believe. She’s in the phone book.”

“All right, thanks.”

Then he strolled on to the pub and ordered a drink.

It was only another five minutes before Bantock walked in.

“Well, James,” Crane greeted him, “and how were the painters?”

“Oh, you guessed. Not much good, I’m afraid. I spoke to the men working yesterday morning and the day before that. They were all adamant that they hadn’t looked in the window even, let alone climbed in, and they gave each other excellent alibis. Nothing to it, I suppose, but it looked promising.”

Crane looked non-committally into his beer.

“It looks bad for that fellow Moss,” Bantock remarked finally.

“We’ll have to go into those painters again, you know, James. They’re the likeliest at the moment. Robbery motive. And a man using a rope for his work would be the man to use it for another purpose.”

“I promise you I’d thought of all that, Edmund, but it won’t wash. The alibis will stand up to anything. The men working yesterday and the day before are in the clear.”



"I'd still like to look into it, if I may," said Crane, finishing his drink and rising to go.

"Certainly."

Edmund Crane spent the rest of the day in pursuits into which Inspector James Bantock was not admitted. Bantock himself, after a few inquiries, established the identity of the lady currently posing as Mrs. Cecil Curtis as being Miss Lucy Mather of Gervase Court, S.W.1. He called on the lady, and found her to be a hard-faced opportunist with a veneer of uneasy refinement. She had had a difference of opinion with Cecil. She had been devoted to Cecil, of course, and she still was, but she had not seen him since she walked out, and she intended to let him do the apologizing. Cecil was so sweet. Yes, they had been living at the Charles Hotel together; she would never have dreamed of taking any money from Cecil, but she was devoted to Cecil and had he been a naughty boy?

Bantock had ascertained previously that the bruises on the corpse were unlikely to have been inflicted by a woman, and a woman in an hotel room is not normally in a position to put her hands instantly on a length of coarse rope. He considered the interview very much of a formality.

That evening he received a call from Crane asking him round to his flat, and having nothing else to do he went.

"Come in," Crane greeted him, introducing him in rapid succession to a chair and a glass of whisky. When

they were settled, Crane proceeded to run through the case.

"All very well," Bantock interrupted, "but have you solved it?"

"Yes, I have solved it."

Bantock digested this information with the lees of his glass but made no comment.

"Consider the facts," Crane continued. "Here we have Cecil Curtis killed, strangled some two days ago. There are signs of severe bruising all over his head and shoulders, and marks of a coarse rope round his neck. Rigor had set in and the body was in a sitting posture. That means that the body was in that posture for a period of almost twenty-four hours. Also——"

He did not finish, as there was a ring at the bell. Crane answered it, and re-entered accompanied by two men in working clothes.

"Would you be Mr. Edmund Crane, the solicitor?" asked the taller man, evidently the spokesman of the two.

"Let us take it that I am." Crane smiled. "You are John Andrews and Michael Kirby, your foreman told you that I wanted to speak to you and that you might hear something to your advantage?"

"That's right, sir."

"Well, very much to your advantage is the suggestion I have to make to you. This gentleman is Inspector Bantock of the Metropolitan Police, and I think you might do best to make a clean breast of it all to him."

The two men looked abject, puzzled, and terrified by turns. They



did not speak, and after a pause Crane continued.

"Let me just run through the events for you in case you have any difficulty in remembering the sequence of them. First, you two are employed by the firm painting the Charles Hotel. The composition of gangs varies from day to day and you have both been off for a couple of days. This morning, however, your foreman informs me, you were on the site, alone together from half-past seven till half-past eight. At about eight o'clock, seeing that no one was around—Mayfair isn't crowded early in the morning—you forced an entry into the bathroom window of a suite facing on to Charles Mews. The idea in your minds, I have no doubt, was burglary. You didn't get very far with this because when you got into the bathroom you found the body of a man leant over the side of the bath, and at the same time you heard someone on the other side of the door who tried to open it. It was the chambermaid, in point of fact. You realized that you were in a sticky position, with a dead body on premises where you had no business to be. You're both already known to the police, anyway, and you couldn't afford to be discovered in that position, so you decided to confuse the issue as well as you could. You dressed the body first, rather roughly, and then lowered it from the window with your tackle. You put one rope round the neck, producing marks that made it look as though the man had been strangled with a rope, and when you got the body to the ground you

sat it in the back of a taxi. You gave the taxi-driver a very nasty turn, I can tell you. All that's more or less as it happened, isn't it?"

"You might've been there, sir," said Andrews. "Honest, we didn't do any harm, he was dead and stiff when we got there. We're not to blame——"

"There'll be trouble, nevertheless, won't there, James? But not so much as there might have been."

Bantock gave a grim nod at this, and phoned the local police-station. In a few minutes two constables arrived and the men were taken away, to give a full statement and face a charge of breaking and entering, and also, as Bantock's Parthian shot implied, one of being accessories after the fact.

"And the actual murderer?" Bantock inquired, nursing his second Scotch.

"Murderess. The name is Lucy Mather, and she lives at Gervase Court—but your expression tells me you know her already."

"But the bruises, man! You've explained away the marks of the rope, but how about that savage beating round the head and shoulders?"

"It never happened."

"Never happened?"

"No," Crane smiled. "Let me elucidate. Cecil had a row with the Mather woman. Probably he caught her at his wallet or something, as he was about to have a bath and was more or less undressed. The upshot of it was that she strangled him with that stocking that was in the bathroom. He fell over the edge of the bath, and



she locked him in and left. Rigor set in while he was in that posture, bent at the waist, head down—the sitting posture that we noticed but inverted. And he was left like that for two days.

“You’ve heard the rest of the story, how the painters took over and left the body in Moss’s taxi. The Mather woman was lucky that that happened. If it hadn’t been for that accident, the case would have been clear against her.”

“Except for the bruises,” put in Bantock. “But you say they don’t exist.”

“Well, let’s recapitulate. We had Cecil leant over the edge of the bath, and what happened during that time?”

“Rigor set in.”

“Apart from that, some other medical process occurred—in a word, hypostasis.”

“Hypostasis?”

“Or excess of blood in one part of the body,” Crane explained, draining his glass. “The heart stops pumping when you die and gravity takes over, pulling all the blood down to the lowest part of the body. Now, Cecil was lying across the bath, and the blood drained into the head and shoulders. That’s known as hypostasis. Any doctor would have spotted it if he’d been presented with the body the right way up.”

“So what?” Bantock inquired blankly.

“Just this. This foregathering of blood beneath the skin colours it naturally enough. Any book of forensic medicine will tell you how hypostasis has been mistaken for signs of assault. It looks just like severe bruising.”



I like, my dear Lord, the road you are travelling, but I don’t like the pace you are driving; too similar to that of the son of Nimshi—I always feel myself inclined to cry out, Gently, John, gently down hill. Put on the drag.

SYDNEY SMITH (1771–1845): *Letter to Lord John Russell.*



# REHEARSAL

## CRAIG M. MOONEY



THOUGHTS WERE funny the way they would sometimes get fixed on one thing. He knew them all right. Travelling this prairie country for twenty years kept a man alone with his thoughts a lot of the time.

All by yourself. Driving and thinking. Just the hum of the car and your own thoughts. Car and your thoughts. Your thoughts.

Two methods. By the first you. . . .

There. Like that. Like what he was doing just now. One part would keep going over something you'd last said or thought, while some other part would be thinking of something different.

It was odd. You'd be thinking like this, and all the time your eyes were watching the beams of the headlights sliding on through the darkness ahead and seeing at the sides the black line of the plains with now and again far out in the blackness little glimmering specks of light from the windows of farmhouses. It seemed as if there were many you's bundled up there together in the car, thinking, steering, seeing steering seeing. . . .

He blinked his eyes rapidly and shook his head from side to side, and lowered the car window and gulped down the cool night air.

It was dangerous when you got fixed in that drowsy state. A horse

could rear up out of a ditch on to the road or an empty car loom up suddenly in front and before you woke up you were into it.

He didn't want anything to happen. Not now. Twenty years without a serious accident. Keep awake nothing will happen. He knew the car inside out, and every little thing was okay. And he knew every inch of this road, and every detail of the country out there.

All right. And now, if his mind insisted on going back over that question again, well—let it! Maybe he'd turn up a new angle he hadn't thought of, but he doubted it. However. . . .

The idea was that there were only two methods. By the first, the thing was done right out in the open—the body left there, weapon, blood and all, so that when the police and everybody came on it they could see at a glance it was murder. By the second, you covered up—no body, no evidence, nothing ever found, just a blank where there used to be a person. With the first, you had a murder, and there was the problem of finding and convicting the murderer. With the second, someone had simply disappeared and the problem was where and why. He guessed that half the murders were done one way and half the other. You couldn't know for sure, of course, since a lot of murders probably never came to light, and these would certainly be com-



mitted by the second method and you didn't know you had a murder until you had a corpse which showed signs of having been done in by somebody.

It was a good question which method you'd choose. The first was sort of putting your cards on the table—face down, of course! You didn't beat about the bush, you just killed your party and left him there for the first person that came along. Naturally, you took some trouble to see that you wouldn't be connected with the murder or, at any rate, convicted for it. It was a good method because you soon knew right off where you stood. On the other hand, people didn't seem to have too much success with it. It was like trying to invent a secret code; no matter how you complicated it and criss-crossed things, somebody else seemed to be just as clever at seeing through it! You couldn't read as many detective stories as he read without realizing that.

A big black mass came rushing straight at him. He shoved the brake to the floor, the tyres screeched through the gravel and the car slowed to a stop with the radiator a scant foot from a loaded hay-rack.

He cursed the farmer who had left it there. He fought down a vicious impulse to leap out and set fire to it. He backed up, drove out around it and shot ahead, gripping the wheel tightly to stop the trembling in his hands and legs.

The second method—where was he? The first—like an unbeatable code—oh yes!]

The second method didn't seem to be the way a man would want to do it. It would be a lot more exciting the planning and thinking you had to do. The main thing was it doubled your chances. They had to prove first a murder had ever even been done. But it was certainly hard to work, too. You had to do it so as to leave not the slightest trace at the scene. Any kind of weapon was bad because you got blood spots and scratches and things like that. Then getting rid of the weapon often turned out to be about as hard as getting rid of the body itself. You had the business of cleaning up the scene so that nobody could tell anything from it. For instance, say the victim had false teeth and you murdered him in bed asleep. Well, then, it wouldn't do to get rid of the body and arrange things to look like he'd gone away on his own, and then for you to forget his false teeth in the glass there beside the bed! You had to think of every little thing like that.

He shook his head impatiently at this poking about with details. So far as he was concerned, he certainly preferred the second method. If you're killing somebody, you can have the best reasons in the world but you can bet that nobody else is going to see it that way. You do it and you're glad you did it and you feel good about it, and after that you don't want any more bother about it. You get around all that nuisance by not having it like a murder at all, by getting rid of the body and getting rid of it so it's never going to show up.



He was watching the road, watching it all the time. What was that? He jumped on the brake and brought the car to an abrupt stop. Something queer had run across the road. It was too low down and scittery for a rabbit. Not a gopher. Wasn't a badger. A low, squashed-down black thing that scuttled instead of running, and he had caught a reddish gleam of light from a beady eye. It had been more like a rat. A rat! Horrible thing. Getting this far west, were they?

The car had stopped just short of a clump of roadside weeds. It was in there. He reached behind his seat and groped around until he grasped the handle of the jack, opened the door, tip-toed around behind the car and came up the right side towards the clump of weeds. With a spasm of loathing, he leaped forward and began flailing the whole patch. He sensed movement in a dark spot and struck at it furiously. The iron crunched into something alive. He struck at it several times more with a frenzied swatting motion until the soft lump was flat and still. Then, using the end of the bar, he flipped the body out in front of the headlights. Its thick brown fur was plastered down with blood and dirt. He got a sick feeling. It was a muskrat. He liked muskrats.

What was the damned thing doing running across a highway? He peered about in the darkness, but could see nothing but the flat black floor of the prairie on every side. There were no sloughs or lakes around here. The ditches along both sides of the road

were dry. Maybe the long hot summer had dried up its marsh and made it head out across country on a desperate hunt for some new water-hole. The thought of the animal hunting about like that up to the moment it crouched frightened in the weeds there hoping it wouldn't be seen made him feel very bad.

He realized that the episode had emptied his mind of the thoughts that had been keeping him company. But, at that instant, back they came—springing out of the Case of the Murdered Muskrat.

There—there was the moment of murder, the very instant of its commission—an unpleasant elaboration that he tried to hurry over. The leaping fear with its back-lash of rage that fused body and weapon into a single instrument. The downward sweep of the first bruising blow. The abominable unbearable twitching and whimpering of the maimed thing, and the frantic bludgeon falling again and again to make the bloody pulp lie still and stop its sounds. Then the bewildered faint feeling. . .

He shuddered and his mind wheeled away from it like a frightened bat. Then it came back.

This was the first method. Direct, brutal murder, the body lying there on the roadside for all to see. Perhaps in this case there would be no suspicion of murder. They might assume the victim had been struck down by a car.

You might think this would be a good way to kill a human being. But no, sir. A human body there instead of just a muskrat and it'd be a dif-



ferent story. You can see the first fellow along stopping his car and getting all shaky and edging around it a couple of times, and then jumping back in and going off hell-bent for the police. The cops come, and they're bustling about and taking measurements and photographs and studying the car-tracks and looking hard at bruises and wounds and writing it all down. They take the body away for the doctors to look over and say how this guy got killed and what time it was, and then they get busy finding out who he is. They start figuring it was unusual for him to be out on that highway at that time. Then the doctors come out and say the wounds weren't made by being knocked down by a car, but appeared to have been administered by repeated blows with an iron bar. After a while they had you.

That's the way it was. A stray human body was something people just couldn't stand. Even little bits like teeth or finger bones got on their nerves. They were kind of superstitious about things like that. Any carelessness about human remains seemed to be a terrible sin—one of the things that made it so hard to get away with murder.

So it was plain foolish to leave the body around. Easier on everybody's nerves if there wasn't any corpse or bits and pieces.

He went and got a piece of sack-ing from the back of the car and gingerly pushed the muskrat on to it with the tip of the iron bar, rolled it up in it, picked the bundle up with just his thumbs and forefingers and

put it on the floorboards in the back of the car. He turned off the headlights and stared into the darkness ahead of him and behind him. He listened. Nothing. He jumped into the car, switched on the lights, started up and was on his way again.

It was odd when you thought about it. You'd think it was a simple matter to take an object not much bigger than a sack of potatoes and dispose of it completely. But it was the devil of a job, as he knew from his reading. You take your body off into a dreary isolated swamp and sink it under the mud and figure it won't be found in a hundred years, and what happens? Come the autumn, a duck hunter wades out into that swamp and steps on it! Out of all the swamps in a hundred thousand square miles of northland he splashes into that particular swamp and plumps a foot down on the very spot where the body lies. And soon it's all up with you. Or you find an abandoned road winding around for miles through scrub-brush and you dump your body in a dense clump and forget about it until the police call on you and explain how the coyotes left some bones in the open—human bones. If it wasn't animals, it was children. Kids were always finding bodies because they picked the hardest paths and the most out-of-the-way places for their hikes and games. Sometimes you tried dissolving the body in lime, or weighing it down in ponds, or cutting it up in little pieces and dropping them down old wells and holes. This last was very bad, since it was like getting rid of



as many bodies as there were pieces. Somehow, sooner or later, the body kept turning up.

What you had to do was put it in a place where it just couldn't be got at by man or beast. A good place would be at the bottom of a grave underneath the regular corpse. You'd bury it at the bottom of a newly dug grave. Nobody would notice the extra dirt on the fresh earth already piled up. The next day the regular occupant would be laid to rest on top of your body, the grave would be filled in, and that would be that.

A slight bucking of the car brought his attention back to the road. A gusty wind had sprung up and was buffeting the car and swirling up clouds of dust. He slowed down until the car steadied at forty miles an hour. Now the road angled left for a short distance and then straightened out again. He recognized this as the correction line, and knew that not far ahead the road suddenly dropped down into a great hollow.

It was one of those old, dried-out river-beds which cut across the prairies at intervals. It would be about eighty feet deep, an eighth of a mile or even maybe a quarter of a mile wide, and ran in a north-westerly direction for many miles. Its bleak hummocky sides were overgrown with coarse grass; on its flat bottom lay a centuries-old deposit of leprous white salt; out in the middle little linked pools of stagnant water turned the alkali into a mushy quagmire that gave off a sickening stink like rotten eggs.

He approached the edge cautiously.

The road fell away abruptly, and the beams of the headlights shone far out over the coulee. Before nosing down into the chasm, he glanced about into the surrounding darkness. He knew that in daylight this spot gave a view not only of the road down through the coulee but also its continuation for miles behind and ahead. At night the lights of an approaching car would be visible at a great distance. There were no lights. It was most unlikely that at this hour, and it must be close to three in the morning, any other living thing would be out in this desolate place.

The beams from the headlights swept in arcs over the dead pools as the car hair-pinned downwards. Dank, evil-smelling air began to seep in through the windows. He tried inhaling it slowly, holding his breath as long as he could, then letting it out explosively before filtering down another lungful. At the bottom he drove out between white beds of salt on to a steel bridge spanning the alkali quagmire. He stopped the car over the largest pool, turned off the motor and lights, stepped out and stared down at the scummy surface which shone up clearly in the ghostly phosphorescent light given off by the salt-beds.

You'd open the door on the right and you'd take out the curling stones first. They were heavy, with strong handles. Then, reaching far in with stiff mechanical arms and hands that no longer seemed your own, you'd grasp this stiff thing in the auto-rug bound round and round with wire, grasp it desperately and, with the



strength of revulsion, tumble it out on the road. You'd be thinking only of a bundle, stiff, lumpy, well covered, just a—a bundle—a thing, not big, not much really. Lift it with a single heaving motion and get it right on the edge. Take one of the curling stones and slip the handle under one of the strands of wire, under two or three strands, and twist the whole stone about until the handle was knotted securely in the wire. Two at the top. Two at the bottom. Brace your back against the car and put your feet against the thing and push. Shove it over the edge and jump back so you won't be splashed.

Wait for a muffled plopping sound followed by the bursting of a few sluggish bubbles. Step forward and look down for an oily ripple or two dying out in the alkali jelly. See the broken scum sliding back into place.

But there was nothing like that. There was just a thump. There was just the body lying right on top in an inch or two of water.

If it were just a muskrat it wouldn't matter.

Muskrat. Drought. Hardly any water down there. The alkali was drying up. He should have thought of this when he killed it back there.

He had to get it back.

He ran to the end of the bridge, leaped from the roadside on to the white salt-bed and strode out over its sugary surface towards the body.

Within ten yards of it the crust suddenly broke beneath him, and he sank into a slimy scum up to his hips and a stench of rotten gas enveloped him.

Astonished and terrified, he clutched at the rim around him. The chunks of crust broke off in his hands. He jerked his legs and went a foot deeper into it.

There was no help for him, and with incredulous and vivid clarity he could see from the bridge the footprints leading up to the round black patch of water that covered him and filled the hole he had made.





# CHUREL GANJ

CHRISTOPHER MILLER

**P**ETER AND I were only too thankful to leave the dusty track that served for a road. We were half choked by the dust stirred up by our horses' hooves. Riding up to the highest point we could find of the low sandhills which fringed the river valley, we looked out over the vista of long yellow grass and green bushy "jhow" which stretched away as far as the eye could reach.

Gunga Persad rode up on his half-starved pony to meet us, and pointed with his whip.

"Those trees over yonder, two miles away, are where the tents are pitched. Everything is ready for the Sahibs."

"Have you any news of pig?" we both asked together.

"Yes, Cherisher of the Poor," replied the old shikaree. "I have seen marks of many large boar along the river, but the camp is not in a good place."

Gunga Persad has known many generations of young Englishmen, and like all his kind was as stubborn as a mule. I realized that the old man was determined that we should move camp at the earliest possible moment, and knowing his ways I felt that I should have no peace till I gave way; but it was quite clear that we could not move that day, as the sun was near to setting and we had little more

than an hour before the sudden Indian dark would be upon us.

As we walked our horses for the last mile before reaching the camp, which we had sent on ahead, Peter tried to get all the information he could out of the old man about the prospects of finding the boar which we hoped to spear the next day.

"Yes, there were plenty of pig, but all down by the river, too far from the camp, we should certainly have to move camp. No, the village near by was deserted and beaters would be hard to get. The water, too, is very bad."

Peter, who was new to the country and could understand only about half of what the old man was saying, began to get a little cross, for what Gunga Persad was saying did not altogether make sense. I began to realize that the reason he was giving for striking camp was not the real reason, and that something was upsetting him which he was unwilling to mention. I decided to talk to him by himself after I had changed and had a drink.

The sun had just set when, having bathed and changed, I left the clump of pipal trees, which the Hindus always regard as sacred, and walked across to the grove of mango trees where the horses were picketed. Here I found Gunga Persad watching the syces trying to calm the horses, which were stamping and fretting as if



something had upset them.

"Can they smell a 'guldar'?" I suggested, for away by the river I could hear a leopard calling with a sound like a huge saw raking through rough timber.

"No, Sahib, for the spotted one is far off by the banks of Mother Ganges. Did I not tell the Sahibs be-

indeed the place is called Churel Ganj, the village of the Churel."

It is very easy to laugh at native superstitions when at home in England, but away in the grass jungles, surrounded by men who are frightened and who believe in such things as a matter of course, it is a different matter.



fore that this is a very bad place?"

"Well, Gunga Persad, we cannot move in the dark, and, anyway, what is wrong with the camp?"

"Listen," said the old man, "I know the white man does not believe in such things, but it is said that this, that was once a village, was deserted because it was haunted by a Churel, and

"Tell me," I said, "what is a Churel?" For I had never heard of this particular superstition before.

Gunga Persad stopped for a moment and, picking up a stone, threw it in the direction of a jackal; one of two or three which, attracted probably by the smell of cooking, were gradually closing in on the camp and



making night hideous with their weird, wailing cry.

"The Churel, Cherisher of the Poor, is the spirit of a woman who has died in child-birth and who comes back to haunt the living. Her feet they say are turned backwards on her ankles, and by this alone can she be recognized for the evil thing she is, for she can take the form of the woman a man loves best. Such spirits love the pipal trees, and when she took up her abode near by no one dared live here any longer, and the village became a ruin, as you can see."

"Rubbish," I said, for it was maddening to have our plans upset and our sport spoiled by the Indians' fear of demons. "Even if there is a ghost here, what harm can it do to grown men—are you all a lot of women to be frightened by an old wives' tale?" None the less, I realized that it would be wisest to move in the morning, for the syces were clustered together as if frightened. The horses, too, were beginning to get uneasy again, and I feared some of them might pull up their shackles and make off into the darkness.

"If a man," went on Gunga Persad without taking any notice of what I had said, "mistakes a Churel for his beloved and sees not her twisted feet——"

"Well," I interrupted, "what then, what harm will befall him?"

"He will die, Sahib; he will die very terribly, as many died in this village before all the living left and the fields went back to jungle."

I left Gunga Persad and went off

rather irritably to take a last look for the night at the horses. They were quieter now, but, as I expected, each one of the syces had some different complaint about the situation of the camp which, as a matter of fact, was almost ideal. I never mentioned what Gunga Persad had been talking about, they were upset quite enough as it was, but I gave a few instructions which I thought might make things easier if we were going to move camp the next day; for I had by this time come to the conclusion that, owing to the superstitions of our Indian servants, it would be wise to do so. I then strolled across towards Peter's and my tents, which had been pitched under the pipal trees about a hundred yards away.

I was turning over in my mind how best to convince Peter that we must move. He was not long out from England, young and inexperienced with little or no knowledge of the ways of India. He was, I knew, fretting at the parting from Mavis, whom he had only just married. The Plains of India are no place for a young woman, just out from England, in the hot weather, and, like all the other European women-folk in the Station, she had gone up to the cool of the Hills.

I wondered, if she had been my wife, if I would have been quite happy for her to go off without me to Ranikhet. I knew too much of the sudden flirtations, to put it mildly, of an Indian Hill Station. Mavis Brandon, I thought, was too attractive and too fond of admiration to lack companionship in the Hills for long. I don't know if Peter thought as I did,



probably not, but he was becoming short tempered and irritable and would be hard to persuade to any course which would interfere with the sport we hoped to have next day and to which we had both been looking forward for so long.

As I thought, Peter took a lot of persuading, and over our meal we argued the matter out.

"Damn it," said Peter, "why should we have our sport spoiled tomorrow by some idiotic, crazy idea of that old fool Gunga Persad? We shall spend half the day changing camp, and we shall never get coolies to beat for us in time to hunt tomorrow at all. Why should we give up a day's hunting because Gunga Persad and the syces are frightened of ghosts?"

"My dear Peter, rubbish or not, we shall get no sense out of any of the servants if we stay here. The village, as you see, is deserted, and we shall never get any beaters now in time to hunt tomorrow even if we stay here. We might as well make the best of a bad job and move to a village from which we can get beaters. Furthermore, when you have been in the country as long as I have, you will realize that once Indians have got scared over one of their superstitions, you damned well have to give in, for you will get no co-operation out of them at all. Another thing," I burst out, "I hate this place and I hate these bloody pipal trees—just look at them."

