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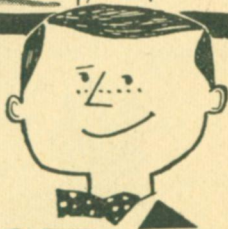
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# THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

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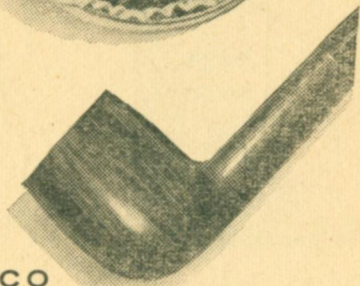
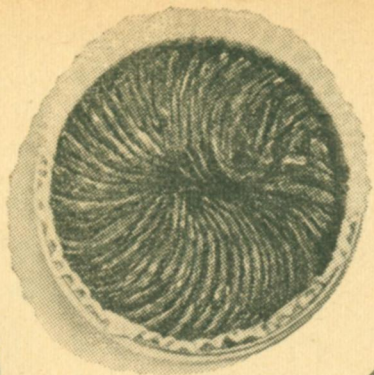
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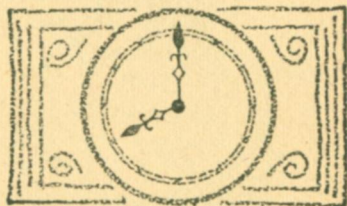


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## THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

Mystery is defined, tersely, as "hidden or inexplicable matter". To this we add our own, wider, definition of "mystery" when we choose the stories for this magazine. We recount mysteries of the past: hidden matter, the explanation of which has now been revealed; we look into the future, prophesying, perhaps, the shape of mysteries to come; and we leave with you the accounts of those inexplicable matters outside Time for which a solution may never be found.

Stories of crime and detection, whether true-life or fictitious, naturally take a prominent place in the magazine, for here we have accounts of the activities of people whose intent is to mystify, while their tangled skeins of deceit are teased out by those who, like our readers, enjoy pitting their brains against apparently insoluble problems.

Perhaps at one remove from real life we can place the science mystery, which speculates on what might happen as a result of the latest advances in human knowledge. In an age when people discuss a journey to the moon with fewer doubts than when they consider the journey to work, it is surely not surprising that Science Fiction has become a minor industry.

Beyond the bounds of science lies the vast uncharted land which is the province of the poet, the visionary—and, of course, those who investigate the paranormal: we prefer the old-fashioned term, "supernatural", for not only does it suggest such comparatively common experiences as telepathy, but breathes an air of apparitions, spectres and those delicious fears which can safely be indulged in the fireside armchair.

Judging by the kind letters we receive from you, you seem to have the same ideas about mysteries as we do. We like to receive such letters; we also welcome stories, real or imaginary, about *your* mysteries. They should be between 1,500 and 4,000 words, and we will print and pay for any that are suitable.

EDITOR.



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(P2032A)



# MIRROR BOY

L. P. DAVIES

*Illustrated by Jennifer Gordon*

**B**RADLEY MACKAY came back from the interview with a vague feeling of uncertainty tinged with guilt at the thought that others seemed to know more about his son than he did himself.

"Peter is different," the sallow-faced, fluttering Miss Primrose had said brightly with obvious pride in her pupil. "Mark my words, one day he will be a genius."

"The boy's healthy enough," the school doctor had said. "Despite the . . . er . . . unusual physical characteristics."

The headmistress had said that it was too early for an opinion to be passed. Her tone conveyed a mild censure on Miss Primrose's enthusiasm. "Peter," she told them, "is certainly bright for a six-year-old, but we must try to maintain a sense of proportion."

Bradley came from the garage after putting the car away and was attracted by a flicker of blue from behind the bushes. He went soft-footed to peer over the bushes to where his blue-jerseyed small son was crouching on the lawn engrossed in a construction of wire and pieces of twig.

Coming away from the headmistress's study, Miss Primrose had been most anxious that he should understand why Peter was "different".

"A teacher has more opportunity of noticing these things," she explained. "Why, right from the start, a year ago . . ."

It seemed that on Peter's first day she had sat him at a tiny desk with a box of gummed coloured paper shapes and a clean sheet of brown paper. The picture he had assembled had been such that she had expressed the opinion to the headmistress that "one day little Peter Mackay will be an artist".

The headmistress had been interested even to the extent of coming to the classroom a week later to inspect Peter's effort.

"Interesting," she had allowed, "but we must be careful not to give the child the impression that he is something out of the ordinary. That would be very bad for him. . . ."

"And the thing he had made!" Miss Primrose told Bradley. "I'd never seen anything quite like it. Not a little man or a doggy like those my other pupils make. Bless me, no! Peter had made himself a little house. Or that's what he said it was. But the intricacy . . ."

"But the Head," Miss Primrose sighed. "She said that it wasn't natural, and that an unnatural child is a difficult child. She said that Peter must conform or else there'd be trouble. That was why, when we had your note, she sent for the school doctor."

Leaving his son to his play, Bradley went down the side of the house and took out his pipe as he sat on the garden seat. The note had been Dr. Bell's idea. He was the family doctor; he knew all about Peter's displaced heart and the rest of it. He said that Peter was a "mirror-child", that he was back-to-front, as it were. Bradley had never understood about that. He knew that Peter was left-handed of course, but there was nothing strange in that. But Bell had said that everything else was the same, the heart on the wrong side, liver, kidneys, everything. . . .

"All in excellent working order," he had said heartily. "But we mustn't take chances for all that. I think we must avoid exertion until he is older. I think that a note to the school pointing this out would be advisable."

So the note had been written and posted. A few days later came the letter from the headmistress requesting that if Mr. Mackay could spare the time she would like to discuss the matter with him in the presence of Dr. Blundell, the school doctor.

Reading the letter, Bradley sighed. Louise, his sister, who had kept house for him ever since Mary's death asked, "Something wrong, Brad?"

"It's Peter," he told her. "This is from the school. They want to see me?"

"He's not been naughty, surely?" she asked, prepared to become indignant. "He's such a quiet little chap."

"No. Nothing like that. It's about his heart."

"Oh," she sniffed. "That——" And

went about the business of getting breakfast ready.

\* \* \*

"The Head's very strong on conformity," Miss Primrose explained, having met Bradley at the school entrance. "She doesn't like the idea of Peter being excused physical training."

Dr. Blundell was thick-set and grey, and apologetic with a thinly-disguised interest.

"The moment I laid my stethoscope against his chest I knew there was something different," he rumbled. "I gave Dr. Bell a ring and he said there was quite a history to the case. He's going to let me have all the details, but because I shall have your son in my care for some years to come he suggested that we got together and discussed the case."

"He tells me that he is a mirror-child," he said, rubbing his hands together. "One has read about such cases, of course, but one hardly expects to come across anything like it. I believe the whole system is completely reversed. Interesting. There are also unusual circumstances connected with his birth, I believe?"

Bradley sat back in his chair, looking through the narrow-paned window into the deserted, cheerless playground. He was aware of the headmistress's bespectacled eyes fixed intently on his face, of Miss Primrose sitting primly on the very edge of her chair, of the doctor leaning forward with interest large on his solid face.

"It was an accident," he told them.



"A rail crash, Rensdale in Cumberland, six years ago."

The doctor frowned in concentration, and shook his head. Surprisingly, Miss Primrose recalled it. "The Inexplicable Accident," she dragged from her memory.

"That's what the papers called it," Bradley said. "You see, apart from other things, they never found the cause. They assumed that the engine left the rails. Three people killed, sixteen injured, five missing."

"Missing?" the doctor breathed. "Now that is unusual."

"Mary was one of them," Bradley said heavily.

A piece of burning coal clattered into the hearth and Miss Primrose busied herself with tongs and shovel.

"My wife," Bradley said. "We had been married for a little over a year. In those days I was a representative covering the Cumberland area. We had taken a house in a small, isolated village. Inconvenient in many respects, but it was central for my work. There was a doctor, and when we knew that Peter was on the way he kept in touch. Then he was rushed away with appendicitis, leaving us to fend for ourselves. Mary had a fortnight to go and we both panicked. We didn't know when the doctor would be back so decided we'd better get to the nearest town. We took the train."

The doctor interrupted. "You are saying that at the time of the crash Peter hadn't been born?"

"That was how it was. I made her as comfortable as possible in a first-class compartment towards the front of the train. There was a buffet-car a

little way back and Mary said that she would like a drink. She was in some pain. She said that she thought——"

"She thought it had started?"

"That's what she said. I didn't know quite what to do. I told her not to worry—the stupid things we say at times like these—and went to the buffet to see what they had. I took her a cup of coffee, then went to find the guard, to see if by any chance there was a doctor on the train or maybe to get the train stopped at the next place. We were talking in his van when the crash came. I can remember the next few seconds vividly. I had been looking over his shoulder through the window to where the grey chimneys of the Rensdale Atomic Plant thrust up into the sky. Then I was flung across the van to fetch up with my head striking a packing-case. I cried 'Mary!' and then blacked out. It must only have been for a few seconds, for I can remember coming round again and jumping down to the track to run to the front of the train. There was screaming and a horrible sound of escaping steam. The engine was lying on its side. The front three coaches were telescoped together. I was tearing at the wreckage when I fainted again. The next thing I knew was waking up in hospital.

"The rest I found out as the days went by. They told me that Mary and four others were missing. They seemed reluctant to go into details. Possibly because there was no explanation for many of the things that had happened. Like Peter being found



in the wreckage when the crane was used to clear the line; like the fact that half of the first coach seemed to have disappeared completely; like my son being 'inside out' as one of the doctors tried to explain.

"They said that he must have been born just before the crash. Beyond telling me that it was a miracle, there was nothing else they had to say."

"Interesting," Dr. Blundell said into the silence. Then, seeming to object to his choice of word, "A sad affair, Mr. Mackay. But what is past is past. So that's how little Peter came into the world."

"A rough start in life," the headmistress said in a matter-of-fact voice.

Miss Primrose was agog with excitement. "Mark my words, Mr. Mackay, your son is different. I mean apart from his heart and things. He'll turn out to be a genius. Have you seen the things he makes?" She turned to her superior for verification. "Don't you think so?"

"He's a very ordinary little boy," the headmistress reproved. "It's far too soon for anyone to express an opinion."

\* \* \*

With the word "different" nagging at the back of his mind, Bradley watched Peter's small fingers moulding the wire and twigs into shape. A toy wooden car lay neglected nearby. There was a sense of reason about the construction that had taken shape. "And what's that you're making, Peter?"

The boy looked up, startled, the structure collapsing with the jerk of

his hands. A swift flicker of annoyance was replaced by a smile.

"I don't know, Daddy. I think it's a house."

Taking off his coat in the hall, Bradley said to Louise, "It looks as if Peter will become an architect some day. He seems to have quite a gift for drawing and construction."

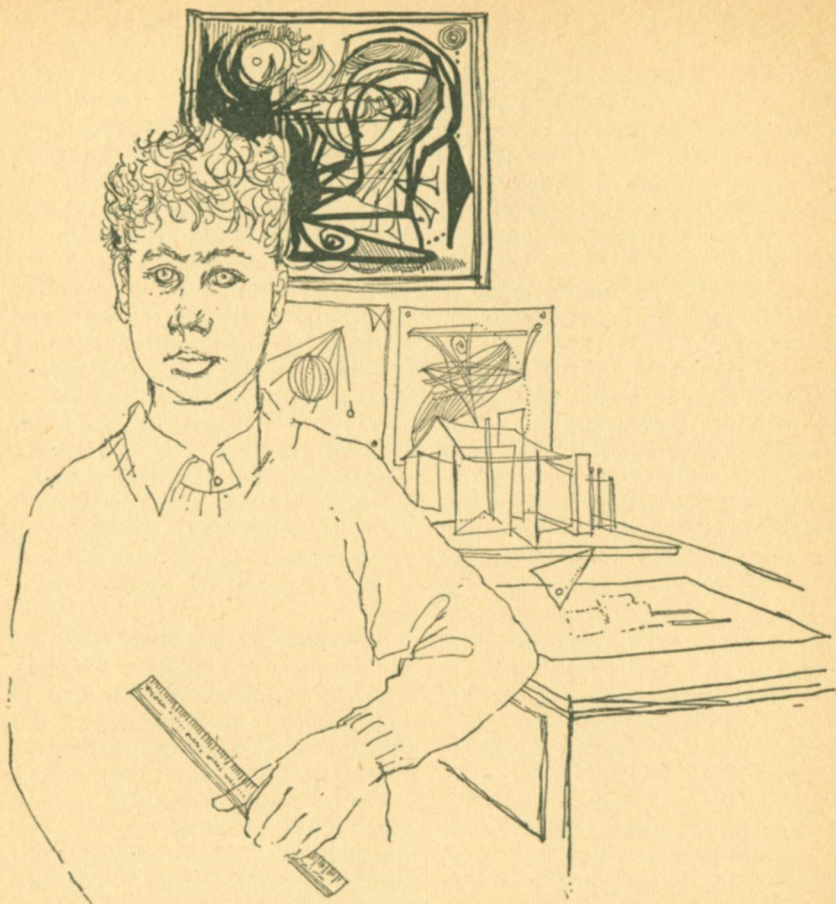
His sister, small and buxom and very pink-cheeked, with a tall gathering of brown hair that always seemed on the point of collapse, smiled placidly. "Our little boy is very clever," she said with certainty. "Hadn't you noticed?"

Feeling guilty at his past omissions, Bradley went up to the bathroom, resolving privately that from now on he would devote more time and attention to his son. The past was over and done with; what had happened couldn't be changed. Once he had blamed Peter for his mother's death—for surely she was dead—telling himself unreasonably that if it hadn't been for his coming into the world then they would never have been on the train at all.

With the new interest in Peter, Mackay found himself agreeing with Miss Primrose. Peter *was* different, both physically and mentally.

As the boy grew up, passing the milestones of his first long trousers and the entry into senior school, incidents cropped up from time to time that accentuated what Miss Primrose still called his "difference".

When he was seven he first discovered for himself about his displaced heart, coming to his father with small peaked face filled with



concern, inviting him to put his ear to his chest and listen for himself. Bradley tried to soothe his fears, telling him that it was nothing to worry about. But the boy refused to have his fears allayed, asking unanswerable questions. And from that day he seemed to set a barrier between himself and the world.

He was small for his age, with the tight mop of golden curls inherited from his mother. His face was colourless and thin, seeming to be too small for the huge, grey eyes.

In the senior school he had his first drawing lesson. His first real lesson in art with a teacher who had set his class to work on the complexity of



perspective, using spheres, cubes and cylinders as demonstration. Peter came home puzzled and slightly indignant; it appeared that he had had a difference of opinion with the teacher.

"Up, across and along," he told his father, showing how a cube was to be drawn. "But not 'in'. Why is that, Dad?"

Out of his depth, Bradley tried to explain. "There are only three dimensions to a cube."

"No," Peter said. "Four." And refused to say any more, going up to his room at the top of the house where he spent much of his spare time.

The next day Bradley took his son to see an optician. He was afraid that there might have been something wrong with Peter's eyes, but the optician said that they were in excellent shape. The pupils were inclined to be rather dilated, and the iris was an unusually pale colour. But that was neither here nor there.

The next day Bradley called on Dr. Bell.

"Nothing to worry about," the doctor said cheerfully. "Peter's health is as good as it could be. Old Blundell's keeping a weather eye on him and we often have a chat together."

"Your son," he said as they parted, Bradley not having been given the chance of broaching the subject of Peter's unusual way of looking at a cube, "is a budding genius. Don't stifle his ambitions whatever you do."

A year later, Peter was introduced to geometry. He brought his copy of Euclid home, studying it carefully

and only making one comment—"It's all wrong, Dad. . . ."

The barrier had grown and hardened. Bradley found it increasingly difficult to talk to him on equal terms. At times he was almost his son's mental inferior. There was an air of searching that hung round the boy like a tangible cloak.

Sometimes, with an idea of trying to break through the reserve, he would try to draw Peter out about the paintings and drawing that decorated the bedroom walls. Formless creations of swirls and patches of colour that seemed to change shape with the blinking of an eye. Incomprehensible even when they were explained. . . . "This is a tree, Dad. Can't you see? These are the roots and here the trunk. It is an old tree, so here is it's life, going right back . . . See?"

But Bradley could never see; even though he tried hard to understand. The barrier thickened. Peter took to spending more time than ever in his room, even to the extent of locking himself in.

On his sixteenth birthday, on the threshold of the university, he asked about his mother. Bradley got the impression that the questions had been building up for some time. Tall now, and slender with narrow shoulders and hair that had changed to a pale brown, Peter asked his questions, and Bradley lived for a while in the past while he told the full story.

He felt that he was talking to an understanding adult and not a teenage boy. But then Peter had never really been a child, and with the coming of



the barrier at times he was almost a stranger.

They had already decided his future, all three of them, Peter, Louise and himself. And the school had approved the choice. He was to become an architect; in a few weeks' time he would go to the university.

"So long as he can bring himself to concentrate," the headmaster had told Bradley wryly. "Your son is inclined to be rather"—he had searched for a word—"unorthodox. His maths teacher tells me that he is exceptionally clever in his manipulation of figures, but, on the other hand, is inclined to disagree with the . . . er . . . approved formulæ. There is his approach to Euclid; unconventional to say the least. And Calculus is child's play to him. . . ."

When he had finished telling the story about the train crash, Peter said: "Rensdale? Isn't that the Atomic Research Station?"

"Yes," Bradley agreed, remembering with a pang how the tall chimneys against the leaden sky had been his last picture before the accident.

To questions about the cause of the accident and the subsequent disappearance of five people and part of a coach he could give no answers. Peter seemed strangely excited, his face becoming animated, his eyes lighting.

"I was going on a walking holiday for a week or so," he said. "I think it would be a good idea if I went up to Rensdale."

That evening Bradley was persuaded to dig out all his old maps of the Cumberland area and to point out

the exact position of the crash. While privately thinking the proposed trip bordered on the morbid he was still willing to co-operate with his son in the faint hope that such co-operation would tend to bring them closer together.

Later, when Peter had gone early to bed, saying that he would make a start at first light, he got to wondering just what purpose there could be in visiting the scene of the tragedy. Somehow he could hardly believe that sentiment was involved; Peter wasn't made that way. His was a purely and coldly scientific mind. He wondered if there could be any connection between the proposed trip and the thing that the boy seemed to have been searching for. He lay awake staring at the ceiling and wondering just how the mind in his left-handed, inside-out son worked.

A week later, Peter returned with an air of achievement. He had located the scene of the accident, although the railway no longer ran that way, it had been diverted into a double track the other side of the Atomic Establishment. He had been admitted to the office of one of the scientists working on the Station, had demonstrated his mathematical skill and been assured a post there once he had completed his university training.

"An atomic scientist?" Bradley wondered with some dismay at having his prearranged plans cut away from under his feet. "But I thought it was all decided?"

"An architect?" Peter cast the idea aside as a frivolity. "I can build a house without having to be taught the

way of it." He was supremely confident. "Besides, that was just a means to an end."

"An atomic worker," Bradley mused. "Is there likely to be danger? I mean, one reads about radiation and things. . . ."

Peter was honest about that. "There is always the chance, but it's most unlikely. There are all sorts of precautions. There was one escape once, but that was right at the beginning, before they had got into their swing. Sixteen years ago . . ." He looked up from unpacking his haversack as if anxious to assess his father's reaction. "Just at the time of the accident. . . ."

"Quite a coincidence," Bradley said absently, adjusting himself to the new future.

"Yes," Peter said, smiling a little. "A coincidence."

He went to the university and for the next five years his father saw him only from time to time. There were the summer and Christmas vacations, but Peter spent most of the time at home in his room, which he now kept locked all the time. He had very little to say to Bradley, the barrier had grown, there was little they had left in common.

To Louise, now greying, Bradley said: "Peter is a stranger. He has drawn so far away from us, I can't believe that he's really my son."

"We must make allowances," she replied comfortably. "Peter is very clever."

When the time came for him to start work at the research station he left home filled with barely suppressed

excitement. He refused Bradley's offer to go to the station with him.

He wrote regularly to start with, hasty scrawls filled with the work upon which he was engaged, incomprehensible for the most part and unsatisfying to their recipients. Then came the news that he was going to have a house built. It appeared that the authorities had taken over part of the countryside surrounding the atomic plant and were going to enlarge the plant itself and house certain of their employees. Peter was going to make a home for himself in the shadow of the plant.

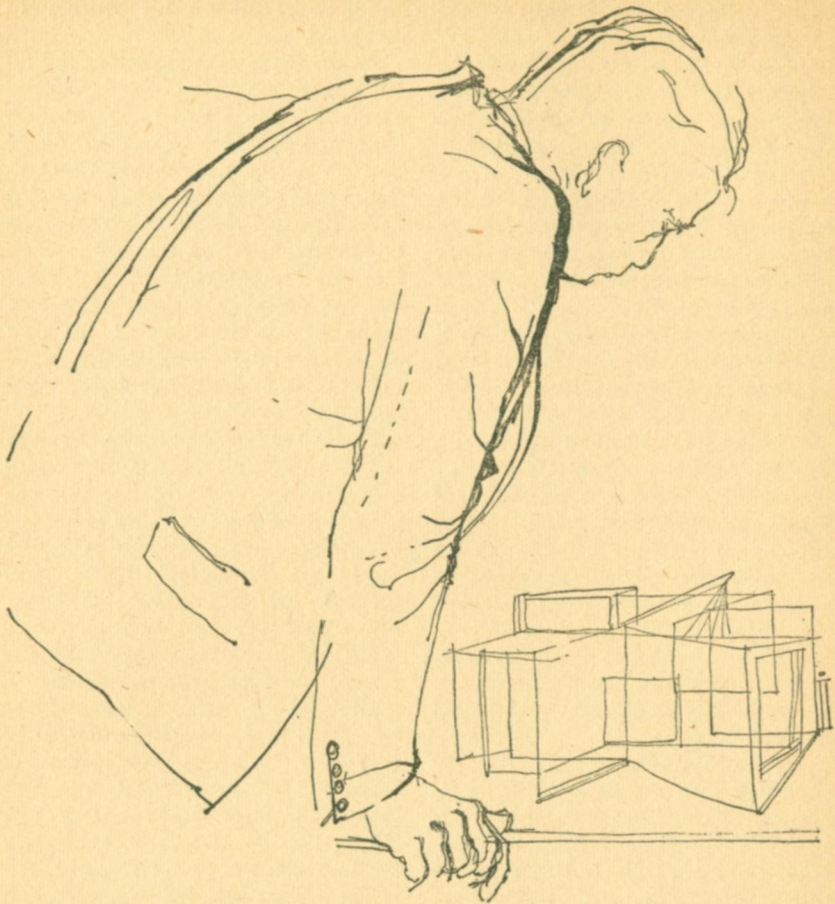
Bradley read the letter with calmness, ceasing to show surprise at any of his son's decisions. But for all that he was conscious of a dull fear that had settled inside him. He had the feeling that this latest move was another part of the picture.

Louise wept a little. Her boy wouldn't be coming back home any more. "He won't be using his room any more," she said tearfully. "I've left it locked all this time."

"We can clear it out then," he said almost brutally. "I've learned that it doesn't do to cling to the past."

Taking the key from his sister he went up to the room, collecting the pictures from the walls and stacking them face downwards on the floor. On a table by the window was the last model Peter had been working on before leaving home. It was roughly a cube about a foot square, made of a complexity of cardboard strips and pieces that defied recognition until he stooped to set his eyes on a level with it.





Then he saw that it was a house, but of a design that he'd never seen before. The doors were set at unusual angles and the rooms dovetailed into each other so that their shapes melted and changed each time he moved his head.

Shaking his head to clear his vision, Bradley moved closer to the front

aperture. And as he stared into the shape, one of the walls seemed to shiver and vanish, so that for a moment he seemed to be looking into emptiness.

Rubbing his eyes and annoyed with himself for his fancies, he straightened, bringing his fist down on the creation, smashing it beyond recog-

dition. In some way it had seemed part of the barrier that had come between himself and his son. It was, he found, a very lonely thing to be the father of a genius. Especially when there was always that indefinable fear nagging at his mind.

For a while he forgot about the cardboard house, only bringing it back to mind many months later when he came across a picture in the morning paper.

"The Dwelling of the Future", it was captioned. "Is this the kind of house our children's children will live in?"

With an intensification of his fear, Bradley read the supporting article: "Designed by Peter Mackay, brilliant young scientist, this house of the future is being constructed under his personal supervision on the new estate at Rensdale. It has aroused considerable local comment . . ."

And looking again at the illustration he suddenly remembered the model he had destroyed, for this was its exact duplicate.

Two things leapt to his mind: the wall that had melted into blackness and something that Peter had once said—"I can build a house without having to be taught. In any case, it's only a means to an end. . . ."

Quite suddenly Bradley knew that what his son was building wasn't a house at all. It was a gateway, a door to another dimension. And Peter was going to walk through it—they would never see him again.

Throwing a few things hastily into a suitcase and leaving a note for Louise who was away for the day,

Bradley set off on his journey to Rensdale.

At the gates to the research station he was, as he had guessed, refused admission. He asked to speak with his son, telling the uniformed guard that it was vitally important. Through the window of the small wooden cabin he could see the guard speaking on the phone. A few minutes later he received the information that Peter had left the plant a short while ago, going in the direction of the new estate. "Goin' to look at that there contraption that 'e calls a house," said the guard, smiling and pointing.

Following the directions, Bradley found himself skirting the boundary fence, finally reaching a part-made road that led to a scattering of houses. From the distance he could recognize the shape of Peter's house even through the scaffolding. He broke into a half-run.

It stood a little way apart from the others, seeming to sit astride a shallow, dried canal. It was only as he turned to follow the road that he realized that it was the old track along which the railway had run. And with that realization came another certainty; that Peter had built his gate on the exact site of the accident.

The front door was unpainted and without a handle; he pushed it open, coming into a hall with doors set at angles. The one directly facing stood open. Peter was in the room beyond, facing the far wall, standing close to it, hands outstretched, palms flat against the rough surface.

Bradley said sharply, "Peter!—No!"



His son's face was almost unrecognizable; the flesh seemed transparent, the eyes glowing.

"Father," he said. "How did you find out?"

"Don't go," Bradley implored. "Stay with us, Peter."

The other seemed to look right through him. "I don't belong here"—his voice was detached and dreamy—"I belong to the place behind this wall. I have to go . . . I thought at first that the power would be needed each time to open the door; just like it was that first time. But once the way has been opened it always stays ajar, only waiting for the key. And this is it. It is ready and waiting."

Bradley took a step forward, his face filled with anguish.

Peter said, "Stay where you are. If you come any closer you, too, may—"

And then it happened; just as it had in the model. The wall seemed to shift on its foundation blurring and misting into nothing. There was blackness for a brief moment and then came the light. Beyond the door was a new world, green fields stretching into purple hills. And in the front a railway coach lying on its side, half a railway coach, rusted and broken, with the tall grass growing through its shattered timbers. Peter smiled once over his shoulder and stepped over the threshold. Bradley made to follow, fighting back a sudden wave of nausea. The whole house seemed to rock like a ship at sea.

Standing by the wrecked coach, Peter called, "Go back, Father!"

Plaster cracked on the ceiling and

rained down; a joint detached itself and struck Bradley across the shoulders as it fell to the ground. He swayed forward beneath the impact, hands outflung, seeking a grip. Involuntarily he took a step forward and for a moment was across the threshold. A giant hand seemed to grip him, lifting and turning before setting him down. Behind, he could hear the sound of breaking timbers as the house, weakened by the vanished wall, collapsed and crumbled.

He tried to move forward but a piece of masonry was across his feet. Stooping, he tried to move it, taking a step backwards. Then suddenly the light had gone, the wall was back and he was alone in the room with the sunlight striking in through gaping holes in the ceiling. Bradley turned and left the place, picking his way across fallen beams and scattered tiles. As he passed through the front door coming out into the road, the walls behind swayed and broke inwards in a cloud of dust and flying fragments.

\* \* \*

There was the torture of explanations. No, he didn't know what had happened to his son. Yes, he had seen him for a few moments, but he didn't know where he had gone. . . .

In the train, on the way back to London, he sat for a while looking out at the flying countryside. He tried to recall the shape of the house; the doors had been set at such an angle, the walls had been built thus . . . quite suddenly the whole structure seemed to make sense. He took

his wallet from his pocket and on the back of an envelope started to sketch in the first tentative lines. He wasn't surprised to see that he was using his left hand; when he set his palm to his breast and felt how his heart beat from the reverse side he accepted it as natural.

A drawing on the flat was no use for such work; this was something that had to be figured out in four

dimensions. He ripped his envelope into strips, doubling them for rigidity.

The train roared along the line back to London. On the seat of a first-class compartment a middle-aged businessman set about the work of constructing a model of a house, a door—a door that would lead to Peter and to Mary. Bradley Mackay was sure in his own mind now just what the fourth dimension was.



Even such is time, which takes in trust  
Our youth, our joys, and all we have,  
And pays us but with age and dust,  
Who in the dark and silent grave,  
When we have wandered all our ways,  
Shuts up the story of our days.

SIR WALTER RALEIGH.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,  
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.

EDGAR ALLAN POE.

A wanderer is man from his birth.  
He was born in a ship  
On the breast of the River of Time.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.



# THE STARS ARE TOMORROW

BY R. M. EGGLESTON

*Illustrated by B. Herdson*

**I**T HAPPENED MANY years ago, señor. Soon after Dolores and I came to investigate the secrets of this place in the desert.

"What do you see here, señor? Sand, burning winds and bare, red hills. A few boulders and that dirty stream trickling through the sand.

"So! But it was not always thus. Once, I think, there was a great civilization here. Oh, yes. Sometimes the winds blow away the sand and we find relics of it. Pieces of metal, señor, made of light-weight steel. Remains of a complicated water system leading from the stream into the desert. Only a month ago we found what seems to be part of an engine. All made of that light-weight steel, señor, and scarcely rusted.

"Nor is that all. Across the sand-hills there, behind that huge rocky outcrop, there is something to make you scratch your head. A twenty-foot-high platform of tall stone slabs. Nature? No, señor. The slabs are shaped and the platform obviously built to plan.

"I have been an archæologist more than twenty years, señor, and have seen only one other like it: the Baalbeck platform in Lebanon. That is also in a strange, remote place.

"Who did it, señor, and why? They are the things we came to find out,

Dolores and Tony and I. Tony is our boy. He was six when we came and bounding with energy.

"This desert is no place for a boy of six? I agree, señor. Very bitterly. But he had spent almost all his early life with his grandparents while we roamed the world with expeditions. This time we wanted him with us. Dead this place may be to you, señor, but has any place ever been dead to a six-year-old boy?

"When he had finished lessons with his mother in the morning, he went off exploring. In a week I think he knew more about these hills than we did. And he was useful. During his wanderings he often found relics for us to examine.

"At night he read. We don't have many books, señor, so of course he had to open mine. That is probably where the end began. I am a science-fiction fan, señor. Yes, laugh, but it is relaxing. Particularly the type I choose.

"The good ones, Bradbury and writers like him, are too good: too often they come close to my own day-to-day work so I—well I read what you, señor, would call trashy space thrillers. Full of beetle men with three eyes and ray guns. For a six-year-old this is better than cow-boys.

"So with all this, and with this vast, desolate waste around him, is it any

wonder that Tony's games were all about a great space war? It was a war of the universe, with planets being destroyed, supermen born on others from radio-active parents, whole worlds made desolate and waste. You can understand.

"His favourite play place was that tall platform of stone I told you about. So it is three, perhaps four miles away—what is that to a boy who is a wounded space fighter struggling back to his ship?

"It was Tony's fortress under the sea, the observation platform of his space ship, his mountain eyrie where he hid from the Martians.

"Señor, one Sunday his lunch talk was full of a mysterious, flat flying saucer which had slid in quietly during the night after some battle for the moon. Immediately after lunch he rushed back across the bare hills. He was Buck Rogers with the fate of the world depending on his destroying the flat space ship.

"Sunday night he was still the hero, but on Monday evening the story had changed. He had been captured. And to fit in with this story change he was no longer Buck Rogers but a little earth boy. The flying saucer was a scout from a mother ship hovering two hundred miles in space.

"Tony had been lying in the shadow of an old wreck (yes, señor, it was really an overhanging rock) when he heard a noise behind him. It was one of the crew from the space ship. Tony was taken down to the machine and invited, by some form of thought transference, to look it over. The space men had claimed the earth as

their territory thousands of years ago, he was told. This trip was only an inspection.

"You smile, señor. Yes, it is a small boy's tale. But it taught us something, Dolores and me. Too late, unfortunately.

"This space crew apparently took a liking to our Tony and offered to take him back with them. They promised him other children to play with, rivers to swim in, fish to catch, ice-cream to eat, sweets to suck. I see you understand, señor. That is what we learned, too late. Our little boy was lonely.

"It came to us only when he asked if all the things he remembered from the days with his grandparents were still available in the places where people lived. In fact, was there still a world where there were other little boys, milk-cart horses and green grass.

"It is bitter for Dolores and me, señor, to know now that we should have guessed it before.

"His questions did not come all together. Perhaps that is why we did not understand at first. They were scattered among the ever-growing story of the spacemen.

"Señor, when you are being told of men 'sucking' your brain at night to see what your knowledge and memories are, and of visits to this planet by spacemen for more than ten thousand years, you pay little attention. And so you miss other things.

"Particularly when they are broached in a sideways, hidden fashion. Such as saying that the 'skipper' had decided Dolores and I



were too old to take away, and anyway we were quite happy where we were, but he wanted Tony because he was young and his brain could be trained, and in any case he liked horses and other little boys. You see why we paid no attention?

"It was about three days after he had first started talking about the old days when he said the spacemen were leaving soon. Could he go with them to see some of his old friends, and perhaps have a swim.

"He was so earnest about it. They promised to bring him back, he said. It was just for a little while. He would definitely come back.

"By this time we had realized what we had done and had decided to take him back to his grandparents at the end of the year. So equally gravely we said yes, he could go. So long as he promised to come back and not get lost. So off he went.

"We worked hard that day, señor, and it was perhaps nine in the evening—it was already half-dark, I know—when there came a sudden roar from the direction of that platform of rock.

"It was so loud it startled us from our work. You know how it is, señor. One moment you are deeply engrossed, but once you are startled you notice the ordinary things. We noticed that it was late. Very late. And Tony had not come asking for his tea.

"Señor, we were frightened. He had never been so late. Suddenly, we realized how easy it would be for him to lose his way in all that desolate waste of sand. It was a fear we had



when he first came, and then forgotten in the way that men do.

"No one said out loud that he could have been trapped under those falling rocks. Quickly we found torches and lanterns and ran across to that platform of stone, shouting his name as we ran. . . . One whole side had collapsed and the ground was littered with a tumble of shattered stone. With fear and panic we ran to see if we could find his body."

"Tony was not there, so we climbed to the top of the platform. Dolores was first, and as she reached the top she suddenly began to scream.

"I raced up. She was pointing to

where the stone was scorched black and to some strange metal waste I had never seen before.

"Dolores burst into hysterical sobbing. 'He was telling the truth, oh God, the truth. Why didn't we believe him?'

"Yes, señor, the platform had been used as a launching pad. There had been a space-craft.

"And so now we stay here—forever. Time passes slowly. The weeks and months go by and slowly become years. We keep watching the skies and pin our hopes on one thing . . .

"They promised to bring him back."



Alas, regardless of their doom,  
The little victims play!  
No sense have they of ills to come,  
Nor care beyond today.

THOMAS GRAY.

I sit beside my lonely fire,  
And pray for wisdom yet—  
For calmness to remember  
Or courage to forget.

CHARLES HAMILTON AIDE.



# A STITCH OF EVIDENCE

A. E. MURCH

*Illustrated by Vera Jarman*



HERE ARE IN Britain, even today, remote country districts where the inhabitants seem a race apart, with their own dialect and ways of living, resenting strangers as intruders. Nowhere do these characteristics persist more strongly than in the Forest of Dean, the hilly, densely-wooded region between the right bank of the Severn, just below Gloucester, and the lower stretches of the Wye. In 1688, an Act of Parliament described the foresters as "a sort of robusitic, wild people, much in need of government and discipline". True, they are fiercely jealous of their ancient rights, but they have always observed their own code of laws and crimes of violence are so rare in the Forest that men still argue over a brutal murder that took place there more than two hundred years ago.

In 1732, the village of Mitcheldean had one straggling street with an inn and a few shops. The largest belonged to Thomas Tuberville, the carpenter; a bluff, hard-working man, well liked by customers who came from miles around to buy stools, tables, pit props, treadles for their looms, water-butts or wheelbarrows. He was a childless widower of forty, who lived alone and was reputed to have "a

tidy bit put by." Usually his shop was open early, but on Saturday, April 29th, 1732, his customers grew tired of waiting for him to take down his shutters and serve them. By the afternoon, a puzzled group had gathered in the street outside his door.

"Where can 'a be? 'A was 'ere all right yesterday. Has 'a bin took bad, d'ye think?"

"If 'a were, 'a'd call down to us for sure. His bedroom's over the shop and the window's open a crack."

"Mebbe 'a's out on a job. Has anyone seen him today?"

"I mun find 'un," insisted a free miner from Cinderford way. "My butty's drivin' a yeadin' and we need more props."

"Here's others wanting him. Looks like the Lydbrook gang that allus goes out after deer on a Sunday."

Down the street came a band of sturdy youths, followed by a little crowd of villagers. Rough hands battered on the shutters, but no answering sound came from the workshop.

"Tom don't seem to be there, lads."

"But our gear is. He minds it for us in the week, and we'll need it tomorrow. Flitted, has he? Then we mun help ourselves. It's just inside. Hup! Once agen! Hup!"

The door yielded to their heaving shoulders, but those who first stumbled forward drew hastily back with a hissing intake of breath. Others

peered into the dark shop, and a whisper ran like fire through the crowd. Thomas Tuberville's headless body lay on the blood-soaked shavings covering the floor; his head, chopped into fragments of flesh and bone, littered his work-bench, and his own axe stood propped against it, the bright blade streaked with red.

When the sheriff's officer, hastily summoned, had sealed the workshop and ridden off to notify the coroner, the people of Mitcheldean put their heads together, determined to discover the murderer for themselves. Everyone known to have been at the shop on Friday was closely questioned. The last to see the carpenter alive was a local sheep-farmer, who had called at dusk to pay for a hay-rack and had stood chatting while Thomas put up his shutters. Then he walked on, but hearing voices a moment later had glanced back. By that time it was dark, but the door of the inn beyond Tuberville's shop was suddenly flung open and outlined against the light he saw the carpenter in his doorway talking angrily to a man the farmer did not know—"a working chap wi' a little bundle on's shoulder."

On Sunday morning, a cowman's wife from a cottage on the Stenders brought down her ten-year-old son, who had information to give. On Friday he had been playing with his friends till it got too dark to see and his friends had gone home. "Then I 'eard someone runnin' up the path from the village so I hid behind a bush. It was the man we boys make fun of when we see 'im 'ereabouts, a

hunchback. He gets mad at us and swears real sharpish, so I was feared to let 'im see me. He come pantin' up the steep, his face white as a maggot and his mouth a-workin', but not sayin' nothin'. 'E was carryin' 'is 'at grabbed to's side wi' both 'ands as if 'twere main 'eavy."

"That sounds like Ely Hatton, the weaver from Ruardean. His father keeps the pub there, such as it is. They're a shifty lot, all that family." Farmer Morgan thought the man he saw talking to Tom had a bundle on his back, but "it could 'a bin Ely with his hump." The furious crowd marched out to Ruardean, but the officers of the law, mounted on ponies, got there first. Ely Hatton, fiercely resisting, was arrested on suspicion and kept in custody till the inquest, two days later.

In view of the special circumstances, the coroner and his jury were supported by a deputy sent by the Earl of Berkeley, the official Warden of the Forest and Constable of the Castle of St. Briavel, but the prisoner faced them all with a sneer. "Yes, he had gone over to Mitcheldean that evening to get a new shaft for his loom. That last one had been no good. Tuberville's shop was shut when he got there. He knocked several times but no one answered so he had gone home. He knew nothing of the murder, nor of the dead man's missing gold. Had any of it been found on him or at his house? What had they against him? Nothing but a silly tale from a fool of a boy!"

From the back of the courtroom a woman elbowed her way forward





through the crowd and spoke to the coroner: "Please, sir, can I have a look-see at the shirt this chap's got on?" Instantly, Hatton clutched his coat together at the neck, but the officers pulled his hands away and the woman took his shirtband between her needle-roughened fingers. "Now I can tell ye summat, sir." She was duly sworn, and testified as follows: "I am Sarah Virgo, and I live at Plump Hill, near Mitcheldean. Since my husband was killed by a fall in the pit I have earned a living by needlework. When Mrs. Tuberville died I offered to make and mend for Thomas, as I've now done these five years. On Friday last I took him a new shirt and a pair of stockings. This is the shirt. I know the feel of the flannel and the look of my work. There'll be pieces of the same stuff in my cottage. Yes, I make shirts for other gentlemen, too. How do I know this is the one I made for Thomas? Well, I do know, but you may not feel so sure. Perhaps I can sense ye into it another way. Is this chap wearing stockings? Wait. Before I see them let me tell you this. There's a special stitch my mother taught me in the turn of the heel in every stocking I knit. It's my own mark. Here it is in this new one I'm still knitting, and the wool's the same as I used for Tom's. I got it from the packman only two weeks ago. Now let me see the stockings that man's got. Sir! Here it is! Here's the stitch! He *couldna* be wearing this unless he took it from Tom's shop last Friday! Oh, ye villain! A spracht chap like Tom! And to wear his clothes after!"

Ely Hatton was conveyed to the

grim prison of St. Briavel's Castle to await trial at the next Gloucester Assizes. The case had aroused intense public interest, and the *Gloucester Journal*, which gave an account of the inquest in its issue of May 6th, 1732, later carried a detailed report of the trial. Strangely enough, no trace had been found of the missing money, several hundred golden guineas according to Thomas Tuberville's own account book, which was discovered in his bedroom after the murder. The inn at Ruardean was searched without result; the small patch of garden behind it was dug up; neither Ely nor his father Thomas Hatton had left the village that Saturday or Sunday. Had Ely hidden it in the forest on his way home from Mitcheldean, under the turf or in a hollow tree? For three months, gangs of foresters searched those few miles of track, and examined thousands of the trees that bordered it, with no success.

At his trial, the prisoner was confident that he could not be convicted. When asked if he had anything to say before sentence was pronounced, he created a violent disturbance in court, shouting that it was all a plot against him\* by Tuberville's friends. All Mitcheldean would rot if he had his way. He was condemned to be hanged on Meane Hill, near Mitcheldean, his body to swing in chains from the gibbet and be refused burial unless, before execution, he made full confession.

On September 4th, at 7 o'clock on a bright autumn morning, he was brought up Meane Hill, still accom-



panied by the minister who had journeyed with him from Gloucester, pleading with him to confess and purge his soul of guilt. Ely remained unmoved. He'd done a bit of poaching, of course; spent his Sundays in the "vert" after a deer; had his fun like other chaps at the Whitsuntide romancings; but he had not killed Thomas Tuberville.

As he neared the crest of the hill where the gibbet stood, he faltered for the first time. Beyond lay a broader hill sloped like a grandstand, Pingry Tump, and it was black with people. From every corner of the Forest they had walked through the night, ten thousand of them, and were now waiting in silence to watch him die. He was forced up the ladder to the little platform where the executioner tied his hands behind his back, and the crowd grew light with uncovered heads. The noose was adjusted, tightened, and a moment later

Ely was swinging lifeless in mid-air.

For weeks his body hung there in chains, till no man dared to pass that way alone or after dark, but he managed to cheat his judges in the end. A strange and horrible rumour swept the district: "Ely swore that Mitcheldean should rot, and now the flies bred and fed by his decomposing flesh are tainting the meat at Mitcheldean market." At last, authority turned a blind eye while the local butchers, faced with ruin, went in a pallid, trembling band at dead of night to cut down the pestilential weaver and bury him by torchlight in a secret grave.