"Don't talk rot," said Peter, for tempers get very short in Indian hot weather. "Have another drink and then, if you are determined that we

shall move, tell Gunga Persad ~~that~~ we shall move as soon after daybreak as we can. The whole thing sounds crazy to me, but, after all, you have been out in India much longer than me and I expect you probably know best."

With this Peter got up and went into his tent, whilst I started to stroll across to the servants' tents to give my orders for the move on the next day.

I found them all huddled together and obviously thoroughly scared. They cheered up a bit when I told them that we should be moving at dawn.

The arrangements took longer than I thought, and the light was out in Peter's tent when I returned from a last look round the horses. I was just about to go to my tent when I thought I saw a glimmer of something white in the shadows cast by the trees. It disappeared behind one of the trees, and then appeared again closer than before. A few moments afterwards the figure of a European woman, dressed in white, came out of the trees near Peter's tent.

The moon was full though it hung low and copper coloured, but the light was good enough for me to recognize Mavis Brandon. Mavis whom I knew to be hundreds of miles away at Ranikhet.

"Peter," she called in a low voice, and at the word Peter rushed out of the tent and caught her in his arms. Then together they went into the darkness of the tent.

It was very obvious that I was not wanted just then, so I left them to—





gether and walked off into the open. It was clear that something had happened up in the Hills to bring Mavis down to the Plains unannounced and without letting even her husband know; but the real puzzle was how she could have followed us here. The thing seemed impossible, and yet it was Mavis without a doubt, for even if I could have been mistaken by the uncertain light of the moon, Peter at any rate could be in no doubt about his own wife. Yet the thing was impossible; however, there would be plenty of time to solve the mystery in the morning. Still, I felt there was something badly wrong; something quite outside my everyday experience; something evil.

Over in the mango trees I could hear the horses stamping, and I could

hear the voice of one of the syces trying to quieten them.

Perhaps Gunga Persad's story of the Churel and the nervousness of the Indian servants had upset me more than I realized, for however much I disbelieved in Indian superstitions, and I did whole-heartedly disbelieve, there is something disquieting in being amongst men who are in a state of abject fear.

After strolling about in the open for half an hour or so and beginning at last to feel a little sleepy, I determined to turn in and returned to the camp where Peter's and my tent were pitched. The moon had risen higher by this time, and everything, except in the shadows, was as clear as in daylight.

Against the background of the pipal trees, Peter's tent showed up



white as paper. I could see the tent wall nearest to me billow out as if someone was leaning against it; then it sagged and billowed outwards again. It was almost as if someone was struggling there inside the tent and in his struggles writhing against the tent wall. I admit the talk with Gunga Persad had made me a little uneasy, and that, combined with the infernal howling of the jackals, had set my nerves on edge, but only now did I really get the feeling amounting to a certainty that there was something really uncanny happening. I suddenly became convinced that Peter was in real and terrible danger.

"Peter," I called out, "Peter, are you all right?" I got no answer from Peter, but at that moment the flap of the tent opened and there stood Mavis Brandon dressed in white.

"Hallo, Mavis," I said, feeling rather a fool. "How in the world did you get here? I thought you were up at Ranikhet in the Hills."

As I spoke, she turned her head and looked at me for the first time. It was Mavis, there was no doubt of it. The moonlight, the light of that accursed witches' moon, fell full on her face, and every feature was as clear as if seen by daylight. The face was beyond all question Mavis's, but the expression was strange and different. I had always thought of Mavis as rather a vapid, silly little woman, weak willed and rather childish and only out for a good time. The face turned towards me in the moonlight had an eager and resolute look on it such as I had never seen on the face of a woman before. I can only say

that it had in its expression something of that relentless hunger which one glimpses in the eyes of a caged tiger. She was dressed in white but wore, I noticed, a red scarf or something of that nature; at any rate, her throat and chest showed darkly red in the moonlight. Her feet were in the shadow of the trees.

For a moment she met my eye and then she smiled, but it was not the smile of Mavis but rather the smile of some great animal. Then, without saying a word, she was gone, and I saw the shimmer of a white dress disappearing in the direction of the ruined village.

I called out to Peter at the top of my voice, but no sound or movement came from the tent. The jackals suddenly ceased their weird howling, and I was at once conscious of being the only living being in that accursed grove of dark trees. I called out to him again, but this time not so loudly for by now I was standing within a few feet of the tent. As I moved towards the tent flap my foot slipped and I glanced down towards my feet. I stood there for I know not how long, staring at what I saw with a horror which I cannot describe; for from underneath the tent walls a slow dark stream was gently flowing towards my feet. The parched sandy earth drank it eagerly, but it was on this that my foot had slipped. For the first time I smelt the thin bitter smell of fresh blood.

I started to call out for help, and in a minute the sound of excited voices came from the servants' camp which was scarcely a hundred yards away,



and the flash of moving lights was visible among the trees. "Bring a lantern, for the Captain is injured," I cried.

It seemed hours before anyone came, but actually it could not have been more than a couple of minutes before Gunga Persad ran up carrying a lantern with two or three of the syces at his heels.

With the coming of the servants and the light I managed to pull myself together and, snatching the lantern from Gunga Persad, I threw back the tent flap and shone the light inside the tent.

Peter was dead. He was lying on his back on the floor, staring up at the tent roof with a look of horror on his chalky white face. From his throat which was unbelievably mangled slowly trickled that dark rivulet of blood. "It is the work of the spotted one," I cried; for even then I could hear a leopard "sawing" from the grass jungles.

"No, Sahib—no, it is not the spotted one. Do you not know that this village where no one now lives is called Churel Ganj, the village of the Churel?"



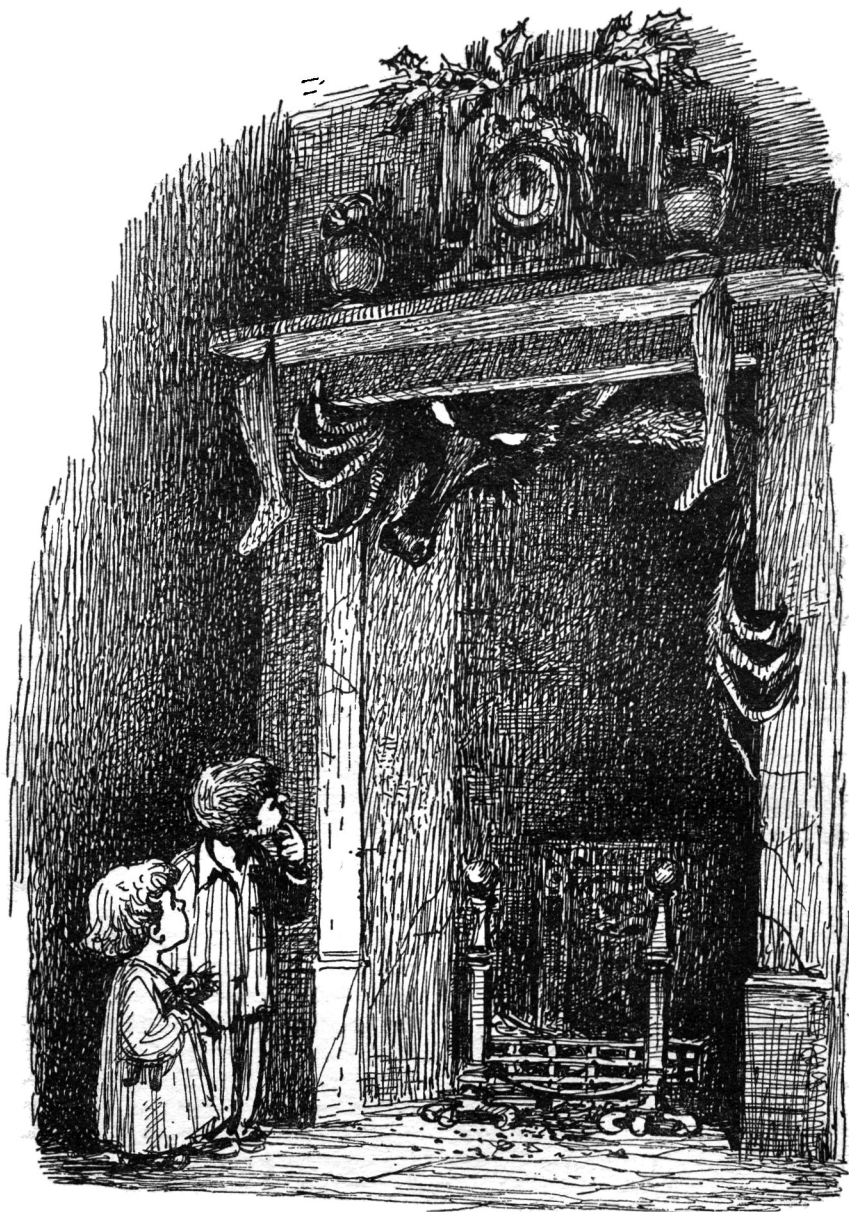
How I managed to pull myself together during what hours remained of that terrible night I do not know, but by dawn I found myself, though exhausted and pouring with sweat, sufficiently master of myself to make those arrangements which the Indian climate makes terribly urgent. In the hot weather the dead do not lie in state for long.

I could not, of course, accept the servants' superstitions, nor could I, I feared, accept the evidence of my own eyes; yet Peter's death must be accounted for to the Government, to the Station and, above all, to his wife. It was, of course, to a leopard that I attributed those terrible injuries to his throat.

I confess I was very badly shaken, and a bout of fever made it necessary for me to go on leave. I went to Ranikhet, through a desire which I could not master, to find out if Mavis had been away from the Hill Station at the time of Peter's death. As far as I could find out, she had never been away from the station, and she had not been alone when she received the news of Peter's death; so there was independent proof of her presence at Ranikhet at a time when I had seen her several hundred miles away.

Now, the problem is that I have got the impression that Mavis does not wholly believe my story about the leopard, for I have had to tell the story many times and I am not by nature a good liar. Sometimes I cannot help asking myself how much she really knows of the truth and, above all, what the truth really is.







# HECATE AND THE INNOCENTS

MARY M. BAYNE

*In an old issue of the LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE, long consigned to the dusty archives of Mystery and Imagination, is the great chimney-piece illustration, which 'haunted' Miss Bayne for so long until her obsession eventually took form in the following most memorable and gruesome story.*

**I**T WAS DECIDED that the children were not to go to the station to meet Cousin Polly, for Saint Lucy's Day had dawned stormy and lowering, with an overhead gloom that was barely lightened by reflection from the snow that had covered the north-east corner of Kent since Martinmas. Never, within the memory of the oldest villager, had winter set in so early or with so savage a grip.

*"Lucy light, Lucy light,  
Shortest day and longest night!"*

sang the twins as they watched from the mullioned window of the hall the departure of the Panhard landaulette that had replaced the brougham two years ago—one of Cousin Polly's innovations that had evoked criticism in the household and the village. This change was hardly surprising, however, since "the 'osses were that scared of her," as the old coachman, now retired, had attested.

For once Mademoiselle de Sazilly forgot to correct the inaccuracy of the rhyme that Nick and Letty had learned from Nannie Grewel, for the little French governess had weightier matters than the Gregorian calendar

on her mind. For the moment French precision was eclipsed by subconscious perception inherited from her Breton mother. Claire de Sazilly had never liked Mrs. Reccared, the children's guardian and the next heir to the estate—"Cousin Polly" whose real name was not Mary but Apollonia. This cousin of the late Sir Nicholas Frant who had, in Nannie's phrase, "fair bewitched him," had Hungarian blood—or was it Serbian? Friends of the family, discussing the matter, were as vague as most of the English before 1914 on the subject of Eastern Europe.

Cousin Polly, a well-preserved, mature widow, was a great traveller, and was well known in somewhat exotic circles in half the capitals of Europe. Intelligent and gifted, she had studied music, and, it was reported, other arts, in Paris and Vienna.

Claire de Sazilly, after forty years' career as governess in distinguished families, had Continental connections nearly as wide as those of her present employer. Former pupils, in letters from Paris, Vienna, Budapest and the Balkan capitals, had given hints of curious episodes in Mrs. Reccared's varied experience. She was reputed to have made advanced researches into



the "occult" and to be acquainted with the practitioners of strange arts. This was perhaps no more than a fashionable fad in certain coteries, bored by more conventional amusement, but it was inexpressibly repellent to the rigidly devout little Frenchwoman, who combined Gallic lucidity with Breton faith. At the time when her great but impoverished family were disdainfully ignoring the Second Empire, Claire had "tried her vocation" with the legendary and incredibly austere "Vièrges Chartreuses." Her physical health had been inadequate for this severest form of monastic life, but the rigorous mental training in the novitiate had given her concentration and insight beyond those of many a professional psychologist. These powers, in conjunction with native intuition, resulted in a penetration profoundly disconcerting to Mrs. Reccared and proportionately irritating.

*"Lucy light! Lucy light!"*

The children's delicate piping recalled "Santa Lucia" and other songs that Cousin Polly used to sing to them. She was an accomplished musician, and her singing had a peculiar, almost hypnotic quality. She would sing again this Christmas, songs of many nations in as many tongues. Santa Lucia! "*Omnes sancti et sanctæ Dei, orate pro nobis!*" Claire de Sazilly's arms spread in a protective gesture round the twins' shoulders. Her sense of responsibility weighed more heavily than usual. She had never shirked the most onerous duty,

but since the death of the children's father she had felt very much alone in her care of these two last representatives of their ancient name, for Nannie Grewel and Mrs. Glasse, the housekeeper, were old—they had served the late Sir Nicholas's parents, and one could not confide in the under-servants, excellent though they were. Young Mr. Carfax, the agent, would laugh at her fears, and Mr. Oldschool, the family solicitor and trustee for the estate during little Sir Nicholas's minority, could only be approached on matters of strict business. The Rector, a pious Low Churchman, would attribute her anxiety to Popish superstition and be politely evasive, and the matter-of-fact Belgian chaplain at the convent on the Canterbury road would tell her that she was too imaginative, which she knew well enough. Since childhood she had been far too imaginative for her own peace of mind. It *might* only be one of the causeless fears that torment highly strung natures, and, even if she could induce anyone to listen, how could she formulate that fear and how justify her oppressive sense of impending crisis?

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the motor-horn as the landaulette rounded the snowy curve of the avenue. The twins shrieked a descant to the mellow note (this was before the days of Klaxons), and their excitement rose to fever pitch that Mademoiselle's reiterated "*Doucement! Doucement!*" failed to calm, as the car drew up and Cousin Polly's robust yet lithe figure, swathed



in furs, stepped from it to the low threshold of the manor-house and into the lighted hall where the household were assembled to greet her. The draught from the open door made the candles gutter and the fire smoke, and for a moment the hall seemed as dark as the gloom beyond the windows. Then the air cleared and Apollonia Reccared was seen, smiling, as usual, a little enigmatically as she responded in her rich, mellow voice to the children's vociferous greetings and the politely formal ones of Mademoiselle and Mrs. Glasse, who looked her stateliest, walled about by her best black silk which was so much newer and smarter than the Frenchwoman's. All was geniality on the surface though, as usual; Cousin Polly's narrow green eyes could not quite easily meet the penetrating gaze of Claire de Sazilly's large searching black ones.

While Nick and Letty chattered and romped, the grown-ups exchanged banalities about the seasonable weather and the ideal setting for Christmas celebrations afforded by the fifteenth-century house; and then Cousin Polly was conducted to her own rooms by Mrs. Glasse, who could never accustom herself to Mrs. Reccared's habit of doing without a personal maid. "I like privacy," was her explanation, "and I can engage a sewing-woman or a coiffeur when I need one." When she had become the children's guardian and taken up periodical residence at Frantham Old Hall, she had chosen for her own use two rooms in a wing which had been added in the time of the first baronet

during the reign of James I. This wing was narrow and high, rising two storeys above the long, low, main building, and was known as "Lady Ipach's Tower" from the notorious wife of the first Sir Nicholas—eldest daughter of the seventh Earl of Glenmorven, called the "Demon Earl" both from his evil life and his reputed practice of black magic. Lady Ipach Graeme was said to have inherited her father's sinister propensities, and her name had been whispered in connection with an alleged "witch plot" against the timid and credulous king, but, as in many such cases, the important persons concerned had been allowed to escape while their humble accomplices had suffered the awful retribution of a terror-ridden age. In the top room of the "tower," which was approached by a spiral stair, the suspected lady had undoubtedly practised astrology and alchemy, and was of course reputed to be an adept in blacker arts. This room had been disused and closed for nearly three centuries when Cousin Polly chose to reopen it for use as a studio, taking the room below for her bedroom. Although she modelled figurines, some of them of very curious form, her workroom would have been more aptly termed laboratory, for she was fond of making experiments with herbs from the garden that had been laid out in Henry VII's time by Dame Isabel Frant, who had been lady-in-waiting to Elizabeth of York and had shared that Queen's love of gardening. Mrs. Reccared would spend hours brewing and distilling washes and perfumes



and other extracts less aromatic; she used other ingredients too, reflected the housekeeper, recalling the odd affair of hog's puddings at the home farm.

Mrs. Glasse, panting a little after climbing three flights of stairs, expressed the hope that "Madam" had all she required. Her offer of help with unpacking was graciously declined, and she went down to superintend the preparation of tea, which the children were to have with their cousin that day in honour of her return and the beginning of the Christmas holidays.

Tea was served in the library that had been the chapel until an "Italianate" and sceptical lord-of-the-manor, in the last decade of the sixteenth century, had it converted to secular use. A vast fireplace had been built where the altar had stood, and between it and the west window were ranged tier upon tier of the books collected by scholarly members in whom the Frant family-tree had been singularly prolific.

Firelight and lamplight made a magic circle round the hearth, and it seemed to Nick and Letty that the huge chimney was big enough for Santa Claus, sledge and reindeer and all, to drive down. Cousin Polly smilingly encouraged this notion, and related Christmas legends of many lands during the leisurely hour after tea that was devoted to story-telling. She had changed into a red-velvet tea-gown, and lay back in a deep chair, her knees crossed and a gold-brocade shoe dangling from a foot remarkably small and slender in contrast

with her buxom form. Her voluptuous pose shocked Mademoiselle, who had been trained at school and in the novitiate to sit rigidly upright on a backless form. Mrs. Reccared's luxurious lounging was a bad example to the children; one could not begin too young to learn self-discipline. But it seemed that all discipline was to go by the board this Christmas season, for Cousin Polly begged a cessation of studies during her stay at the manor-house, and set herself to amuse Nick and Letty with games, charades, songs and, above all, stories. Every afternoon after tea, she prolonged the leisure hour with tales from every country she had visited. She told of the fauns and satyrs of the Mediterranean; the kobolds of Germany; the trolls of Scandinavia; the vampires and werewolves of the Balkans. These thrilling narrations caused Mademoiselle's legends of the saints and expurgated versions of Perrault's fairy-tales to fade into insipidity. The governess thought that Polly's fireside tales were too thrilling, and that they over-excited the children. Nick and Letty were certainly sleeping less peacefully than formerly, and were having troubled dreams. Mademoiselle even ventured to mention this and to suggest some moderation of the evening entertainment, for the stories became a little more frightening each time; but Mrs. Reccared urged that the children should be allowed plenty of fun during the holidays. "They can be quiet enough after Christmas," she added; "I am going to spend the *jour de l'an* with friends in Paris."



Nick and Letty were certainly over-excited, nervous and irritable, and it seemed to be their guardian's intention to aggravate this state and to over-stimulate their eager anticipation of Christmas Eve and the visit of Santa Claus. The lack of outdoor exercise, due to the continued stormy weather, also contributed to this tiresome state of things. On some days it was possible to take them into the walled garden known as "Dame Isabel's Pleasaunce," and to walk briskly along the box-bordered paths or in a sheltered alley bounded by thick yew hedges nearly fifteen feet high. But Claire de Sazilly had felt a distaste for this gloomy avenue since she had heard Nannie's account of what the Scottish head gardener's wife had seen there on All Hallows' Eve, the night after Mrs. Reccared's curious visit to the home farm. The family at the gardener's house had been up later than usual, celebrating Hallowe'en with the traditional games and ceremonies. The mother had sent the children to bed at midnight and had stayed in the kitchen to make a hot drink for one of them who had a cold. While waiting for the kettle to boil she had happened to glance out of the window, and had seen someone, muffled in a black, hooded cloak, come out from the yew walk that led to the herbary. Though there was no moon, the figure was thrown into relief by a dim, greenish light that seemed to emanate from another dark form barely distinguishable from the background of yew hedge; it resembled a misshapen animal, and the gardener's wife declared that it "gave

her a cauld grue." On Saint Thomas's Eve Claire had noticed curious tracks in the snow, close to the yew hedges, and thereafter had kept the children away from that path.

On Thomas Day, as the villagers called it, Cousin Polly went to London to visit friends with whom she was to stay the night. Nannie took the opportunity of making the children rest during the afternoon, and Mademoiselle also tried to enjoy the luxury of a siesta, but, finding that she could not relax enough to win sleep, she sought to calm her nerves by walking slowly up and down the long corridor that ran the whole length of the main building on the first floor, while silently reciting the psalms of Compline which she had known by heart since her days in the novitiate. Soothed by the familiar rhythm, she was pacing steadily on, between the two rows of small, sturdy oak doors, and had just reached the turn to the left of the latticed window at the end where an archway led to the turret stair when, as her lips soundlessly formed the words "*a negotio perambulante in tenebris*," her steps were abruptly halted by the perception of a presence.

It was as if the phrase she had just articulated—"the Thing that prowls in darkness"—had been translated, not into sight or sound, but into an acute sense of being watched and an equally vivid apprehension that the watcher was malevolent and hostile. This is a sensation that is easily imagined, as the Frenchwoman well knew. She paused an instant, wondering if she was merely being too fanciful, as



the novice mistress had told her long ago, or if indeed the quintessence of all that is not-light had invaded the house on Saint Lucy's day. Then, crossing herself with the amplitude and precision learned at the Charreux, she stepped firmly through the archway to the foot of the turret stair and looked up.

It was as if a challenge had been uttered and accepted. The terrific words from the Epistle of Saint Peter, which she had spoken a few minutes before at the beginning of Compline, recurred in her memory, and full perception of their meaning crashed into her consciousness with shattering force: "Your adversary goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

There was nothing to be seen but the shadows on the twisting stair, barely lightened by the loopholes that pierced the turret walls with narrow bars of dim light quickly fading in the early dusk of the shortest day. There was no sound but the many small noises of an old house in stormy weather. But the sense of an inimical presence, malignant beyond imagining, increased until it seemed to Claire that it must, the next instant, manifest itself in a physical attack like the pounce of a savage beast. Her heart fluttered, and a wave of nausea forced her to crouch on the lowest step, her head between her knees to prevent fainting. As she bent down, her heavy crucifix on its silver chain slid out from the collar of her dress; she clutched the emblem of her faith and, with the last remnant of her strength, held it above her head

as, on the verge of unconsciousness, her mind reached out in a wordless appeal for help. Then gradually the tide of danger ebbed, and she could rise, slowly and feebly, knowing that in the unhallowed tower something brooded and threatened, and had only been checked on the brink of manifestation because its hour had not yet come.

She dragged herself along the corridor, now nearly dark, to the day-nursery, where Nannie Grewel, who had been sewing by lamplight, promptly installed her in her own arm-chair beside the high wire fender and revived her with home-made cordial from the medicine cupboard. When a little colour had crept back into her face, which had been, Nannie declared, "as white as a turnip-ghost," and her lips had lost their bluish tint, she answered the old nurse's anxious inquiries with the reply, truthful so far as it went, that she had had an attack of faintness. In order to change the subject, she offered to help with the mending, and sat for the next hour, her fingers busy with the exquisite darning she had learned in the convent, while Nannie placidly related news from the village: how the organist had quarrelled with "the Reverend" about the Christmas music; how Mrs. Bunce of the bakery had had words with the postmistress over the decoration of the pulpit, etc., etc.

While half-listening to the nurse's soft, slow voice, Claire's thoughts were busy with a less innocent item of local gossip gleaned from the same source two months ago. Early in the



afternoon of All Hallows' Eve, Mrs. Reccared had called at the home farm and, as the weather was already very cold, had been invited into the kitchen where the farmer's wife was preparing to make black puddings from the classical recipe which begins: "Catch the blood of a hog." The substitute lady of the manor had chatted amiably and knowledgeably about cookery, had spoken of black pudding's German cousin "Blutwurst," and described curious dishes she had tasted in "foreign parts." Her hostess went to fetch a glass of her famous cherry brandy (made from smuggled spirit, Nannie roundly declared), and returned to find her guest in a hurry to be gone, remembering an engagement at the Rectory. On continuing her work Mrs. Ashworth had found the bowl of hog's blood on the table unaccountably depleted. Everyone at the farm house denied having touched it, and the only possible explanation seemed to be that Mrs. Reccared had taken some of it away in "one of those new-fangled flasks for keeping things hot" which she had had with her in a basket. Why she should have wanted this grisly ingredient was a question fruitlessly discussed by Mrs. Ashworth and Nannie, but Claire de Sazilly thought that she knew. After learning from correspondents abroad that Mrs. Reccared frequented the lurking-places of necromancy in ancient cities, the governess had studied histories of witchcraft which were among the many rare works in the library, and had discovered that pig's blood was a favourite medium used by sorcerers in the conjuration

of malevolent elemental spirits. This seemed to be linked up in sinister fashion with the gathering of certain herbs of the dark of the moon, which was probably the purpose of the midnight visit to the herbary which the gardener's wife had witnessed. All this might, of course, be only a pastime, though suggestive of perverted taste; but one of Claire's former pupils, a Hungarian, had reported that Cousin Polly was an habitu   of a certain house in Budapest where such things were known to be more than a mere amusement.