But his story still lives on the lips of the old foresters, and eyes as black and bright as chips of their own coal flash between jutting cheekbones and craggy brows as they talk of the murder at Mitcheldean and wonder what happened to Thomas Tuberville's gold.



# THE VALLEY

ROBERT BLAKE

*Illustrated by Derek Herdson*



UNTIL HOLDEN told us his story that spring evening I had thought that I knew everything about him that there was to know.

He had been my friend for nearly twenty years and in that space of time one comes to understand and appreciate a man's character.

And because, knowing him as I did, I felt sure that the very thought of telling a falsehood or even enlarging on the truth would be repugnant to him, I had to accept his story—unbelievable as it seemed—for the truth.

And having accepted it, my first thought, strangely enough, was not to question him further about that desolate, wind-swept valley, but to wonder why he had waited all these years before telling us about it. I found the reason a few months later when he died of a malignant inoperable cancer. And when he had come into the club that evening he had just received his death sentence from a specialist who had been out-spoken enough to forecast almost to the day just how long he had to live.

Andrew Holden was a writer; an artist in the use of words with a gift for an unusual turn of phrase. I can still remember how he described that valley. "A wilderness of evil where

the wind has blown since the beginning of time," he told Melville and me. "A place where space itself has been worn into a groove by the eternal wind."

He said that he wasn't the first person to enter the valley. There had been others before—a man and a woman—but why they had passed between the polished pillars he didn't know. But that had been only a legend, a story of something that had happened centuries before. They had gone into the valley and had never returned. The people who lived in the plains below the mountains would not go near the place. They said that there was nothing there except the polished black rocks and the wind that never died. They said that it was a valley of evil; one of them called it the Gateway to Hell.

"I was young," Holden told us sadly. "I thought they were ignorant, superstitious people; I didn't listen to their warnings."

He sat by the window with his hands clasped between his knees. A gentle, soft-skinned man with a fine sweep of raven-dark hair that winged above each ear; his profile, turned to us as he stared out of the window, was etched against the pale sky: a gracious line from sloping forehead through curved nose to pointed chin. His eyes, when he turned to look at us, were deep-set and brilliantly blue.



We had had a downpour of rain that morning which had been followed by a sudden wind that had ripped the clouds to shreds. It was our first idle polite comments about the weather that had been the stepping-stone leading into his story. There were only the three of us in the club lounge. Holden was in his favourite seat by the window, I had drawn my chair closer to the fire and Melville, grey-haired and plump-faced, sat opposite.

"It still gets chilly in the evenings," Melville said, offering an excuse for holding out his hands to the blaze. "I thought we were in for a rough time of it when that wind got up. This time of the year it never seems to know when to stop."

"The wind—" Holden echoed, and shook his head as at some memory. Then: "When I was much younger I had a leaning to archæology. I went to a place in the mountains where the wind had never ceased to blow since the beginning of time."

"Well now," Melville said with a half-smile. "That sounds as though you've been up in the Himalayas. And to think I've always regarded you as a scribbler and not an explorer . . ." He winked heavily at me, inviting my co-operation. As a retired stolid business-man he seemed to find a certain pleasure in poking mild fun at Holden's profession. There was never any malice in it; it was merely the gambit for a pleasant discussion on the rival merits of their respective professions. As an estate agent I usually found myself in a neutral position, having a little to do with both worlds.

"No," said Holden, refusing this time to rise to the proffered bait. "It wasn't in the Himalayas; it was in another part of the world altogether." He rubbed his forehead for a moment. "I forget what we used to call it, but it's in the Balkans, north of where Greece is now."

He looked up suddenly. "It was the change that was so horrible," he said inconsequently. "The faces, the houses, even the very countryside. One day it was sunshine and blue skies; graceful, pillared buildings inhabited by friendly people; red-roofed farmhouses and tall trees. And the next day, when I came down again, it had all changed out of recognition. A different world; evil, cold forbidding. You wouldn't believe . . ." He shuddered into a silence and something in his face kept both of us from breaking in.

"I would be in my early twenties," he said after a while. "I had started on my career as an archæologist and I was over-anxious, as perhaps most of us are in our youth, to gather recognition of a sort. I spent a year in the country we now call Mexico, and the following year I went to Greece."

"In the forefront of my mind was always the dream of making a new and significant discovery, then exploring it to its fullest extent, subsequently writing a treatise or even a volume that would make my name famous."

"After a few months spent in dabbling among hackneyed ruins, I moved northwards to the mountains, keeping both ears and eyes open."

They called this country one of the oldest parts of the world. There were few villages and they were scattered and hidden in the lush, green valleys. But they were picturesque and clean, and the people who lived in the white-walled, red-roofed houses were friendly and helpful. It was in a small fishing village on the estuary of a river that I first heard talk about the valley of the winds.

"Because the country was over-rich in folk-lore and legend I paid little attention at first to the stories of the lost valley. But gradually I felt a stirring of interest, building up in my mind a picture of a desolate, wind-swept ravine high in the mountains, where the rocks were polished and black.

"I moved inland again to a group of farms set in the middle of a plain with the mountains all round. The people there spent their days in herding sheep and goats. They were a friendly group with faces burned almost black by the sun and anxious to do all in their power to help me once they knew what my work was. They told me all the tales of the past, handed down through the ages, offering each one as if on a plate for my approval, watching my reactions in the beseeching way of a dog who is anxious to please its master.

"But I found little of use to me in any of their legends except those about the valley of the winds. And that only because one of the herdsmen told me how his father had once climbed the mountains farther than usual in search of some strayed sheep, coming upon the knife-edged ridge

and passing across it, driven by curiosity, had heard the howling of the gale and seen the tall, black-basalt pillars that guarded the entrance to the ravine.

"When I showed my interest they were pleased; when I asked if one of them would show me the way the smiles went from their faces. They said that the place was evil, that apart from that one brave soul—who unfortunately had died many years ago—no man within living memory had even been as far as the entrance to the valley. They knew the way, but it would not be a good thing to show it to me. It was death, they said, to enter the valley itself. Once, long years ago, back at the beginning of time, a man and a woman had passed between the pillars. They had never come out again.

"A legend? Perhaps. But that the valley existed I had no doubts. The description was too graphic to be cast aside. I decided privately that probably the area was barren of grass and so not suitable for browsing goats or sheep. And that for that reason only—in a country where a man's livelihood is bound up in his herds—they had come first to think of the valley as a place of no use, and then, as time had gone by, the stories had grown up and become a legend of evil which they all believed. And for the two who had entered the valley without returning; I thought there was probably another way out of the place.

"But I was intrigued by their vivid descriptions of the tall, polished basalt pinnacles at the entrance. I



suspected that they might not be of natural origin but made by the hands of men.

"So I first asked if any of them would show me the way, and when each of them refused, firmly but with open regret, I next offered money—of which I am ashamed, recalling now how they looked at me as if I had cast a slur on their goodwill. They refused my money as I should have known they would.

"They made it clear that they were only concerned for my safety. That because they firmly believed the place to be evil they would not expose me to the danger that lurked there.

"I sat, I remember, on a massive wooden chair by an equally massive table in one of the low, sturdy farm-houses. Perhaps a dozen or more of

the herdsmen were grouped in the white-walled timbered room, with oil-lamps smoking and flickering. For the most part they were dressed in goatskin and sheepskin jackets, coarse garments that gave artificial girth to their shoulders. Their dark faces were bearded; their deep eyes steady on my face while I argued with them.

"I tried to tell them how the legend must have grown; I told them how my work demanded that I make a new discovery. They shook their heads, the shadows mocking me from the walls. I told them how every part of the world has its own legends of vampires, ghosts and were-wolves. I tried to make them see that for the greater part these stories were only superstition, and that if men like myself allowed themselves to be dis-



couraged by such tales history would never be made.

"And when they still refused I fell silent, brooding on the way ignorance was blocking my path. Now, more than ever, I was determined to see the valley for myself, even if I had to try and find the way on my own.

"Perhaps the decision showed on my face; perhaps they thought that if I were shown the entrance to the valley and saw for myself how the wind howled and roared without ceasing, then I would be satisfied.

"The one who finally agreed to show me the way was a tall herdsman with a face of mahogany. His name was Parka. He spoke with the others in a low tone, glancing at me from time to time, before coming to stand by my side.

"'We must take food for four days,' he said gravely. 'We will need two donkeys, and we must take shelter with us. We will start at daybreak. . . .'

"I shook his hand and found it reluctant. His wife, a small apple-cheeked creature who had stayed silently in a dark corner, came into the light to take his arm in a protective grasp. Her face expressed concern for us both. But she made no attempt to make him change his mind.

"Before going, he said: 'I do this only for one reason. We all feel that if we refuse to help, then you will try to find the valley by yourself. And this is a wilder country than you imagine. You would lose yourself the moment you leave sight of the plains. You would starve to death and your

bones would lie heavy on our consciences for the rest of our lives.'

"'At daybreak,' I told him, and went to my bed with a pleasurable anticipation.

"With the first violet light of dawn we set off towards the base of the mountains. It was a glorious morning with the dew sparkling on bush and tree, and with the grass a rich carpet beneath our feet. The peaks were misty and inviting; the sun warm on our shoulders. It was a morning of promise, of beauty, of clear, sharp air.

"That last picture before we struck into the first cleft in the mountains is still alive in my mind. It has stayed with me all these years. It was almost as if the world had turned its smiling face towards me to leave me with that particular memory.

"The first day we spent in climbing a rough path that for all its winding and contortion was still clearly defined and showed signs of usage. Parka told me that a wiry grass grew in the crevices and that from time to time they brought their herds up here to let them browse on a different grass from that of the plains.

"We camped on a miniature plateau surrounded by huge, tumbled rocks. A cool breeze rose with the coming of dusk and we were glad of the goat-hair tent that one of the donkeys had carried. In the morning we set off again at first light. We were completely out of sight of the plains, enclosed in bleak, towering crags. After a while the path petered out and we were forced to leave the two



donkeys to graze on a kind of thick moss while we pushed on ahead.

"It was late in the afternoon of that day when I first caught the sound of the wind. It was a mournful, unearthly wailing, monotonous, without rise or fall. Parka, his jaw-bone suddenly white beneath his tan, took my arm while he peered upwards.

"And then, turning a corner and scrambling over a wall of grey stone, we came upon a ravine. A narrow knife-edge of rock bridged it to the far side. The surrounding rock had become darker in colour and harder to the touch than the sandstone of the lower slopes. No moss or grass grew at this height and there was only bare stone beneath our feet and on all sides. The ravine dropped sheer to a frothing ribbon of stream far below.

"Crossing that ridge was a nightmare. It was a different world from the sunlit plain far below and out of sight. Our voices, the few times we spoke, echoed about our ears. Parka went first, straddling the ridge for a few yards, then climbing precariously to his feet and taking the remainder at an arm-extended swaying run. I followed, keeping my face turned upwards, reaching his hand held out to help me over the last few feet.

"And now the sound of the wind came louder with each step we took. There was no path to follow, but then none was needed. We had the howling and whistling to guide us.

"Abruptly, we came out from a narrow corridor on to a level stretch of rock, finding now that we had to keep close to the wall to avoid being lifted off our feet by the pressure of

the wind. Parka, a few steps ahead, stopped and pointed.

The tall pillars of black, polished rock towered only a few paces ahead. Between them was a kind of indefinite greyness that at second glance appeared to be made of swirling particles of dust. The wind howled and whistled in a steady fury, sucking itself between the pillars.

"And when my guide showed no sign of going any farther I pulled myself past him, ignoring his restraining arm, clinging to narrow crevices in the rocks with sore fingers and making my way towards the entrance to the valley.

"The pillars I could see were polished to an unbelievable smoothness by the continuous action of the swirling dust. There was nothing to show that they had been made by man. Fighting down my disappointment I inched forward step by step with the gale tearing at my clothing and making my hair stream out in front of me.

"And then I rounded the corner, with my arms clinging to the rock, and the valley opened out in front of me. The greyness was confusing, dancing and shifting like a mirage or a heat-haze. Narrowing my eyes I peered through the haze, taking in the full extent at the first glance. It was a dead valley, devoid of any living matter, perhaps less than a quarter of a mile in length and about half as wide. It seemed obvious that it was the crater of some long-extinct volcano. At the far end of the valley was a smaller crater that gave off clouds of steam which were swept upwards

into shreds as fast as they emerged from the depths.

"I could see then what I thought to be the reason for the never-ending wind. The small crater was obviously throwing off a terrific heat, the warm air was being sent upwards and the cold, outside air sucked into the vortex. The mystery of the valley of evil was solved; it was purely a matter of physics, if you can call it that. There seemed no signs at all that man had ever had a hand in making any part of it.

"What persuaded me to take that one step over the threshold I shall never know. Perhaps it was just curiosity—a wondering about that greyness that danced and confused the eye; perhaps it was the wind itself that took hold of me, pulling me forwards. But I let my arms fall from their grip on the pillar and was immediately urged forward a few paces between the towering rocks.

"What happened then is unbelievable. One moment I was fighting the gale with the roaring and howling in my ears. The next, there was a silence as of the grave, but with a thickening of the greyness so that I could see nothing at all. And when the mist fell like a curtain there came a wrench that seemed to take my whole body to pieces, holding it poised for a moment that was eternity before returning me to the ground, panting and retching and fighting back the waves of cold nausea. And then the greyness was swept away in an instant.

"The valley had changed; it was a different place. The smaller crater

had gone and the floor of the valley itself was covered with miserable, stunted trees whose shape, for all their contorted branches, seemed familiar. A pale, watery sun sent a sickly glow through the sparse greenery.

"What happened after that I can only remember vaguely. I found myself walking among the trees where not a leaf stirred and where the fruit glowed with an unearthly inward light. I remember thinking—and you will see how confused my mind must have been—that there seemed hardly enough soil to keep the trees alive let alone cause them to bear fruit. I picked one of the apples and found it hard and uninviting despite its red colour. I tossed it away and turned to leave the valley.

"And outside, on the plateau of rock, there was no sign of Parka. And the black basalt pillars had vanished. I had come out into a different world. But just how different I wasn't to discover until I had come down into the plains and finally back to civilization.

"Civilization I call it, for want of a better word. This new world was a place of ugliness, misery and suffering; of evil men and grotesque buildings. Even the way down the slopes had changed; the rocks that on the way up had seemed at the worst to be forbidding, now seemed to menace; the trees were stunted and leafless. And in the plains I was set upon by narrow-faced, slant-eyed men who took what few possessions I carried and left me bleeding in a ditch.

"I think that for a while I was sick and feverish, for I can remember





little of my journey to the coast. I lived on vegetables, raw potatoes and turnips filched from the crude barns of the miserable farms. I slept under thorn bushes with the rain dripping through and woke to freezing mornings.

"My misery gave me little time to think, to try to discover just what had happened. At times I found myself believing that things were just as they had been before—that it was only my sickness that made me see them in this distorted light. But one night, crawling into an evil-smelling haystack to seek some shelter against the cold, I remembered that Parka had called the pillars the Gateway to Hell. In a moment of lucidity I knew that he had been right, and that if only I had listened to his warnings I should

never have found myself in this new and terrifying world of misery.

"There is little I can tell you about my journey back to the coast. I came, finally, to a cold grey bleakness of rock that thrust out into a tumbled black sea. There were boats in a harbour—crude, half-formed vessels that were as ugly and deformed as everything else, and which seemed incapable of riding the storms that the broken seas foretold.

"I worked my passage to another country, lived there for a time by helping a farmer with his miserable harvest. I was shocked at the primitive tools he used and amazed at the waste of good land. I found it almost impossible to believe that people could live in such conditions when it lay in their own hands to change

them. The towns were ugliness itself, covered with layers of filthy smoke that blacked out even the sun; unhealthy breeding-grounds for the multitude of ailments that filled the so-called hospitals. Everything was a grotesque caricature of things as I had once known them.

"After a while I saved up enough to take passage in another vessel that brought me back to roughly the place I had started from so long before. My home had gone, of course. I was among strangers. And steadily growing at the back of my mind was the conviction that there was no way out of this world of horror other than death itself. That I would never see my own people again."

He fell silent, leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed. His face was drawn and lined; his breath coming heavily. I caught Melville's eye and he raised his shoulders in a

shrug that could have meant anything.

At first I didn't know what to make of Holden's story. I sat and stared into the fire while pictures built themselves in the dancing flames. I saw a valley of stunted trees; I saw a man and a woman who entered there and never came out. I thought about the apple that Holden had plucked and thrown away.

I wondered why that picture persisted; and I wondered, too, why I found myself thinking of that valley as a garden.

Melville finally broke the silence. He said to Holden: "And after all that, how did you manage to get back?"

Holden opened his eyes as if surprised.

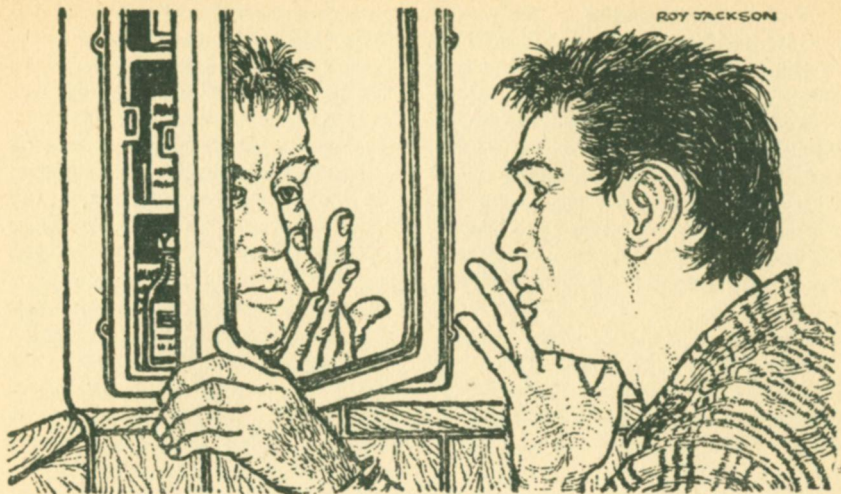
"Get back?" he wondered of us. "That's the whole point. I never did get back."



Leaves have their time to fall,  
And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath,  
And stars to set—but all,  
Thou hast *all* seasons for thine own, O Death!

FELICIA HEMANS.





## THE MAN WHO LOST HIS PAST

G. K. THOMAS

*Illustrated by Roy Jackson*

**T**HADIUS BAXTER stirred, woke and stretched.

He swung his legs out of bed and spent a few luxurious moments in yawning and rubbing his cheeks with his open palms. Then he went to the window, opened it another couple of notches and leaned out to view the world.

A very ordinary little man assessing an ordinary summer morning with no idea at all behind his ingenuous, cherubic face of the slow, insidious thieving that had been taking place while he slept.

At forty-three Thadius enjoyed perfect health, had a virile mind and only occasionally worried about his inclination towards plumpness. Married—witness the still-sleeping figure of Mrs. Baxter curled comfortably with hands clasped beneath one round cheek close to the still-warm spot that he had recently vacated—happily married without a care in the world. A self-complacent, placid and comfortable denizen of a pleasantly green suburb.

And then came the roaring and howling and thunderous shattering of the silence that happened each morning at the same time. Thadius

slammed the window tightly to against its passing; he winced, trying to shut out the sound by closing his eyes. And when, as always, that proved ineffective, he watched with jaundiced gaze the oncoming monstrosity of nickel, chrome and scarlet, with the rider like an inhabitant of some other world in black leather and red helmet. The exhaust thudded and thundered, filling the world with its passage.

Yesterday, Thadius had said: "Tearing along like that as if he hasn't got a second to spare. Why doesn't he fit a silencer to the damned thing? One of these days he'll take the corner too quickly and then—"

He had found himself almost wishing that the motor-cycle and its driver would end their tumultuous career against a wall. But then, because he was essentially a gentle soul with no desire to see harm come to man or beast no matter how strong the provocation, he had stifled the thought while it was still-born, consigning it along with the horror of sound to the innermost recesses of his mind.

This morning, he said aloud: "Young fool; you'd think he'd have more sense than to come spoiling the morning like that." He felt very bitter about the whole thing. It would be all the same if he wanted to lie in for an extra half-hour; that confounded noise would be enough to waken the dead.

"He can't be more than eighteen," he told the morning. "Now, when I was his age, I—"

And then he stopped; not because Emily had murmured sleepily, "Did

you say something, dear?" but because, just for the moment, he couldn't for the life of him recall what he had been like when he was eighteen.

He consoled himself with the thought that one is never at one's best first thing in the morning. Especially when one's nerves have been set jangling by the hideous roar of an unsilenced motor-cycle engine. One's thoughts are turgid, he mused fancifully; they lie heavily coiled after the night's sleep.

So Thadius passed into the bathroom, pausing on his way to lightly touch his wife's shoulder and say gently, "Half-past seven, dear."

The cabinet mirror in the bathroom saw his usual daily inspection of his eyes: still clear and bright with no signs of tell-tale red veining. A finger beneath each showed that the flesh was firm with no sagging. His teeth were white and even. His hair thickly black with the gloss of youth. Thadius approved the well-preserved general appearance, humming to himself as the water ran into the basin.

"When I was eighteen," he tried again, forgetting to take razor and brush from the cabinet. But there was no response; his mind kept the secret to itself. He tried again. "When I was fourteen." And still there was nothing.

"Sixteen?" Thadius wondered. "Twenty? Twenty-two?"

A stirring came then. "When I was twenty-two," he told himself, "I was working in the outer office and I had the draughty desk by the door that young Spender has now. I was still going to night-classes and—"



The memories were all there, rolling out at the bidding of his thoughts. All present and correct.

He went back a year. Surely he would have some memories of his twenty-first birthday. "When I was twenty-one," he said, "I—"

But that year had gone, wiped cleanly from his mind as if it had never existed. And with it all the preceding years; just as if a dripping sponge had been passed over the writing on a child's slate.

Conscious of a slight annoyance at this obviously temporary hiatus in his memory, Thadius set about the business of shaving.

The sun took his shoulder in a warm grip and walked by his side to the station. Refusing to desert him in the train, it rested pleasantly across his blue serge knees. Thadius lost himself in the morning paper and forgot all about the slip in his memory until later in the day when he had occasion to visit the outer office and his eyes fell on the draughty corner desk where he had started his business career. Then he tried again to stir his memory.

"When I was fourteen, and going to school—" But nothing came. When he came to think about it, he couldn't remember ever having been at school. Which was all very silly and frustrating, and just the slightest bit worrying. He wondered absently if loss of memory was the first sign of approaching senility. But surely not yet? Not at his age?

That evening over supper he said: "Emily, I was trying to remember something this morning—"

Patently anxious to please, she said brightly, "Yes, dear?"

"About my school-days. I was trying to recall the name of the headmaster. So annoying; I had it on the tip of my tongue all the time but I just couldn't bring it to mind."

He waited anxiously for the words that would set his memory back in motion; just one name would be sufficient to trigger off the train of recollection.

Emily said: "Oh, you mean—" and then stopped, her lips moving silently, a faint frown creasing her usually placid forehead. Thadius watched her efforts with an increase in his anxiety.

She tried again. "His name was—" she started, then turned wide eyes on him. "I forget," she said simply. "Isn't it silly?" She laughed a little. Thadius fought down a surge of annoyance. He thought that she looked like a doll, with her fluffy yellow hair and round pink cheeks and bright blue eyes; a doll in a box edged with doyley-frilled paper. At one time he had called her Doll.

That was something to go on; that was something from the past. But that was no use. He had been nearly twenty-four before meeting her for the first time.

"Isn't it silly of me?" Emily asked. "I can't for the life of me remember his name; and you must have told me about him. I mean, he was the one who—" She stopped, the frown deepening. "Just what did he do?"

"It is silly," Thadius said. "We're both silly." He could find nothing else to say. That night he puzzled himself to sleep.

At half-past seven the next morning the petrol-driven monster howled down the street, leaving a wake of dust and exhaust fumes, and Thadius opened the window after its passing. The action stirred up the anxiety of the previous day; he tried again, deciding this time to work backwards systematically. "Twenty-two," he started. "When I was twenty-two, I—" But now that had gone. Twenty-three became the new starting-point. The night had unwrapped his mind and taken away another year.

That afternoon he went to see Ian Mackay.

Dr. Mackay had his surgery only a few doors away from the office where Thadius worked. He was tall and very thin with tight-cropped, wiry hair. Thadius knew him well as they often played golf together. He showed a certain amount of surprise when Thadius was admitted. "Why, Thaddy old man! What's all this? Not on the sick list?"

Thadius accepted the proffered chair. He had privately rehearsed his opening speech. A self-deprecatory laugh, a faint embarrassment, an offering of the fact that his memory was failing.

Mackay gave the matter his gravest attention, listening intently and playing with a silver pencil. When the tale was done, he rolled the pencil thoughtfully between his palms. "Been overdoing things?" he asked as an opening gambit. Thadius was very firm about that possibility. "No. Things are very quiet at the moment."

Mackay selected one part of the story. "You say you lost another year

last night?" Thadius nodded, waiting with some eagerness for the next question.

But the doctor appeared to be out of his depth. He even admitted it, indicating that he was only so doing because Thadius was a personal friend.

"I've never met anything quite like this before," he said apologetically. "It's the fact that you lost a year last night that lifts it out of the rut of an ordinary amnesia. But, in any case, it's a little out of my line. Psychiatry is called for, I think . . ." He looked up quickly, as if anxious to see how the suggestion was received.

Thadius said sadly: "I had half an idea you might say that."

"Nothing to worry about," the other said heartily. "Probably just a passing phase, a mind block set up by some incident. You mustn't worry; the past is there all right, locked tightly in your subconscious." He looked wise and knowledgeable, as if this suggestion redeemed his past admission of ignorance.

"Subconscious?" Thadius asked miserably.

"Every past thought and action is tucked away safely. It only needs the key to open the door. For instance, if I think back to my own youth certain salient memories will emerge immediately, but the others will come only if I really concentrate." He prepared for a demonstration.

"I qualified when I was twenty-six; I can recall that vividly because of its importance, you see?" He awaited the nod of understanding before proceeding. "But before that, now let me see.



When I was twenty-one, I—" He stopped, frowning.

"When I was twenty-one—" he started again and then broke off to laugh with some embarrassment. "It's gone," he confessed. "I knew a moment ago what I was going to say, but now I can't for the life of me . . ."

Thadius waited anxiously, aware of the first faint stirrings of something that was most certainly fear. This was the second time; first Emily, now the doctor.

"No," Mackay said after a short period of creased-brow concentration. "No; it's all gone." Now he looked worried. "Nothing," he told the top of his desk, "nothing before the twenty-fourth year."

"Is it likely to be catching?" Thadius wondered when the silence threatened to be prolonged.

Mackay stirred. "I don't like it. I just don't like things I can't understand."

"Psychiatry?" Thadius hinted gently.

But that, it appeared, was now out of the question. At least for the time being; they would think about that later.

"It's something deeper than that," Mackay said earnestly. "I mean, one can't accept coincidences of this sort. Not the two of us. And there may be more." He looked up, startled by the thought. "I wonder if there are any more?"

"I wonder?" replied Thadius, thinking of Emily.

He passed the remainder of the day in morose preoccupation. Once during the evening Emily remarked on

his silence and he offered the excuse of work at the office. He toyed with the idea of further exploring her memories, but the previous evening's abortive attempt scared the idea away. He feared his own reactions if it turned out that her past had vanished as well.

That night he lost another year. As before he discovered the loss with the passing of the motor-cycle. Now his life started from when he had been twenty-four.

Desperation forced him out into the open; he broached the subject over the breakfast table.

Carefully spreading marmalade on a finger of toast, Emily said: "Think back? What do you mean, dear?"

"Tell me about when you were young," he said inadequately. "What school did you go to, for instance?"

"Why," she said placidly. "You know as well as I do." He felt a surge of relief. "It was the one at—" she started, and then laid down her toast. "It was the school at—" she tried again.

"I forget," she said brightly. "Isn't that funny. It must have just slipped my mind. But why do you want to know, dear? It can't be important."

"No," Thadius told her sadly. "It's not important."

And now the fear was growing, hardening into something tangible. Now there were three of them; three people who were losing their past. And all at the rate of a year a night? That was a preposterous idea. He would have to pay another visit to Mackay, to tell him that now Emily too . . .

And in the train going to the city the new thought came unbidden with the sharpness and clarity of a lightning flash. What would happen when the past had been completely swallowed up? What would it be like to wake up one morning with no memory at all?

He worked out the figures in his head. He was forty-three; he had lost twenty-three years. There were twenty days left.

Thadius left the station in a daze, seeing nothing of the teeming pavements or the streams of traffic. He narrowly escaped destruction under the wheels of a passing lorry. He bumped without apologizing into innumerable passers-by.

At eleven o'clock he was back in Mackay's surgery, telling him that there were now three people who were losing their past.

"Nine," the doctor corrected soberly. "Including my wife. The others only discovered what had happened when I went out of my way to find out. Just ordinary patients." He picked up a sheet of paper from the desk. "I have their names here. I'll add Emily's. How old is she?"

Thadius considered.

Mackay said: "Somewhere between forty and forty-five."

"Forty," Thadius told him. "How did you know?"

"That means she has lost twenty years' memory so far. For myself, I'm forty-four; I've lost twenty-four. I have twenty days left." He tapped the paper. "They all work out the same. And they're all primes."

"Primes?"

"All in the prime of their life; all healthy, all with excellent mental capabilities. With the exception of this loss of the past."

"One would almost think," he added thoughtfully, "that we had been selected. But nine—no, ten now—is hardly conclusive proof."

Thadius indicated the paper. "Who are the others?"

"I can't tell you their names," Mackay said reproachfully. "Professional etiquette, you know. But they're all in the same age group, they're all intelligent and they're all healthy. One came in for his annual check-up; two had colds; the others similar trifling complaints." He looked up. "And they all have twenty days left before they lose their pasts completely."

"That's assuming," he pointed out, "that we continue to lose a year a night. It's rather an alarming thought."

Thadius said: "There'll be others, too; people walking about in the streets..."

"I'm sure of it," the doctor said bleakly. "A few will know what is happening but will possibly be afraid of contacting their doctors or even discussing it with their friends. People are touchy about that sort of thing. . . . Others won't even have realized they are losing their memories. I mean, we don't often have cause to think back through the years unless anything special crops up."

"And there's nothing we can do?" Thadius asked, feeling the fear increasing.

"I'm going to contact Clough-



Roberts this morning," Mackay said. "He's a psychiatrist, perhaps the best. But first I'm going to ring up some of my colleagues and see if anything has come to their notice." He sighed. "Beyond that I can see little else we can do. At the moment it's a question of confirming the epidemic rather than taking steps to cure it. But that's how we work. Confirm, identify, cure."

"Twenty days," Thadius reminded.

"You don't have to tell me that," the other said shortly. "It's nagging all the time at the back of my mind. That and the idea that there is something with a purpose that is taking our past away. A gradual seeping of the memory that is working exactly the same in each of the victims."

Thadius returned to the office with the word "victims" tearing and scratching at his thoughts, and with fear over-riding all other emotions.

And that night he lost another year.

Hovering silent and intangible in the distant depths of space one thought contacted another. "It goes well . . ."

The next day Thadius had an idea. He called to Emily, "The snapshot albums, dear. Where are they?" He kept the inquiry matter-of-fact. He hadn't mentioned a word about the failing memory but he had noticed that her usual placid face occasionally carried a look of worry. To discuss it, he felt, wouldn't help in any way. And, in any case, he had noticed, or fancied he had noticed, the same look on many of the faces that came his way.

"In the bookcase," she called back.

He bore the albums in trembling

hands to the window. Each holiday they had taken pictures, afterwards mounting them in the books. He started from the back. Emily on the pier at Southsea. That was clear enough. That had been last year; the year before they had gone to Italy. Four pages of sunshine and sparkling sea. He riffled through the pages. Now the places and faces were unrecognizable. There was a vague familiarity that defied his memory when he sought resemblance.

Returning the albums to their place he went out into the garden, seeking comfort in the familiar things—the dahlias, he had planted those last year—the rockery; that had been laid three years ago. But the lawn. Had that been there when they took the house over? Or had he laid it? And the rose-bushes?

That night he lost another year.

Out in the spaces of eternity one thought spoke soundlessly to another. "Soon. Only a short time now. . . ."

Thadius went to see Mackay. The doctor said: "Seventy-four all told. Six more to my own list, the rest from two doctors who are as worried about it as I—we are."

"The psychiatrist?" Thadius asked.

"I forgot until I was on the phone. He's sixty if he's a day. So he had no personal impressions. He took a bit of convincing before he would accept it. Then he spoke about mind-blocks and triggers and the rest; much of it over my head. But that's often the way with these Harley Street types, they talk down to the ordinary G.P." The worry of the moment seemed lost in the brief rancour.

"He ruled out coincidence; he said there had to be a link. Then he said that it was all a question of the subconscious folding up. It seems that the memories are there all right, they can never be destroyed so long as the function of the brain remains perfect. He suggested that over-strain might be the cause, a sort of rebellion against the speed of modern life. He finished by saying that if I could locate the common factor, then that might be the trigger."

"The trigger?"

"Key would be the better word; the key that would unlock the door of the prisoned past. Memories have been repressed and locked away. The common-cause factor will be the key to release them." He spread his hands. "Now you know as much as I do. But I've been working along the lines he suggested. A link of sorts does show itself. One name on the list has a thing about clattering milk bottles in the early morning; another can't bear the squeal of brakes. Things like that . . ." He eyed Thadius hopefully.

"A motor-cycle," Thadius told him eagerly. "Every damned morning at half-past seven. Roaring and howling . . . you know?"

Mackay made notes. "It's beginning to add up," he remarked without looking up from his writing. "In my own case I feel an acute annoyance when a dustbin lid is banged into place. All the penalties of living in a civilized community. Subconsciously we repress these nuisances; now we have gone too far, we have slammed the door both on them and the past. But why," he looked up, "—why all

at the same time? That is what we must next discover."

That night Thadius lost another year. And the night after that.

In the dark, endless night of eternity the thought hovered closer, feeling, waiting. "Not long now," they told each other.

The days slipped by and memory shortened. Thadius began to find it difficult to keep abreast with his work. Now he had to rely upon his staff for any information that was more than three years old. He kept constantly in touch with Mackay, learning that the doctor was having similar trouble. That not even his case cards were of any use when the patients to which they referred hadn't been seen for more than three years.

"I treat them like new patients," he told Thadius. "And talking about new patients, they are fairly rolling in now, all with the same trouble." He nodded at the inquiry in Thadius's eyes. "I tell them not to worry, that their memories will come back in the course of time. I tell them not to talk about it. There's no point in starting a panic."

On the last night, Emily said, "There's something I must tell you, Thaddy. It's my mind—" She was almost in tears. Thadius set about comforting her, giving her no time to go into the details.

When she had finally cried herself to sleep, he sat on the edge of the bed fighting back the overwhelming urge to sleep. His eyelids were lead-heavy, his mouth set in an almost perpetual yawn.

He bent to drop a light kiss on



Emily's forehead, noting how sleep had smoothed the creases from her forehead. Then sleep fell on him like a velvet pall; the last thing he remembered was the clock striking two.

\* \* \*

From out of space the thought-beings dropped silently and remorselessly, invisible, non-existent so far as their hosts were concerned, each seeking out the chosen habitat.

The sun stirred the world into life. The new Thadius rose and stretched luxuriously. By his side the new Emily uncoiled and smiled up at him.

"It is good," Thadius said, peering into his mind. "It is as clean and untouched as if there had never been a memory there. The brain is undamaged, the gradual process of thought elimination has proved successful. We shall not repeat the failure of our last attempt to find a home." The voice was brittle, the syllables carefully spaced. He stood by the window, breathing in the sharp morning air.

"It is good to have a body again," he said. "Come, stand here by me and look out on this new world. Gather the first memories for your new past."

The woman said: "And the rest of us?"

He smiled up at the sky. "They will be waking too. In a little while we will seek them out and talk with them about the future.

A distant roar shattered the peace. The man shivered at the impact of sound. "What is that?" he wondered.

The sound increased, building up into a screaming tornado of discord.

Involuntarily his hands pressed against his temples, his whole body shuddering with the effort to hold up the barrier. Unbidden, alien thoughts pounded furiously, rising to even higher pitches than the noise outside. The woman cowered on the bed, her arms wrapped about her head.

The noise rose to a crescendo, and the barrier shattered, releasing the pent-up tumult of thought, so that it rose in spirals, cascading in showers.

"They are not destroyed," the man cried in unutterable anguish. "Their past was here all the time; the memories are flooding back. . . . It is useless, we cannot stay. . . ."

He rose from the body of Thadius Baxter, seeking refuge in the peace of space from the howling tumult of the mind. The woman half-rose from the bed, releasing herself in the moment of collapse, rising to join her companion.

They gathered together in an invisible writhing cloud, swirling and billowing, waiting while their companions poured up from the world which had proved so inhospitable. And when the uprising stream began to thin out, with only the last few to come, they started to move away, already sending out fresh tendrils, seeking the next world on which they might set their parasitic life.

Thadius Baxter yawned hugely, pulling himself to his feet. He looked absently at the floor, wondering how he had come to be lying there. Perhaps he had been walking in his sleep? That would never do. He turned to open the window another couple of notches.

"Our friend is late," he told himself wryly, watching the end of the street, ready to slam the window. Then he glanced at the bed-side clock.

"We're late, Emily," he cried, shaking her shoulder vigorously. "It's getting on for eight."

A fleeting thought came to him while he was shaving, something that he ought to remember. Now what was it? Something at the office no doubt. And he was running late; he'd have

to hurry to get there on time.

"Emily!" he called, hearing her about the bedroom. "Did I ever tell you about my first day at the boarding-school when I overslept . . .?"

"I don't think you did, dear," she said, smiling from the door.

"It was like this," Thadius said happily. "There I was, lying as snug as you please in bed, and—"

He felt very safe and secure in his own private little world.



. . . Oft, when day's declining light  
Yields her pale empire to the mourner night,  
By hunger roused, Fear scorns the groaning plain,  
Gaunt wolves and sullen tigers in his train:  
Before them Death with shrieks directs their way,  
Fills the wild yell, and leads them to their prey.

WILLIAM COLLINS.

My soul begins to take her flight to hell,  
And summons all my senses to depart:  
. . . and now doth ghastly Death  
With greedy talents gripe my bleeding heart,  
And like a harpy tires on my life.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE.

They are neither man nor woman—  
They are neither brute nor human,  
They are Ghouls.

EDGAR ALLAN POE.



# THE SLAVE DETECTIVE

THE CASE IN THE CAMP

WALLACE NICHOLS

*Illustrated by Juliette Palmer*

**G**AIUS FLAVIUS LATERANUS, commander of the Roman army on the Gallic frontier, where he was engaged in pacifying the restless supporters

of the new Emperor's defeated rival for the Empire, Clodius Albinus, was seriously perturbed. Thrice had his plan of campaign been betrayed to the enemy. It was clear that there was a traitor at headquarters: but who was he? Lateranus and his staff had made investigations in vain.

He dared not approach the fierce-spirited Emperor with a matter so domestic to his local army; Septimius Severus was not the man to condone inefficiency. Besides, he was on the eastern frontiers, still dealing with the adherents of his other defeated rival, Pescennius Niger.

Lateranus unburdened himself to his most trusted Tribune, Plautus Atticus, who considered silently for some time then suddenly laughed.

"This is no jesting affair!" Lateranus rebuked him.

"I was laughing, sir, not at the affair, but at my remedy."

"If you have a remedy, nobody shall laugh at it, certainly not I. What is this remedy?"

"Will you employ a slave, sir, in so secret a matter?"

"A slave? What slave?"

"You know, sir, that my cousin, Gratianus, is the Prefect of the City. Well, he swears by the detective ability of a certain slave belonging to one of the Senators. Gratianus often employs him in cases of great difficulty. He is a proud fellow—I have met him—and must be rich enough to buy his manumission, but some sentimental attachment to the family keeps him in the service of his master."

"In the name of the Gods and my peace," ordered Lateranus, "send for the fellow."

"I'm due a turn of leave, sir; let me fetch him."

So came it about that Sollius found himself some time later travelling in a military convoy towards Gaul. One night, about a further day's march from Lateranus's headquarters, Sollius and Atticus were seated together by a camp-fire's blaze after their evening meal.

"Tell me again, O Atticus," said Sollius, "who in his way of duty would know these betrayed plans?"

"Just ourselves, the General's staff—and I would go bond for all of them. I have worked with them and fought beside them for months, and



as fine a set of soldiers you couldn't meet anywhere."

"But what do you know of their private lives? Who, for instance, is crippled with debts? Or is one of them a relative of the defeated Albinus? It is such things I must discover," Sollius murmured.

"I know of no such circumstance," said Atticus.

"Perhaps their legionary servants will know more," breathed Sollius slyly.

"We did not spy, O Sollius. on a nest of gentlemen."

"I am after a spy, and it needs a spy to catch a spy. I shall spy on everybody," laughed Sollius, "even you and the noble Lateranus."

"We must endure it in such a case," answered Atticus with a sigh of disgust.

When Lateranus saw the lame, elderly, bald Sollius his soldierly temper was not impressed; in fact, he at once took contemptuous dislike to him. He knew nothing of his reputation beyond the report of Atticus which, no doubt, he considered, was grossly exaggerated, and he censured the Tribune roundly for his credulity in the slave's supposed powers. Sollius, used to his servile condition and the scorn that it sometimes received, remained imperturbable, and limped about the camp in the guise of an army contractor's clerk.

The outposts were continually in-



fested with itinerant traders of all sorts and it was among such that he expected the secret emissary would be found—but only the emissary, not the principal. Still, with the emissary caught, torture would speedily uncover the other.

Playing his usual part of an amiable fool, he allowed himself to be cheated at games of chance and in his haggling with the merchants of grain and livestock at the camp's four gates. It amused him considerably when he found himself taken under the protective wing of a blunt centurion named Gallus.

"You need to be more wideawake, clerk," the soldier warned him. "Anybody seems able to fool you."

"I don't know how it is," murmured Sollius meekly.

It flattered the centurion's self-conceit to have Sollius cling to him in humble deference, and in no time the two were on terms of confidence. Sollius constantly brought their conversation round to the officers about Lateranus, learning from Gallus's uninhibited gossip which soldiers gambled, who ran after the Gallic girls, who drank to excess. None of these vices belonged to Atticus.

Sollius had been in the camp over a week, and so far had neither a clue nor even a blind suspicion. Then one morning he was summoned by Lateranus.

"Slave, I am planning a new attack on the Nones of this coming month," he announced in a haughty tone, obviously disliking the disclosure of military information to a non-combatant. "I look to you to

prevent any news of it from reaching the enemy."

"Who knows about it, Excellency?"

"Three men only: Atticus, Vestinus, the commander of the selected legion, and Jaromir, leader of the auxiliary cavalry—nobody else until the hour of march. And I trust those three completely."

Sollius immediately sought out Gallus and casually introduced the name of Jaromir into the conversation.

"There he is yonder," grinned Gallus, and pointed to a tall, lean, moustached man in somewhat barbaric armour, who was conversing with another officer near by. "They say he is a prince in his own land. A fine leader of horsemen."

"Who is the man in talk beside him?"

"The commander of my own legion, Vestinus."

Sollius smiled to himself; he had guessed as much.

"Drinks like a gudgeon," growled Gallus, "but fights like a pike. I served in Britain with him. We had good practice on the Wall, I assure you! A born fighter—and of the blood of Etruscan kings."

"Your legion served in Britain? Under Clodius Albinus?"

"Everyone know that. We were ordered out of Britain for this frontier just in time to avoid being caught up in his rebellion and silly leap for power."

"Did either of the two other legions stationed here serve in Britain under that would-be Emperor?"

"No, but Plautus Atticus was once one of his Tribunes."

"Atticus?"

"They quarrelled. Atticus, having influence," replied Gallus, spitting, "got a transfer. Lucky, by the Gods, or he'd have been killed belike at the Battle at Lugdunum with the rest of Albinus's friends."