In spite of these disturbing reflections, the warmth of the fire and her companion's monotonous voice lulled Claire into sleep troubled by a curiously evil dream. She seemed to be still sitting, or rather crouching, at a fireside, but it was the broad hearthstone in the library and the vast chimney yawned above her. The fear that had possessed her at dusk in the tower held her again in its grip, for the Thing that had menaced from the newel stair seemed now to lurk in the chimney; the panic paralysis of dreams constrained her, and even her power of thought seemed numbed, for she could only wait and gaze fearfully up into the great flue which seemed to be growing preternaturally large. Then a current of air, drawn upwards, was followed instantly by a down-draught of foul air, nauseating beyond endurance, that seemed the breath of some gigantic beast crouching above in the cavernous chimney. There was more, too, than physical horror, for that fetid gust seemed the miasma of spiritual corruption, pol-



luting body and soul. Claire struggled for breath, and woke, gasping and shuddering, to find Nannie announcing that tea was ready in the school-room.

To the twins, jaded with the excitement of the past week, schoolroom tea was both an anti-climax and a relief. They were unconsciously soothed by a temporary return to their normal routine, and Mademoiselle's bedtime story, which that night was the legend of Saint Nicholas and his gifts bestowed by stealth on the three impoverished sisters, made a restful change from their cousin's too thrilling narrations. They felt proud of bearing the name of the patron saint of Christmas presents—Nicholas and Nicolette—and were content to go early to bed, where they slept more peacefully than they had done since the beginning of the holidays.

The next day, after Cousin Polly's return at tea-time, the conversation veered to Santa Claus, and Nick and Letty, as so many children have done, expressed a wish to see the beneficent sprite. "Why not?" replied their guardian, and suggested that they should write notes to Santa Claus, making their request, and throw them into the fire as they had done with the lists of the presents they wanted. This they did, and the two scraps of charred paper were whirled up the chimney, looking like tiny black goblins with fiery eyes. It was Cousin Polly's idea, too, that the stockings should be hung beside the library fireplace instead of in the nursery.

The following two days were given up to intensive preparations for

Christmas, and the children ran riot all over the house, capering on the stairs while they "helped" to decorate banisters and newel-posts with garlands of holly, running races in the long corridor, and invading the kitchen and stillroom to taste the delicacies that Mrs. Glasse and the cook were preparing.

Christmas Eve was so dark that lamps burned all day long in the low-ceiled, panelled rooms. In the afternoon Mrs. Reccared, amiably concerned about Mademoiselle's white cheeks and darkly ringed eyes, persuaded her to rest and undertook to amuse the twins until tea-time. This she did by a game of hide-and-seek for which the older part of the house, full of odd nooks and corners, was admirably adapted. Frantham Old Hall was known to possess a "priest's hole" in which Robert Southwell, the martyr poet, had found safety from the pursuivants. Only the head of the family was supposed to know the exact locality of this hiding-place and the way of access to it. This information lay in a sealed envelope in a safe in the trustee's office, and would be revealed to young Sir Nicholas on his eighteenth birthday.

By evening Mademoiselle was no better, and decided not to go to Midnight Mass in the convent chapel. For some reason this seemed to disappoint Cousin Polly, who had been unusually pressing with her offer of the motor-car, and had even suggested that the drive would be refreshing. Claire was firm, though punctiliously polite, in declining, but, although she went to her room early, it was not to



go to bed. Tonight she must wake and watch.

At eleven o'clock she put a blessed candle and a box of matches into her capacious pocket, wrapped herself in a shawl, and, carrying her well-worn travelling-rug, stepped softly across the corridor and into the day-nursery, locking the door behind her. It was said that to certain forces a locked door was no barrier, but the illusion of safety brought a measure of comfort. The day-nursery had two other doors, one beside the fireplace communicating with Nannie's bedroom, and the second, in the opposite wall, leading to the night-nursery, where the twins were fast asleep. Their room had no other door.

Claire drew Nannie's arm-chair to the window, and pulled the curtains a little apart so that she could see, far away across the park, the lighted east window of the convent chapel where Midnight Mass would soon begin. Then she sat down, the rug over her knees and her rosary in her hands, to wait and to pray. She was sprung from a race of iron Crusaders, but perhaps none of them had ever kept a braver, more knightly vigil.

During her midnight watch there came into her mind a piece of gipsy lore that an antiquarian friend of the late Sir Nicholas had told her. It was the ritual pronouncement of a wish to take on oneself, "for love's sake," any evil that threatened another. Christian contemplatives called it "mystical substitution." The governess silently made this offering on the children's behalf at the hour when she knew that the climax of the Holy

Sacrifice was reached in the lighted chapel that was just visible in the gloom of the midwinter night.

A little after one the light in the chapel went out, and at the same moment there came a slight noise from the next room, a sound so faint that only an eagerly listening ear could have caught it. It had hardly registered in her brain before the Frenchwoman had opened the communicating-door. In contrast with the darkness in which she had sat during the past two hours, the gleam of fire and nightlight was enough to show her at a glance that the twin cots were empty and to reveal a vertical break an inch or two wide in the panelling. She lit the blessed taper and entered the "priest's hole," which had evidently been revealed prematurely to Nicholas that afternoon by his guardian who had no doubt inveigled the secret out of the boy's father years before.

A narrow passage in the thickness of the wall led to a short stair; then another passage at an angle, followed by more steps and a further turn. Claire, stumbling on with laboured breath and fluttering heart, felt that she was threading a labyrinth during an eternity bounded by seconds measured on the clock, but probably there were not more than three or four turns until she faced another sliding panel and pushed it open as a child's whimpering cry of fear chilled her blood:

"It doesn't *look* like Santa Claus!"

With an answering cry of "*Courage, mes enfants!*" Claire was kneeling on the hearthstone, her arms



extended like a cross, her eyes darting defiance at the abomination that crawled slowly down the vast chimney in a greenish glow like the phosphorescent gleam of putrefaction—a black, bestial form with a long, flattened snout, hairy pointed ears, horns and huge claws that gripped the stone supports of the chimney-piece with savage strength that seemed capable of rending them from their base.

Then, as if the charred logs on the hearth had burst into leaping flames, the foul apparition was drowned in clean and lambent fire. Where the ancient altar had stood there was now a priestly figure, vested in rose red, his arms raised as at the sacring of the Mass, his hands holding a new-born Child shining in an aureole of fire—the “Burning Babe” of Robert Southwell’s poem. An instant later the vision was gone, and there was nothing but the Christmas stockings swaying in the draught from the

chimney, and a little figure, covered by a shabby black shawl, lying collapsed on the hearthstone. The children tried to rouse her with frightened cries, not knowing that her devoted heart had stopped.

But it was another cry, a prolonged and strident scream of stark fear and fury, pealing in hideous clamour from the tower, that woke the household and sent them hurrying up the turret stair to find the upper tower room wrecked as if by the invasion of a rabid wild beast. Among fragments of smashed furniture and rags of crimson velvet that strewn the floor lay a blood-stained gold-brocade shoe. The latticed window had been torn from its frame and flung into the snow-smothered shrubbery at the foot of the tower. In the bleak, belated dawn of that Christmas morning, it was the head gardener who found Mrs. Reccared’s body in the yew alley, and fainted at the sight.



*“Our Babe, to show his Godhead true,  
Can in his swaddling bands controul the damnèd crew.”*  
MILTON.



# COBRA AT EVENSONG

G. VILLIERS

*Illustrated by  
Jennifer Gordon*



**I**T SEEMED AS THOUGH we should never get there. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon—the time when the sun in India is about at its hottest. The glare off the water stabbed one's eyes like hot needles. We had some sort of sail up, chiefly, I imagine, for the sake of appearances; but the air was breathless, and whatever movement there might be was due to the exertions of the coolies who were poling the boat across the lake.

We were a party of six returning from a Christmas week of duck shooting. We finally made the landing ghat at about 5.30 p.m., but by the time we had unloaded the tents, bedding, cooking utensils, suit-cases, guns and the rest of our paraphernalia, and had reloaded it all on to the bullock-carts, it was well past six o'clock.

Then what? The Calcutta train—if punctual—was not due for another four hours, and the prospect of spending the intervening hours on a small wayside station platform was not an attractive one. The alternative was to wander up towards the village; lots of villages in Southern India

boast some fine old temples. Maybe we should find one worth looking at. But when I made the suggestion to our party, the only volunteer was Shirley—a girl to whom I had recently become engaged.

So off we started, with one of the coolies leading the way. After plodding through thick red dust for about three-quarters of a mile, we reached the outskirts of the village. But we could see nothing even faintly resembling a ruin, except possibly some of the inhabitants. The village was like the million or so other villages scattered throughout India; mud huts on either side of a single street, a scraggy goat tethered to each hut, numbers of very small children very naked and with very large tummies; pariah dogs covered with mange, and a few shrunken old men and even older women whose wrinkled skins hung loosely like an elephant's trousers.



It was a kindly, leisurely place, and the acrid smell of the evening fires gave it a warm and pleasant atmosphere.

Shirley was looking tired. "What would you like to do?" I asked. "There is obviously nothing worth looking at here. We can't wander up and down here for some hours, and yet it will look rather futile if we go straight back to the station. Let's go and squat under that mango tree and have a smoke."

But Shirley didn't seem to think that was a very good plan. "You know what these people are like," she said, "the whole village will turn out and stare at us. Let's walk on a bit; perhaps we shall find somewhere to sit down rather less public than the middle of the village."

When we got to the far end, we saw to our surprise a church. It was a small, squat, whitewashed building with a thatched roof, and it gave the impression of being rather bat-ridden and dilapidated; nothing in the way of a wall or fence surrounded it. There it stood, looking rather forlorn and unprotected—an alien in a foreign land. Evidently it had once been a mission church, for the ruins of the mission buildings could be seen scattered around. We walked towards it.

A service of sorts was going on, because in the quiet of the evening we could just hear what sounded like some form of chanting. A young Indian passed us.

"Good evening, Babu; can you tell me what church that is?" I asked.

"That, sir, used to be the Naaga-

puram Mission Church, but the mission was moved some years ago somewhere near Bangalore; that is where I am now studying."

"But there appears to be a Padre here still," I replied; "there is evidently some sort of service going on now?"

"Yes, sir, there is an old retired priest here. He is a very old man, and perhaps not quite right in the head. They say he was affected many years ago when he suffered a great misfortune through the tragic death of his only daughter."

"Poor old man. Ah well, thank you, Babu, and a Happy New Year to you; good day."

Shirley tucked her arm through mine. "Come on, Dick, let's go in; after all, it is still Christmas week."

"Right-o, but I expect the service will be in Ooriya, in which case we shan't understand a word of it. But at worst it will be somewhere cool and shady to sit."

So we pushed open the door and in we went.

Entering out of the glare of the sun, it took a little time to get accustomed to the dark within. If the church had seemed moth-eaten and dilapidated from the outside, it was much more so from within. The plaster was peeling off the walls, window-panes were missing and the ceiling-cloth sagged ominously. At the east end there was a bare wooden altar, and half-way down on the left-hand side a rickety worm-eaten pulpit. The absence of any seats—except a half-dozen rush-bottomed chairs



near the entrance—made it look even more forlorn.

The congregation, which numbered about twenty-five or thirty, squatted on their haunches on the floor. The six chairs were arranged in pairs, four on the right side and two on the left. Shirley and I sat down on the rear pair on the right, the pair on the left-hand side being on a level with the two unoccupied chairs in front of us. The old padre was well into his stride; as I had feared might be the case, he was speaking in Ooriya, and we couldn't understand a word of what he was saying.

Shirley nudged my attention to a couple of lizards which were chasing each other across the floor. Suddenly the old man paused, and although he quickly resumed the thread of his discourse, the break was sufficiently abrupt to make me look up. He was staring intently at what, until a moment ago, had been the two empty chairs on the left-hand side, now . . . they were no longer empty! One of them was occupied by a girl, but when or how she had entered I had no idea. It could hardly have been through the door which we had used, because I remembered the noise made by its rusty hinges both when I pushed it open and again when I closed it.

She was a Eurasian, and as beautiful as so many of them are in their youth. She wore nothing on her head, and I could dimly discern the curling clusters of her dark hair silhouetted against one of the windows. She was dressed entirely in white except for a black belt. She sat abso-



lutely motionless, staring straight ahead. I glanced at Shirley to see whether she was still occupied with her lizards and then back at the girl. She was still staring straight ahead, but instead of being motionless, she now appeared to be stroking very gently something on her lap.

It was evidently some kind of animal which from time to time raised either itself or its head, for her hand would rise to the height of her breast, but always with that gentle, unhurried, persistent stroking motion; then her hand would fall to the level of her lap, but the stroking motion never ceased. I tried to guess what sort of animal it could be; at times I thought I could just make out something dark against her white dress, but it didn't seem to have any recognizable shape. Finally I concluded it might be a mongoose, though that



seemed an odd sort of animal to bring to church.

And then quite suddenly a ray of the setting sun pierced a window, lighting up the gloom, and I saw clearly what it was. It was a cobra lying curled up on her lap, with its hooded head waving very gently from side to side as she fondled it. From time to time it would raise itself up and then sink back again on to her lap. I sat there literally riveted with horror; this gentle, graceful waving from side to side was a terrible thing to see.

Presently it reared itself up again, but this time in rather a different manner, because it went higher than before until its dead, expressionless face was on a level with hers. By now she had stopped stroking it, and she sat as still as a statue, with her hands motionless in her lap.

With its blunt nose and flickering tongue it started nuzzling her face—her lips—her eyes—even her ears. But she never so much as moved an eyelid. It was a wicked, horrible and utterly loathsome sight. The cold passion of its evil kisses made me want to vomit.

Meanwhile the service had evidently finished, because the congregation started shuffling—quite quietly—towards the door. But as they passed down the aisle some of them edged over towards the chairs on our side and made a deep salaam to the girl. Beyond this they took no notice. Finally Shirley and I were left alone in the church, except for that ghastly performance which was still going on only about ten feet away from us.

By this time the snake had got one coil round her neck and its repulsive face was browsing over hers; still she remained motionless. I didn't know what to do—the slightest move would have frightened it, and then anything might have happened. It seemed to me that the only thing was for me to remain absolutely still in the hope that finally the cobra would tire of its obscene love-making and depart.

And then I must have inadvertently moved my chair, for there was a screech of its wooden legs on the stone-slabs. In a second the cobra had uncoiled itself from her neck, poised itself opposite her face with its head slightly drawn back—and struck!

The next thing I knew was that someone was shaking me. "It's all right, Sahib, there is nothing to be frightened about. It was a vision that you saw, a vision of what happened many years ago." It was the old Padre speaking.

Shirley was as white as a sheet and was trembling as if she had ague. "Did you also see it, Dick?" she gasped, "that bestial business? Thank God it wasn't real, but for heaven's sake let's get out into the open."

I helped her out as best I could, for in truth I was as badly shaken as she was. We sat down outside, and presently the old padre came along with a tin mug and some cool water in a chatti—just about the best drink I ever remember!

"Sahib, I am sorry this should have happened." His gentle voice was shaking with emotion. "Not many Europeans come here, and very few of them see the vision."



"Thanks for the water, Padre, but do explain what happened. What is it all about?" I asked.

"Sahib, what you saw in a vision was the tragedy of my only child's death. Nearly forty years ago I was a student at this Mission, and in due course I was ordained. It was here that I fell in love with and married one of the teachers—a Swedish girl. In due course she bore me a daughter, Elizabeth, but her dear mother died in child-birth. Unfortunately our daughter was an epileptic—at least, that is what the doctors said. Without warning, she would suddenly go off into a trance. Various things affected her in this way, but in particular the sight of a snake. The natives used to say that she must have been specially loved by Naagoba—the snake-god. Some of them—not those who had been baptized, of course—used to treat her almost with veneration, for snake-worship was quite common in those days, as in-

deed it still is in many parts. One Sunday evening I was preaching in this church and saw from the pulpit what you have seen this evening; only on that occasion it was all too real. Evidently the cobra had come in out of the great heat, seeking the cool of the stone floor.

"Anyway, there it was, coiled up on her lap and she, in one of her trances, stroking it. I was terrified lest someone in the congregation should also see what I saw and frighten the cobra by making a noise. I stopped my sermon abruptly and explained to the congregation that the slightest noise might cause death, and I asked them to leave the church very quietly. They trooped out on tip-toe, but as they passed the chair most of them salaamed.

"Soon the church was empty except for Elizabeth, myself and the cobra. I waited motionless until at last it began to uncoil itself, and I thought it was going to leave her. Very quietly I moved towards her, intending to snatch her from off the chair, but my dhoti must have caught in something or other, because I moved the chair whose legs made the same screeching noise on the stone-flags as yours did. Then the cobra struck just as you saw in your vision. It was the will of God.

"Some time later the mission was moved, but they allowed me to stay on here. Her spirit is waiting for me. Here," and again he smiled that sad, gentle smile, "here they say I am a little mad. Perhaps; who knows? But God is kind and I wait in peace. I think I shall not have to wait much longer."





# THE KNIFE IN THE MIRROR

GEOFFREY LEE

*A series of Jack the Ripper type murders. The police have no idea who is responsible. More curious though, the murderer hasn't either.*



THE TOWN SEETHED with excitement over the latest murder. A vibrant tension communicated itself one to another, until the chill November afternoon seemed electrified and anticipant.

All day long the customers coming into the bank had been talking about it, until Mr. Oliver felt utterly sick of the subject. He stroked his thinning hair wearily and looked at his watch. Only another ten minutes to closing time. "Thank God for that," he thought.

He turned on the green-shaded lamp above his desk and opened a heavy ledger. Methodically he picked up a cheque from the top of the pile in front of him and posted it in the ledger.

His lamp cast a white circle of light over the dark mahogany desk, and for some reason made him feel isolated and alone.

Mr. Jones, the cashier, began to balance his till. The click, click, click, as he flung little piles of silver into five-pound paper bags seemed loud and harsh.

The junior turned the rest of the lights on, and Mr. Oliver felt comforted by these. The last customer

had been in a quarter of an hour ago, and a depressing silence had fallen on the office since then.

True they were all there together.

The manager sitting in his office with his door half-open so that he could command a view of his staff by merely raising his head from his writing. The cashier in front of Mr. Oliver now pouring a pound of sixpences into a little oblong envelope and sticking it down. The junior listing the remittance cheques on long white sheets and muttering under his breath as he cast a particularly long column.

Yes, they were all there, four of them, each at his own work and apparently absorbed in it.

Yet Mr. Oliver still felt a sense of depression corroding the atmosphere. The hurrying footsteps in the street outside that had earlier carried the feeling of excitement through the thick stone walls now seemed muffled and dull.

The junior went to the entrance porch as the clock on the church opposite struck three. He banged the heavy doors shut and shot the bolts and fixed the chain with vigour. He was not sensitive to atmosphere.

"Perhaps," mused Mr. Oliver, "I'm the only one who notices it. It's all this talk about these murders. Three



people stabbed to death in two months, all within half a mile of this office. All customers, too. Still, that was no coincidence seeing that we are the only bank in the west end of the town."

Mr. Oliver started as he turned a sheet over in the ledger and came to one of the murdered customer's accounts.

Through her name were two pencilled strokes and the date of death. Just "deceased" and the date, not "stabbed through the heart with a razor-sharp knife." No. Nothing sensational allowed in bank ledgers.

Under the last entry in the ledger were more pencilled lines and the words "Pay nothing more." On the next page an executor's account had been opened.

"Damned old sow," thought Mr. Oliver. "She deserved to die. Mean as hell. Now someone who can make good use of her money will get it."

All the murderer's victims had been wealthy. Two women and one man. The police were puzzled by the lack of motive. None of the victims had been robbed, and the man at least had been carrying a fairly large sum of money with him at the time. The murders had been cleverly planned by someone who obviously knew the habits of his victims.

Mrs. Benton—the first one—had left her flat at seven on a Friday evening, to go down the road and call on a friend. The pair of them had booked seats at the repertory theatre every Friday, and it was Mrs. Benton's practice to walk to her friend's place and pick her up.

This particular Friday she never reached her friend's house. Someone stabbed her to death before she had gone a hundred yards from her own home.

The second victim, Mr. Fortescue, died five weeks later. He was a retired stockbroker, wealthy, a bachelor and mean as a miser. He was stabbed coming out of his club at about ten o'clock one night.

Neither of these murders had been witnessed, but the third, which had happened on the previous day, was witnessed.

Mrs. Smythe, a cantankerous old spinster with five needy nephews and nieces who could have done with a little financial help from their aunt but never got any, was struck down on her own doorstep.

She had just returned home from a Christian Science Meeting; it was just after eight o'clock at night and a man had sprung out from the bushes and stabbed her.

The witnesses were a courting couple on the other side of the road. They had been standing in the shadow of a tree thinking how wonderful life was, when the woman's scream had disturbed them. They rushed across in time to see someone running away from the house. They couldn't see much in the dim street light; all they were certain of was that it was a man and he was wearing a dark overcoat.

Mr. Oliver closed the ledger and put it up on the brass rail that ran across the top of his desk. Then he took a second ledger down and began posting it. White credit slips, yellow



credit slips, cheques orange, debit slips red. Standing order cards, pink for debits, white for credits. They flowed through his hands in a steady, monotonous stream. The names and amounts penetrated into his brain just far enough to order his pen to write them down. Nothing was retained in his mind. As he turned one item over, it was forgotten.

All the time he was brooding over the murders. He had heard the customers give their theories to Jones and Jones giving back his. The general view seemed to be that the murderer was some maniac, who hated mean and miserly people and saw their deaths as a means of liberating their wealth amongst more needy relatives.

One customer, Mr. Cramshaw—as tight-fisted a man as you could hope to meet—believed this, too.

Mr. Oliver hated him. Mr. Cramshaw was white-haired with a lined leathery face and cold blue eyes. He had a habit of pointing to any member of the staff and making personal remarks. His finger would stab out towards the junior—"That boy needs a haircut," he would say to the cashier in ringing tones.

Once he had pointed to Mr. Oliver and snapped out loudly: "Fellow there's got a revolting tie on—no dress sense at all."

There was nothing they could do about it. Mr. Cramshaw was far too important a customer. He had come in today, his face full of a malicious challenge.

"I'd like to see anyone try to murder me," he said.

Jones murmured something about it not being safe to go about after dark.

Cramshaw laughed icily, "I've been going down to my club at nine-thirty every night for the last twenty years, and I'd like to meet the fellow who could stop me."

Mr. Oliver put the second ledger on top of the first and opened a third one. He wished to himself that someone would shatter the cocksure complacency of Mr. Cramshaw.

It was half-past five when Mr. Oliver reached his lodgings. He had a bed-sitting-room on the second floor of a decayed semi-detached Victorian house in a decaying street on the fringe of the fashionable West End.

He had his tea in the dining-room with the other three lodgers, or paying guests as their landlady preferred to call them; then he went up to his room and lit the fire.

It took a long time to warm the tall, sparsely furnished room, and he sat huddled in the faded arm-chair, still morosely brooding over the murders. He was still thinking of them when he walked to his favourite coffee-house a couple of hours later. He had banked the fire up carefully and placed the iron guard around it.

The coffee-house was full of steam and talking. Mr. Oliver sat down opposite to the row of tables that stood in front of a long glass mirror that fitted flush to the entire length of one wall. It was partly obscured by the gusts of steam that misted the shimmering wet surface, then faded away only to be resurrected by another whirl of white vapour.



It was unpleasantly hot after the cold night outside, and Mr. Oliver removed his hands from his pockets and opened his overcoat.

He ordered a coffee and a plate of biscuits. He looked about him and nodded casually to the man behind him. He couldn't remember his name, a commercial traveller, came in the bank quite often to pay in. Never had much to say for himself.

Mr. Oliver couldn't see anyone else he knew. He idly glanced into the mirror. It was a useful way to study people unobserved.

Tonight the clouded ever-changing surface made this difficult. He was about to turn away when something he saw reflected in a clear circular patch opposite to him arrested his attention. Its impact was so startling that at first it did not fully register.

It was the handle of a knife, a white ivory handle to what looked like a sheath-knife. It protruded from the pocket of a dark overcoat. A great swirl of steam obliterated it as it fell back into this pocket.