Sollius proceeded thoughtfully to the Porta Decumana where principally the sellers of produce from the nearer villages congregated, the Porta Prætoriana being kept free by Lateranus's bodyguard. The Slave Detective sat himself down on a large oblong stone just outside the Gate and watched the vociferous crowd. He had seen most of them before, and had, indeed, trafficked with them in his assumed character. He now studied them with half-closed eyes. It was a very hot morning.

He felt despondent. It was not his usual kind of case. There were so many possible suspects—every soldier in the three legions under Lateranus. His customary technique was of little use. But Lateranus's contempt for him was a spur to his pride. He intended to succeed. What about his boasted powers of observation? Were they going to let him down when he needed them as never before?

Who were the most persistent throngers at the Gate? He had noticed three: an old man, an old woman and a younger woman, very handsome in a wild sort of way. They were there every day, the others came and went in accordance as their produce was available; but the three

seemed to attend sometimes without produce to sell at all. Yes, that was something he had observed.

Gallus, striding over, rejoined him.

"Not chaffering today?" he said in a mocking voice. "You are a strange commissary, clerk."

"Do you know anything of those three?" Sollius asked in an undertone, and he indicated the old man, the old woman and the handsome girl.

"A horse-thief, a bawd and a girl who'd likely kill me as I slept in her arms," laughed Gallus. "What of them? They sell nothing good for any of us."

"Do they belong to any tribe of the enemy?"

"They're from a village friendly enough."

"I'm wondering if any of them was ever a camp-follower in the army of Clodius Albinus," whispered Sollius. "Do you know?"

"You're not as simple, friend, as you behave!" said Gallus sharply. "I believe you're a spy. Ho! Comrades!" he called.

In a few moments Sollius was more roughly handled than he had been for years.

"To Vestinus! Take him to Vestinus!" cried Gallus.

They hustled him away across the camp to where Vestinus and Jaromir were still conversing together, probably, thought Sollius, discussing the coming operation. But now a little boy was playing beside the leader of the auxiliary cavalry. As they approached, however, he ran away.

"What is this, O Gallus?" roared





Vestinus as the centurion, backed by half a dozen legionaries, saluted before him.

“A spy, sir!”

Vestinus looked at Sollius and Sollius at Vestinus. Though he had not met Vestinus, the Slave Detective knew at a glance that Lateranus had confided his identity to him and he wondered what the legion’s commander would do.

“The fellow has the best recommendations,” said Vestinus crisply, “but your charge shall be investigated. Leave him. I’ll interrogate him myself.”

Gallus saluted, gave Sollius a dark glance and he and his fellows dispersed.

“Who is this?” asked Jaromir. “I do not understand.”

“A spy all right, but ours,” replied his colleague. “Any news to report?” he asked, turning to Sollius.

“But little,” answered the Slave Detective. “I do not trust these infesters of the Gates. . . .”

“They can have no touch with the command,” interrupted Vestinus. “Some officer is a traitor—so thinks, at least, Lateranus.”

“How long, sir, has the noble Lateranus commanded here?”

“Two years,” said the other curtly.

“And before?” asked Sollius.

“In my country—eastern Pannonia,” broke in Jaromir “—he put down a rebellion by my cousin. I was

always for Roman law, Roman order, Roman arms. My cousin was a fool. In fact, it was I who killed him—in a charge.”

He spoke with flashing eyes, as though joyously remembering the battle: there was no anti-Roman bitterness there, decided Sollius. He gave a diffident bow and turned away, back to the Porta Decumana. He felt a little rapt from himself. He knew that he had observed something, but it had gone from him. What had he seen while being hustled across to Vestinus, or while speaking to him? He returned to his stone under the astonished gaze of Gallus and his comrades, closed his eyes and endeavoured to see again what he had had within his sight during the previous moments. Something was speaking to him within his inner being. He began to concentrate.

The whole of the camp, as though it were a huge market square, had been in lively movement. Here men were cleaning their arms and scouring their armour; there they were doing fatigues. Some were gossiping in groups. Even while being hurried across to the two officers he had observed these things. There had been the clamour of a brief quarrel; a cook was fussing over a cauldron; a little boy was running across towards the Gate; a juggler, allowed in, was doing his tricks. The sun was very hot. A string of horses was being led out to drink at a stream near by. What of all these simple occurrences was in the least significant? He opened his eyes. The sellers still thronged the approaches to the Gate; the horses

were enjoying the running stream; the little boy was clutching at the skirts of the old woman, and they were both walking away.

What had all these things to do with the dead Clodius Albinus and his defeated bid for imperial power?

Suddenly he beat his forehead with his two fists. Perhaps the case had nothing to do with Albinus at all. Perhaps . . . A blaze of revelation seemed all about him. Then he set himself to plan his next steps.

For some time he sat on the stone, thinking. It was the motive which still eluded him. After a while he rose and limped to his allotted quarters, and there he continued to think. When evening came he limped out again and went on the search for Gallus. He found him dicing with three or four comrades in the shadow of a wall. The sun would presently be setting.

“Why aren’t you hanged?” growled Gallus.

“Come,” said the slave, “I want you, and any comrade you choose, to act as my bodyguard this night. I will see that you receive special pay for it. I have authority.”

Gallus and his friends stared at him.

“If this is a jest—” began Gallus.

“In the name of Lateranus, a true promise!”

They turned sober at once.

“Say on,” said Gallus. “Regulus here and I are your men.”

Sollius quietly gave them their instructions.

“At moonrise,” he concluded, and limped away.



As the moon rose later over the low, distant hills, Gallus and the legionary Regulus met Sollius in the midst of a quieter camp, though many were singing in their quarters.

"Come not within earshot," said Sollius, "but be near enough to protect me."

He led the way towards the Prætorium and the officers' quarters about it. He was spared the trouble of arousing the man he sought, for he came out of the guard-room as they approached.

"A word with you, lord," said Sollius, firmly yet humbly.

"With me?"

"Let us speak, sir, alone, under the ramparts."

"I am going on an inspection—I have a moment."

They passed into the shadow of the high wall, out of the rays of the moon; Gallus and Regulus kept pace for pace with them.

"Who are these?" angrily asked the other.

"My bodyguard," answered Sollius simply.

"So, Slave Detective, we are at grips."

"At grips, lord. But my object is to save a defeat for Roman arms, not to hound a soldier of Rome. You do not hate Rome, and you owed no allegiance to Albinus; you just hate Lateranus, is it not so?"

The calm moonlight was an ironic frame for the passions in play.

"I hate him as I would salt in my wine! You can prove nothing."

"I could arrest an old woman and a little boy who has your favour, and

takes a message without knowing, probably, what it means."

"I could have their village burnt to the ground tomorrow—and they'd not survive. You did well to bring protection!"

"These treacheries, lord, must cease."

"And Lateranus," said the other bitterly, "extend his reputation?"

"All I need is your word."

"You would trust it?"

"Lord, I would trust it."

"I would save my name; I am a proud man."

"Give me your word and I will save it."

"It is too late not to give it. Indeed, it was to be my last throw. If I had not ruined Lateranus's military reputation by this new disaster, I should have believed that my Gods were against me, and have bowed the head."

"Would it not have been a better pride, lord, to have served Rome faithfully?" asked Sollius. "Of what were you jealous?"

"It was not jealousy that drove me, slave, but revenge. He injured my whole race. He injured my sister's reputation. I swore to injure *him* in his most sensitive spot—his reputation as a soldier. Injury for injury, an eye for an eye. He was too Roman to wed her—and she was above him by the descents of a thousand years! But the Gods will otherwise. I shall not return from the next battle."

\* \* \*

Sollius sought audience of Lateranus early the next morning. He was

received with amused tolerance.

"What? At last? You have news for me? It is not, I suppose, the name of the traitor?"

"Lord," answered Sollius stiffly, "the name is too honourable for a slave's tongue."

"One of my officers, eh? Must I whip the name out of you?"

"Suffice it, lord, that the treachery is over. Change the day of your attack and all will be well. I have seen to that. Change it not, and you will be ambushed."

"Give me his name, slave!"

Sollius returned no answer.

"I see—he has bribed you to silence!" Lateranus accused, his face livid. "Has he already honourably stabbed himself?"

"He will die in battle."

"I would rather hang him!"

"Lord, it was not between him and Rome—but between him and you."

"Treachery through jealousy?" exclaimed Lateranus.

"Would discipline, lord, approve of *that* coming to light?" said Sollius softly.

"Jealousy!" repeated Lateranus. "Jealousy!" he said again complacently. "Is it Vestinus? Did he, with his tale of Etruscan kings for his ancestors, despise my rise by merit? Well, slave, keep silent if you will. But if I am betrayed again I will have you flayed by metalled whips."

Sollius returned to Rome in a convoy leaving the same day. Half-way on the journey they were overtaken by one with despatches. He shouted his news as he galloped by. Lateranus had gained a great victory. Among the dead was Jaromir.



The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment  
Can lay on nature is a paradise  
To what we fear of death.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.



# MUSICAL BONES

R. F. SONGHURST



IT WAS ONE OF those grim, awful days that we sometimes get in the summer, and a warm, south-west wind was blowing the horrible smells of flowers, lavender and beer through the churchyard of St. Wulfric's, while a blazing hot sun parboiled the weeds on the sides of the tombs and ripped the last vestiges of comfort from the unfortunate inhabitants within.

In our semi-detached vault, my wife, Emma, and myself vainly tried to stop shivering as blast after blast of languid hot air was wafted through the cracks. Not even the comfort of a stone-cold fire fed with sooty ice and slag could stop us from twittering.

"I've never known such a terrible summer as this," snivelled Emma, rattling her vertebrae . . . "not in all my whole Death have I known it so horrible." And she rattled in an agitated manner that set my teeth on edge. After a quiet writhe I was about to resume my perusal of the *Under-taker's Echo*, when Emma again started rattling like a set of castanets. Holding my head in both hands, I peered at her over the side of my coffin.

"For the Devil's sake, stop that row and let's have some peace."

"I can't help it . . . I think I've heat stroke or something," she said.

"At least rattle rhythmically," I

snarled. To my surprise, she did. I sat up.

"I didn't know you could do that, Emma."

"Do what?"

"Why, rattle like that. It's amazing. Do it again."

"Why should I? First you object to my rattling, and now you want me to rattle . . . can't you make up your mind?"

I explained that I thought there might be a way of making money out of her rattling, whether caused by heat stroke or not, and turning on our gramophone I played an aria from the British opera, "Brenda of Bush House".

"There, now try rattling in tune to that."

Standing up and brushing the crumbs off her puce nylon shroud, she commenced to rattle in perfect time. It was really astounding the way her spine clicked. We tried it again, this time to the tune of "Sophoric Haunting", and she still kept perfect time.

"I think it would sound even better," panted Emma, now quite excited, "if we could have a drum to accompany it . . . couldn't you thump a coffin lid in time to my rattling?"

"I've a better idea . . . pass me that tin tray. Right. Now, let's go, Baby." As the music started, I rested the tray across my knees and sitting on the edge of my coffin bounced my head

with both hands on the tray in time to the music. The combined effects were remarkable. I also discovered that by opening and shutting my jaws as I bounced my head I could vary the note from C sharp minor, to a deep booming note.

Before we could discover anything else, our mutual friend Aggie the Were-Wolf emerged from a mist that had been gathering near the gas stove and lapped up the best part of a pint of Fungus Juice that was heating.

Taking her muzzle out of the bowl, she remarked, "I prefer drinking like this . . . not only do I get more, but it saves the washing up that is involved when one uses a cup." She winked both her eyes wickedly at us and showed a set of teeth that would have made an alligator go green with envy.

For our benefit, she partly incanted and changed shape . . . so far as the upper part of her went, she became ravishingly lovely, while her lower part remained animal, including her long tail, which she wagged in an entrancing manner.

"Now, tell me about yourselves. What *are* you doing?"

I explained that I thought there was money to be made out of Emma's vertebræ and bouncing my head on a tin tray. Setting the gramophone going, we demonstrated in time to that old Victorian ballad "In a Pathologist's Garden".

Aggie was so impressed that she went yellow all over, and when we tried it again she forgot herself and changed back to a wolf, throwing up

her head and baying until the plaster dropped off the chandelier.

"I'm so sorry," she apologized, "but somehow what you do just sends me."

"Sends you where?" inquired Emma, rather sourly, for although she likes Aggie, she is rather jealous of her.

"I just don't know, but it does really send me, you know . . . so that I want to join in."

"By all means join in," I said gallantly, "the more the merrier."

"Perhaps," remarked Emma, with a sneer, "if you tied a cow bell on your tail, Aggie, we might make a trio."

And that is exactly what we did. Aggie partially changed shape, keeping her upper half human, in case she was tempted to start baying; while a small handbell was tied to the tail section of her canine (or lupine) half; when she wagged it in time to our bone music, it just rounded off the whole effect. Really, you cannot imagine the extraordinary effects of clicking vertebræ combined with a well-bounced head and a wagging tail.

After several weeks spent in continual practice, we decided to try and obtain our first professional engagement, which turned out to be a show given for charity by the Society of Crypt Creepers.

The show was due to take place in the nave of St. Wulfric's, and tier upon tier of seats had been built up on top of the pews, facing the long aisle, where the performers were to carry out their acts. We were billed to appear eighty-ninth in the list under the title of "Musical Bones"



and awaited our turn in that state of intense placidity so well known to actors the world over.

Before the concrete drop curtain went up, we peeped at the audience seated beyond the footlights, cracking coconuts and jokes.

For a charity concert, the place was packed. Several major criminals were present, half a dozen suicides were in the stalls and seated in a box, with several mincing abominations, was a well-known poisoner.

We retired behind the scenes, the curtain rose and the show commenced. When our turn came we took our places behind the curtain, I sat on a silver gilt chair, a tin tray on my knees, and my head held in both hands resting on it. In the centre stood Emma tastefully attired in a transparent nylon shroud that showed off her bones seductively. In the middle, her bosom resting on a padded stool, lay Aggie, centaur-like. Her upper half feminine and luscious, her lower half lupine and revolting, with a large silver cow bell lashed on to her long brush.

The curtain shot up, and at once we broke into the "March of the Post War Credits". Madly I rattled my head up and down on the tin tray; Emma's spine gave forth sounds like a machine-gun, while sweetly smiling at my feet, Aggie swished her tail in a gay silver-toned carillon. We followed this with a quieter number, and then without a pause dashed into the fierce "Cascara Polka".

We concluded on a more pastoral note with "Conveyancing" (by Gibson), which, as you probably recall,

has three movements, commencing with the flute-like "Contract", thence to the stirring gallop of "Investigation of Title" and finally culminating in the gavotte entitled "Completion Statement".

At the finish we advanced, rather timidly, to the footlights. We were received in absolute dead silence, something that few of the previous performers had obtained. A little silence we had expected, but to our amazement we received a full two minutes intense silence . . . an outstanding compliment. Then, at last, came the real reception. Three-dozen rotten eggs impacted on Aggie's face, a long-defunct cat wrapped itself round Emma's neck and three copies of "Prison Regulations for 1859" hit me over my left eye. We were covered in fruit, old boots, discarded burial urns and Income Tax Returns. Bowing lower and lower, we smiled into the storm as the curtain descended.

When we were all seated at tea in our vault, a letter arrived addressed to myself. Removing a dagger from Emma's ribs, I opened the letter, and after reading it gasped with amazement.

"Listen to this . . . we are commanded to appear at the next Walpurgis Night Gathering and are to be paid £50,000 each."

With a sniff, Emma produced a bottle of vintage Hellwater and poured out three glasses. We tearfully drank to our future—a future so bright that we became quite incandescent.

It is a very pleasant death that we lead.



## THE MAN WITH NO FACE

LESLIE VARDRE

*Illustrated by R. A. Neave*

**I**T HAD BEEN raining for three days almost without stopping. Sitting morosely in his usual corner, Blasser said that it was freak weather. "Even fer Derbyshire," he commented, "where it'll rain one side the street while the sun is a-shinin' on t'other. Freakish, that's what it is."

Ringer Jackson took hold of the word and tried to use it to bolster the flagging conversation. "Weather is a natural thing as you might say," he told the room. "You can't rightly say as 'ow it's freakish even when we does

get rain fer three days on the trot in June."

"Not even when we get lightning blasting a ring as clean as a whistle out of a field o' standin' corn?" Blasser took him up. "Like it did las' year in the field be'ind the 'ouses?"

"Not even that," Ringer assured him. "Like as not it would've struck a tree if a tree 'ad bin in its path. It just so 'appened that the corn was tall an' dry an' set afire, an' if the rain hadn't come a-teemin' down after, then likely the whole field would've burnt up."

"It were a freak, any'ows," Blasser



said, getting in the last word before relapsing into a sulky silence.

The rain drummed steadily on the windows; the old clock above the counter ticked monotonously. The landlord sat behind a screen of bottles and read the evening paper.

Blake sipped his whisky and made an attempt to get the conversation going again. "Talking of freaks," he started, and then thought better of it. Perhaps he wasn't well-known enough in Lyncham to start discussing his sister's neighbours. In any case, Joan would have it that there was nothing out of the ordinary about Mr. Dankar. Apart from his name, of course. She said that it was all his imagination. "Just because he's a foreigner," she said, "and he doesn't speak the same as we do, there's no need to go round saying he's queer."

But he hadn't meant that. It was something apart from his name and his accent. A feeling, perhaps . . . Something that defied explanation. Something about the face.

And that was the whole point of the matter, only Joan wouldn't see it that way. As a professional photographer he had spent his life in studying faces; old and young, clear-eyed and smooth; the time-wrinkled and glaze-eyed; immobile and animated. Laughing, smiling, serious, tender. He knew them all. The high, exciting cheekbones and narrow brows of the true Latins; the square solidity of the Nordics; the deep shadows and satisfying high-lights of age. The true artist learns to use his camera like a third eye, with plates for canvas and

the delicate touch of the hand for a brush.

There was something about that face of the man who had come to live next door that wasn't right.

Blake set his glass on the table, suddenly conscious that the others were waiting for him to continue. "Just thinking aloud," he excused himself lamely and turned to stare out of the window. The rain seemed to be easing, a faint streak of light breaking the leaden clouds.

It looked like clearing up, he told himself, forcing his thoughts into a new track, but it was a week-end spoiled. All week he looked forward to his two days in the country and it was so disappointing to have to spend it indoors. He wished that Lyncham wasn't so far out in the wilds, then maybe he'd be able to come down each night instead of only at the week-ends. In any case, he was lucky to have an unmarried sister with a pleasant house in the country who was always pleased to see him every Saturday morning.

He and Joan got on well together; there were the usual brother and sister differences, of course. She could never understand his intense interest in portrait photography. "Always faces," she said once. "I wonder you don't get sick of them. Places are much more interesting. I mean, I'd much rather look at a landscape than a portrait; there's so much more in it."

His own face was uninteresting; so was Joan's. That was one reason why he'd never asked her to sit for him. Family faces, long and narrow with

eyes rather close together, no bones to catch the high-lights, no hollows to pool into interesting shadows and nothing artistic about the neutral hair. But that had only intensified his interest in other faces. He collected faces as others collect stamps and old china.

The story of a lifetime could be told in a face; character was there for the trained eye to appreciate and assess. Every face held it's own different story. Every face, no matter how flat and grey. Every face he had seen—except that of the man who had come to live next door.

At first sight a very ordinary man; inclined to be self-centred perhaps, for he seemed to have very little to do with his neighbours. Joan said that so far as she knew he had only once been down to the village. But that wasn't all that unusual.

His name was Dankar. Mid-European by the smack of it. And there was the faintest of accents to go with it. He always seemed to wear the same clothes; a neat grey suit with matching shirt and tie. All very uncreased and smart. Perhaps a shade too sophisticated for the country. But you couldn't label him queer on that account. Only because of his face. . . .

He didn't go out to work; one must assume that he had a comfortable income. And yet he was young to be retired.

Young? Now what gave that idea? The rather slender figure perhaps, the promise of athletic ability in the tapering waist. Certainly not the face. That told not a thing.

Blake carried his empty glass over

to the counter and the landlord refilled it without bothering to get up. Rain-induced boredom seemed to have seeped into every cranny of the low-ceilinged room. A pale ray of sunshine suddenly flung a pattern across the bare boards of the floor. Ringer leaned from his chair to push the door open. "It's gone off," he said unnecessarily.

Blake downed the rest of his drink at a gulp and went out into the street. The hedges were sodden and dripping, some of the fields were partly flooded, tufts of grass marooned like miniature atolls. The ditches were awash, but the sky was clearing. Thankfully he breathed in the freshness after the stale air of the bar.

Joan was in the front garden inspecting her precious rockery with some concern. She was always complaining that it wasn't sufficiently drained; each winter she lost some of her plants.

"Saturated," she mourned at his approach. "It'll be days before it dries out." He offered mute sympathy, stooping to inspect the bedraggled greenery. A flicker of movement from one of the downstairs windows of the house next door caught his eye, and fortified into rudeness by the previously-consumed whisky he deliberately turned to stare.

Dankar, a grey shadow, pulled back the curtain sufficiently to incline his head in a polite bow. Blake put his hand up to return the gesture, and Joan asked absently, "Who are you waving to, dear?"

"Him next door," he replied inelegantly and went into the house.



The face was all wrong. But why?

Earlier in the evening when he had toyed with the idea of getting the opinions of Blasser and Ringer he had thought better of it and had tried to bring the face to mind. But it wouldn't come; it had flitted elusively and tantalizingly at the back of his mind, refusing to take shape. And it was just the same now. Even though only a few moments before he had stared straight at it, now he was in the house he couldn't recall what it had looked like. It was as if his brain had refused to accept the evidence of his eyes.

He tried working up from the feet; he hadn't been able to see the bottom half of Dankar through the window, but he knew that he always wore highly-polished brown shoes. Then there were the grey-flannelled legs, the smart single-breasted jacket, the matching pale lilac tie. And after that, nothing; just an oval blank. Mouthless, eyeless, noseless, but topped with a tight mat of red-gold curls. Now why could he recall the hair and not the face?

Was it because it lacked expression? Perhaps that was it. But it was a galling thought to an artist, a specialist in the study of faces, to admit such a thing. Almost angrily Blake shrugged his shoulders, annoyed at his inadequacies. Selecting a book at random from the packed shelves he eased himself into the most comfortable chair. The thought came to him that it was nearly seven o'clock and he must soon be thinking about starting on the three-hour journey back to town. He should really be out in the open, taking advantage of the

change in the weather. But the faceless figure next door had spoiled the evening.

\* \* \*

The week passed uneventfully enough; it was the quiet off-season that always followed on the Easter wedding rush. Sitting in his office surrounded by his collection of framed photographs he found himself comparing the faces one with another, seeing how the balance of eyes, nose and mouth made up the personality of the features, adding to this the hair-line and shape of jaw. The most minute angling of an eye was sufficient to alter the cast of a face; move the hair-line a fraction and you had almost another person. . . .

Quite suddenly the thought came that it would be a good idea, an excellent, satisfying idea, if the face of the man next door could be hung on the wall for closer study. Then he would know what was wrong about it; no face, no matter how expressionless, could defy a close scrutiny. Blake saw it as a challenge to his professional pride. Until he had solved the problem he would enjoy no real peace of mind. Close study was the only answer.

But how to broach the matter to Dankar? So far he had had very little to do with the man, exchanging mild comments over the dividing hedge in the back garden about nothing in particular. He would have to get on a more friendly basis.

A letter from Joan on the Thursday morning warned him that she intended spending the Saturday on a shopping spree in the nearby market

town. Accustomed to this occurrence, Blake folded the letter absently, knowing that his meals would be left ready for him. In any case, he had already decided that because there was little work on hand he would travel down on the Friday evening instead of the following morning as was his wont.

Before setting off the next evening he put one of his cameras, a tripod, a box of plates and a selection of lamps into the back of his car. He reached Lyncham at nine o'clock.

Saturday dawned bright and clear with the promise of more fine weather on the way. Declining his half-hearted offer to run her into town, Joan caught the early bus, leaving him alone. Collecting his equipment from the car he carried it into the lounge. Then he went into the back garden. There was no sign of the man next door.

He busied himself with the lawnmower, finding the grass thick and sappy after the rain. Towards the middle of the morning he caught a stir of movement from over the hedge; leaving the machine in the middle of the lawn he went to peer over the hedge. Mr. Dankar, hands clasped behind his back, eyes to the ground, was walking slowly along the path. Blake wished him "Good morning." The other looked up, obviously startled, and returned the greeting unsmilingly, taking a step nearer the hedge.

Blake found himself fighting down a wave of revulsion. There was so patently something not right about the smooth perfection of the olive

oval, the thinly-pencilled brows, the straight nose and the cupid-bow mouth. They were all too perfect, like the face of a wax dummy in a tailor's window. And even now, with the face a bare yard away from his own, it seemed that his brain rejected the evidence of his eyes.

He became aware that Dankar was speaking—a voice as expressionless as his face; something about the weather; trite, everyday remarks about how nice the gardens were looking after the rain. And did Mr. —Mr. . . .? Yes, of course, how silly of him; and did Mr. Blake think the weather settled? And what an excellent job he was making of the lawn. Hard work, too, by the look of it. The grass was so thick . . . There was a faint accent with the words, not unpleasant but hard to place. Hungarian perhaps . . . Rumanian?

Blake said: "It's harder than I bargained for; I'm tired already. In fact I was just going to break off for a drink and a breather." The smooth face watched dispassionately.

"I'm on my own," he chatted on. "Almost a grass-widower you might say"—indicating the lawn and inviting sympathetic amusement. When none was forthcoming he pressed on: "And they tell me it's bad manners to drink on one's own, even in the morning." Disliking platitudes he felt a twinge of self-repugnance at his choice of words.

"It would be a kindness," he went on, "if you would share it with me. I mean, we're almost neighbours and we've never really got to know one another."



Mr. Dankar seemed taken aback; Blake could almost persuade himself that a faint flush had touched the smooth cheeks. It appeared that the casual invitation called for a certain amount of consideration. After a while a decision seemed to have been reached. "If you wish," Mr. Dankar said stiffly in the tones of one who has an unpleasant duty to perform. He glanced from a gap in the privet hedge to his immaculate trousers; Blake said: "Round the front, I think. . . ."

"Of course," the other agreed courteously.

Having offered the most comfortable seat to his guest, Blake busied himself pouring out two glasses of the whisky that Joan always kept in the house for his regular visits. He watched covertly in the mirror over the sideboard, seeing how Dankar eased himself carefully into the chair, his colourless eyes flickering rapidly but methodically over the room and its furnishings.

Blake took the glass over and it was received in tapering brown fingers. A faint, sickly-sweet, barely-discernible smell emanated from the seated figure and he found himself accepting it with distaste. An after-shave lotion perhaps; or a hair-cream. But he had never smelled anything like it before.

Dankar sipped his drink gracefully, his fingers coiled like miniature serpents round the stem of the glass. He coughed a little at the taste, glancing up apologetically. "This is very good," he observed in the polite, precise accents of a foreigner.

Feeling uncomfortable in the other's presence, Blake came directly to the point. "I'm a photographer by profession," he said. "I specialize in faces. I was wondering"—he swirled the amber fluid in his glass—"I was wondering if you would sit for me. It so happens that I have my equipment here. I would like to add your portrait to my collection, and, of course"—smiling—"I would like you to accept a copy in return. . . ."

A silence fell; an uneasy, nerve-tingling pall.

"Why?" asked the man in grey.

Unaccountably, Blake found himself searching for reasons and excuses. His chosen sitters didn't usually bother to ask—and so coldly as that—why he wanted to take their photographs. Usually they were only too pleased. After all, he had made quite a name for himself in the photographic world.

He spoke hurriedly of his work, of his collection of portraits that lined the walls of studio and office. He mentioned the people he had picked from the pavements because he had found their faces interesting. He broached modestly the question of his wide experience, saying that he was an expert in the study of features.

"But why my face?" the other asked, still coldly but with some urgency.

"Because it's different," Blake told him almost unthinkingly, and immediately and instinctively knew that he had said the wrong thing.

The silence that followed was profound. Dankar set his glass down with exaggerated care, sighing to him-

self. "How did you find out?" he asked gently. And while Blake was searching for the reason for the question, "I have made another mistake. The second one since I came here. This time I have been too hasty. . . ."

Blake clutched his glass tightly, feeling at a loss for something to say. Dankar's reactions didn't make sense. The sickly smell seemed to fill the room as if startled into life by the other's ill-concealed self-annoyance.

"They told me that I would be completely undetectable," Dankar said, as if trying to excuse himself for some mistake. "They said that they had studied this planet long enough to know for certain that there were no differences between ourselves and the people who live here. But they did warn us to exercise caution. . . ." He shook his head regretfully. "We weren't to mix with you until we were sure. They suggested a period of three of your years."

The face was raised to Blake. "But I have spoken to people like you and they found nothing strange; I have even been down to the village, and they accepted me without question. I felt sure that I was safe from detection."

The stem of Blake's glass snapped in his suddenly tensed fingers. His thoughts swung back . . . "This man is insane; what shall I do? Get him out of the place and ring for a doctor?" and then, "'They'? who are 'They'? What does he mean—'They' have studied this planet'?"

Dankar was still talking. "Not that we watchers are supposed to have any special qualifications other than

patience and understanding and an ability to interpret what happens here. My mistake was in not having discovered your unique gift of perception. But how was I to know that your world has its experts on faces as does ours? And yet I should have known. They said that you were identical to us in every respect. Otherwise we would have taken your world over eons ago. . . . We only permit similar peoples to exist."

Blake stood silently, trying to control his racing thoughts. Whatever else, this man wasn't insane. His reasoning was too orderly, his tone too matter-of-fact. He was simply stating the bald truth. And in that case . . .

"Who are you?" he asked, keeping his voice steady with a supreme effort. "Where do you come from?" The questions came almost involuntarily, as if they needed to be asked for the very asking and not because of the answers they would evoke. Because they would be terrible and frightening, breaking down all the fabrics of the ordinary, everyday world. A nightmare quality had invaded the small, sun-filled room.

Mr. Dankar folded his hands, studying the pattern they made. "From a long way away," he said simply as one would talk to a child. "But you must have realized that when you found out I was different. I—we—came here less than one of your years ago. And coming, I made my only other mistake. There was a mark . . . But it didn't seem to arouse comment. That mistake passed unnoticed; this one I must correct. . . ."



Blake's mind went back to the talk in the local only last week-end. A circle, a perfect circle of burnt grass in the field behind the houses. A freak they had called it. He knew now for certain that this man—or was it a man?—who sat so placidly in Joan's best easy chair, resting his head against the cushion that she had embroidered last winter, was from some other world—an alien.

Mr. Dankar seemed to be summing up the situation. "You knew that I was different, but apart from that, nothing?"

Blake shook his head, unable to trust himself to speak because of the cold fear that was spreading outwards from his stomach. There was something terrifying in the other's cold approach to the situation.

"A pity," the man in grey sighed. "But the damage is done. You have spoken to others of your suspicions?"

"We are a humane people," Dankar told him. "We kill only those that are different from ourselves. We exterminate only for self-protection. In time to come we would have allied ourselves with you. But that time is far distant. With only a few of us on this planet we must safeguard ourselves. I'm sorry, very sorry. . . ." He sighed as if at the prospect of an unpleasant duty to be done.

"It will look bad in my report," he mused. "But they will understand that it was unavoidable. It will probably mean my recall. And just when I was becoming interested in your way of life. Tell me, Mr. Blake, why is it that

you wear such a wide variety of faces? I have found it very intriguing. We only use a basic six types, with variations, of course. . . ." He seemed very anxious for a reply.

"I don't understand," Blake said through dry lips. The hypnotic quality seemed intensified; his legs were incapable of movement.

Mr. Dankar unfolded his hands gracefully, coming to his feet.

"A pity," he murmured. "But your confusion is understandable." He became apologetic. "You must understand that what I have to do now I find most distasteful. It has never been my intention to harm any people similar to myself."

He came forward, raising his hands. "Perhaps you would like to remove your face before—?" He smiled. "I know little of your customs as yet, but we never bring death while wearing our faces. Similarly, when death approaches us we always meet it featureless."

His hands came up each side of the smooth oval of his face. For a moment they groped as if seeking invisible fastenings. When they came down, the smooth expressionless oval came with them.

And looking at what lay behind, Blake found his voice in a scream. Not so much at the horror there, but at the sudden realization that the human race was, after all, different from this advance party from an alien world. And that soon, very soon now, Dankar was going to find out about that difference.

# THE BAD LORD FERRERS

MICHAEL FORSTER



VER THE YEARS many stories have arisen concerning the crimes and the death of Lord Ferrers, who was hanged at Tyburn Tree on the 5th day of May, 1760; the most popular of these legends is that he was hanged in a silken rope as a concession to his rank. In fact, the normal hempen rope sufficed, and no distinction was made between his aristocratic neck and that of the ordinary felon.

He was hanged for the murder of his steward, Mr. Johnson—although one Grub Street author mistakenly started the rumour that he had murdered Dr. Samuel Johnson!

Lord Ferrers appears to have been both mad and bad; throughout his life he fluctuated between periods of eccentricity bordering on lunacy, and periods of such intense sanity that it was impossible to swindle or defraud him in any respect. His solicitor, Mr. Goostry, permitted him to carry out certain legal acts in connection with family business, and to sign various documents; if Mr. Goostry had considered the earl to be insane, it is very unlikely that he would have allowed him to transact business of importance.

But as an example of the earl's eccentricity, one need only consider the case of the stabling of his mare. The earl was living in lodgings at

Muswell Hill—at that time on the edge of London—and had left his mare at an inn not far away, kept by a Mr. Williams. One Sunday afternoon, Lord Ferrers sent for the mare. He had previously given strict orders that nobody except his own personal groom was to have access to the animal, and for this reason the stable was kept locked. Unfortunately, the boy who held the key was at church, so that the mare could not be handed over. When the earl learned this he was so enraged that he seized a sword-stick and, followed by two servants armed with guns and a hammer, he went to Williams' inn.

On arrival at the hostelry, he walked into the yard, and when the man's wife, hearing a noise, came out to see what was wrong, his lordship promptly knocked her down with his fist; Williams, who rushed to protect his wife, was instantly wounded by a thrust from the sword-stick. Aided by his servants, the earl smashed open the stable door and departed in triumph with his mare.

There was no logical reason for this behaviour at all for, assuming that the mare was required in a great hurry, and even assuming that the key could not be found or had been lost, it is quite probable that Mr. Williams would have agreed to the door being broken open—provided that his lordship paid for the damage. Had Williams refused to hand over the



animal, then the earl might have been justified in using force towards him; as it was, without rhyme or reason, both husband and wife were attacked, and the stable broken open.

Nor was this the only example of the earl's strange behaviour, for his general oddity was such that people of his own rank refused to consort with him; he was forced to accept as friends people of the hostler and groom class, and other "low company"—and the low company of the eighteenth century was extremely low indeed.

He occasionally lodged at the inn kept by Williams and his wife; both they and the neighbours regarded him as mad, and not without reason. He had the habit of drinking his coffee out of the spout of the coffee-pot, without going through the formality of pouring it out into a cup. Occasionally he would threaten to break all the glasses in the inn. Sometimes he would break open Mrs. Williams' bureau, and when she tried to prevent him he would abuse and threaten to throttle her.

If all this had happened when he was intoxicated, it would be comprehensible and, perhaps, excusable, but when all these unpleasant feats can be achieved on nothing stronger than coffee it is reasonable to suppose that the person concerned is mentally unstable. The Williams's, however, made no complaints, and probably made as much as possible out of Lord Ferrers as was consistent with safety. His lordship at times was sensible, and lamented his wild behaviour, and no doubt in these lucid moments

compensated his landlord for damage done.

His relations, however, were so upset by his behaviour that they agreed that his rents should be paid into the hands of a receiver; but in order to create as little ill-feeling as possible, Lord Ferrers was permitted to name the receiver.

He appointed a certain Mr. John Johnson, who had been employed by the family of Ferrers since childhood days, and who acted at this time as his lordship's steward, and had the reputation of being a very honest man. In fact, if Mr. Johnson had not been so straightforward he might not have been murdered, for in appointing him Ferrers hoped that he would be able to influence him as he wished.

Mr. Johnson, however, confined his actions strictly to his duties, and was faithful to his trust; as a result, his employer conceived an intense and unrelenting hatred for him, referring to him in insulting terms, accusing him of conspiring against him and, finally, ordering him to quit a farm which he held as tenant.

However, he could not eject Mr. Johnson from the farm, since the trustees of the estate had already granted Johnson a lease. Ferrers brooded over the matter, and contemplated taking a drastic revenge. He succeeded in masking his real feelings under an apparent disguise of affability, and was successful in deceiving the steward into the belief that they were on excellent terms with each other.

Mainly as a result of his wild behaviour, Lord Ferrers had parted

from his wife; he was living at Stanton, near Ashby-de-la-Zouch, in Leicestershire, in the company of a lady discreetly named in the records as "Mrs. C.", who was more than a mere housekeeper. She resided with him, together with her four daughters, five servants, three maids, a boy and an old man; the four daughters, by the way, were his natural children.

Mr. Johnson, the steward, lived not far away in a house known as the Lount, which was part of the farm he held from the trustees. On the 13th of January (a Sunday), the earl called at the Lount and, after some general conversation, ordered Johnson to visit him at Stanton on the following Friday at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Ferrers dined at two on the Friday appointed, and after dinner he told Mrs. C. that she and her daughters might go for a walk. Mrs. C., presumably having had prior experience of the earl's temper, took this as a direct order and departed with her children; she told the earl that she proposed visiting her father, who lived in the neighbourhood, and would stay there until about five o'clock.

When she had departed with her children, his lordship sent the two manservants out of the house on some pretext, so that the house was empty except for himself and the three maids.

At three o'clock Johnson arrived. Elizabeth Burgeland, a maid, let him in and showed him to the earl's door where, on knocking, he was bidden to wait in the still-room. Ten minutes

later his lordship called out to him to come to his room. Johnson entered and, the mouse being in the trap, Ferrers instantly locked the door behind him. He then ordered him to settle certain accounts, and after a while produced a statement which, so his lordship said, was a confession of his (Johnson's) crimes and frauds, and ordered him to sign it.

This, naturally, Johnson refused to do and attempted to argue the matter with the earl, who flew into a frenzy and produced a loaded pistol from his pocket, threatened Johnson with it and bade him kneel down. In hopes of pacifying him, the wretched man did so. Lord Ferrers then shouted out in a voice sufficiently loud to be heard by the maids in the kitchen below, "Down, down, on your other knee . . . declare what you have acted against Lord Ferrers . . . your time is come, and you must die."

He then fired the pistol, the ball entering the steward's body just below the last rib. Despite the intense shock, Johnson did not fall but, staggering, ejaculated broken sentences to the effect that he was a dying man. His ghastly looks were such as completely to reverse the current of the earl's temper; he threw down the pistol, unlocked the door and called out to the maidservants, ordering one to seek out one of the grooms and the other to help Mr. Johnson to bed. He then despatched a messenger to Mr. Kirkland, a local surgeon, and returned to the room where he had left Johnson with the maid, and asked him how he felt.

Johnson brokenly gasped out that



he was dying, and asked his lordship to send for his children; Ferrers promptly sent a messenger to Johnson's daughter at the Lount, saying that Miss Johnson should be told that her father had been taken very ill, and that she was to come at once.

On her arrival she was told by the servants what had occurred, and ran to the room where her father lay, followed by the earl. Mr. Johnson was in bed but, still dazed by the shot, did not speak to her. The earl pulled down the bedclothes and having bathed Johnson's wound with a linen swab left the room—to drown his senses in porter.

Shortly afterwards the surgeon arrived, having been intercepted on his rounds by the messenger. The earl told Mr. Kirkland that he had shot Johnson, who, he said, was more frightened than hurt, that he deserved to die, and after cursing him soundly said that he (Ferrers) would not surrender to anyone, would not be seized, and that if anyone attempted it he would shoot them dead. Mr. Kirkland, noting Lord Ferrers' evident state of frenzy and intoxication, soothed him, and then, accompanied by the earl, visited his patient.

Johnson complained of a violent pain in his intestines, and when Mr. Kirkland prepared to search the wound, the earl kindly assisted him by demonstrating how he had held the pistol. On the surgeon discovering that the ball had lodged in the body, his lordship showed great surprise and coolly remarked that a few days earlier he had tested that particular pistol and found that the ball carried

through a plank nearly two inches thick!

The surgeon went below stairs to prepare some dressings; the earl also left the room—not to assist, but to drink more porter. Its effect was to change his temporary feelings of compassion to a compound of rage and malice against the wounded man. Going into the sick-room, he seized the dying man by the wig, shook him, screamed abuse at him and swore that he would pistol him through the head. It was with great difficulty that he was prevented from tearing the bedclothes off the steward and from striking him.

Mrs. C. had, by this time, arrived on the scene, and she suggested that Johnson be taken to his own house. To this well-meant suggestion, the earl replied, "He shall *not* be removed, I will keep him here to plague the villain!" This remark was made in the hearing of the dying man's daughter, whose feelings must have been indescribable.

In a fit of compassion as violent as his fit of malice, his lordship swore he would look after Miss Johnson, and the other children . . . provided they did not prosecute.

Presently the earl retired to bed, overcome by excitement and excessive porter.

Seizing his opportunity, Mr. Kirkland made arrangements for Mr. Johnson to be removed to the Lount; fitting up an easy chair as a litter, he took the steward to his home, where he languished in agony until about nine o'clock the following morning and then died.

News of the crime having got around, a number of the local people armed themselves and set out to capture his lordship; on arrival at the hall they found him apparently just out of bed. However, his lordship intimidated them so successfully that they allowed him to escape into the house, where he shut the doors and windows and appeared to be preparing to withstand a siege.

The house was surrounded, but he eluded his besiegers and was seen some hours later coolly standing on the bowling green, armed with a blunderbuss, three pistols and a dagger. Without offering any resistance or firing a shot, he meekly surrendered . . . and then announced to all who cared to listen that he gloried in his deed, and had killed a rascally villain.

He was held in custody at a nearby public house for nearly a week, when, the jury having brought in a verdict of "Wilful murder", he was transferred to the prison at Leicester. He set out from there under close guard for the Tower of London, riding in his own landau and tastefully attired like a jockey in a close-fitting riding frock, jockey boots and cap. He was confined in the round tower near the drawbridge. Two yeoman warders were constantly in the room, and one just outside the door; two soldiers were stationed at the foot of the stairs, and another upon the drawbridge. All had fixed bayonets, and from the commencement of his imprisonment the gates were ordered to be shut one hour earlier than usual.

These precautions were taken, less

from the fear of his escaping than from a fear of his possibly meeting with mob violence, news of his crime having been bruited abroad amongst the Londoners.

While in prison, he was moderate in eating and drinking, his breakfast consisting of a half-pint of tea laced with brandy and a muffin; with his dinner he drank a pint of wine and a pint of water. His day finished with supper and another pint of wine. To the eighteenth century this was austerity drinking.

His behaviour was quiet in the main, although he was observed sometimes to open his coat and to start suddenly for no obvious reason. He was not without company, for Mrs. C. made three attempts to visit him; although she was not permitted to enter, her daughters were allowed to visit him.

Two months after his arrival at the Tower, on the 16th of April he was put on trial before his peers in the House of Lords, and conducted his own defence in a very able manner. In the course of his speech he remarked that he might even have to try to convince his audience that he was a lunatic and not a murderer. When this plea failed, he admitted that he had only entered it to please his friends and not because he himself had any great faith in it.

The evidence of his guilt was only too convincing: he was convicted and sentenced to be hanged, and then to be anatomized in accordance with the law at that time. As a concession, instead of being hanged on Monday,



21st April, he was respited until Monday, 5th of May, and in this interval he made his will, leaving £1,300 to Johnson's children, £1,000 to each of his four natural daughters and £60 per annum to Mrs. C. for life.