When the mist cleared again Mr. Oliver found he was unable to determine whose overcoat it had been. A knife, a white shining handle, with a silver star-shaped bolt through it. It was impressed with force upon his mind.

The tables and people in front of the mirror made it difficult to say exactly where that knife had been reflected from. It appeared directly opposite to him, therefore it must be either the man behind or the man in front.

He turned from the mirror and

looked at the person in front of him. A grey-haired man with a light tweed overcoat.

Then it must be the man behind, the Commercial Traveller. He gave a surreptitious look round.

Yes, he wore a navy blue overcoat. His surreptitious look ascended to the Commercial Traveller's face. Their eyes met, startled.

Mr. Oliver turned back hastily. His coffee and biscuits had arrived, and he picked up the brown hot liquid and gulped some down before he would allow himself to think again.

He knew by the look on the other's face in that moment their eyes met that the Commercial Traveller knew he'd seen the protruding knife. The noise around them continued unabated. No one else appeared to have noticed.

"It is just between the two of us," thought Mr. Oliver. A reflection in a mirror. A knife resting in the bottom of a pocket—brought up momentarily by someone drawing out a handkerchief or merely removing their hand—as I myself did to loosen my overcoat.

A simple action—and for a fraction of a second something dreadful is revealed, then slips back into oblivion.

"What ought I to do?" Mr. Oliver asked himself slowly behind his coffee.

It is foolish, of course! A sudden wave of relief came over him. His imagination was running away with him. Just because he had seen someone with a sheath-knife. Fool! There's nothing unusual in a person carrying a sheath-knife. The Com-



mercial Traveller had probably bought it for his son. Bargain he'd picked up whilst on his rounds.

No! No, surely not. Would any father buy such a present at a time like this. Three murders, three vicious murders committed by a knife and he takes a knife home for his son? No. And, in any case, why should he carry it about with him at nine o'clock at night. And that startled look as their eyes met. What was in it? Anger? No. Fear, fear and suspicion.

The Commercial Traveller knows that I've seen the knife. He can guess the conclusions I've drawn. No, it's ridiculous. Why should he murder anyone? Well, someone murdered them. Someone who knew them, someone who knew the town.

"But what shall I do?" Mr. Oliver asked himself in agony. "I can't go to the police, they'd laugh at me. There's nothing criminal in carrying a sheath-knife about with you. Anyway, the Commercial Traveller would make up some excuse. But he knows that I know." That thought kept drumming through Mr. Oliver's head.

"He knows. A man who has committed three murders—he knows that I could prove dangerous. If the police believed my story they would have him watched.

"I alone in this town know," thought Mr. Oliver. "What will he do? A man who has committed three murders will have no compunction about choosing me for the fourth victim."

Mr. Oliver shuddered, the coffee scalded and burnt his throat un-

heeded. He shuddered because of the man behind him. Because he didn't know what to do. Because he was afraid for his life.

"If I go from the café first, he may follow and murder me," thought Mr. Oliver. "And if I wait until he goes, he may lurk outside until I come."

Mr. Oliver finished his coffee, he couldn't eat his biscuits. Straining his ears, he tried to imagine what the other man was doing. He didn't turn around again. He daren't even look across to the sweating mirror.

Eventually he decided to go. He picked up the ticket that the waitress had given him and walked to the cash-desk and paid. Then he pushed through the glass door and hurried blindly into the night.

A light drizzle fell icily through the air. Under the shade of a tree he hastily threw a glance over his shoulder.

The Commercial Traveller was coming through the door of the coffee-house, blinking and peering anxiously around.

Mr. Oliver stumbled away from the tree. Hunching his shoulders, he walked rapidly down the road. The cold damp glow from the lamps cut across him and fell behind as he sped by. He did not look back again.

Instead of turning right at the bottom of the road, he turned left away from his lodgings.

The rain glinted on the black iron railings, lights from houses deep in laurel and massed shrubbery showed as dim yellow patches in the night.

At the end of the road he turned left again, then crossed over and went



down an avenue on his right. A wide avenue with tall trees growing down the centre on a green bank that split the road in two. Tall, four-storey houses flanked the avenue, and opposite to one of these Mr. Oliver drew into the shadows of the centre trees. He looked around suddenly, and with a start saw that the Commercial Traveller was still following him. He hadn't shaken him off, then.

Mr. Oliver drew deeper into the column of trees; he crept cautiously, hidden from view, farther down the road.

The Commercial Traveller stopped. "Good," thought Mr. Oliver, "he's lost me." The Commercial Traveller slowly looked around, then drew into the darkness of the tall stone entrance gates of one of the houses.

A light came on in the hall of the house. Something inside Mr. Oliver contracted. The house was Mr. Cramshaw's! He looked at his watch. Mr. Cramshaw was going to make his nightly pilgrimage to his club.

Mr. Oliver suddenly felt clammy. "The Commercial Traveller hadn't been following him at all," he thought. "He's come to murder Cramshaw."

He held himself tense. His throat seemed too constricted to allow him to cry out, his brain too paralysed for him to move.

The door of the house opened. Mr. Cramshaw, pulling on his gloves, descended and walked leisurely and arrogantly to the gate. Mr. Oliver closed his eyes. He heard the iron gates clang. Then footsteps on the road. He opened his eyes. Mr. Cram-

shaw was walking slowly towards him, he would pass within a foot of Mr. Oliver as he crossed the avenue.

Dimly Mr. Oliver realized that the murderer had not struck. No doubt he waited behind the stone gate-post ready to spring. Mr. Oliver tensed himself for the sound of swift running feet and the soft thud of a knife.

But all he could hear was bells ringing, and ringing; filling his head with sound, and all he could see was Mr. Cramshaw's face coming closer and closer.

The sound of the bells grew louder, Mr. Cramshaw's face bobbed like a pale white balloon in front of him, now within a few feet of his face.

Mr. Oliver moved forward towards him. A blackness obliterated the face and died away, and with it the bells died away and Mr. Oliver was conscious of silence.

Then from the shadows of Mr. Cramshaw's gate he heard footsteps, panic-stricken footsteps speeding away into the night. Then he was conscious that he was doing something with his hands. He looked down at them.

He was holding in his left hand a large white handkerchief on which his right hand was wiping a red wet knife. His brain registered no shock at this. He folded the handkerchief with care and put it back in his pocket.

He looked at the knife, it had a white handle with a silver star on each side. He last remembered seeing it in the café mirror. "Of course," he thought, "how stupid of me, it's my own knife."

He looked down dispassionately



at the body of Mr. Cramshaw lying aslant the road with a dark stain spreading from his mackintosh front. Then he walked away, back towards his lodgings.

His mind seemed wandering between two entirely different sets of thought. Each previously separated, but now flowing together in stunned confusion.

One part of him denied all knowledge of the knife, yet he carried it now in his pocket. "It must have been there all the evening," said this part of his mind.

But the other part, a deep, wordless, powerful consciousness, assured him that the knife was his, the murder was his, the hatred, the planning, all his. He began now to realize that the chance reflection in the mirror had somehow smashed the barrier between these two parts. He'd thought it was somebody else's knife; somebody else's murder. But no, now he knew that it was his, that they were all his.

Mr. Oliver's brain was still stunned by the force of these revelations. A dull drugging opiate flowed over him, cooling him, sending him back to his lodgings on steady automatically placed steps that had on three other nights thus brought him out, and thus returned him.

The rain had stopped when he reached the brass-knocker door of his lodgings. He went inside and hung his overcoat on the hall-stand. The hall was empty. A faint glimmer of light shone from under the parlour door. Mr. Oliver carefully took the knife and the handkerchief from his

overcoat pocket and transferred them to his suit.

When he reached his own room, he locked the door behind him and went over to the fire. The covering of banked-up slack had burnt through and a bright flame danced towards the chimney flue. He removed the guard and placed the folded blood-stained handkerchief upon the fire. It burnt, spluttering and hissing into blackness, then dropped in disintegrating and shredded rags to nothing.

Mr. Oliver then went to the chest-of-drawers beside the bed. He pulled out the bottom drawer and felt under the shirts and underwear for a leather brief-case. He unlocked this and took a black-coloured knife-sheath out.

Then he slid the ivory-handled knife into the sheath and put them back into the brief-case. He locked it and replaced it carefully in the drawer.

He shivered slightly and sat down by the fire. Then he allowed himself to think again. Slowly and with deliberate control over his mind.

He remembered the running footsteps from Mr. Cramshaw's gate. Mr. Oliver thought about this carefully. The Commercial Traveller followed me because he saw the knife in the café. When he lost me in the avenue, he hid behind the gate-post because he was afraid I might spring out on him unawares. When Cramshaw came out, he was still trying to see me in the trees. He watched Cramshaw cross the road, not knowing that Cramshaw was a predetermined victim—that I was there according to a carefully timed plan.



He witnessed the murder and fled in panic to fetch aid—to fetch the police.

Mr. Oliver visualized the scene. Lights going on in all the houses. Police cars, an ambulance, crowds, noise, confusion.

"How they'd laugh," thought Mr. Oliver, "when the Commercial Traveller said that Mr. Oliver of the bank had committed it."

He could see the jovial sergeant who came down every Friday for the wages; he could see his face curl up in disbelief.

"But the Commercial Traveller would be emphatic, he'd say what he'd seen in the café. How he followed me, lost me in the shadows. How I'd stepped out—the flash of the knife."

Mr. Oliver smiled to himself. "How surprised they'd be to know that I've only just learnt myself who the murderer was."

They would have to investigate the Commercial Traveller's statement, of course. Even now a police car was probably heading towards this house.

No trouble to find the address. Ring up the bank manager—he'd know. Be surprised. But they wouldn't tell him what it was for.

Mr. Oliver stretched himself in front of the fire. "All that planning," he thought, "and I never knew a thing about it. If I hadn't seen that reflection in the mirror, I'd never have known."

"What did they call it? Schizophrenia?"

"Four murders I don't remember a thing about."

"Except bells ringing. That's all."

Great clashing, clanging bells.

"Wonder where I got the knife? Ironmonger? Sports shop?"

"My eldest boy wants one of these things. Must be good. He says he wants one that really kills."

"Shopkeeper laughs."

"What about this one, sir. Nice strong blade, ivory handle, real hide case. Very reasonable."

"Yes, that was probably how it was."

"I must have got it on one of my trips to London. They all know here that I'm not married."

"Funny, I can't remember. I could have sworn that this evening was the first time I'd ever seen the knife or knew of its existence."

Mr. Oliver was disturbed in his quiet and ordered reflection by the sound of a motor-car drawing up outside the house. He turned the light off and lifted the edge of a curtain to see into the street.

A police officer and two constables were getting out of the car. Mr. Oliver let the curtain fall back and turned on the light. He heard the vigorous rat-a-tat-tat on the brass door-knocker echo through the hall.

"The police will come in and search my room and find a knife," thought Mr. Oliver slowly.

He opened the drawer again and removed the brief-case.

Voices, calm and sonorous, and a voice, his landlady's, disturbed and high-pitched, rose to him from the hall. Mr. Oliver unlocked the brief-case and removed the knife. He bared the knife from the sheath and examined it. The hilt end of the blade



was rimmed by a faint line of dried blood.

Mr. Oliver could now hear foot-steps ascending the stairs.

He looked at the knife and then at the fire, then the window. He looked round the room wildly for a moment as if seeking a perfect hiding-place.

Then he relaxed. He took the knife in his right hand, his thumb resting around the hilt. His fingers gripping the handle and the blade pointing upwards towards his breast. He undid his coat and placed the point under his left rib still pointing upwards.

He heard several knocks on the door, but they were drowned by a gentle ringing of bells that steadily

increased into a great, almost unbearable peal.

His right arm was bent at the elbow, which rested a few inches to the right of his hip. The knife was clenched in a tight fist, held rigid and straight by his wrist. Slowly he drew the knife back and down, as if against a steel spring.

Vaguely, against the ringing bells, his mind wondered how he had learnt the correct procedure to stab—the fast rising thrust.

He was still wondering when he released the invisible spring and his forearm sprang upwards carrying the knife under the left ribs and into his heart.



Nor less I deem that there are Powers  
Which of themselves our minds impress;  
That we can feed this mind of ours  
In a wise passiveness.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770–1850).



# GRIN DEATH

## FRANCIS GRIERSON

**"T**HERE," said Magda Gray, as she withdrew the hypodermic needle from her patient's mouth, "we'll just let that do its work for a few minutes, Mr. Farles."

The sensual lips of the overfed man in the reclining chair curved to a smile in which the palely vulpine eyes had no part. Critically his gaze followed the easy movements of the woman, mature but still slim and desirable, her dark beauty enhanced by the austere lines of her high-necked white jacket. He noted the governed certainty with which the long fingers handled the instruments; and when she reached for a phial on a high shelf his tongue brushed his lips avidly as the tightened skirt revealed gracile legs and ankles.

Monty Farles considered himself a connoisseur of women. He had pursued so many of them that he could at least claim an expert's assessment of their bodily charms, but he had not always been so successful in estimating their moral resistance.

This time, however, he was satisfied that he had made no mistake.

He gave silent thanks for the impulse that had made him fill an idle hour between lunch and dinner by availing himself of a half-forgotten invitation to one of the Kendalls' rather dull cocktail parties. It was there that he first met Magda Gray.

At once he had known that here was a prize not easy to be won. Magda was neither innocent maiden nor eager nymph, to be swept off her feet by flattery or gifts; but she was a woman, and no woman was impregnable. . . .

Farles could be charming, and he had used his charm cleverly, suggesting rather than expressing the respectful homage of a wearily disillusioned man suddenly awakened to the perception that a new and absorbing interest had come into his life.

Magda had responded at once—not in words, but in the vibrant sympathy, he thought, of a woman also disillusioned and weary of banalities.

She said little about herself, but he gathered that she was a native of Middle Europe. After a university course at Prague, she had come to London just before the war to take a degree in dental surgery. Her parents had died in a German concentration camp—she changed the conversation quickly. Now, with the help of friends she had built up a successful practice.

He was astute enough not to force the pace. He did not even ask her to dine with him, but he contrived to find out the names of mutual acquaintances, and when he had met her at their houses he asked her to take him as a patient.

As he lay back in the deep chair he congratulated himself on his patience; the longer the chase, the more triumphant the kill.



He caught her eye and smiled again.

"You certainly are kind to your victims," he said. "In the old days one was given an injection only before having a tooth out, but now you people give it for a mere drilling."

"We don't believe in giving unnecessary pain," she answered. "It's as bad for the dentist as it is for the patient."

"I can't imagine *you* wanting to hurt anyone, Miss Gray," he declared fervently. "By the way, is it Miss or Mrs.?" He looked at her plain gold ring. "I don't think I've met your husband."

"My husband is dead. Ronald was in the Royal Air Force when he——"

"Ronald? Would that be the Squadron-Leader Gray who got the D.F.C. for bagging four German planes in one fight?"

"Yes. Did you know him?"

"No. Only wish I had. What happened?"

"He was shot down, badly hurt, and the guards in his prison camp just let him die for want of care."

"The swines!" Farles exclaimed. "It makes your blood boil to think of it. How I wish I could have had a crack at those brutes. But I was needed for other work, and one can't choose in war-time."

He sighed.

Magda took an angled mirror and looked into his mouth.

"Good," she said. "That'll soon take effect."

"Novocaine, I suppose?"

"Professional secret," she smiled.

"As a matter of fact, it's something I made up specially for you."

"I think you're marvellous; so kind, so clever," he murmured.

Then he caught his breath sharply, his hands and feet twitching.

"Don't worry," she soothed. "It's only the drug working."

He regained his poise with an effort.

"Magda," he said, an artistic tremor in his tone, "ever since I first saw you I've thought of you. I'm not a romantic boy running after the first beautiful woman in sight. I had given up hope of finding true happiness. Life has bruised me. Then I met you. Magda, if you only knew how I long to take care of you, to shield you——"

The woman thrust her hands into the pockets of her jacket as she leaned against the cabinet.

"As you shielded Franzie Rakova?" she suggested ironically. "I see you remember the name," she added.

Farles's ruddy cheeks had paled and his hands gripped the arms of the chair.

"Oh, vaguely," he stammered, "only vaguely. But does it matter?"

"Yes. That's why you're here."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I'm going to tell you. It won't take long, because you haven't much time to listen, or to live."

"Really——"

"Oh, I'm quite sane; much saner than you'll be in a few minutes."

She smiled bitterly as she took a small automatic pistol from her pocket.

"Stay where you are," she ordered.

"I don't want to have to shoot you,



but I will if you move." She laughed as he shrank back. "You rat! And you talked about having a crack at the Germans; you who moved heaven and earth to get sent with a British mission to America. It was in Washington you met Franzie, wasn't it?"

"Well, what if it was?" He gasped. "What's making me feel like this? What have you given me?"

"Strychnine, my friend. One of the deadliest poisons known."

"You bitch!" he cried, but the drug had gripped him.

Gasping again, he drew back his lips in the ghastly grin known as the *risus sardonicus*.

Magda watched him coolly.

"Listen," she went on when the paroxysm subsided, "Franzie was my sister. She wasn't much more than a child. She'd always lived with decent people, and she didn't know there were men like you in the world." Her voice shook, but she recovered her deadly calm. The knuckles of the hand that held the pistol shone whitely under the taut skin. "The rich Monty Farles was so kind to the poor little refugee who'd escaped from Czechoslovakia; so kind, so generous, so loving. So ready to *shield* her and give her a new life of happiness and safety. . . . Oh, I found it all out, though it took a long time. . . .

"One day she told you she was going to have a baby. She believed you were going to marry her. And what did you do? You laughed and offered her money. When she begged you to give her and the child your

name, you said you were married already. Even that was a lie. . . . But we haven't much time. . . . Franzie cut her throat. . . ."

She stopped and passed a handkerchief across her forehead. The livid man in the chair was convulsed, and again she waited for the spasm to pass.

"There isn't much more to say," she resumed. "When I discovered the truth, I knew that the law couldn't touch you. Very soon you'd forgotten Franzie; she was just another of your past adventures. But I didn't forget. I had to be careful; but you had no reason to suspect that Magda Gray had once been Magda Rakova. At last my chance came. I got the Kendalls to introduce us, and after that your silly vanity made things easy. You were always ready for an affair with any woman stupid enough to fall for you. You thought it would be a new and amusing experience to make love in a woman dentist's surgery——"

"Magda, stop! I can't bear it——"

He shrieked, contorted in a final agony, and slumped in the chair.

Magda bent over him for a moment.

Going to a writing-table, she took from a drawer the picture of a beautiful girl. For a long time she gazed; her tears fell as she kissed it, and then tore it into fragments.

There was a new peace in her eyes as she placed the muzzle of the pistol in her mouth and pulled the trigger.





# THE SLAVE DETECTIVE

THE CASE OF THE MISSING SLAVE GIRL

WALLACE NICHOLS

*Illustrated by J. Ramsey Wherrett*

I  
**M**ARCUS VIPSANIUS was an aristocrat of the old school, and though he loved his only son Valerius with the natural affection of a father, he probably loved him even more because he was the last scion of so great a family. Pride, both of blood and possessions, was his ruling star, and when one of the slave girls in his household was suddenly missing, it seemed an offence to his very standing in Roman society. He felt it a duty to his name to have the mystery solved, and the girl, or her body, restored to his abode.

He came to Senator Sabinus, and asked for the help of his servant Sollius, the famous Slave Detective.

Face to face with the old man,

Sollius realized at once that he would have to tread carefully. Vipsanius was cold and haughty, and clearly felt a distaste for employing the Slave Detective at all; but his pride stung him on. The girl privileged to be in his household was part of his estate, and the Vipsanius estate was sacred to him.

"May I," asked Sollius deferentially, "ask you, lord, a few questions?"

"Ask," replied the old man, always affecting the brevity of a Cato.

"First, lord, have you any suspicion or guess about what has happened to this girl?"

"None."

"What, lord, is her name?"

"Ennid—a girl from Britain."

"A young girl?"

"Just seventeen years."

"Good looking, lord?"



Vipsanius wrinkled his nose in slight disgust.

"Some people have thought her a beauty."

"A fellow slave, perhaps?"

"I had to have one whipped for pestering her. Girl slaves in my house are safe."

"He is not, I suppose, lord, missing, too?"

"Quartus is not missing."

"I think I should like to begin my investigation, lord, by questioning this Quartus."

"I will send him to you," said Vipsanius, and left Sollius in the little walled garden where he had received him.

A small fish-pond lay like a blue jewel in its paved middle, and an exquisite, tiny fountain played in the midst of the pond. It was a hot summer morning, and Sollius was glad of the cooling spire of water.

Quartus was a dark, upstanding young man with a somewhat lowering face. He was clearly both disturbed and angry.

"Why am I under suspicion?" he burst out at once. "I wouldn't harm a hair of her head. I am not like Milo."

"Did I say I suspected you?" asked the Slave Detective. "I sent for you because I might get a picture of her from you which I should not get from the lord Vipsanius."

"That is so, anyway," answered Quartus, a little mollified. "She is a girl as beautiful as spring itself. I love her," he added simply, "and am not the only one."

"Has she, think you, run away

with a lover?" Sollius asked.

"If I thought that I'd seek him out and kill him!" cried Quartus fiercely.

"You spoke of one named Milo; is it he?"

"Milo has not been seen for months," replied Quartus. "I know he was mad for her, but she loathed him. She wouldn't go with *him*."

"Abduction is always by force," said Sollius. "Or would she run away? Is the family good to you slaves?"

"We have no complaints over that," muttered Quartus.

"What of the son of the house?"

"The father is just; the son is mild. They are very different men. We all wonder that they never quarrel. Perhaps the young lord Valerius is sly in dealing with his father. He is preparing to join the staff of the new Governor of Bithynia, and is busy with his armour, weapons, fine clothes and horses. A wonderful soldier he'll make!" he scornfully added. "If he weren't his father's son, he wouldn't even rise from the ranks. He's all for poetry and such-like nonsense."

"It is lucky, then," smiled Sollius, "that the Empire is at peace. I understand," he went on, "that a slave was whipped for his behaviour to the girl. Was that you?"

He had wondered whether the fellow would lie, but all he got was a frightened glance. Then, before Quartus could answer, a dark, handsome young man entered the enclosure and advanced with a smile.

"My father says you may wish to speak with me, O Sollius," he said,





"though, by Jupiter, I have nothing to tell. Perhaps Quartus has been more useful to you?"

"Not very useful," Sollius replied. "I have finished with him—for the moment."

Valerius dismissed his father's slave, and turned again to Sollius.

"Ennid is a lovely girl," he said. "I hope to the Gods that nothing has happened to her."

In spite of Quartus's scorn, Sollius had liked the young man's frank, open face and friendly manner at the first glance. Poets, even would-be poets, were not to him subjects of contempt.

"I feel that if my mother had been alive," went on Valerius, "this would not have happened. My elderly great-aunt is not the best mistress for young girl slaves, and besides," he added with an engaging twinkle, "she is really half-blind."

"I understand that the slave I was just questioning," said Sollius, "was once whipped for pestering this girl Ennid."

"We have forgiven Quartus," smiled the young master. "He meant no harm; he was only . . . in love. But we did not forgive another slave, named Milo, for a worse pursuit. My father, disgusted, sold him to a friend. I have been thinking of Milo. He was certainly wildly, almost brutally infatuated."

"How long ago was he sold?"

"Four or five months ago. He is the property now of Titus Rutilius."

Sollius knew the name; his master knew him personally. No doubt Milo could be interrogated, if necessary.

"Has any other slave left your father's service lately—or been freed?"

"None. We treat our slaves well. When we go to our country villa, we treat them almost as members of the family. They share our sports. I myself taught the girl Ennid to ride. A nice child," he concluded with a condescending laugh.

"Did Ennid take any of her clothes with her?" asked Sollius, returning to the point.

"That causes me my own greatest fear," Valerius answered gravely. "She took nothing with her at all. If she went of her own free will, it was honest, for a slave has no possessions; but if she was taken away it might be a sign of a very hasty enforcement."

"Which supposition do you favour, lord?"

"I have no guess at all. I am—as my father—quite bewildered. She was a very quiet girl always, and we had favoured her because of her nice manners and pleasant ways."



He spoke with a touch of his father's haughtiness.

"I hear," said Sollius, "that you are going to Bithynia, lord."

"That is so. I am much looking forward to life away from the present viciousness in Rome. Neither my father nor I like—or are liked in—the Emperor's circle. I shall be glad to get away. I am taking across some reinforcements of Auxiliary Cavalry, in this case Gauls and Britons. I am sorry I cannot help you, Sollius, about the girl, but really there is nothing I can tell you."

"Thank you, lord!"

At that moment Vipsanius, followed by a slave bearing something indistinguishable in his hands, hurried heavily into the walled enclosure.

"Priscus has just found this in the garden," he said breathlessly, and the slave showed what he was carrying—a woman's outer garment, stiff with dried blood.

"Oh, the Gods!" cried Valerius, and took a horrified step back while the Slave Detective examined the exhibit carefully.

"She has been murdered," sighed Vipsanius, human for a moment. "Poor young creature! Who can have done such a deed?"

"Found in the garden, you say?" Sollius asked.