A scaffold was erected under the beams of Tyburn Tree, so designed that part of it, about a yard square, was raised above the rest of the floor, with a mechanism to cause it to sink down when required. Everything was discreetly covered with black baize.

On the 5th of May at nine o'clock in the morning, Lord Ferrers was formally handed over to the sheriffs of London and Middlesex. He was allowed to ride in his own landau, instead of the mourning coach provided. The landau was drawn by six horses, and his lordship was accompanied by Mr. Humphries, the Tower Chaplain, and Mr. Sheriff Vaillant.

The earl was dressed for the occasion in a suit of light cloth embroidered with silver, reputed to be the suit in which he was married. He remarked to Mr. Vaillant, "You may, perhaps, sir, think it strange to see me in this dress, but I have my particular reasons for it."

Although there is no actual record of the fact, a tradition has always persisted that he cursed his wife, saying that her death should be more painful than his own, and it is true that his widow, who subsequently married again, did die painfully: her house at Sundridge, Kent, caught fire and she perished in the flames.

The procession to the gallows was then formed, in the following order:

A large body of Middlesex con-

stables, preceded by a high constable.

A party of horse grenadiers, and a party of foot (infantry).

Mr. Sheriff Errington in his carriage, accompanied by Mr. Jackson, the under-sheriff.

The landau escorted by two other parties of soldiers, both horse and foot.

Mr. Sheriff Vaillant's carriage, occupied by Mr. Nicols, the other under-sheriff.

A mourning coach and six, with some of his lordship's friends. (The records do not state whether these "friends" were of the ostler class, or aristocrats come to give him a genteel send-off.)

Finally came a hearse and six, provided for the carriage of his lordship's body.

It took the earl nearly three hours to reach Tyburn, due to the crowds in the streets, but during the journey he appeared unworried, and said that "passing through such crowds of people was ten times worse than death itself". When the chaplain tried to discuss religion with him he was politely told to mind his own business, and when the landau reached the Drury Lane end of Holborn he said he would like a drink.

The throng was so great that he could not be granted this wish, and the procession continued its snail-like crawl to the gallows, but before reaching it Lord Ferrers handed over a pocket-book, ring and purse to the sheriff, with instructions to hand the same to a person for whom his lordship "entertained a very sincere regard."

On arrival at the gallows his lordship alighted and ascended the scaffold without appearing in any way upset. In company with the chaplain he knelt down upon a black cushion and repeated the Lord's Prayer, afterwards ejaculating, "Oh, God, forgive me all my errors—pardon my sins!"

Then, rising to his feet, he thanked the chaplain and sheriff, gave his watch to Mr. Vaillant and requested that his body be buried at either Breden or Stanton in Leicestershire. He asked to speak to the hangman, who asked his forgiveness. Said the earl, "I freely forgive you, as I do all mankind, and hope myself to be forgiven!" He gave the man five guineas, but without realizing it gave the purse to the hangman's assistant, which provoked a most unedifying row!

The hangman removed his lordship's neckcloth and tied his arms with a black sash, while a white cap, which the earl himself had provided, was pulled down over his eyes.

The rope was adjusted round his

neck, and he moved forward on to the raised part of the scaffold. The signal was given by the sheriff; the raised platform fell; Ferrers hung suspended.

He kicked and struggled for a short while, but with the aid of the hangman and his assistant pulling on his legs he was soon out of his pain, and swung slowly round at the end of the rope. The whole business from start to finish took under ten minutes.

After hanging for a full hour he was taken down and conveyed to Surgeons' Hall to be dissected, this being part of the sentence. A large incision was made from the neck to the lower breast and another across the throat, and his bowels were removed; the body was then publicly exhibited. Finally it was handed over, on Thursday, 8th of May, to his relations for interment.

During his journey to the gallows he is supposed sardonically to have attributed the vast crowds to the fact that "they had never seen a lord hanged before".





# THE GOLD PLATE

THOMAS PHILIPS

*Illustrated by Woodward*

**I** WAS SELLING GARAGE tools, breaking new ground for my firm, and with eight orders to prove a morning's work I felt justified in taking it easy for the rest of the day. Idling the car along a leafy lane I came to a fork; a signpost told me that I was approaching Tarby Major. There were cottages standing back from the hedges, and the square tower of a church showed above the trees. And there was a reasonable-looking pub that persuaded me to go no farther that day.

Something about the name Tarby Major set my mind stirring. Where had I heard it before? This part of Surrey was new to me—I had certainly never travelled this way before.

I forgot the puzzle in the more urgent business of arranging for a room for the night. After tea I went for a stroll through the village. By the church was a narrow humped-back bridge and sitting on the low wall smoking a pipe and tapping his dusty boots with a piece of twig was an elderly man wearing brown corduroys and a blue cloth cap.

Seeing me stop to admire the church he piped up: "Sixteenth century in parts and they say the tower's Norman. It's worth a look round inside; chock-full of history if you go for that sort of thing."

"History isn't much in my line," I told him, seating myself by his side. "I have to be in the mood before I explore old churches."

He grinned with a great wrinkling of his small brown face. "Most folk feel that way I reckon; some make a real duty of walking round a church just because they think they ought to. But for all that, this one here has more history than most. To do with the Roundheads, way back when this church was one of the richest for miles round, having an altar full of gold plate. The parson at the time got to hear that there was a troop of cavalry headed this way, so no more ado but that he goes and buries all the plate. Buried it with his own hands, so they say, then comes back to the church, gives the spade back to the sexton and straight away collapses and dies of a heart-attack, likely brought on by him being an old man and working under a blazing sun. So nobody knew where he'd buried the gold.

"They've had many a try to find it but never a smell for all their trouble. Some say that it's only a story with no truth in it, but that doesn't stop them having a go from time to time. They say the most likely spot is this field behind us. Dawson's field they call it. . . ."

Then the name "Dawson" triggered

off my memory and I knew where I had heard the name of the village.

"Andrew Dawson," said I. "Of course. . . ."

"Two—three years ago?" I wondered. He shook his head. "Five. Time flies, doesn't it?"

"I'd only been in Tarby for six months when it all happened," said he. "Retired, come to live with my widowed daughter. Tickby's the name, Jim Tickby. I'm a dowser—a diviner—by trade."

He stopped at that point, obviously awaiting my reaction. When I stayed silent, still recalling the past, he continued: "I used to work for the Metcham Borough Council, tracing all sorts of underground workings. Water-pipes, of course, they were dead easy; gas and electric mains; buried man-holes, forgotten pipes. I reckon I must have saved them a fortune in man-hours. Used a hazel twig at first, but after a while they had a pair of real smart rods made for me. Copper tubing nicely bent and set in brass handles. They got the idea from reading somewhere that the Chicago authorities employed several dowsers.

"I got to be quite an expert with the rods; used to practise for hours getting the feel of them. In the end I could pick up a two-inch nail buried a foot down. And once, one of the foremen lost a sovereign—a gold sovereign—out of his pocket when he was stooping over a pile of sand. He didn't find out until the stuff had been carted away and spread on one of the lawns in the park. But I found the coin with no trouble at all. . . .

"A gold coin," he added.

"Of course," I nodded. "The plate . . . I remember how it was found."

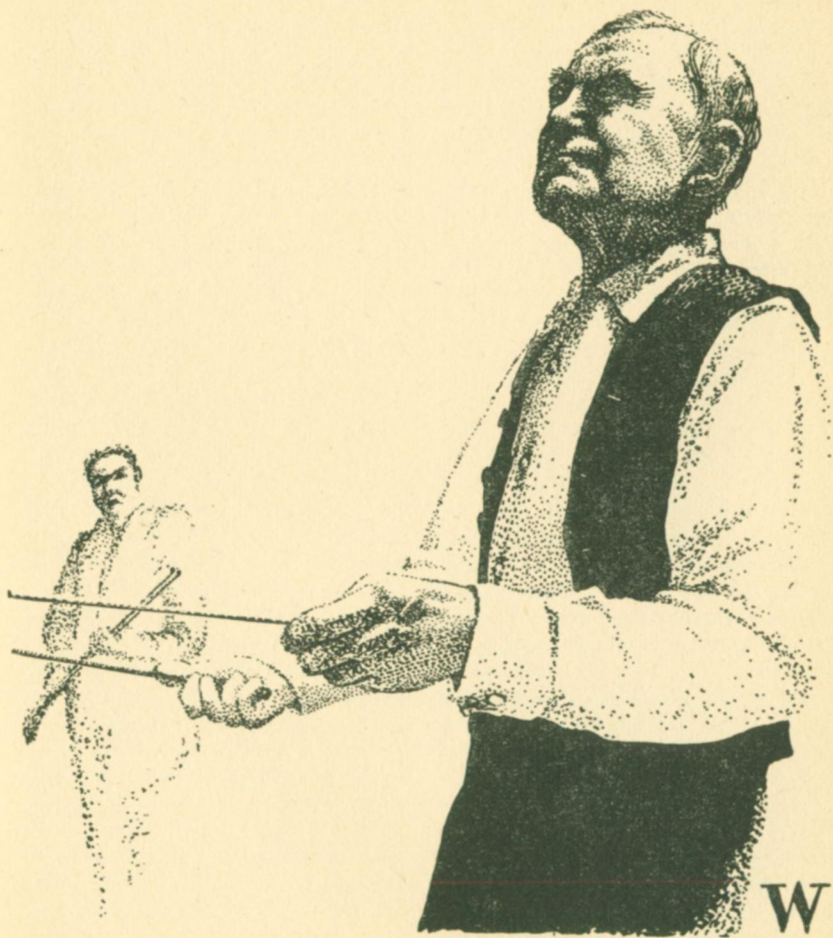
"It didn't work out quite the way I thought," he said a little sadly. "The moment the left-hand rod swung and pointed I knew I was on to something, and I felt sure it was gold. But not much of it—not enough for it to be all of the treasure. But I felt sure it was at least a small plate. We could have started digging right away, there in broad daylight with Dawson watching. But I was afraid; I mean there was just a chance that I was wrong after all, and there was nothing there. And after the way they'd been laughing at me already I didn't feel like risking it."

"They'd been laughing at you?" I wondered. "Why?"

"Partly because of my job. They were the sort of folk who try to find fun in something they don't understand. You'd think that country people would know all about dowsing. Well, maybe they did, but they couldn't see anything serious in anyone earning their living by it. When I first came to live with Flavia—her mother's choice of name that—I never thought they'd be the way they were. They listened right enough when I told them about the sovereign and about another time when I found a watch and chain that a workman must have lost years before when he had been helping to lay some tarmac.

"But at the start I didn't know they were laughing at me behind my back until Dawson made a point of telling me. Not with any idea of putting me on my guard, but to have a laugh himself at my expense. That's the





sort of man he was—taking pleasure in other folk's troubles. And there he was, hanging round Flavia, and him with a wife of his own somewhere.

"When I saw how matters stood, she still being good-looking and barely thirty, and taken in good and proper by his ways, letting him have the run of her cottage like he owned it, I started to make a few inquiries about him. Well, she was my only daughter and she'd had a rough time with her husband until he died. I didn't want her to get hurt again.

"Right from the start I didn't like the look of Dawson, and I'm a mild sort of man who tries to see the best in everybody. But there weren't no best in him. None of the men had a good word to say for him; the women weren't so quick to run him down, especially the younger ones. But that was on account of his looks. Tall, he was, and broad with it. Always used to wear riding breeches and a leather jacket. Maybe you recall seeing his photo in the papers. Usually smiling as if he hadn't a care in the world and superior with it. That was how he was—always thinking himself better than anyone else. Handsome too, in a coarse kind of way; thick lips, solid chin, wavy hair.

"I didn't know what to make of Flavia. I'd thought of her as a sensible sort of person, even though she had picked a wrong one for her first husband. And here she was getting herself talked about all over the village. She wouldn't hear a wrong word spoken about Dawson. It was almost as if he'd got her hypnotized. Not that I believe in such a thing. . . .

"Anyway, I got to asking questions about him in a quiet sort of way, but for the most part the village folk kept their mouths tight closed. It seemed that I was a foreigner and it wasn't any business of mine what happened in the village. Even though it was my own daughter that was involved. But I did find out a few things—from little Joe Binney who was a bit more talkative than the rest. He told me that Dawson had had an affair with the doctor's daughter within a year of him getting married. It had been hushed up, the girl being sent away and her father threatening to horse-whip Dawson. But Dawson had only laughed, telling him to try it. . . .

"It seemed that he wasn't above trying his hand on any woman, married or single, for all he'd got a wife of his own. And she must have had more sense than most—at least that's how it seemed—for she left him about the time of the affair with the doctor's daughter and hadn't been back to the village since. That had been six years before.

"So then I tried to find out more about her, but all Binney could tell me was that she was French, and that she had a brother in Denton, which is the nearest town, about five miles away. I went to see him, finding him to be a decent enough chap; a dentist with a prosperous practice by the look of his place. He wasn't able to tell me much, saying that he'd never been really close to his sister, but for all that had tried to talk her out of marrying Dawson. She'd gone her own way, and he'd only seen her the once after the marriage. That was



when she came to him with her face all bruised from where Dawson had struck her with a riding crop. She hadn't wanted to go to the local doctor—this was about the same time as the affair over the doctor's daughter—so the brother patched her up as best he could. And by all accounts she was a fine mess, her cheek cut open and three teeth broken. He told her she ought to leave Dawson, and it seems she must have taken his advice, for it was only a month or so after that that she left the village.

"He told me that when he got to hear of this he went to see Dawson to try and find out where his sister had gone. But Dawson kicked him off the farm, telling him that it was none of his business. And that was all he could tell me.

"That same evening when I got back from Denton, Flavia told me that she was thinking of going to keep house for Dawson. She said that I'd have to find somewhere else to live. She was very nice about it, saying that she was sorry, but that she was in love with Dawson and she didn't mind who knew it.

"That got me more worried than ever; not so much about having to find somewhere else to go, but at the thought of what Flavia was doing to herself. So I went to the farm and I tackled him. It didn't do a scrap of good; I think I'd known that before I went. But I had to try. He just laughed, saying openly that he'd got my girl eating out of his hand and that if I behaved myself and didn't interfere he might let me come and live with them on the farm.

"When I got back to the cottage she wanted to know where I'd been. I think she must have guessed before I told her. Then we had a flaming row, the only time in the whole of my life that I'd ever quarrelled with her. It seemed that all my plans to spend the last years of my life in peace and quiet were coming to grief. I've never been so miserable in all my life as I was that evening. And yet, you know, out of that quarrel came the solution to all my problems, for Flavia took my rods from where I kept them on the sideboard, and flung them in my face as a final gesture. And I took them with me to the pub.

"I suppose that I had some idea of drowning my sorrows—a thing I'd never done before. I remember thinking at the time that it was a day for first times.

"They spotted my rods the moment I got in the pub. I tried first to forget what had happened in showing them off. But all they did was to set a mug of beer on the floor and ask me to tell them how much water there was in it. Ted Bradley, the landlord, got a bit nasty—him not having a sense of humour—saying that it was a reflection on his ale and he didn't want strangers poking their noses in his affairs. It seemed like everything was going wrong for me. To try and quieten him down I said that an expert dowser didn't bother himself all that much with finding water.

"They'd heard it all before but that didn't stop them asking the same questions again, chiefly for the laughs they could get out of it afterwards, I suppose.

“What other things?” Bradley asked.

“Metals’, I told them. That was when I told them about finding the watch and chain under the tarmac.

“‘Gold?’ he wanted to know. ‘No,’ I replied. ‘It was nickel.’

“But that wasn’t what he had meant. He wanted to know if I could find buried gold. And that was how it started. Something of a joke at first, but before I rightly knew what was happening we were all trailing along to Dawson’s field. I was going to use the rods to try and find the gold plate. I had gone too far to turn back.

“A good-sized field it is; well, you can see for yourself. . . .” He turned to point with his twig. “From that row of trees up yonder right down to the farm, skirting the churchyard.”

I followed the sweep of the twig from the trees to the cluster of barns and outbuildings with a silo rearing up behind the sprawling half-timbered house. It looked a prosperous lay-out and I said as much. The old man nodded. “Ay. And it was just as good a place in Dawson’s time. Every field under the plough except this one, and this he kept for a herd of jerseys.

“Now where was I? Out on a treasure hunt; looking for gold plate. There was about a dozen of us all told, and we went to the top of the field and I started working across from north to south, that being the direction I’ve found works best. When we were about half-way down with not a quiver to my rods, Dawson came storming out and said that if we didn’t clear off he’d let loose a couple of barrels from his shotgun.

“In a way I was pleased to see him; I’d had enough of the game, feeling that the story about the gold plate was a lot of nonsense and that I was only making a fool of myself. But when he saw what was going on—and it must have stuck out a mile that they were trying to make a monkey out of me—he laughed, saying that if I did find anything it would belong to him.

“Then he started asking questions about the rods, wanting to know what they were capable of finding, that is if they were able to find anything at all, which he greatly disbelieved. I told him that apart from water I could pick out any buried metal and be able to identify it from the feel of the rods. Then we started off again, me with the rods held out in front and pointing straight ahead, and him falling in behind with the others.

“And just as we were getting near the farm the rod in my left hand swung out ever so gently, dipping at the same time. Just like it had the time I found the golden sovereign. So I felt sure that just where I was standing was some gold. But not very much of it, unless it was a goodly yard down. I hadn’t had enough experience with gold to be able to tell that.

“I thought very quickly then, barely pausing in my stride and swinging the rod back into place, so that they didn’t notice anything. I might have made a mistake—it had been known to happen. Normally I would have gone back over the ground again, approaching from another direction. But I felt that I would rather admit failure over the whole field than have



them dig up the turf and then nothing to show at the end of it. So I didn't say a word, carrying right down to the bottom, then going back to the cottage, leaving them laughing fit to make themselves sick.

"But I had made a note of the exact spot where the rod had moved, lining it up with one of the trees and the silo. There was a small boulder to help fix the place in my mind.

"That night I took a spade from the shed and went back to the field. It was a light night with a three-quarter moon. The church clock was striking one when I set off again with the rods held steady, checking off my original findings. Sure enough they moved again, shouting 'gold' for all they were worth. I felt sure that I had found at least one of the church plates. Only a small one, perhaps, but there was something there. Then I started to dig; a circle, about four feet across. . . ."

He fell silent for a while, sucking at his now empty pipe. I can still remember the gurgling sound it made. It was the noise that a spade makes when it pulls away from a heavy, damp clay soil. At least that was the picture that leapt to my mind, knowing what was to come next in his story. For once he had started digging, the whole country was soon to know.

"You know the rest," he said, seeming to read my thoughts. "Not very far down, only about three feet, my spade struck something hard. Then, God help me to forget, I put the

spade aside and used my hands. There was a mess of rotted cloth at first—and then an arm. Then I had to climb out of the hole to be sick. After a while I went and woke the village constable."

"I know," I said, to spare him: his hands were shaking, his face puckered at the memory. "It was his wife."

"His wife," he echoed. "They arrested him the next day; three months later they hanged him."

Behind us, the church clock struck nine and I rose to my feet.

"I can't remember all the details," I said. "But wasn't Dawson dead set against you using the rods in his field?"

He drew a pattern with his twig in the dust by his feet.

"He had no worries on that account," he explained without raising his head. "His wife never wore jewelry, and in the last quarrel she had snatched her wedding ring off and flung it at him. So he knew that all that was buried under the field was flesh and bone and clothing. Not a scrap, not a particle of metal. Least of all gold. . . ."

He paused once again.

"It was her teeth," he said. "Three teeth on a plate that her brother had fixed up for her that day. Being French she'd had a liking for gold ones, even though they didn't show. . . ."

"It's odd," he added, peering up. "All the time I was digging I was hoping to find a plate—a gold plate."

# FOOTBRIDGE JULIET

JOHN FALKNER

**E**VEN A DRAMATIC critic feels he must escape from the world sometimes. For my rest I went to an off-the-map hamlet, deep in the Chilterns. It had everything: thatched cottages, a river, a disused mill and, for me, a mystery I shall never solve. A mystery, moreover, which I never want to solve.

On my first evening there I sat for an hour or so in the bar of the pub that was boarding me until I decided there was little difference between the smoke fumes of a country inn and those of a West End lounge.

Outside, the evening was warm and soft. I strolled out of the village, along a lane bordered by a tousled bramble hedge until I came to the river. The mill house was in sight, and I followed a path until I reached it. Over the meadows on the other side of the river I could see a clump of trees. It seemed a secluded enough sanctuary from which to study the best backcloth of all, the sky.

There was a footbridge over the river. I tested it gingerly, and decided it would bear my weight. Half-way over, the handrail was broken: a gap of almost a yard. However, I negotiated the crossing without getting so much as a wet toe-nail, reached the cove of trees on the river bank, and sat down, my back resting against one of them.

How long I remained, I don't really know. I was, truthfully, out of this world, hovering above and knowing my own body was sitting motionless below; the same sensation, I imagine, one has under hypnosis.

I was alone; wonderfully and completely alone—apart even from myself. This trance-like state might have gone on all night, had I not rejoined my soul and body together with something of a start. I had company. At first, I sensed rather than saw the invader.

She was standing on the bank, a low-hanging branch of a tree framing her. When I first saw her, she was looking towards the mill. Then, when she knew I had seen her, she turned towards me and smiled. She was lovely, in a dark, piquant, gamin fashion; a will-o'-the-wisp creation whose mind one might try to apprehend, without every fathoming its depths or owning its profundities.

"This is such a lovely spot I didn't think for a minute I was the only one who knew of it," I said. Then, thinking of local courting couples, I added lightly, "I imagine when the moon is full, there's quite a queue to come here."

She smiled, slightly, distantly. The new moon was rising and shining on her features, making her seem almost transparent.

"You're wrong," she contradicted me. "I come here every evening, but



no one else seems to. I think I must frighten them away."

It was my turn to smile. "That," I said with chivalry, "is not going to apply to me. If I'm allowed to, I'll come here to see you every evening of my stay."

"I didn't think you lived here," she said.

"I don't," I told her. "I'm from London." I shrugged. "Something my doctor called a nervous breakdown. So here I am; complete rest and quiet."

"Rest from what?" she asked.

I smiled. "About two million readers. I'm a newspaper dramatic critic."