"I went for some cabbages, and saw it," replied a shivering Priscus.

"Take me to the spot," the Slave Detective ordered. But when he was shown where the blood-stained garment had been found, he felt that it gave him no clue. None of the ground

near by was disturbed; he could see no evidence of a grave, for instance, hurriedly dug. Neither could he see any signs of blood on the earth about, nor yet between the spot and the house. He was puzzled by that, for the garment had been completely soaked in blood and was stiff all over with coagulation. She must have bled considerably, but it seemed certain that she had not been killed where the blood-stained garment had been found.

"When, and how, was she first missed?" he asked.

"At the evening meal in the slaves' quarters; she was just missing," replied Vipsanius. "It was reported to me. The house was searched, but she was not found. That is all we can tell you."

"She was certainly not killed in the house," said Sollius. "So much bleeding would have left its trace."

"It is clear now," put in Valerius, "that she did not go of her own accord; she was taken away—and murdered. Find that murderer, O Sollius, and I will pay you half again what my father will pay you for your success."

## II

It was like no other case that Sollius had ever had. Not only had he to find a murderer, but also the victim's body. Without the finding of that, indeed, could the fact of murder be proved at all?

He questioned Vipsanius's slaves until they were as sick of his voice as he was of the emptiness of their replies. The girl had simply dis-



appeared without leaving a trace, and the bloodied garment seemed the only material clue there was.

"Do you think a wolf got her?" asked Valerius the next day, when Sollius was again at the house examining the grounds.

"There would be plain signs of that," replied Sollius, "and we should have found the . . . remains."

"I hope you will discover what has happened to her before I leave this week," Valerius said. "I liked the girl, and it is obligatory for a great family such as ours to look after its slaves. This disappearance affects our Roman honour."

Sollius continued to wander about the garden and grounds, but found nothing to stimulate his imagination. He returned to the house to question the slaves all over again, and there caught Quartus.

"When did you yourself see Ennid last on the day she disappeared?" he asked.

"About an hour before supper."

"How did she seem when you saw her? Did she appear distressed or strained?"

"She was smiling," replied Quartus. "I never," he added grudgingly, "saw her look so gay and happy."

Sollius stroked his chin.

### III

That same day he visited the house of Titus Rutilius, and asked if he might see the slave named Milo.

His simple request produced a sensation.

"Milo?" exclaimed the slave whom he had asked. "Milo! Haven't you

heard? I thought by now it would be all over Rome."

"Why, what has happened?" asked Sollius.

"Milo is missing . . ."

"Missing!" cried Sollius.

". . . and the jewels of our mistress with him!"

Though a great deal of blabbing talk was added, Sollius learnt nothing beyond just those two facts. Rutilius himself, in a state of the utmost distraction over the stolen jewels, could do no more than accuse the missing Milo.

Had Milo, with the jewels for their support, run away with Ennid? It was a question which had to be answered. The City Prefect had Milo's disappearance in hand—but there was still the blood-stained garment to be explained, and Sollius was not happy over the negative result of his examination of the garden. He felt intuitively—and his intuition was part of his peculiar powers—that he must have missed something. He returned to the garden once more and began another search.

"What are you looking for?" asked Valerius, going out to him with an air of natural curiosity.

"I hardly know, lord, but I feel that there is something to be found."

"I feel that myself," breathed Valerius, "and am uneasy. Let us search together."

They did so, and found neither sign of a struggle nor evidence of a hasty burial. Valerius, as if impatient over the lack of result, suddenly ceased collaboration.



"There is clearly nothing," he said, and returned indoors.

Sollius himself went back to the spot where Ennid's blood-drenched garment had been found lying between two rows of cabbages, and looked about him. A gardener's shed was built against a wall; a pile of manure was heaped in a corner. But both had already been examined. He crossed to the ancient garden wall, and looked over. A small ilex wood lay about a quarter of a mile away, and a path went down into it; but the gate into the path was from another part of the garden. He limped along thoughtfully, turned out of the gate and entered the path.

The path itself, and the undergrowth to either side of it, showed no signs of disturbance, but in the ilex wood he saw some broken twigs and a scattering of leaves not autumnally fallen. With much damage to his clothes, he burst through into a small clearing.

He returned to the house and called for the slave Priscus. Bidding him fetch a spade and follow, he went back to the clearing. The body was not buried very deeply, and they soon disinterred it: the carcass of a recently killed—perhaps a sacrificed—goat.

They reburied the goat; and Sollius swore Priscus to secrecy.

"Let this get out," he said with deliberate fierceness, "and I will have the City Prefect throw you to the lions in the arena!"

#### IV

He himself made his way at once

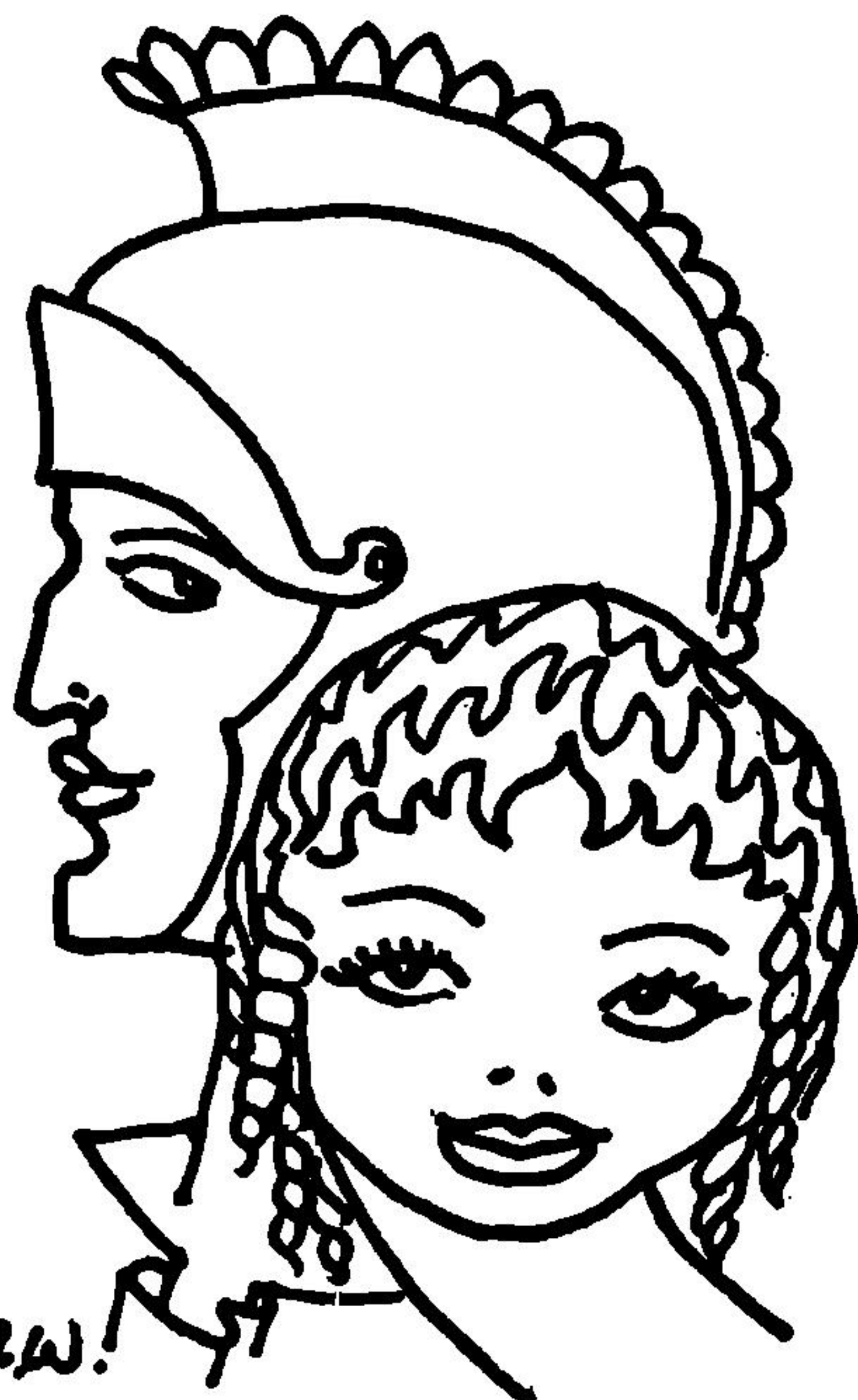
to the City Prefect's headquarters. Ushered in, he found Valerius there, and a slim, dark-haired Decurion of Auxiliary Cavalry in a white, belted tunic, greaves and a light helmet. The latter remained standing apart, just within earshot.

"Has the slave Milo been found, O Prefect?" asked Sollius.

"Not yet. The lord Valerius has just come to ask the same question."

"I am concerned over that poor girl Ennid," said Valerius, "and if she is with Milo I want Milo found, for he is no man for a nice girl."

"If she is with Milo," echoed the Prefect. "Have you forgotten the blood-stained garment? I fear we





shall not find Ennid with Milo, but somewhere underground," he concluded gravely.

"I have something to tell you about that garment," said Sollius, "which makes me think that you may, indeed, find the missing girl with Milo." And he told of finding the dead goat's body. "I think that the goat was killed and the garment deliberately dipped in its blood to lead us on a false trail, O Prefect."

Valerius gave a startled exclamation.

"If," Sollius continued, "the girl has not been murdered, she has been either abducted or she went willingly. She might be with Milo in either alternative."

"Why, if she was abducted," said the Prefect, "did she not cry out?"

"She may have done," put in Valerius, "and, if the household—as seems to have been the case—was occupied, she may not have been heard. The slaves, for it was evening, were either preparing supper or waiting for it."

"That is possible," acknowledged the Slave Detective.

Valerius turned and spoke to the Decurion in a language which Sollius did not understand. The answer was in the same unknown tongue. Then he turned to the Prefect.

"My Decurion," he said, "must have been visiting me at about the relative time, but he saw nothing to report."

The Prefect bowed.

"I am leaving for Bithynia tomorrow," continued Valerius. "What

is it, O Prefect, which you wish me to take to your brother at Prusa? I and the Gallic Auxiliary Cavalry, which I am taking over, will be stationed there. I will willingly be your messenger."

"It is this small ivory box," replied the Prefect, producing it and handing it over. "Inside are some few jewels, lord, which belonged to our mother; they are for my nieces."

Valerius took it, and tossed it lightly to the Decurion, who fumbled the catch, but, quickly opening his knees wide, safely recovered the box.

"I hope, Sollius," Valerius said, "that you will solve this mystery about Ennid. I liked the girl, and she was in the family's care. I hope, by the Gods, that she is not with Milo. He is a mean villain—if ever I saw one. Farewell, Prefect!"

He had barely gone when Gratianus, the City Prefect's principal officer, came in to make a report.

Milo had been found, and most of the jewels with him but not Ennid. He swore that he knew nothing about her disappearance. Even under torture he still swore it.

## V

On his way homewards Sollius ran in briefly to the mansion of the Vipsanii. He felt that the question of timing was of importance. He asked for Priscus.

"What time," he queried, "did you have supper that evening?"

Priscus told him.

"Did you see about the same hour a Decurion of Auxiliaries in the house?"



"Yes, Sollius, I saw him speaking to the young master. It was just as we were about to sit down to our meal. I think they went forth together to the camp," he added, "but I didn't see them go. We were then beginning to worry over Ennid, and weren't taking much notice of anything else."

"If I could interrogate that Decurion," mused Sollius as he limped on to the house of Sabinus, "I might learn a great deal."

He laughed wryly to himself, remembering that the Decurion, on the way to Ostia and the long voyage to Bithynia, would be out of his reach by the morrow. He felt that he needed advice before approaching—as he would have to do—Valerius about it. Or, perhaps, it would be better not to approach Valerius. He would seek the advice of his master.

But the matter was taken out of his hands, for as soon as he had returned home he was summoned by Sabinus.

"I have had Vipsanius here. He seems disappointed in you," said the Senator.

A suddenly meek Sollius made no reply, but twiddled the thumbs of his linked hands where he stood.

"Have you discovered nothing?" snapped Sabinus. "If not, I, too, am disappointed."

"The trouble is," Sollius replied, "that I have discovered everything!"

"Go to Vipsanius at once," commanded Sabinus, "and tell him. He will be good for a large present, I promise you."

Sollius shook his head.

"I am an old fool," he said, "but I think I shall tell the lord Vipsanius nothing. This case, master, shall be one of my failures."

"I do not understand you," replied Sabinus haughtily. "You are *my* slave: your successes redound to my credit; your failures lessen it. I command you, Sollius—if you know the truth—to disclose it to the lord Vipsanius."

"There are some things," returned Sollius slowly, "which, lord, may be condoned."

"Not murder," snapped Sabinus.

"The girl has not been murdered," said Sollius.

"But didn't you find a garment stained with blood?"

"The blood was a goat's, lord."

Sabinus paused a moment, frowning, and then said:

"Suppose you tell *me* the truth? Let *me* be the judge of what you tell the lord Vipsanius."

"I shall be relieved, lord, to lay it in your hands," gratefully replied the Slave Detective. "It is not for a slave without authority to deceive a patrician of Rome."

"Truly not!" importantly murmured Sabinus.

"I will first, lord, list out the few suspects. Quartus the slave, who once had been whipped for pestering her, might have pestered her again, been violently rebuffed, and in the heat of resentment have killed her. But I believed that no longer after finding the goat. Such a planned deception was not in his capacity, lord. Then there was the slave Milo. His guilt



was almost thrust at me. But the girl was not found with him, and he denies abducting her—under torture he denies it.”

“But the girl, the girl!” impatiently exclaimed Sabinus. “What did happen to her, if neither murder nor abduction?”

“A metamorphosis!” answered the Slave Detective. “Her fate could fitly have been sung in Ovidius’s great poem. She was not, as Daphne, changed into a laurel tree, but from a slave girl into—a Decurion.”

“What!” cried Sabinus.

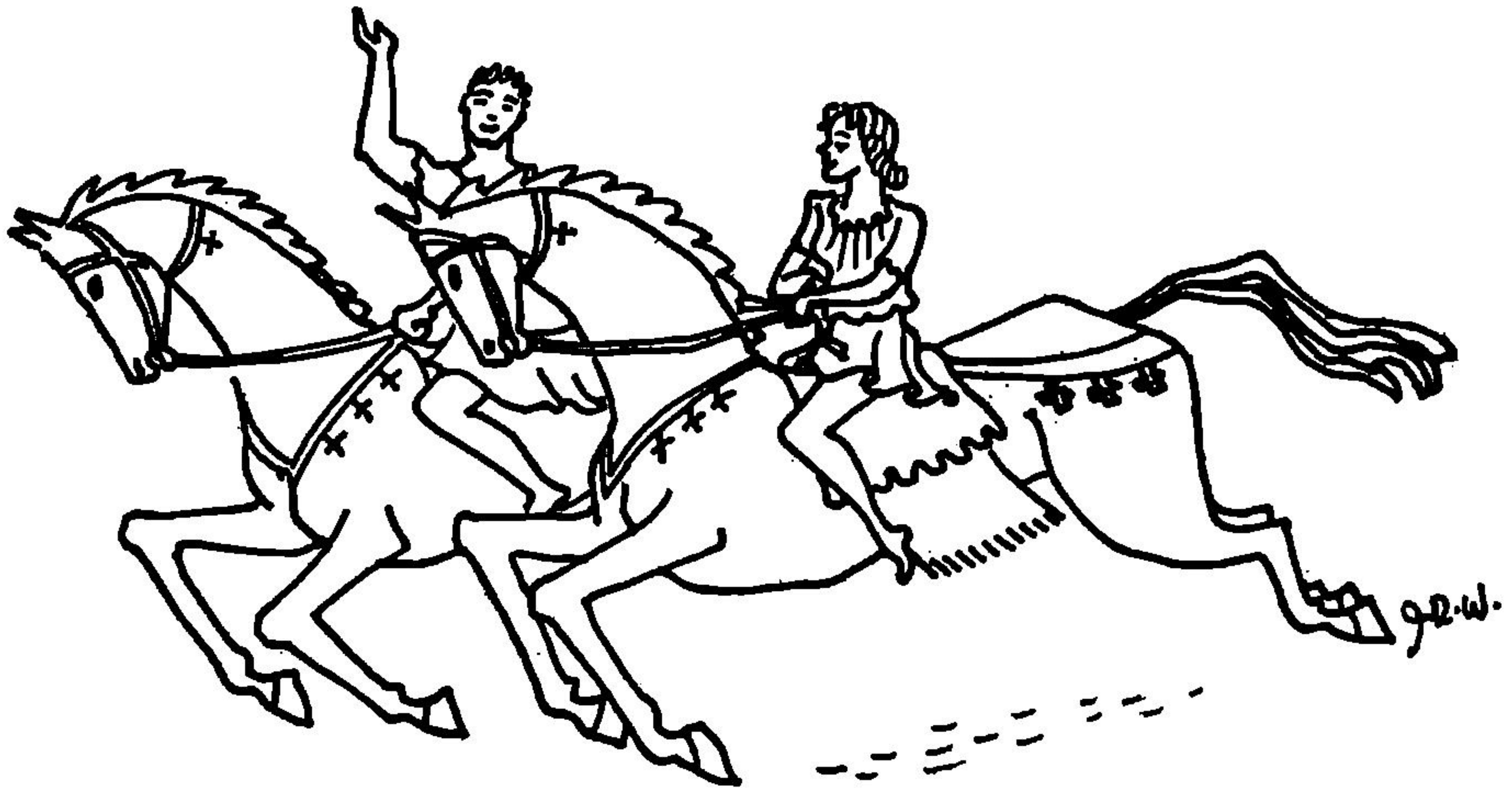
“The lord Valerius made but one slip—he threw a catch to a woman!”

“You are telling me that young

Valerius has abducted a slave girl from his own father’s household?”

“Yes, lord, and that is my trouble,” replied Sollius. “The lord Vipsanius is a very proud man. He could punish his son by disinheritance. This is but a young man’s folly, and with a different father would cause only our wiser amusement. But not with Vipsanius! And who am I to disrupt so great a family? Let the lord Valerius have his distraction in Bithynia—it may save him from some worse folly.”

“True, true,” murmured the elderly Senator, remembering his own follies. “I think I agree, O Sollius: this must be one of your failures!”





# CUM GRANO SALIS

FRANK MACE

**S**ANITY HAS RETURNED to me, for this brief moment at least, though the Doctor assured me it would not do so—but he underestimates the toughness, the resilience of the human mind. My tiredness is passing now, and from the kaleidoscope of weird impressions, one or two grotesque images detach themselves. . . .

The façade of this house, for instance, comes into sharp definition: the strange Victorian hotchpotch of bay-window, pillar and portico; the ugly balustrade projecting over its lateral window. It lies no more than half a mile from the last straggling suburbs, but its walls are high. Behind them it stands remote, as still and grey as a corpse. Small boys avoid its garden.

There had been snow that day, I remember, but the weather had cleared. The eastern sky was a dusky blue; to the west, however, beyond the trees, the setting sun was a hard crimson circle, with one or two thin clouds scattered above it like attenuated red scars. A black lacework of tree branches arched above me, but the few birds were still.

In the driveway, the snow was crisp and immaculate; mine were the first prints to sully it. I paused there, briefly, as the house came into view. Its tall windows reflected the forlorn scene gloomily, as if through black

mirrors; the dying sun flashed coldly, blood-red, in one of its panes.

I trudged on; and as I drew nearer, saw to my surprise that the heavy door, beneath its dark porch, was ajar. Nearer still; and now, in the obscurity of the hallway, I caught a glimpse of something darker.

*He had been waiting for me.*

A small, spare man, his lean little face sallow and ill-shaven; his eyes, behind gleaming thick-rimmed spectacles, a bright, almost luminous blue. He took my hand in a firm, cold grasp, looking hard at me for a second or two; then, suddenly, his gaze had relaxed, and his smile was broad and welcoming. I was not flattered. It was almost as if he had reassured himself, from his brief assessment, that my visit was to be of no significance.

*But he underestimates me, I will be even with him.*

It was, in any case, a visit I had long wanted to make. Richard, before he died, used often to speak of the Doctor; one had, too, occasionally chanced on his name in the "progressive" medical and scientific journals, before that mysterious act of Unprofessional Conduct which had terminated his career in middle age. My own interest in the man had accumulated, and the obscurity surrounding him since his fall from grace had further stimulated my curiosity. I had decided, therefore, when I chanced on his address in a notebook of



Richard's, to employ our mutual acquaintance as an introduction.

His brief reply to my letter, I recall, betrayed little of his personality; somehow, though, I had the impression of a lonely and perhaps unhappy man, arbitrarily divorced from accustomed pursuits and surroundings; one whose present held little, and whose future promised less.

And now, face to face with him, I realized the oddity of the whim that had brought me here; and began to wonder, rather foolishly, what community of interest might serve to keep our conversation alive throughout the evening.

He preceded me down the gloomy, cold passageway (even now its faint, ineffable odour of confinement and disuse returns vividly to me). I had difficulty in following him, I remember, for I could see little but the dull glimmer of the gilt-framed pictures on its dark walls. Opening a door to the left, he motioned me to enter. Instinctively I averted my eyes, but the light here, too, was dim and diffused. He appears, I thought wryly, to have almost a phobia of the brightly-lit.

It was a comfortable room in a heavy, old-fashioned way; a solitary tall reading-lamp illuminated one corner of it, leaving the remainder—arm-chairs, bookcase, oval mahogany table—in shadow. A still place, with not even the ticking of a clock to disturb its profound silence; and yet there seemed detectable in it a certain—absence of serenity. Outside, the wind rose suddenly to a thin whine; I shivered involuntarily. It was a fireside day.

He gestured smilingly towards an arm-chair. "I am so glad you could come. I have few visitors."

"You live alone?"

"Yes, quite alone. . . ." He moved across the room with surprising agility, his hands making quick, blunt movements of gesticulation as he spoke. He poured drinks, and handed one across to me; then, stepping back, composed himself into a stiffly nonchalant attitude before the white marble mantelpiece, and looked down at me. His face was partly obscured in a rectangle of pale shadow, but his blue eyes remained cold and piercing. He seemed, when he spoke again, to be selecting his words with the greatest possible care. "I am so very—grieved—about Richard. . . ."

We spoke of Richard and his work. Our conversation, however, once we had exhausted this subject, became less fluent, and lapsed once or twice into an uncomfortable silence. My sense of unease grew acute. At last, diffidently, I ventured to inquire whether he was still engaged in active research.

This was the spark that kindled him into life. I was mute, respectful, obviously interested; and he had waited a long time for such an audience. He began slowly, almost timidly, as if afraid to bore me, but his zeal lent him fluency; and now, as he poured forth his enthusiasm in that high-pitched, oddly incongruous voice, the irreverent image came to me of a thin, introverted schoolboy, whose engrossing new hobby had made him careless and forgetful of everything except his monomania. I



seem, even yet, to catch an echo of that faintly guttural accent, and a phrase, here and there, returns to me with extreme clarity. . . .

" . . . The possibilities of mutation in animal organisms have always intrigued me . . . my own modest experiments . . . dieting, exposure to certain forms of radiation, and most important of all, the intensive series of injections I have devised"—and suddenly he would smile, nervously, boyishly—"I have, if I say so myself, achieved some rather remarkable results. . . ."

*Once more, a dull soreness suffuses my body; my legs and arms are numb and heavy. Why is it I cannot move?*

" . . . I have no doubts that the range of mutation extends far beyond what is commonly believed possible. Incredible as it may sound"—his thin voice began to waver, slightly—"it is no exaggeration to say that, in the case of certain organisms, and given propitious circumstances, æons of evolutionary advance might be compressed into a matter of months; weeks, even! Think, for a moment, of the significance this research could have for our own species. . . ."

His face, though almost characterless in repose, possessed a striking mobility. He was continually surprising me with some mercurial transformation of expression; his eyes, however, seemed to take no part in these, but to remain wide and cold. Now, as he seated himself opposite me, he became eagerly confiding, almost conspiratorial; like a child with some splendid secret.

"I have one or two quite—interest-

ing examples here, in the house; perhaps, later on, you might like. . . ."

His voice tapered off into silence; he turned suddenly away from me, and sat motionless for some moments, staring unseeingly at the bright orange fire as if hypnotized by it. "Beginnings, of course," he said slowly. "Beginnings, n o t h i n g more. . . ."

I shifted a little in my chair, trying hard to conceal my impatience. "Perhaps—is it possible I could see them now?"

He looked up. "Now?"

"That is, of course, if——"

He seemed surprised, but also a trifle flattered, by my eagerness. "Very well; we will go down now, if you wish. But, my friend"—he rose and, standing above me, laid a hand on my shoulder—"I must ask you to say nothing to anyone, as yet, concerning—what you will see." (His voice had assumed a quietly pleading tone; yet did it not carry, also, the faintest suggestion of something vaguely hostile?) "In time, naturally, I shall make public any results I may achieve. At the moment, however, everything is extremely—tentative. You understand?"

"You have my word."

He appeared to be greatly relieved at this; and together, without further delay, we left the room. Beyond that bright oasis, I found, the house was a place of unrelieved coldness and gloom. Our footsteps echoed as we walked down the ill-lit, uncarpeted corridor; its walls were grey with dirt, its paint peeling; and I became aware then, for the first time, of the neglect



and near-squalor that characterized the remainder of the house. Turning, now, at the end of the passageway, we descended a narrow flight of stone steps. A low doorway confronted us; the Doctor, with fumbling eagerness, unfastened its large padlock and, reaching inside, pressed a switch.

"Here it is, then: my workshop, as I call it."

The room before us was flooded with brilliant light. It was a large basement, dazzlingly bright and clean, and filled with a pungent, clinical odour. Its walls were lined with tables and benches, on which lay a variety of mysterious apparatus. In the centre of the floor stood a tall, gleaming cylinder, whose function I could not even guess. Nor did he attempt to enlighten me. Without a word, we crossed the room together towards a partition which walled off its farthest end and into which several small doors were set. The Doctor stopped before the first of these; he seemed to hesitate for a moment, and half-turned to look at me; then, with a brusque, decisive movement, stepped forward and unfastened the catch. . . .

*That dull, intermittent moaning sound; what is it? Surely there is no one here but myself. . . .*

The door swung back; there was a whispering scurry of legs, and something dark and bulky moved quickly to a corner of the room, out of the shaded light's yellow circle.

We stood together in silence, looking into a large, bare cubicle. The Doctor spoke; his voice was a blend of pleasure and ill-concealed pride. "A simple experiment in aggrandize-

ment," he said. "But I have also provided him with a good brain; he'll be very interesting when he's fully grown." He walked in, and swung the light to illuminate the far corner of the cell.

I had been prepared for something beautiful and incredible—some marvel of brilliant colour or exquisite delicacy. What I saw made me sick with fright and horror. A gigantic spider, like a foul, swollen pustule of evil, crouched motionlessly in the corner of the room. It was as bloated and smooth as a balloon, but glossy black and green-speckled; its great legs supported it stiffly, like brittle jointed sticks. It remained rigidly still, as if stunned by the light; and seemed, to my heightened susceptibilities, to be glaring directly at us with a look of venomous hatred.

I turned away, a sensation of nausea rising from my stomach. My mouth was suddenly dry, and I discovered with a sort of detached surprise that I was unable to stop trembling. I met his gaze; my incredulous disgust must have been obvious to him, and I saw his eyes glitter oddly. It was pointlessly horrible, a perversion of knowledge. . . .

Did I summon up the courage, or find the words, to speak to him then? He must have known, in any case, what my thoughts were. . . .

His face had become an impassive mask; it was as if his features had no vocabulary for his emotions. Abruptly, he turned away. My last distinct impression was of his black silhouette against the brilliant light, the slope of his shoulders. . . .



Nothing, after this, is clear; there remains in my mind a pastiche of brief, fragmentary impressions, a vague recollection of black corridors, carved oaken doors, and lofty echoing rooms; rooms whose echoing rose to a screaming, and then a muffled roaring, in my ears; and darkness, spreading irrevocably, like a stain, until it enveloped me entirely; and through the darkness cascades of silver and golden fire . . . and then—now—the greyness, and the hard outlines, of this room.

I am in one of the cubicles; bound, too, it seems, for I cannot move. And the Doctor has prepared an entertainment for me; he has fitted a small glass panel at the base of the wall, directly in front of me, so that I can see—must see—into the compartment next to mine.

The creature lies with its head close to the glass; beyond, its body stretches out of my little square of

vision. An enormous worm, it might be, were it not for the shrivelled fore and hind limbs; a foot thick, at least, and perhaps ten feet long—I cannot see that it tapers. . . .

A cockroach feels its way blindly down its glistening grey length, but the thing does not move. . . .

The head is a bulbous grey mass; the round eyes, bright and beady, are peering directly through at me; and from the thin reptilian gash of its mouth there slowly oozes a slimy pink tongue, that now hangs motionless, obscene. . . .

Suddenly, with a terrible clarity, I know the reason for my mind's refusal to remember. The Doctor explained it to me. He was bending over me; his voice was very gentle, and he was smiling.

The glass before me, you see, is not transparent.

It is a mirror.







## THE WEREWOLF

DERRY PENN-BULL

*Illustrated by Nicholas Wadley*

**A**BOVE THE LASH and beat of the Highland wind came the ghastly, long-drawn baying-howl of a wild hunting animal, piercing through the night into the rich, warm room.

It stilled the woman and two men to silence until Neville whispered, "There, Ian, there. Now do you believe?" Without waiting for his cousin to reply, he turned to the girl at his side. "You heard it, too, didn't you?" he demanded.

Valerie Anton nodded. "What was it?" she asked.

Neville leaned towards her. "Don't," he said tensely, "don't ever

go near the woods at night."

"Why, what was it?" she repeated, half-laughing, half-serious at his intensity.

He paused, listening keenly for long moments before he said, "It was the howl of a werewolf."

"Rot," said Sir Ian Keith from the other side of the table, "rot. This is modern Scotland; not mediæval Auvergne."

Neville nodded. "But we come from mediæval Auvergne. We trace male descent from the witches and wolves of Auvergne," he said, "don't we?"

"So legend says," conceded Ian.

"And legend adds," persisted Neville, "that our wood—your half and my half—is the haunt of the



monstrosities of our tainted family."

"Hearsay," retorted Ian, "superstition and old wives' tales. Ye mean to tell me ye believe such nonsense? Why, nothing's happened in our wood for a hundred years or more. Can we, then, believe anything ever really happened?"

"What is all this?" interrupted Valerie.

Neville turned to her. "Hasn't Michael ever told you?" he asked.

"Told me *what*?" she countered. "And why blame Michael for my ignorance just because he's away and can't defend himself? Blame yourself, too. I've known you just as long."

Neville ignored her chiding. "You're going to marry either Michael or me—me for preference," he said; "so you'd better know now what sort of blood's in our veins."

Sir Ian Keith leaned across to her, touching her hand. "Listen to him, Valerie," he said, "but remember it's all legendary."

Neville said, "Do you know how many persons have been burned, stoned, drowned or otherwise put to death in Europe for witchcraft since the fifteenth century?"

Valerie shook her head.

"Over nine million," answered Neville. "That's authentic. It's the estimate of Dr. Sprenger, a recognized statistician on sorcery. It shows just how prevalent witchcraft used to be. But there was one village—a village of Auvergne—where the people were more humane; to their cost. They didn't kill. They simply drove their witches away; drove them into the woods. And that's where a new

cycle of an age-old phenomenon recommenced, for the witches were women denied the company of men. What happened then's a bit horrible, but it's a practice which was very common in Biblical times and one which has never quite died out. The witches mated with animals. They mated with the wolves.

"And they conceived, too. . . A rare occurrence, but possible according to Aristotle.

"Then, because the women were sorcerers, the progeny was a new outcrop of one of the most terrifying specie in the world—the werewolf—a monstrosity normally human in form, yet possessing the power to become a wolf at will. Lycanthropy the power is called, and is mentioned in the writings of Herodotus, Virgil and Pliny.

"These werewolves were so savage, so diabolically evil, that they terrorized the whole countryside about Auvergne, until at last they were ruthlessly hunted down and exterminated. But the task was difficult, for the merciless horrors which ripped at the throats of lonely wayfarers in the night frequently wore the guise of respected citizens by day.

"That is why certain werewolves escaped with their lives. One indeed anticipated the vigilance of the villagers accustomed to detecting werewolves. He fled the country and sought refuge in Scotland. In fact, until the third Sir Michael Keith learned that he harboured a seducer in his home, the werewolf lodged in this very house.

"Then Sir Michael killed him with



a claymore. But it was too late. The werewolf blood shared our name. Even so it had to fight Scotch blood, and the Scotch blood won—always it won—except once in perhaps every five or six generations. Then the werewolf strain predominated; utterly and completely.

“Three times this has happened——”

“According to legend,” interrupted Ian.

“According to legend, yes,” acknowledged Neville, “and each time the villagers have known stark terror. Twice the clansmen have risen and wiped the horror from the woods. But the third time they didn’t kill; they never even found their quarry.

“That was over a hundred years ago—possibly only half the natural life of a werewolf.”

Neville paused, looking at Valerie. “Do you know what I believe?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No, what?” she said.

He leaned forward intently. “That he has come back. That the third werewolf of our name hunts in these woods at night.

“Two months ago I first heard the howl we all heard tonight. Since then it has been frequent; always near my house.” He looked across to his cousin. “But now it is near yours, Ian; near yours tonight, even though you won’t believe. But you will believe soon, all right. I know you will, because the werewolf is *real*.”

He paused, marshalling his facts. He was going to speak of the missing sheep; sheep which had vanished

without trace, and deduce further evidence from them; but before he could continue, the bleak wind-torn night again reverberated with the sobbing howl of a wild animal slobbering over the trail of its prey.

Perceptibly they started, and knew they had been waiting subconsciously for the sound to come again. There was vague questioning in their glances. Ian broke the silence as he rose to his feet. “Werewolf, bosh,” he said. “A gun and a torch, and I’ll soon rout it out, whatever it is.”

At first they protested, but he was adamant.

“I’ll come, too, then,” said Neville.

“You won’t,” retorted Ian. “We can’t stalk silently together, and separate guns in a dark wood are too dangerous for me. I’ll go alone.”

They never saw him alive again. There was blood on the heather when they found him in the morning. He was lying among trampled bracken in the woods he loved, with his throat ripped out.

Later that day, when Michael arrived in response to a telegram, Neville took him to the spot where Ian had died.

They were strange cousins: utterly dissimilar—Neville massive and blond; Michael slight and dark. Yet as they strode across the wasteland to the wood Neville, for all his strength and length of stride, was hard put to keep abreast with the swift, effortless pace which Michael set.

“I was a cross-country blue, remember,” Michael said as though reading his cousin’s thoughts. “I love the country. Ian loved it, too, but



differently. He liked to hunt and shoot. I love it for its beauty; its peace."

"Ian died a hunter's death," said Neville gently. "He wouldn't have wished it otherwise."

Michael nodded silently, thinking of his brother. At last he said, "There'll be no more hunting in my woods."

Neville was horrified. "You mean you'll revoke the almost hereditary right to shoot in the wood? You can't! The clan will ostracize you. Even the villagers will shun you."

But he was wrong, for the villagers renounced the woods themselves. They had been there where Ian died, when Michael viewed the stained and trampled heather, and together they had seen the marks of great paws—as of some huge dog or wolf—deeply impressed in the soft, damp soil. There were old men there; men whose grandfathers, a century ago, had beaten these very woods for the fabled animal which was to them no fable. So from that time on the woods were avoided.

An inquest was held on Sir Ian Keith; an irregular inquest, true, but an inquest nevertheless.

"Ye see, mon," said the coroner to Michael the previous day, "ye an' I—the whole village i' fact—ken it was a werewolf that killed the bonny laird. But I canna say so officially; no' officially."

So officially he recorded "Death by persons and/or animals unknown,"—which he considered very apt—and added a rider that the woods should be searched. Under this official en-

couragement the woods were searched, but not too well; the locals hadn't the fire of their ancestors, and the village constable mumbled under his breath that "banshee-hunting wasn't his job, anyway," and acted accordingly. So the mystery remained unsolved, and the cottagers locked their doors and windows at the approach of dusk; while in the taverns men spoke only of werewolves and called them "the Curse of the Keiths." In the evenings they even heard what they called "the howl of the werewolf." They heard it first in the village on the night that a poacher, Jock Campbell, broke the new Sir Michael Keith's edict that there was to be no more shooting or snaring in his woods.

They heard the baying howl traversing the woods and ending in a shrieking crescendo of human terror, for the wind was blowing towards them. Then there was silence. They found Campbell's body next day. It was scratched and bruised, with clothing torn to rags, for he had run for his life; run blindly through bush and bramble, river and thicket. Yet there had been something behind which had gained on him.

Campbell lay flat on his face with two great muddy paw marks on his back and his spine severed behind his ears.

He never saw what killed him.

But Michael did.

It was night, a week after Campbell had died, and Michael was alone on the moors a mile from the wood. It was almost full moon and the bleak land between him and the wood was



bathed in a radiance almost like day; clear and shadowless—shadowless save for a dark blot, which, like a cloud across the moon, stole from the velvet blackness of the distant trees towards him. It was half-way to him when he knew the shape for what it was.

Instantly he sprang from the log on which he had been resting and broke into the long, swift strides which once had won a running blue. He stripped off his jacket and flung it from him.

Rapidly he calculated distances: his course was less than a mile, and for the thing behind him the distance was half as much again. He glanced over his shoulder. The shadow no longer moved with stealthy slowness: it distended and contracted with lightning rapidity in a smooth line of speed.

And then it howled—a delirious, throaty, agonizing howl which pierced Michael's ears and made his human pulses drum. He knew it was death behind him; a death which snarled and loped over the moorland on swift, soft-padded paws. Michael nerved himself for a faster, gruelling pace. There were reserves of speed in his slender whip-cord legs which he had never produced on the track. Before it had been enough to win, and win, and win; something always had kept him from breaking records. But now he knew that clothed though he was with heavy garments and boots, he was yet running faster than any human had ever run before. But he was losing ground. He knew that was inevitable, and he remained calm. But he knew, too, the pangs of the

hunted animal, and resolved again that no creature should ever after run from man or gun or dog on his land. None; save one animal only—the slobbering death behind him. That, he swore, he would destroy.

He was four hundred yards from sanctuary and leading by a furlong when his breath began to fail. He had been running with chest stretched wide and head held high, but now his shoulders drooped and he bent low to the ground. Thus he ran with his mouth gaping and his breathing easier. In the distance he could see the lights of his home. For long moments they seemed infinitely and eternally remote, though his limbs surged on and on towards them. Then suddenly they were near. But he could hear the splatter of fast-moving paws behind him now, rising above the sobbing howl of the animal.

He left the road and hurdled the low flint wall into his garden, reeling under the effort and crashing through the bushes. He was half-way across the lawn, heading for the small door leading from the lounge, when he heard the ceaseless baying behind him falter for a moment as the pursuing shape crashed through the bushes in his wake. Then the animal howled triumphantly and sped across the brief, intervening space for the kill.

But the lounge door was open. Michael knew that from the thin line of light edging its frame, and because of it he hurled himself against the woodwork, not seeking for the handle. He was almost black in the face and his features looked drawn



and pinched as he slammed the door behind him. Instantly he felt the shock of a heavy body checked in mid-flight. Then there was silence, broken once by snuffling, and again later by a far-distant, long-drawn howl.

From the servants' quarters Michael heard excited voices, but he ignored these and went straight to his bedroom. Once on the stairs, he faltered and paused for a moment on his hands and knees before he could continue the ascent.

He was the first to learn that the horror was no longer confined to the wood, but prowled the countryside as well.

Neville was the next to figure in an incident, or rather almost the next. He was walking one night along the road which led by his house, around the edge of the wood, on past Michael's house, into the village, when a car came to a crash-stop beside him.

"Get in, get in!" shouted the driver. "For God's sake, get in. I've seen it on the road and it's only two hundred yards from us now."

"Seen what?" asked Neville.

"The werewolf," answered the man. He pushed open the door and Neville half-stumbled and was half-pulled into the car.

"Right in my headlamps, he was," said the motorist some seconds later. "So I've seen him all right, but I don't want to meet him again—never; not even in a car. His eyes, by God, his eyes."

"I'd like to see the werewolf," said

Neville, and added, "from a distance."

He had his wish three nights later, but not from a distance. No man ever came so near the hairy body of a werewolf as he and yet lived. He was entertaining Valerie at the time.

"Valerie," he said, breaking a silence, "don't you think Michael would make a good best man?"

She considered him gravely for a moment. "Yes, I do," she answered, "at almost anybody's wedding."

"Then you will marry *me*?" he asked impetuously, "me, not Michael?"

She shook her head gently. "I said *almost* anybody's wedding," she emphasized. "Perhaps not mine. Perhaps he'd make a better husband there." Then she stopped teasing. "Oh, Neville dear, what *am* I going to do? I . . . I think I love you both. Or perhaps it is I can't bear the thought of hurting either of you. I don't know. I'm so happy with you now; yet I miss Michael. I miss you, too, when I'm with him. Tell me why. Do I love you both? Or is it just because we mixed so much at varsity and can't now get on alone?"

Neville nodded. "That's it," he said. "Michael and I are so different. We each give you something the other can't, and yet, being cousins, the fundamental appeal to you exists in both of us." He smiled humorously. "But that won't help Michael. We're fey in the north, you know," he said with mock-seriousness. "We're sensitive to the future. Come to the window, and I'll show you our marriage written in the stars."



He was still joking when he opened the window. Then it happened. From the ground outside, immediately before him, rose up a huge dark form; hairy and reeking. On the level of his face, inches close, he saw fierce eyes glittering red in the reflected firelight and felt rancid breath engulf his features.

It was pitch black outside and he could distinguish little detail, but for one instant he saw animal lips drawn back over gleaming fangs as he looked right into a savage, snarling maw.

Instinctively he struck with his huge fist. The blow sped wide, but the animal flinched sideways and vanished in the darkness. Neville dragged shut the windows, and the heavy shutters, too, barring them swiftly.

One glance at Valerie was enough to show she had seen as much as he.

"My gun," he said, "my gun."

He was at the front door when she thrust a torch, which she had rummaged from a drawer, into his hand.

"Be careful, darling," she said, "I won't try to stop you, but be careful."

He returned within an hour, shaking his head.

"We're getting nowhere," he said. "The villagers won't help; they're too scared. And yet we've got to find and



kill that thing. I can only see one way for it: Michael and I must patrol the wood ourselves every night. It's our responsibility."

He saw Michael the following evening and put the project to him. Michael agreed, and together they were deep in their plan of operation when Cairns, the shepherd from across the valley, was shown into the room.

At first they thought him drunk,



for his eyes were rolling and his mouth working, but he knuckled an eyebrow respectfully and spoke coherently with an effort.

"I've found it," he gulped, "I've found it."

"Found what?" asked Neville curiously.

The man swallowed. "Yon were-wolf's lair," he whispered.

He had been hunting a lost lamb, and the search had taken him to the edge of the wood. "Nigh th' cave," he said, and added, "I lay two hundred yards awa', but I saw bonny i' the braw moonlight. I saw a mon leave the thicket an' crawl into th' cave. . . ."

"What was he like?" interrupted Michael.

The shepherd shook his head. "I canna say, th' mon were too far awa' to be clear," he answered. "But I stayed awhile, an' then d'ye ken what I saw?"

Michael shook his head.

"What?" demanded Neville.

The shepherd leaned forward towards them, peering from one to the other through half-shut eyes. Then he straightened abruptly and slapped his thigh. "I saw a wolf come oot. Ay, it were a wolf, for I saw it wi' me own eyes, an' it 'owled."

Neville banged his fist on the table excitedly. "Now we've got something to go on," he exclaimed. "We'll organize a search of the cave. The villagers will come with us in daylight."

He was right. The villagers felt there was safety in numbers; besides, in daylight the terror evaporated; the

hunt was almost a lark. But they found nothing. The cave was deserted, and their untrained eyes detected no trace of recent occupation.

Nevertheless, Michael felt Cairns had been right. There was the stamp of truth about the man's narrative, and because of it Michael went to the cave again, alone, that afternoon.

He crawled from the sunlight, through the low entrance on his hands and knees, into an inky gloom. He was barely in the cave itself when some vast force crashed down on to his skull behind the ear, and a mantle of darkness descended on him as he slipped into oblivion.

He was cold and hungry when he recovered consciousness and his head throbbed violently. He was in utter darkness—a darkness which denied him even the vague outline of his surroundings. His flash-lamp was gone. He groped about him and his hands encountered bones. He recoiled shuddering, and drew matches from his pocket. He struck one. By contrast with the darkness, it burned like a torch. He was in a cave. But not the one he knew. Around him were the shattered, teeth-scarred skeletons of sheep, how many he didn't know, but he counted six skulls. Then the dying match burned his fingers, and he was again in darkness. He struck another and held others ready in reserve. By their light he saw he was in a low, squat cave, large as a normal room, and pierced at one corner by a small passage, barely large enough for the wriggling body of a man. He leaped to it excitedly, falling on his hands and knees before it. But his



hopes were groundless. It was blocked. There was a rock against the other side, and though he lay on his back and struck with his foot the obstruction remained firm.

He wondered how long he had lain unconscious. He felt his chin and from its bristles deduced almost a day. An hour was added to this time while he launched another fruitless attack on the rock which held him prisoner. He was in despair when he heard a sound beyond the obstruction.

"Help," he shouted, "help."

The answer thrilled him. "Michael, are you there?" cried a familiar voice. It was Neville.

"Neville, I'm trapped in here; get me out," he answered.

He heard scuffling and straining outside; then the stone moved and dim light entered his prison.

"Where am I?" he called.

"You're in a small cave leading from the large one," answered Neville. "We always thought there was only one cavity. Actually there were two but the hole to the second was hidden by rocks. The way's clear now; you can come out."

Michael dropped on his hands and knees and squeezed into the short tunnel. There was light in the other cave from a hurricane lamp, and he crawled towards it with his face forced well down to the ground. At last his head and shoulders were free, and he raised his eyes, looking about him. He looked straight into the mute, snarling mouth of some great wolf-like animal which strained to-

wards him with bristling hackles and writhing lips.

Instinctively he flinched and thrust himself back into the cramping passage with the strength of both arms. He wriggled well clear of the entrance before he spoke, then he called, "Neville? Neville?"

He heard a throaty, sobbing howl and deep, frenzied snuffling. Then he heard Neville's voice, cold, merciless and evil; as he had never heard it before.

"You can come out now, or shall I come in and get you?" it said. "Either way you won't leave this cave alive."

Michael shook his head incredulously as though not believing what he heard.

"You, Neville, you?" he whispered in horror. "You are the fiend who murders in our wood? You killed Ian? You killed poor Jack Campbell?"

He heard Neville laugh harshly, like one who at last throws off all restraint. "Yes I; and my dog. He's a beauty."

Michael nodded. "Yes, of course, you and your dog. God help you, Neville. Even I, who suspected, could never truly believe you were the killer."

"He'll tear you to shreds," said Neville. "He's part Alsatian, part Great Dane. I bred him myself from savage stock for this very job." Then he reverted. "You suspected me?" he demanded.

"Yes," answered Michael. "Who else could there be? You wanted the title; you wanted Valerie. Two mur-



ders—Ian and myself—you thought, and you'd win both. So you turned your dog loose at night and trumped up the old legend. You knew Ian wouldn't believe, and you weren't sure about me, but you knew the howling would get us both into the wood to investigate. You knew, too—and this was your main reason for using the werewolf legend—that local superstition was so strong that there'd never be a real inquest on the killings."

"You're pretty clever, aren't you?" sneered Neville. "Is that all?"

"No," said Michael. He was talking to gain time. "Your plans went awry three times. First, when Jock Campbell was killed unintentionally, it didn't matter. The second time, when the motorist came across you on the road when you were out with your killer-dog, you just escaped detection. The third time, when Cairns the shepherd saw you go into the cave and the dog come out, the slip was serious. You had to act swiftly. You did. You took the dog out of the district. Then when the villagers had searched the cave you went back alone for a more thorough clean-up than time had previously permitted in case further, and more careful, investigators should come to the cave.

"When you were there I arrived. You bludgeoned me and imprisoned me while you went to fetch your dog. You didn't dare kill me yourself: it had to be done with fangs."

"You're right," said Neville, "right in every detail. Now are you coming

out, or shall I send the dog in after you?"

"I'm not coming out," answered Michael, wriggling back out of the tunnel and retreating from the faint light into the darkest part of the cave.

"All right, have it your way," retorted Neville. Then his voice rose sharply as he addressed the dog. "Fetch him; seize him; kill; kill," and Michael heard the sounds of scuffling. But the dog shied at the hole and would not enter.

"I'm going to block you in to die," finally threatened Neville. "It's your last chance to come out. I'll give you a run for your life."

"I'm not coming out," answered Michael, "and you won't block me in because until my body's found there'll be search parties in this wood for me. In fact, already this morning I've missed an appointment with Valerie."

There was silence for a while, followed by more scuffling and a clattering; and then Neville came squeezing through the tunnel, thrashing the space before him with a heavy stick. In his other hand he held the lamp and a chain by which he dragged the dog through after him.

Michael shrank back into a niche in the rock, and looked at the dog crouching behind Neville.

"So that's your 'werewolf'?" he said.

Neville grinned mirthlessly. "He's evil enough for a werewolf, anyway," he said, fumbling with the chain and collar.

"Neville," said Michael abruptly,



"don't you think that evil attributes of the past can be tamed and trained to good while yet retaining all their power?"

Neville eyed him suspiciously. "What d'you mean?" he said, pausing over the dog. "What are you driving at?"

"Have you ever wondered," continued Michael, "why I never attempted record-breaking running? Have you never wondered how I raced your dog through the wood? I'll tell you why. It's because I can run faster than any human being, but I have to stoop and turn black in the face to do it. And once I swore I'd never do that. But I've broken my oath twice, due to you. Once I broke it a little when I ran through the wood; incidentally, I could have killed your dog that night, but I wanted the dog to live so that I could track its owner. The second time I broke my oath completely. It was on the night the animal reared up before you at your window. Neville, are you sure that that was your dog? Or was it something tracking the scent of your dog?" He leaned forward until his shoulders seemed to narrow and hunch while his arms hung close to the ground. "Now I break my oath for the third and last time," he continued. "Look at me, Neville, and answer: what was at your window? Look at my teeth. Are they not long and sharp? Are they not almost fangs? Look at my eyes and see the red flecks in them as once before you saw them at your window. "Look," he snarled, "look at my wrists. Are they not

slender and hairy; even now like a wolf's? And my ears and neck and face and snout—are they not all sub-human?"

They were. The gentleness, the colour, the shape had gone from them. They were dark and hairy. The face and the whole body seemed alive with effluent movement, as though opalescent limbs and features were shrivelling about a black, horrible form within. And he was stripping off his clothes, revealing thick matted hair on a deep, narrow torso.

The blood drained from Neville's face, and he gaped with staring eyes while sickly sweat started on his forehead.

"Michael," he whispered. "Christ, Michael, who are you? What are you?"

The answer shocked him, though the evidence was before him.

Michael whispered, "I am that ghastly outcrop of ancient evil which taints our blood. I am that thing of legend which in stark reality has branded men of our family at random down the ages since the witches of Auvergne lay with animals. I am a werewolf."

Already Neville's savage dog was cringing from the as yet vague shadow of a fiercer animal. But Neville did not heed him. The chain fell from his hand and he leaped for the tunnel. Fast and sudden, he was yet too slow. His cousin, malformed and horrible, was there before him and crouched drooling and barring the way. "Stay," said the animal



mouth, "stay and see the metamorphosis completed."

Neville recoiled. "Michael," he croaked, forcing the words through dry lips, "this is madness. Werewolves are not real; they're myths; they don't exist. You're playing some frightful jest. Stop it."

"Then how did Ian die?" mocked the monstrous creature that had been Michael. "You believed in werewolves to explain his death." He paused, pointing to the cringing dog, "And now but for the werewolf taint that animal would have had my life and you'd be canting that the Curse of the Keiths had claimed another victim."

"Neville," he snarled, and they were the last he uttered before his fearful metamorphosis was complete, "I am going to avenge Ian. I am going to wipe a murderer from our family. Afterwards I shall block your dog in this cave and fetch

help. None will ever know how you died, but all

will believe they do."

Then the wolf sprang. Neville struck blindly with his stick and screamed — a scream which rose shrieking to the pinnacle of terror....

Michael was white and shaken when he left the cave. Already the grim lines on his face were fading, giving place to sadness and to natural gentleness.

He had not thought to see Valerie so soon, but she was there, outside the cave, with a shot-gun in her hand. She was wide-eyed and trembling.

"I came looking for you," she whispered, striving to steady her words. "I was at

the entrance. . . I heard; I heard everything." She dropped her gun as she went to him, knowing herself at last. "Michael, thank God you're safe."





# THE SMALLEST GUINEA-PIG

PETER PARDIGON



FROM THE VERY first John, my husband, liked Windington. I had never been keen to move from town into a small country village, but when the whole scientific outfit with which he worked was transferred there, we had no option but to go with it. We were lucky, I supposed, to have the offer of a small house on the outskirts of the place as a home of our own; many of the workers' families had to live together in big houses, roughly divided into so-called flats, but, owing to John's senior position in the set-up, we were shown a certain amount of consideration.

As I say, John took to a countryman's existence as if he had been born to it, instead of having spent all his youth in Battersea; and as for our small son James, he simply revelled in every aspect of his new life. He is the friendliest little soul imaginable, and in no time he was on the best of terms with all the villagers, as well as with his father's scientific colleagues, and used to go off on his own for hours on end, tagging round in the wake of the milkman or the postman in a way that would have been quite out of the question in London. I never worried about him—Windington seemed very remote from any sort of danger and everybody round soon knew who he was and would have helped him if he'd got into a fix. How-

ever long he was out, he always turned up in the end safe and sound and, though tired, contented and happy.

It was early June when we moved and we didn't bother about sending him to school for the rest of that term, thinking the long days in the country air would benefit him more than the few odd weeks in a strange school.

I was very busy settling into my new home; every woman knows how much there always is to do after moving house. It so happened, too, that the weather those first weeks we were at Windington was absolutely superb, and I naturally wished that my son should be out of doors as much as possible. So, what with my preoccupation with such things as curtains and wall-papers, which prevented my accompanying him on his expeditions, and James's unaccustomed and prolonged idleness, he seemed, as it were, to cross with one stride the gulf between babyhood and boyish independence, and more or less unnoticeably he slipped into this habit I've mentioned of going off on his own for long hours without anyone bothering much about him or questioning him as to where he had been when he returned.

It was never John's way to ask me much, when he returned at night, about the day's doings, and he left the upbringing of James very much to me



—I really don't know whether he was aware, or not, of the measure of freedom I allowed at this time to our seven-year-old, but he certainly wouldn't have worried about it. He was all for James being manly and independent, and the earlier and more complete his emancipation from my apron-strings, the better he would have been pleased.

I was, then, the only member of the family who regretted the move. Unlike my menfolk, I did not discover that the nearer to the earth the happier I was. I missed the noise and bright lights, the crowds, the warm, pulsating life; I began by being bored with the fields and the slow, inarticulate yokels, I proceeded to active dislike of them, and later still a sort of unreasoning fear superimposed itself upon the earlier emotions, making my final reaction an extremely disagreeable one, especially as I couldn't even have begun to explain to John how I felt. For one thing, he could never have understood, feeling so very differently, himself, about what seemed to him the unspoiltness and purity of country life. To go on with, nothing could, in any case, be changed; his work, which was his life, lay there, and there his family must remain. So what was the good?

I have said I gradually became possessed by fear. Everyone has heard of the evacuees in the early days of the last war who were frightened first by the silence of the country and later by its inexplicable sounds—owls, stricken rabbits and all the rest of it. Well, I was just such another. As I became less busy and preoccupied

with the house and consequently less exhausted when I dropped into bed at night, I began to notice all sorts of terrifying little noises before I finally fell asleep. At first I thought they were caused by nothing more alarming than mice or, in my less-controlled moments, rats, but to me, at that time, mice and rats were, anyway, about the most frightening things there were.

I was always talking to John about it until I could see my nagging was beginning to get on his nerves. He insisted that there were no signs whatever of vermin in the house and that he had never heard any of the rustlings which disturbed me. Our house was, as he pointed out, comparatively modern and well-built, and had not been empty or neglected before we moved in.

I bought the most powerful traps I could find, and then tried to forget about it and to make friends who would, as they say, take me out of myself. Here I found our solitariness a disadvantage, as those families who found themselves sharing large houses naturally tended to hang together, and running into each other continually, as they inevitably did throughout the day, fell into a sort of familiarity, even intimacy, from which I, a comparative stranger, was excluded. So the society of the Unit seemed to me to consist of little cliques, comprising the different families dwelling in each large requisitioned house in the village. These cliques exchanged invitations and got up dances and whist-drives among themselves, but we, living as we did,



alone and rather apart from the village, were all too often left out. It wasn't that the others were unfriendly towards us, but John was senior to the other men and I expect they felt doubtful about extending invitations to the Boss.

There was one big house, however, the only house visible from our garden, which the Unit had not been able to commandeer, and I had hoped that I might find a congenial friend there. That hope was disappointed, too. I soon learnt that there was some sort of rival scientific outfit housed there; though that isn't really the right name to give to a distinguished doctor, who was doing some sort of private research of his own. The woman who "did for me," Mrs. Hodges, was my informant. She told me his name was Dr. Mallarby, and that he was a bachelor, rich, pleasantly mannered but unsociable. I soon saw for myself, for I frequently met him in the village, that he was foreign, perhaps Indian, and very good-looking in a scholarly, refined way. We were never introduced, but we exchanged "good mornings" and the usual platitudinous comments on the weather when we met, and I was flattered to see his occasional admiring glances directed at my sturdy, vital little son.

Time passed till, at the end of August, our outward serenity was painfully disturbed. James returned from one of his wanderings flushed, tearful and obviously ill. His temperature was very high, and the Unit's doctor seemed rather more worried about him than he would admit. There was no apparent explanation of this

sudden fever—"some virulent bug," the doctor called it—but with each hour of the night James grew worse. I sat up with him, and in my acute anxiety I was able for once to disregard the incessant knockings, rustlings, twitterings and squeakings that had been my nightly torment for weeks.

James was delirious. "The little men, the little men," he kept crying. "No! No-o-o! No-o-o-o!" With each shrieked negative, he raised himself in his bed, seeming to ward off something from his face. "Mummy, save me! Save me! Don't let him do it to me."

"There's no one here, darling," I assured him, "no one except Mummy. Try to sleep."

"Can't you hear them?" he demanded, his eyes almost starting from his head. "They've come for me. They're always trying to get me, and soon I'll have to go like all the others. The doctor says——"

As he spoke these last words, a dull stupid expression spread over his face, almost as if he had been drugged or knocked out. His head sagged sideways, his mouth hung open vacantly and he was silent, though his eyes did not close in sleep.

Finally I thought it safe to leave him for a few minutes to fetch fresh water and clean sheets, both badly needed. As I went out of the room I heard the door of his cupboard fly open, but I was in too great a hurry to get back to pause to shut it then. A moment later, a series of piercing shrieks brought me running upstairs again, with weak knees and dry



throat. As I opened the door something brushed past my legs, exacerbating my raw nerves almost beyond bearing. It descended the stairs with incredible spider-like speed and disappeared in the blackness of the hall. I knew, to my horror, that all the doors and windows on the ground-floor were bolted and barred—John insisted on this when he was on night-duty—so that, whatever it was, it could not get out, but must inevitably remain below, waiting for me, when next I went down.

Slamming James's door behind me, I turned my attention to him. He was once more violently excited and clung to me with unbelievable strength.

Somehow I soothed him, promised not to leave him alone again even for a moment and eventually lulled him off to a restless sleep.

All was now utterly silent. The noises which had worried me earlier had stopped completely. Was it possible, I wondered, that they could have been caused by that—that animal—that had evidently been shut into James's cupboard? I supposed it *must* be some sort of dog or cat that had either been accidentally imprisoned or deliberately shut in by my son. If I had had to give evidence on oath about it, I should have been bound to say that it appeared to me more like a tiny naked man about twelve to eighteen inches high; I could even see before my eyes a photographic reproduction of his face, which just shows the tricks one's nerves can play on one after the kind of night I'd had.

John got back soon after 6 a.m.

and came straight to our son's room and, having reported that James had slept more peacefully towards day-break, I told him that there was some animal downstairs which must be let out at once. He laughed at me in some irritation. "Not much chance of its still being there, whatever it was, with the front-door standing as wide open as it does at midday," he said shortly. "I realize you were too worried about James to remember to lock up, but you know how particular I am on that matter."

I gazed at him dumbly. I had turned the key and shot both bolts when the doctor left the preceding evening—that I could positively swear to.

"And what on earth was that chair doing in the hall, beside the door?" he continued. "Oh, never mind. I won't bother you about it now, when you're so tired." And he smiled at me penitently while my weary eyes saw nothing but a tiny, man-like figure standing on a chair to wrestle with the bolts and locks in the way of freedom.

James eventually recovered, physically at any rate, though to my watchful mother's eyes, he seemed to have something on his mind. There was an occasional furtiveness, an air of guilt, which I did not know or like.

For various reasons, I did not want him to begin his solitary rambles again. He was still very weak after his severe illness, and I felt he should go very slowly for a time. Then there had been a series of very disturbing disappearances in our part of the country; a number of



boys and men had vanished without trace, and it seemed there was a maniac abroad whom, for my boy's sake, I greatly feared. Lastly, the very determination he showed to elude my care and get away from me made me the more resolved that he should stay at home.

I seized the occasion to speak to both his old companions, the milkman and the postman, and to explain my wishes. To my astonishment and intense disquiet, both answered in exactly the same way. They told me that James had ceased to accompany them on their rounds after the first few weeks of our stay in Windington, and both added, just a hint warningly, I thought, that since his great friendship with the doctor next door had begun, he had no time for anyone else.

"The doctor next door?" I repeated stupidly. "Dr. Mallarby? But does James know him?"

The men were equally surprised at my ignorance. It appeared that my little boy had been spending most of his time, day after day for weeks past, with our foreign neighbour without either of them betraying the smallest hint even of the acquaintanceship to James's parents. Why? Why? Suddenly I remembered his perplexing cry when he was ill, "The doctor says . . ." just before he collapsed. Of course it was Dr. Mallarby he meant. Again my mind leapt ahead. That horrible animal must have been given or lent him by the doctor; he'd been bringing it home surreptitiously every evening and shutting it up somewhere, where

it squeaked and rustled all night, nearly driving me mad. That explained at least why my enormous new traps remained empty.

Unreasoning rage possessed me. No loving, conscientious mother enjoys the discovery that she has been consistently and cleverly deceived by her only child. Yet, instead of tackling James at once, which I now see would have been the normal thing to do in the circumstances, and demanding to know what the connection was between him and our neighbour, something held me back. I simply couldn't bring myself to mention the subject. Was it fear of disturbing my little boy's nervous stability, of undoing all the "building-up" I had been trying to achieve during his long convalescence? I told myself it was. Now I wonder if a powerful will was not always in firm control of my uncertain, wavering intention, preventing me from carrying it out.

Instead I began to inquire, in what I hoped was a tactful and discreet fashion, into the activities of our neighbour. Nobody seemed to know much about him; but he was reputed to be outstandingly brilliant, and the local people both respected and feared him, without apparently really knowing why. My husband was inclined to scoff at his qualifications and see him more as the witch-doctor than as the scientist.

"I don't actually *know* a thing about him," he told me, "but I've heard quite a lot of uninformed gossip over at our place. The rumour is that he's doing some research with animals. There has been some specu-



lation as to whether he's producing hybrids. Apparently some of his 'guinea-pigs'—only I gather they bear no resemblance to real guinea-pigs—have escaped from time to time and frightened people out of their wits because they seemed unlike any animal familiar to them. Some even say they're like minute men! It's wonderful how the imagination burgeons, given a dark enough night and an unexpected encounter with some swift-moving living creature."

Without any conscious process of thought, words fell from my lips which sounded fantastic to me, even as I uttered them.

"Has anyone ever suggested a connection between him and all those missing boys and men?" I asked.

My husband looked at me queerly. "My dear girl," he said, "what is biting you? No, of course not. Why ever should they?"

I couldn't answer. For one thing, there was no reason except a monstrous, totally incredible idea which, beginning as a tiny grain of suspicion, had ballooned up in a moment into a suffocating blanket of horror all round me, choking and weighing me down. For another, I was really afraid of what John's reaction would be if I told him what was in my mind. My presence, constantly beside him, was the only thing, I was convinced, which could save my son from a fate horrible beyond belief, and I had no intention of being sent away to a mental home "for a nice rest." John was the last person in the world, with his cold, probing, scientific approach to prob-

lems, in whom I could confide my fear.

The next day, holding James firmly by the hand—I now never left him for an instant—I went into the nearest town to the Public Library and, while my little boy sat quietly beside me reading *The Swiss Family Robinson*, I applied myself to a search of the local newspapers over the last few months. In several issues there was a description and photo of a missing boy or man, and I noticed that, if it was a grown man who had disappeared, it was always a very short one. Suddenly I saw what I had all the time known I should see, but the shock was no less for being expected. My senses reeled, and I should have fainted were it not for the paramount importance of retaining consciousness to guard James. There, in the centre of the page, was a clear and distinct photo of Albert George Trevither, age 22, height 5 ft. 4 in., etc., etc., who had gone for a walk one evening in early spring in our part of the world and had never been seen again. Never, perhaps, by those who knew and loved him, but he had been seen by me, shrunk to a fifth of his normal size and darting past me in panic or frustrated fury, to hurl himself down our stairs and make his escape.

I sat, stunned, resting my elbows on the table and my head on both hands. Not for one moment did I doubt my own sanity, but I knew I could not expect to make anyone else believe me; and I could not myself remain, waking and watchful, beside my son for twenty-four hours a day,



week after week, month after month, year after year. Even if I could, would my strength and prayers be sufficient to hold him back, unaided, from those who came to seek him?

There was only one thing to do, I decided. Take James away at once, far away, beyond the doctor's sphere of operations. My sister lived in London, and she would certainly put us up for a few days, while I communicated with John and tried to make him see that we could never return to Windington.

Already a certain blessed relief from tension and fear was stealing over me. Tonight, this very night, I ought to be able to sleep deeply, peacefully with my son beside me. What refreshment of the tortured, weary nerves even to think of it. "Waste no more time," I admonished myself. I had several pounds with me. We would not wait to pack any luggage. The very thought of returning to our house now, even for a moment, drowned me in terror. John was in the midst of some protracted piece of work which had necessitated a visit, by air, to another experimental outfit in the North, and would not be back till the following morning, when I would, of course, telephone him. "Let's go," I said to myself, "let's go. LET'S GO."

Beside me was James's empty chair. Open, face-downwards on it lay *The Swiss Family Robinson*. Of James there was no sign.

The librarian, looking at me curiously, told me he had left a few

moments before, hand in hand with a foreign gentleman.

I went straight to the police, of course, telling them simply what the librarian had told me, and adding that the only foreign gentleman known to the child was our Eastern neighbour. They were kind and promised to do everything in their power to find him as quickly as possible, but in their minds, as well as in mine, I knew, was the long list of boys and youths already missing. I had no hope at all that, even if they searched the doctor's place, they would find any sign of James or of the more sensational of the doctor's experiments.

Then I came home, and I have been sitting at the kitchen table ever since, writing this and waiting, waiting. For a long time now, though, I have not been alone. It is John I am waiting for, to come back and tell me what to do. James, you see, has already returned. He is at this moment in the cupboard beside me, squeaking his little life away. I'm afraid to let him out in case he escapes. Every time I open the door, I see his eyes fixed agonizedly, incredulously, on me, his mother, who does nothing to alleviate his pain. He is as pink and naked as the day he was born, and very, very much smaller, not more than three inches long at most, and he is held securely by one shattered, bleeding leg in my latest extra-powerful mousetrap.

Dr. Mallarby's experiment is, I suppose, a complete success.





## REFLECTION

H. MOORE-BAILEY

*Illustrated by Josephine Collins*

*Another face in the mirror as well as the beholder's has been the inspiration of more than one of the most celebrated tales of the macabre. When it has also the unbearable feeling of claustrophobia the story cannot help being terrifying indeed.*

**T**HE MIST, HAVING persisted over the countryside throughout the day, was now thickening until the trees and hedges along the highway lay enshrouded in a mantle of formless grey.

By the time daylight had faded, the trees and hedgerows were hidden and the deserted highway lay silent.

Barbara Hilton felt a stab of fear as the thickening mist, closing round the car, gradually brought the speed

down to a walking pace, and when the mist turned into fog she switched off the baffling headlights, and opening the window, peered obliquely forward. The damp fog, swirling in through the open window, settled in tiny globules on the tumbling strands of jet-black hair.

Barbara controlled the feeling of panic as she realized she would shortly be forced to a stop and be alone in an impenetrable fog.

A dim white light shining from some short distance off the road decided her, and, stopping the car, she



stepped gingerly towards it. A gravel drive crunched beneath her feet, and she guessed she was approaching some substantial country dwelling.

The electric-light bulb, protruding from above a white-painted door, revealed a short flight of steps.

Barbara pressed the inset circular bell. Scarcely had the ring died away when quick footsteps approached and the door was opened by a man, dressed in blue-serge trousers and white alpaca jacket.

"I'm terribly sorry to trouble you," began Barbara. "I'm afraid I've been caught in this fog and motoring is hopeless. I saw the light of this house."

"Yes, of course, Madam," the man replied courteously. "Please come in, I'm sure the Doctor will help you."

Barbara stepped inside, and was led across the hall into a comfortably furnished lounge. A huge fire was burning in the fireplace, and she approached it gratefully.

"Please make yourself comfortable, Madam. I will inform the Doctor." The man withdrew.

She was alone for a few minutes before the door opened and a tall iron-grey-haired man entered. Removing a pair of rimless spectacles, he approached the fireplace and smiled.

"Good evening. I am Dr. Hallett. You are having trouble with the fog, my man tells me. Please sit down."

Barbara introduced herself and sank into a deep leather chair. He is nice, Barbara thought, but unusually tired and over-strained.

Dr. Hallett rang for tea, and Bar-

bara took the opportunity to draw close to the huge fire and finger out her damp curls to the heat. The Doctor looked down at the beautiful long black tresses as the woman tossed back her head to the flames, the sheen dancing and rippling with every movement of her head. Hallett thought he had never seen such beautiful hair on a woman. It had the depth and lustre of polished ebony. Its masses of light and dark imparted to him a subtle sense of relaxation.

He did not speak until tea arrived, and whilst pouring said, "Now, Miss Hilton, to return to your predicament. It is obviously impossible for you to continue your journey tonight. I will move into an empty patient's room in the north wing, and you can have my room——"

Barbara interrupted with a shake of her head.

"I refuse to inconvenience you to that extent. I shall be quite happy to take the other room you referred to." She hesitated, then went on, "You did say patient's room?" There was question in her tone.

"Yes," he replied. Then added quietly, "Evidently Dibbs did not tell you. This is a mental-home."

He hesitated, frowning into the fire, and then, as if he had made up his mind, said:

"Miss Hilton, I have no wish to frighten you, but you have had a most lucky escape this evening."

"Escape?" she echoed. "How do you mean?"

Staring into the flames, he went on as if he had not heard her question.



"It was not necessary to ask you when you arrived here if you had seen anyone wandering around this district. Had you met the man I am referring to, I doubt if you would be alive at this moment. Five hours ago Parker Smith escaped from here. He is the most dangerous of all the homicidal maniacs I have ever had in my charge. You may remember the cases in the newspapers, they were particularly horrible."

Barbara shuddered as she recalled the dreadful reports of Parker Smith, although no newspaper carried the details of the sadistic horrors he had perpetrated on the two luckless women before a terrible death took them from his frenzy.

She also remembered Hallett's name in connection with the case. He had appeared briefly at the trial in his capacity as psychiatrist, and was one of the panel of doctors which certified Parker Smith as insane. His appearance had been no more than a technical formality before Smith was consigned to Broadmoor.

The Doctor continued; his voice was lower and in the light of the flames he looked tired and worn.

"Shortly after Smith had been admitted to Broadmoor, I was consulted by the prison authorities with regard to certain symptoms of his behaviour. We thought it best if I could have him under my own observation system; so he was escorted here under heavy guard exactly four days ago. How he escaped my own staff and the police nursing staff we do not yet know. Of course, a most intensive search has been started, but the fog has made it

impossible. We have merely been walking round in circles."

He looked up suddenly. "Speaking of travelling in circles reminds me. We had better bring your car in. In the meantime, I will get Dibbs to put some furniture for you in one of the rooms."

Guided by the Doctor's torch, Barbara drove the car up to the house. The Doctor lifted her suitcase out and led the way back to the house. Back in the lounge, they chatted until Dibbs entered and informed Barbara her room was ready.

Dr. Hallett, carrying her suitcase, led her out of the room and along the corridors.

Mounting a short flight of steps, he turned the key in the lock of a heavy oak door.

To Barbara's surprise, this opened into another corridor.

"This is the north wing I spoke of," he said. "None of the rooms in this corridor is—er—occupied. There is, however, something about these doors I must explain to you."

Halting before the third door, he stretched up and pressed what appeared to be a small stud. There followed a faint click, and the door swung slowly back revealing a plain room. The walls were of a light-grey material which Barbara guessed to be both sound- and fire-proof. The high ceiling was of the same material, and let into the centre of it was a circular dome of the thickest glass which shrouded the electric-light bulb.

The room stood empty, apart from the bed, dressing-table and large



mirror which Dibbs had brought for her.

Dr. Hallett placed the suitcase on the bed.

"I regret the austerity," he said ruefully. "Now about these doors. Once closed, they can only be opened from the outside in the manner you saw. On closing, they lock automatically. If you wish, you may leave the door open as this wing is unoccupied, or you may have it closed, whichever you wish. Either Dibbs or myself will give you a call in the morning."

Barbara hesitated a moment, then thought of Parker Smith. "I think you had better close it, Doctor," she said.

"Very well," he replied. "There is just one other thing. That ceiling light is automatically switched off at 8.45." He glanced at his watch. "That is, in fifteen minutes from now. Dibbs has wired the table-lamp, so you can have that for as long as you wish. I also regret there is no service bell."

Dr. Hallett withdrew, wished her good night and closed the door behind him. It came to with a quiet thud. So effective was the sound-proofing that Barbara could not hear the Doctor's footsteps as he walked back along the corridor, nor the bang of the oak door at the end as he closed it.

She opened her suitcase and, slipping off her dress, drew on a white dressing-gown. Turning to the dressing-table she arranged the large mirror, and, shaking free her long black hair back over her shoulders, began to brush it.

The long sweeping strokes of the brush drew out the latent electricity. The delicate but sharp sound of the

electricity jumping from hair to brush crackled clear-cut and weirdly in the dead silence of the room.

Suddenly the ceiling light went out and Barbara nearly screamed. The room and its unearthly silence was getting on her nerves.

With a sudden feeling of terror, she realized she was a prisoner until morning. There was no bell to summon anyone and the dreadful room was sound-proof.

The silence became terrible. She moved into the circle of light from the reading-lamp instinctively, the brush moving among the tresses of her black hair in long mechanical sweeps.

The arc of light from the reading-lamp threw a circle round her feet and just reached the drapings of the bed. She moved closer to the mirror and then froze with terror.

Through the mirror she saw that the bed drapings were moving and lifting slowly. For a brief second she swayed as a hand appeared and, lifting aside the drapings, revealed the hideous face of the maniac Parker Smith.

For how long she stood there frozen with terror Barbara Hilton never knew.

Gradually she became aware that the madman had not attempted to come out from under the bed. With a terrible effort she forced herself to look at him again through the mirror.

Parker Smith was not looking at her, but his eyes, filled with round childish wonderment, were following the crackling movement of the brush through the hair.



The tiny crackling sound the brush was making held him fascinated.

Then slowly, but with an ever-increasing certainty, she realized that as long as she kept brushing she was safe.

The instant she stopped, Parker Smith would leap. She could not escape.

She was locked in a padded sound-proof room with a maniac, and only the tiny crackle of a brush through hair was keeping him at bay.

The long sweeps of the brush continued. Her arm became numb and beyond feeling. The tiny crackling went on deep into the night.

Slowly the hours crept past, at six

o'clock Dr. Hallett called her name through the speaking grille.

Receiving no reply, he pressed the push lock and the door swung inwards.

A cry of horror broke from his lips.

A woman in a white dressing-gown was standing at the mirror slowly brushing her hair. She stood with the terrible light of madness in her eyes, staring at the brush which with dreadful precision was dragged jerkily through her hair. The hair was completely white.

Lying beneath the bed with a smile of childish contentment on his face lay Parker Smith, fast asleep.







## DESERT EXCURSION

SIR LAURENCE GRAFFTEY-SMITH

**T**HE DRAGOMAN, Osman, rode in front. Twenty yards behind him, far enough away to avoid his dust, came Mrs.

Henry Mammatt, looking monolithic on a very small donkey. Her husband, riding a much larger and uncomfortably energetic animal, tried to keep near her side but his donkey had its own ideas and wanted to catch up with Osman. Mr. Mammatt, being very small, elderly and without experience of saddles, found it all he could do to stay on.

He had disliked the day's excursion from the moment his wife announced it, and he was disliking it more every minute. The sun was pitiless and the desert air incandescent with heat.

Small rivulets of perspiration embarrassed him. His shoulders ached, and the incessant bumping and jolting maddened him.

His wife, who was wondering whether that charming Armenian boy had really meant all he said, seemed indifferent to discomfort. Her face was puce; her topee had slipped to the back of her head and her tussore skirt had ridden far up her legs; but she trotted on, implacably determined to pursue all possible tourist attractions.

Luxor has very many such attractions to offer: it is one of the few places it is impossible to over-advertise. But few of the thousands of tourists who admire the Colossi and the Ramasseum or exclaim at the moonlit enchantment of Karnak, ever think of visiting the caves of Dhag-



out, which lie beyond the tiny village of the same name, some miles away from the Nile on its left bank. Indeed, anyone wishing to go there finds considerable difficulty in obtaining a guide. And if one is engaged, he will probably find an excuse for backing out at the last moment.

No reasons are given—or too many. Mention of the place anywhere in Kenh Province provokes a peculiar fluttering movement of the fingers and an obvious anxiety to talk about something else. Even the suave manager of the hotel had pressingly suggested to Mr. Mammatt that he would be well-advised to choose another excursion more worthy of his interest. Mrs. Mammatt was not impressed. Osman had asked for a week's wage for this one day's trip. At Mrs. Mammatt's massive nod, her husband had agreed to pay it, much to Osman's distress.

They had been riding for rather more than an hour when Osman stopped his donkey and pointed to a hill a couple of miles away and to the right of their course. The Mammatts also stopped, glad of an excuse to do so.

"I suppose that's it," said Mr. Mammatt.

"Obviously," said his wife. She had for years made little effort to conceal the contempt she felt for her husband's shrimp-like proportions. She weighed nearly twice as much as he did, and she considered him in every way inadequate.

"I was wondering, Edna," Mr. Mammatt began uneasily; "I mean, do you think it might be better if we

turned back? There seems to be something very funny about these caves. Personally, I think——"

"Rubbish," she replied. She was a woman of few words.

Osman started off again, and the Mammatts followed.

Another half-hour's riding brought them to the foot of the hill, which rose abruptly out of the sands like a cliff. It lay tawny under the blinding sun, in the profound silence of the desert. Mr. Mammatt had the sudden feeling that they were expected. The sandstone cliff was some two hundred feet high, and its face was honeycombed with the caves they had come to visit. Of these they found there were very many. Some were completely inaccessible; most, however, were connected with adjacent ones by rough steps cut in the sandstone, so that the general impression was one of a number of cubicles or cells joined by a series of external staircases. Not all the steps were practicable, for time had worn away parts of the façade.

Mr. Mammatt ventured the conjecture that the place had once been an early Christian monastery. Osman looked at him queerly.

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no, my lord," he said. "These caves before Christian, before Moslem, perhaps before Adam, who knows?" He set about unstrapping the luncheon-basket and paraphernalia. An eagle, plummeting from the brazier of the sky, made them all jump.

It took Mrs. Mammatt a long time to find the right cave for lunch. Those on the lower level smelt unpleasantly



and in some of the higher caves there was evidence of bats. At last, having clambered up various interconnected little stairways, she approved a small, moderately clean cave, about a hundred feet up.

"Here," she decided.

Osman gratefully laid down rugs and picnic-basket and the movie-camera, and carpeted the floor of the cave with old newspapers brought for the purpose, which he then burned. This simple rite of purification was assumed by all to dispose of minor vermin. He then left the Mammatts to their cold chicken and salad, and squatted near the mouth of the cave to eat his own lunch. In his unofficial uniform of black evening-trousers, white gym-shoes and soiled linen coat, he looked strangely incongruous and rather pathetic, silhouetted against the flaming circle of the sky.

It was while Mr. Mammatt was reaching for the salt that they first heard the noise.

"What on earth was that, Osman?" he asked. "It sounded like a child."

Osman had jumped to his feet. His face was an ugly grey and his hands trembled uncontrollably.

"I, too, heard something, my lord," he stammered. "Perhaps better I go and see."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Mammatt. "I didn't hear anything." She implied that there had consequently been nothing to hear.

"Funny thing," replied her husband. "I could have sworn I heard a child whimpering. But it's certainly stopped now."

Mrs. Mammatt snorted contemptu-

ously and turned to the dragoman.

"Never mind, Osman," she said. "Get on with your lunch."

But Osman did not want any more lunch.

"Please I go," he said. "Milady excuse, but I must go. My . . . my stomach not very good just now. Soon I come back." And he hurried out of the cave.

"Really, these Egyptians!" said Mrs. Mammatt. "What a thing to tell us at lunch-time."

They were finishing their cheese and biscuits when they heard the noise again. It was, as Mr. Mammatt had said, like a child's whimper, but now it was much louder. Mr. Mammatt got up to look out of the cave. Before he reached the entrance, he exclaimed: "Good Lord!"

Galloping away across the desert, flogging his donkey with his stick and with great swinging kicks, Osman became with each passing minute a smaller and smaller figure, vanishing over the infinite sand. The noise came up to them again, whimpering but bestial, and Mr. Mammatt gasped as he looked below him.

Something monstrous had come out of the cave beneath their own and crouched on the steps, sniffing. It was huge, grey with the greyness of immense age, naked and wrinkled, and its bald head wove slowly from side to side in the bright sunlight. It seemed to have enormously powerful hind-quarters, but its arms were stunted and mutilated, as if they had been caught in a trap long, long ago. Two small but vicious tusks protruded from the blubbery mouth. The



creature's eyes were quite white and obviously blind. From time to time a dreadful whimper, now recognizably one of excitement and not of grief, broke the hot silence. A faint sweet smell of corruption polluted the air.

Mr. Mammatt looked wildly round and above him. Unfortunately the series of steps they had followed ended at their cave. There was no road, however perilous, to safety. He turned back into the cave.

"Well, Henry, what is going on?" his wife asked. As usual, she sounded aggrieved, and he noticed with a slight shock of surprise that she was still eating a cheese-sandwich.

"Don't look out of the cave, Edna," he said. "It's rather shocking." He took off his spectacles to wipe them, and the familiar little action helped him to pull himself together. "For once, my dear," he continued, "I want you not to argue but to do exactly what I tell you. There is something down there which is very dangerous indeed. I don't know what it is—I don't think anybody does—but it is very dangerous and it is going to try to kill us. I want you to get up on that ledge, and you must stay there without moving. I'd come up, too, if I thought it was the slightest use, but it isn't. When the—er—thing comes here, I shall do my best to deal with it. That at least will give you time to get out of the cave and down to the donkeys, and that you must do at once, and—er—whatever happens, get out as soon as you see your chance. Is that clear?"

"But, Henry——" Mrs. Mammatt began.

"For God's sake, Edna, SHUT UP!" he cried. "Be quick, and don't argue."

He was so small and she so big that it was not easy to get her up on to the ledge, but by kneeling down and letting her use his shoulder as a step he was able to hoist her up. She had lost her self-assurance under the shock of his new authority, and she looked at him with new eyes. What the charming young Armenian might be going to suggest at that evening's Fancy Dress Dance was no longer important to her.

There were seventeen steps between their cave and the cave below them, and if they had wished to count them they could have done so by the sounds of the creature's approach. At each step there was a shuffling thud as the mutilated arms settled, followed by a swinish grunt as they took the strain and the huge body was heaved up, for the massive hind-quarters had long been paralysed. The whinnying excitement became louder and louder. Mrs. Mammatt began gnawing her hand. Her husband, looking very small, stood a little farther back in the cave than the ledge she lay on, so as to give her a clear path of escape, and he held, desperately, one of the small picnic-knives.

Suddenly the entrance was darkened, and a huge, obscene shape swung itself into the cave, blotting out the sun. Its excitement was now intolerable and a high purr broke the whimpers. The stench of sweet corruption was all but stifling. Mr. Mam-



matt waited until the thing was almost upon him and then he lunged and lunged again. He might as well have clawed at a hippopotamus, and he was overwhelmed immediately. Mrs. Mammatt saw the tusks strike and the lips nuzzle before she flung herself from the ledge and out of the cave. She was sobbing as she stumbled down stairway after stairway, and sobbing when she found that the donkeys had followed Osman and were gone. She was still sobbing as she ran across the desert towards the distant river.

The New Year's Eve Ball at the Winter Palace Hotel in Luxor is a famous occasion, and the lounge and staircases were crowded with noisy, happy people in every kind of fancy-dress. Mr. Bobo Ipekian ("Old English Gentleman") waved to Mr. Vic-

tor Khouri ("Louis-Quinze Courtier"), who joined him near the bar.

"Hallo, Bobo. Anything fixed up?" Mr. Khouri asked. They had hunted together before and knew each other well. Mr. Ipekian shrugged elegant shoulders.

"If you'd asked me this morning, I should have said 'Yes.' But now I'm not so sure. She wasn't in the dining-room and I haven't seen her the whole evening."

"She may be planning some delightful surprise for you," remarked the Courtier. "Am I allowed to ask if it is the Kensington Mammoth we are discussing?"

"My dear Victor, just because you're consoling the skinniest woman ever married in Arkansas, don't pretend to develop a dislike for over-development. I know your taste too well. If all goes well—and some





pretty sentiments were exchanged last night, I may tell you—this evening may get me those Cartier links you wanted so badly. Who is the lovely in the Jacques Fath sequins?"

"With Prince Selim? Something in tin from Bolivia, I believe. Much too young for you or me, she must be our age."

"Yes. Life definitely begins at forty for us, old boy; *their* lives, anyway. That's what it is to be tall, dark, handsome and nothing else!"

"Tell me, Bobo, about this Mammoth of yours. It looks like a lot of hard work to me. I should hate to think you were wasting your charm."

"Give it time, Victor. Give it time. And just watch me when she comes in! It'll help your technique. But what goes on here?"

They both turned towards the door of the hotel, where a woman was standing, staring around her. She was

hatless and dishevelled, and one stocking was in shreds. She was covered in mud and sand.

The Old English Gentleman looked closely at her.

"It is," he said. "It really and truly is."

"Do you mean to say——?" Mr. Khouri began.

"What a make-up!"

"What's she supposed to be, Bobo?"

"Some sort of a cave-woman, obviously. The return to the primitive! But I didn't know they always dyed their hair white." He hurried up to her.

"Allow me to congratulate you, dear Mrs. Mammatt," he said, with the courtly bow of an Old English Gentleman. "You're quite magnificent!"

Then she began to scream, and someone sent for a doctor.



In men, we various ruling passions find;  
In women, two almost divide the kind;  
Those, only fixed, they first or last obey,  
The love of pleasure, and the love of sway.

ALEXANDER POPE (1688–1744).



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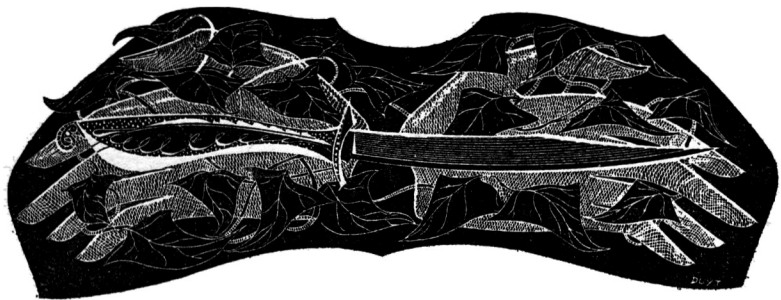
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## CROOKS IN BOOKS

*A review of some recent crime, mystery and detective books.*

ANTHONY SHAFFER

"A REASON FOR MURDER," by Anne Hocking (*W. H. Allen, 9s. 6d.*).

Murders, somewhat less than foul, in the solid, comfortable murder country round Oxford. It is claimed, on behalf of Miss Hocking, that this is a psychological novel, which in this case, as in so many others, merely means that the motives for murder are less dramatic than in the straightforward thriller.

"LOVE CAN BE DANGEROUS," by Octavius Roy Cohen (*Arthur Barker, 10s. 6d.*).

Danny O'Leary: Smart cop and great lover. The smart cop wins—but natch.

"PLAYBACK," by The Gordons (*MacDonald, 9s. 6d.*).

Another photographically accurate, problem novel by the authors of *Case File, F.B.I.* The book contains an ex-

cellent description of the "talking bugs" department—the microphones and television eyes which destroy the old maxim "a man's home is his castle." They crack cases at great speed, but in the process put in jeopardy the way of life they seek to protect. Talking point: If people are really free, they must be free to be murdered, kidnapped and extorted.

"THE BECKONING LADY," by Margery Allingham (*Chatto & Windus, 11s. 6d.*).

This review is a little late, but so felicitous is Miss Allingham that no issue of LONDON MYSTERY MAGAZINE would be really complete if it ignored her latest work. It must be confessed that *Tiger in the Smoke* has the better plot, but oh those delicious characters, Tonker Cassands, Maggersfontein Lugg, the Imperial Augusts, Mr. Burt and Mr. Hare, and not forget-





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Green Trees**

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ting the palindromic V.I.P. Sidney Simon Smith. If you haven't read it, do so. If you have, read it again.

"THE CASE OF THE AMATEUR ACTOR," by Christopher Bush (*MacDonald*, 9s. 6d.).

Ludovic Travers to the rescue of the credible, but half-baffled police, again. The question is, has the killing of a literary agent a link with the disappearance of an amateur actor? The answer is that it has, and L. Travers does the very competent linking.

"THE BLIND FROG," by Francis Grierson (*Robert Hale*, 9s. 6d.).

This is one of those leaden soufflés where everyone will risk fortune and life for "ze plans" (needless to say, of a top-secret war weapon). The whole future of civilization is, of course, menaced. A touch of the political right wing imparts some superficial originality.

"DANGEROUS ANGEL," by Clarence Buddington Kelland (*Robert Hale*, 9s. 6d.).

Period: San Francisco at the time of the Gold Rush. Style: The same. Theme: Diamonds are a girl's best friend up to and including page 190. Diamonds are not a girl's best friend on page 191 (the book's last.)

"DEAD OF SUMMER," by Dana Moseley (*Bodley Head*, 9s. 6d.).

A heat storm in a tea-cup. The violence at the end does nothing to give it increased significance.



"WEEK-END AT GREEN TREES," by Mary Meynell (*Geoffrey Bles*, 10s. 6d.).

Week-end atmosphere prevails here to a weak ending. The style is good, clean, rectory facetiousness. There is also a cast of trite young things and shrewd old dears, and someone mildly nasty.

"DISCORD IN THE AIR," by E. H. Clements (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 10s. 6d.).

An implacably unnecessary book all about test aeroplanes and murder. Guess the murderer's affiliations and motive. No prizes.

"MURDER AT END HOUSE," by Michael Halliday (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 10s. 6d.).

Nice people versus the mad megalomaniac—boss of a crooked empire (indeedy)! The climax comes with Master Mind's house being blown up in a spasm of devilish glee, seldom encountered outside the pages of Sapper. In the end, only the unjust die young.

"THREE OF DIAMONDS," by Kathleen Moore-Knight (*Hammond & Hammond*, 9s. 6d.).

A worthy account of gang warfare by one who quite obviously does not believe in gangs. Far-fetched clues do little to help out, though the title does turn out to be a deliciously execrable pun.

"A CORPSE AT CAMP TWO," by Glyn Carr (*Geoffrey Bles*, 10s. 6d.).

Amusing, English, classic school whodunit with Chomolu, a Hima-

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layan peak of twenty-four thousand one hundred and seventy feet, doing service for the lonely country-house, Sherpas for the sinister but non-suspectible hired-hands and the Yetis for the red herrings. The solution is by no means stunning, but the book on the whole is very pleasant reading, with the leader of the expedition, actor-manager Sir Abercombe Lewker ("Filthy," to his friends), taking the honours, and the descriptive passages of the local terrain running him a close second.

"GIDEON'S DAY," by J. J. Marric (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 9s. 6d.).

Neat trick of hitching a 'tec story to the day in the life of a Senior Superintendent at Scotland Yard. Otherwise routine junketings with the Nobs, the Corblimeys and the Chinks.

"MURDER MADE ABSOLUTE," by Michael Underwood (*Hammond & Hammond*, 10s. 6d.).

Competent light-weight 'tec with Q.C.s and High Court Judges falling about the place like ninepins. It always seems the fashion where the background is the law to say that it is authentic. This is undeniably true here, but *quid igitur* as the Latins so wittily observe.

"MARGIN OF TERROR," by William McGiven (*Collins*, 9s. 6d.).

The excellent Mr. McGiven, doubtless delighted by the success of the film of his book *Rogue Cop*, has been so far perverted as to write his latest thriller with one and a half eyes on



its cinematic possibilities. This tends to make a very good book fearfully confusing because we never stop rushing, usually purposelessly, from furtive alley to sinister cocktail bar, and eventually, of course, to suave hideout.

"THE SAINT ON THE SPANISH MAIN," by Leslie Charteris (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 10s. 6d.).

Another splendid collection of saintly adventures with the iron hand flexing itself beneath the velvet glove, exactly as before. (Boxing blue's hand beneath the Bond Street glove?) The best story is the "Arrow of God," with "The Questing Tycoon" a good second.

"MIDNIGHT HAZARD," by Bruce Sanders (*Herbert Jenkins*, 9s. 6d.).

Taken strictly from the standpoint of those detective stories which once picked up can't be put down until finished, usually late at night, this is no Midnight Hazard. Set in a night-club peopled by a lot of old friends, this murder scores a flip-through-till-nine-p.m. rating.

"MURDER MAKES A VILLAIN," by Dennis Scott (*Hammond & Hammond*, 9s. 6d.).

Literary skulduggery on Long Island with the Ivy League chasing each other round a rare manuscript. The style, which keeps things moving at a jolly clip, remains precariously balanced just the right side of facetiousness.

## ***Recommended Thrillers***

### **The Secret Mountains**

**JOHN APPLEBY**

"Mr. Appleby is fast creating a reputation as a first-rank thriller writer. His latest book again demonstrates his ability to create both suspense and character." *Oxford Mail*

(10/6 net)

### **Murder at End House**

**MICHAEL HALLIDAY**

The new thriller by the author of *Cat and Mouse*.

"Michael Halliday is an impossible bedfellow for depression." (10/6 net) *The Observer*

### **Deep Sand**

**B. J. MUNSLOW**

A thriller about a man who returned to North Africa.

"Dramatic in its very simplicity. Breathlessly exciting. Should not be missed."

FRANCIS GRIERSON, *Daily Mail*  
(10/6 net)

### **Gideon's Day**

**J. J. MARRIC**

This story of one man's day at Scotland Yard gives a vivid picture of a Detective-Superintendent's life and supplies a new kind of excitement — the excitement of reality.

(10/6 net)

**HODDER AND STOUGHTON**



# THRILLERS OF THE MONTH

September

**Jack Finney**

(author of *Five against the House*)

**THE BODY SNATCHERS**

*"A thriller in the old, great H. G. Wells sense; subtle, disturbing, thought-provoking."*

CHRISTOPHER PYM

October

**Ursula Curtiss**

(author of *The Iron Cobweb*)

**THE DEADLY CLIMATE**

*"One of the season's best thrillers—a throat-clutcher in the absolute. . . . Choose your evening for this one; you won't get anything else done till you've finished it."*

NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

November

**Arthur Behrend**

(author of *The House of the Spaniard*)

**UNLUCKY FOR SOME**

A brilliant suspense story, set principally in Liverpool and in the Yorkshire Dales.

EYRE & SPOTTISWOODE

"THE BODY SNATCHER," by Jack Finney (*Eyre & Spottiswoode*, 9s. 6d.).

One of the most original thrillers (dept.: Science Fiction) I have read for a long time. An insidious life-form which germinates in giant pods invades the little township of Santa Mira. The really original touch Mr. Finney gives us is that from the pods hatch out embryonic human beings waiting to be stamped with a personality. With this end in view, they take possession of the town's inhabitants, so that they act and talk as they always did but are not the same people. Fine reading. Better filming.

"DEEP SAND," by B. J. Munslow (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 10s. 6d.).

Hanky-panky in the desert. Mr. Munslow seems to have an intimate knowledge of his desert background. A similar knowledge of plot construction and the English language would not make his task of telling an entertaining story so wildly unattainable.

"THE CRIMSON CLUE," by George Harmon Coxe (*Hammond & Hammond*, 9s. 6d.).

The indefatigable Mr. Coxe is back again, this time with a little downbeat mayhem among musicians. There are quite a few corpses in the "Hit Parade" before this slick, professional novel ends, alas, in a time-smoothed situation.

"A SHROUD FOR MR. BUNDY," by James M. Fox (*Hammond & Hammond*, 9s. 6d.).

Crazy, mixed-up kids at greedy,



lethal play. Routine, but the 'tecs, man and wife, are refreshing.

**"THE MEAN STREETS,"** by Thomas B. Dewey (*Boardman*, 9s. 6d.).

A fine, deeply felt, tough, tough toughie by one of the best of the heirs of Chandler. Swift, exciting, deadly, it still contrives to be a powerful indictment of juvenile delinquency. I'm screwy for Dewey.

**"THREE FOR THE MONEY,"** by James McConnaughey (*Hammond & Hammond*, 9s. 6d.).

Light-weight tale of a man framed for attempting to poison his wife and child. The improbability outweighs the narrative style, though the climax is exciting. Two for the money would have been a fair price.

**"HAWK WATCH,"** by Brandon Bird (*Boardman*, 9s. 6d.).

This book is billed as a "crime and character" novel (presumably to distinguish it from the murder and marionette type of situation located by hallowed tradition in country-houses). Anyway, the crime is murder, and the real characters are the great savage golden eagles that beat their predatory way through the Smoky Mountains of West Virginia. The plot is what is known as action packed, i.e. something happens once a chapter, and the setting should disillusion those who consider Epping the mightiest of forests.

*Edgar Box*

## **DEATH LIKES IT HOT**

"Witty sophistication . . . one of the most entertaining recruits to American Crime fiction."

—SUNDAY TIMES

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*Erle Stanley Gardner*

## **THE CASE OF THE CAUTIOUS COQUETTE**

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*Kevin Fitzgerald*

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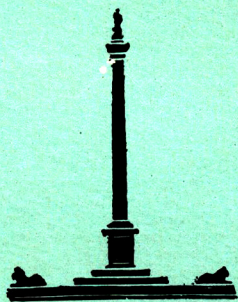
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