A few confused emotions chased themselves across her expressive features. When the race was over, the winner proved to be an outsider to me: a blaze of fury that made me wonder with alarm what I had said to provoke it.

"Dramatic critic," she raved. And she continued to storm for quite a while until I scrambled to my feet. Then she became calm and appealing again. "Don't go," she said. "I—I'm sorry."

"I'm used to it," I said. "But I'm supposed to be convalescing from 'shop'."

"Then just let me explain: perhaps you'll understand, if you won't forgive my outbreak. You must know how much a piece in the papers helps a player when he or she is starting out. Some of them will do anything to get a mention. But somehow, I was always omitted, no matter how good I felt I was."

There was something about her—

her looks, her manner, her personality—that made me feel she undoubtedly had prospects as an actress. I said: "Maybe you just had bad parts."

"That's what I decided too," she went on. "So I made a break from modern plays to specialize. A friend once told me I would make a good Juliet. So I drew out my savings and came down here to study and rehearse.

"Every evening I came here," she went on. "I used the bridge," she pointed towards the rickety planks I had crossed with trepidation. "I used that as my balcony."

I remembered my own schooldays' Romeo. "*All these woes shall serve, For sweet discourses in our time to come.*"

She responded: "*Oh God! I have an ill-divining soul!*"

"Well, go on," I said. "Let me audition you."

"No." Her voice held a frightened quality. "It's too late now. It doesn't matter any longer. At the time, if I could have got my name in the papers, I'd have done anything. . . ."

"I know," I said sympathetically. "It isn't enough just to have ability. You've got to have a stunt, a gimmick to get that ability to the people who matter. If it's any consolation, there are plenty of good actors, potentially stars, who are unknown, and who will remain unknown because of that."

"I don't like being beaten," she said, and her delicate, urchin-like face became determined, stubborn. "Just one mention in the papers and then—well, I feel I could rest."

I didn't intend to return there next

night in case I met her and she renewed her request for what, obviously, had become an obsession with her. I liked her in the way I had not liked any other girl I had met. But I wished from the bottom of my heart that she was a miller's daughter rather than a would-be actress. Then there would be no hint of underlying motive to any friendship which might develop between us. All my professional life I had avoided doing personal favours. I didn't want to start now.

But I did go back the next night. And the night after that. Every night, in fact. Always she was there, waiting. Always, when it was time to part, she made me leave first.

I loved her air of elusiveness and the faint tinge of mystery with which she seemed to be surrounded. In fact, I realized suddenly, I loved her—entirely, completely. To the devil with my professional ethics. If I could do something to help her, to make her reward me with the first warm, confiding touch of her hand, I would.

I suggested that, as I knew many producers, I could arrange some introductions for her.

She shook her head, rather sadly I thought. "It doesn't matter now," she said. "It's too late." My heart sank. Like so many young actresses who found the going tough she had, I decided, got married and left the stage.

"You know, you've given me the idea for quite a story," I said. "The footbridge Juliet. Every night she rehearses by herself on the bridge. A new, exciting interpretation of Shake-

spere's young lover. But, because she's unknown, hasn't got any cuttings or notices, she can't get a producer to audition her."

"Then?" she prompted.

I looked over at the bridge, at the ominous gap in the handrail. "She decides to get newspaper publicity in a desperate way. The handrail will break, she'll fall in, scream and be rescued. The papers will take the story—she'll be made. She'll get farther because of a stunt than she will by ability alone."

I warmed to my theme. "And then, as a surprise twist ending—you see, this happens during the war—what with paper rationing and battle news, there's such a pressure on space, even for local county weeklies, she still doesn't make the news columns. Not even for the stunt that caused her death."

"So poor Juliet's soul is chained to earth until some kind newspaper tells her story and releases her."

I shook my head. "Sorry. Editors don't much like the supernatural. Not in fiction." I thought her face fell slightly. "But you've been my inspiration, so I'll let you choose her name."

She thought for a long minute. "Lucerne," she said. "Lucerne Rodette."

It was a good name, I thought. Fortunately, I had brought my portable typewriter with me. The story wrote itself. By lunch-time I had been to the nearest station, put the envelope on the London train and was phoning my editor.

"So you can't stop working, eh?"



he chuckled. "All right. If this fiction début of yours is any good, I'll use it in our daily Short Story feature."

Obviously, the story was good. There it was, on the top of our feature page, with my name alongside. The first truly creative work I'd done.

As usual she was waiting for me that night. Her eyes widened and sparkled as she saw the newspaper under my arm.

I threw it over to her. "They used it," I cried.

I waited for her to read it and congratulate me. Authorship makes one vain. But, when she had finished, her face lengthened and became grave.

"Please," she said, almost in a whisper. "Please leave me."

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Have I? Isn't the story?"

"It's wonderful, wonderful. Now please go, please. . . ." There was a note of near-panic in her tone. Because I loved her, because I wanted to please her, I hid my disappointment. "I'll come tomorrow," I said. But she didn't answer.

The next night, the river bank was deserted. I waited all night, but she never came. I stayed there many nights, but I never saw her again.

Like my editor, I don't believe in the supernatural. Instead, I reread *Romeo and Juliet*. I got as far as the quotation we had exchanged, where she refused to continue after the line, "*Oh, God! I have an ill-divining soul.*"

It went on: "*I see thee, now thou art below, As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.*" I had no heart for reading further.



What beck'ning ghost, along the moon-light shade  
Invites my steps, and points to yonder glade?

ALEXANDER POPE.

I fled, and cry'd out, Death;  
Hell trembled at the hideous name, and sigh'd  
From all her caves, and back resounded, Death.

JOHN MILTON.

# THE MORGAN TRUST

RICHARD BRIDGEMAN

*Illustrated by T. J. Gough*



ODDLY ENOUGH, it was a small handbook entitled *Not the Highways* that set Selby Pyle on the track of the strange village in the mountains.

He bought the slim volume at the station kiosk because there happened to be a picture of Snowdon on the cover, and he had for some time been toying with the idea of spending a holiday in Wales.

He rifled idly through its pages, noting in passing that it had been written—not very well written—by one John Kilby; as he read, the train rattled him along the way to Guildford where there had been rumours of a cottage with strange noises.

For Selby Pyle, middle-aged gentleman of leisure and assured income, had an unusual hobby. He liked to call himself an "Amateur Psychic Investigator." And when his contemporaries asked, "Why?" he would go into details, explaining that he used the word "Amateur" to denote that he worked without payment, and not because he was lacking in knowledge or experience of his subject.

But if they asked, "Why such a strange hobby?" he would become evasive. "Because it's out of the ordinary," was his usual lame excuse. Only in his more sanguine moments

would he admit even to himself the real motive behind his pursuit.

And if they still persisted in their amazement that a portly and immaculately-clad gentleman with cherubic blue eyes, a shapeless blob of a nose which offered only the most precarious of resting-places for rimless spectacles, a soft baby-tight mouth and a series of flabby chins should adopt such a way of spending time and money, then Selby, squirming a little, and rubbing his thin flaxen hair with stubby white fingers would be driven to confess openly certain of his innermost secrets.

He would tell how, despite the fact he was a religious man, he had failed to find solace in the teachings of the Church, and that he had an overwhelming dread of being snuffed out like an ephemeral candle when his time came. He was searching, he would tell them, for proof positive of life in the hereafter.

He kept notes and pictures in voluminous folders. On the wall of his study was a large-scale map with the sites of past investigations marked with red dots. He had a supply of small blue flags which were to be used if ever his search proved fruitful. But although the map was a measles-rash of red spots, it was devoid of blue flags.

Every rumour that came to his ears



he traced hopefully to its source. So when he read the few lines in his morning paper about the strange happenings at Guildford, he boarded the first train.

London melted away, fields and farms slipped by, and Selby flicked through his booklet, sighed a little and stopped just by chance at the page that contained the description of Cwmbach.

"This village," Mr. Kilby informed him through the medium of the pages, "is one of the most isolated that I encountered. Situated in a hollow in the shadow of Crib Goch it is steeped in the past. There is an excellent hostelry—the 'Bryn Mawr'—and I can heartily recommend it as a centre for the enthusiastic fisherman. The roads are in poor condition; the air is mild, being shielded from the northerly winds; the people are friendly, and there is a fund of local superstition and tales of hauntings to delight even the most hardened of travellers."

Selby, himself a writer, wriggled a little at the rather formal and Borrowesque turn of phraseology. But all the same his interest quickened and his psychic nose quivered at the mention of "tales of hauntings". He took out his notebook, made a note of the author's name and discovered that the publisher of the booklet was a friend of his, who had published certain of his writings.

The Guildford investigation having proved, as he had feared, to be fruitless—a matter of faulty plumbing—Selby wasted no further time: he telephoned the publisher from a kiosk

in the High Street. Armed with Mr. Kilby's address he returned to London, dined and took a taxi to the home of John Kilby, M.A.

The author of *Not the Highways* was angular and elderly, had a domed forehead and watery eyes. He listened to Selby's request for further information about Cwmbach with a certain air of suspicion.

"I take it you are engaged on a similar work?" he commented heavily. Selby went to great pains to protest his innocence of such a thing, whereupon the other unbent enough to produce a file of notes which he explained had been the basis of the book in question.

"It must be three years since I wrote the book," he offered. "Cwmbach," he toyed with the name, "I remember a little. But so far as the—er—supernatural aspect is concerned, I know no more than I wrote. If I had," he pointed out, "then I should have put it in. After all, there is little enough one can write about a place of that size.

"Cwmbach," he said thoughtfully to the ceiling. "Grey stone cottages, a stream that runs down the main street and some grand views of the valley. But the name brings back something else. . . . Now what was it?"

He sat for a while, staring at his notes; Selby waited with some impatience. So far as he was concerned, if Mr. Kilby had nothing more to add about the hauntings, then the interview could well be terminated.

"Morgan," Kilby said into the silence, "—that was the name, Ifor

Morgan. There was a picture of him in the pub, and when I asked about it they told me the story."

He stroked his chin, smiling a little. "Not that it can be of any use to you; indeed, it was of no use to me. But interesting, from a psychological point of view, for all that. Ifor Morgan, it seemed, was something of a rascal in his day. Many years ago he set up a kind of a Trust Fund, getting most of the local people to subscribe to it. The idea being that he would build a new village for them; modern houses, you know, bring in power and water on tap. It was going to be built in a green valley, just below Cwmbach, and by all accounts it was going to be a proper Shangri-la.

"But of course, like all plans of that sort it fell flat. He did start the building, but without previous consultation with the local authority. In the course of time they came down on him like a ton of bricks. A stupid man more than a knave, perhaps; a visionary—a dreamer. There have been many such: their follies litter the countryside. But Morgan took it very badly. . . ."

"I take it he is dead?" Selby asked with quickening interest.

"Good Lord, yes. This happened years ago. But the people of Cwmbach talk about it as if it were only yesterday. Three years ago, when I stayed at the 'Bryn Mawr', there were still some alive who had actually subscribed to the fund, their life-savings had gone down the drain. But the strange thing about that——"

"Yes?" Selby encouraged.

"They seemed to bear no animosity.

Rather, his memory had been kept alive with affection, almost reverence. Think of it; he'd done them out of thousands, for most of the village had subscribed, and all there is to show for it—and I went to see for myself—is a pathetic collection of grass-covered foundations and partly-built walls.

"There's no accounting for people," he mused. "They forget the money they lost, remembering only that he did try to make things better for them. They were very proud, jealously proud, of Ifor Morgan."

Selby said: "The tales of hauntings, you don't connect them with this unfinished village?"

"Llanef it was to be called," Kilby told him. "I made a note of the name, intending to look up its meaning—I have an interest in Welsh place-names. No, Mr. Pyle, it was merely an idle word dropped by the landlord of the 'Bryn Mawr' that led me to comment about it in my book. Now what was it he said?" He clicked his fingers. "Of course. I asked if there were any local stories—the kind of thing I could put in my book, you know? He said that there are ghosts in any village worth its salt. Perhaps he was trying to be clever. Anyway, I enlarged upon it, and put it in for what it was worth."

Selby left him then and returned to his own flat, wondering if it would be wasted effort if he were to journey to the mountains in search of the village. And it was only because he'd already decided to go to Wales anyway, that he made up his mind to include Cwmbach in his itinerary.



He went by car, starting off early the next morning, striking due north, and spending the night at Chester. The following morning saw him driving through the sunshine of the coast road, crossing the Conway bridge, and swinging through the coastal resorts. At Bangor he turned inland, his map taking him readily enough as far as Bethesda. From there onwards he found it more satisfactory to rely upon local directions and reached Cwmbach in time for lunch.

It was much as he had imagined. The mountains, brown and green with out-croppings of grey granite, almost encircled the village. Cwmbach was typically Welsh, with the small, low-roofed cottages clustered about the steep slate roof and tall chimneys of the inn. A bracken-brown stream bubbled merrily at one side of the main street.

White-aproned women and cloth-capped men smiled at him as he coasted past; children broke off their play to wave. Selby felt a pleasure in their welcome; the mountains behind came down like a curtain, cutting off the world of finance and worry, hydrogen bombs and guided missiles. He swung the car on to the cobbled forecourt of the "Bryn Mawr".

He went through an archway, and the landlord, stocky and chestnut-faced, bare-armed and wearing a blue waistcoat with gilt buttons, made quite a thing of shaking his hand.

The bar was a cheerful place, low-timbered and aglow with polished jugs and tankards. A heavy-framed picture on one wall dominated the room, and Selby went to look at it.

It was the portrait of Ifor Morgan of which Kilby had spoken; for the name was written below in a flowing, old-fashioned script. The landlord came by his side, asking in a soft lilt if "The gentleman would be staying overnight, or perhaps for longer?"

"A day or two," Selby told him; then, tapping the picture, "A fine-looking man."

"Our Mr. Morgan?" The voice was even softer, and there was certainly reverence. "Indeed, a very fine man."

And as Selby turned to look at the landlord, a phrase came to his mind, brought there by the expression on the brown, wrinkled face, "I will lift up mine eyes . . ."

Ifor Morgan had the face of a patriarch, a deep-eyed, wide-set face that might have come from the Old Testament. He had the eyes of a dreamer, placid and fathomless, but the high forehead of a thinker. His hair was white and luxuriant, falling in uncombed sweeps and folds to frame the broad cheeks and gently-smiling lips.

"I have heard the story of Llanef," Selby said tentatively. And the other replied, "Have you indeed, sir?" in a tone lacking surprise, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a stranger to know the story.

After lunch, Selby took his coffee to a small iron table in the forecourt, a placid, very ordinary man in flannels and blue blazer, his spectacles aslant on his face, relaxing happily, the world he had left far away behind the tall cloud-wrapped mountains.

Children played in the sun, laughing and shouting, their voices clear



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and shrill. Their clothes were bright and clean, new-looking, almost, and he remarked on this when the landlord came blinking into the sun.

"All in their best today," he explained to Selby, "and a holiday from school. A celebration it is for everybody to mark the passing of old Gwan Hughes."

Selby wondered idly who Gwan Hughes could have been that the anniversary of her death should be marked by a holiday. He put his thoughts into words, and the landlord looked mildly surprised.

"Early this morning, at dawn it was, when she breathed her last; ailing for some time, and very old. . . ."

And Selby, sipping his coffee, with the children's happy voices about him, thought how pleasant it was that death should be celebrated with laughter and a holiday instead of wreaths and mourning. It seemed so right. For a moment, the constant fear of his own death faded, and he could almost believe that here in Cwmbach he might find that which he had sought throughout the years.

Later, in the peace of his room, when he came to analyse his thoughts, he found it was because these people assumed death to be something that called for rejoicing that his own fears melted. For why should they be so happy, he reasoned, unless it was because they knew death to be something more than just the going out of a light?

After tea—an affair of freshly baked cake and hot buns dripping with butter—Selby tried to bring the conversation round to the story of

Ifor Morgan and his village, but the landlord was politely evasive. But not because there was nothing to say about the man and the village that was never completed; Selby got the impression that he was reticent about discussing the matter simply because a "foreigner" wouldn't understand.

The children were still playing in the street, and Selby watched them for a while, thinking that they must have enjoyed their holiday from school. From the school, his thoughts drifted to churches, and he searched the surrounding roof-tops for the spire or steeple that would show him its locality. But the village was flat, only the low slate roofs and the mountain slopes.

When the landlord came out, wiping his hands on a blue-edged towel, Selby asked him about a church or a chapel in Cwmbach, and the other smiled, shaking his head. The nearest chapel was beyond the mountains—at Bethesda, no less.

Then Selby got to thinking about the old lady who had just died. "They will have to take her to Bethesda?" he wanted to know.

The landlord smiled again, almost pityingly, and changed the subject to salmon fishing, leaving Selby feeling that in some indefinable way he had been gently rebuffed.

With some idea of exploring the countryside, he went to the car, passed a rag over the windscreen and checked the petrol. The landlord watched the preparations with a slightly worried air.

"A run is it?" he asked. "Perhaps as far back as Bethesda?"

Selby shook his head. "I was thinking of following this road up into the mountains. There should be some excellent views from higher up."

"I wouldn't advise it," the other said carefully. "The roads are bad, and one must be very careful. Night comes down quickly and there is a chance that you might lose yourself. And that, in the mountains, is a very bad thing."

Selby levered himself behind the wheel and adjusted his glasses. He felt a little put out, even annoyed, at the insinuation that he was incapable of looking after himself.

"I'll risk it," he said briefly, and started the car.

The other shouted something above the roar of the engine, and moving down the slope, Selby cupped his ear to catch the words.

"Look out—the fork—keep—to—left—mind you—right. . . ."

He waved in acknowledgment of the scattered instructions, smiled a little to himself at the thought of the landlord's concern and swung out into the road.

The cottages fell behind, and the mountains crowded in for a while, then swept away again so that the valley spread itself out far below, a thing of brown and green squares, with the occasional glint and glitter of meandering streams. He stopped to admire the view, leaning out of the window, letting the salt-heavy breeze stir his hair, the tang of the sea on his lips. Life felt very good; there was a peace out here, between the sky and the valley, that he hadn't felt before.

He lay back against the soft upholstery, letting the calm engulf him, then dozed off, nodding gently, fat white fingers laced above the mound of his waist.

So Mr. Pyle slept, suspended between Heaven and earth, with the seagulls crying high above, and only the peace of the mountain slopes to hear their calling.

When he awoke, refreshed, the sun was pulling itself down behind the highest peaks; the breeze had freshened and was cooler; dusk was slipping silently about him. The gulls had ceased their clamour, and the very earth seemed to hold its breath.

He started the car, debating for a moment whether or not to retrace his steps, but the lure of the winding road ahead was too strong; he set the bonnet into the cleft of the mountains.

After a while he came to where the road forked, three ways offering invitations, and he tried to remember the instructions flung after him by the anxious landlord, Had he to keep to the right or the left? But what matter when there would be time to explore each in their turn? Tonight it would be the road to the left, for that led up into the mountains, with the trees overhanging, and bushes and gorse thick on its verges.

The sun vanished, and night came down like a black cloak. The world was very still, the air sharp and clear. He breasted a slope where the rocky walls widened, and came on the scattered lights of a village in a hollow. He stopped then, drawing the car well in to the side of the road, and un-



folded his road map in the dim glow of the small roof light.

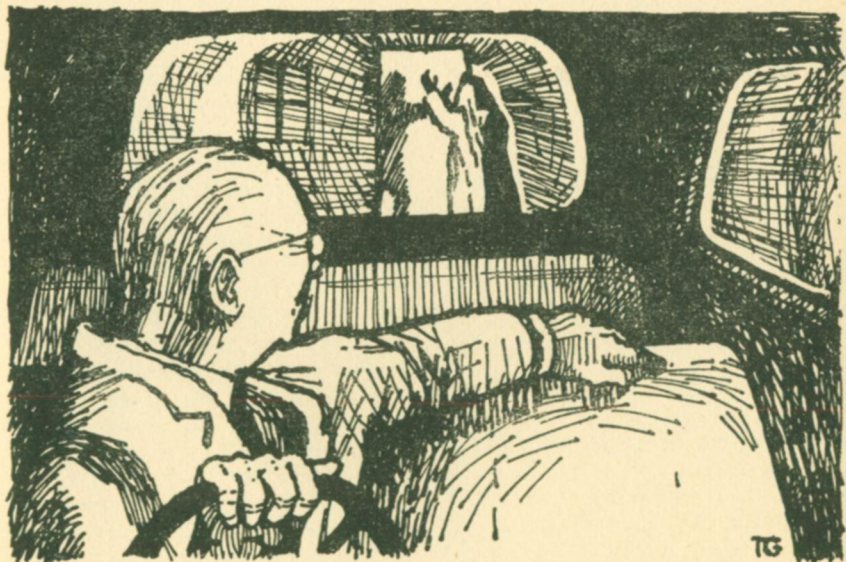
He managed to trace his path as far as Cwmbach itself, but then the road developed into series of dotted lines. He found the spot where he had slept overlooking the valley, and came upon a small village ahead. He strained over the name, holding the map to catch the light. Pengwyn it was called.

While he pored over the map, he caught sight of a movement, a flicker of movement in the driving mirror above his head. Someone was coming along the road behind, a nebulous white shape that resolved itself into the figure of a woman, dressed in a pale coloured frock and with a white shawl draped loosely over her head.

She walked with purpose, almost impatiently, with long, firm strides, her face to the village ahead, but turning to look at him as she passed the car, half-raising her arm in a gesture. She smiled into his eyes, the happy smile of a woman who smiled for the very pleasure of life; then she was ahead, a tall shadow in the lights of the car, vanishing into the blackness of the night.

Selby felt his heart warm to her gesture and smile. A woman who had passed, a stranger who had found time to offer her happiness. It was a woman going home, to a house that waited, with a husband and children to welcome her. He felt suddenly very envious of her happiness.

Her face was still bright in his mind



when he started the car and slipped down the road, his headlamps cutting clear swathes of golden light. He found himself searching the night for her slim figure, with some idea at the back of his mind of offering a lift. But the houses were around him sooner than he had imagined, and then, for a brief moment he saw her, her hand on a gate, sharply outlined in the harsh glare of his lights.

He turned to look back over his shoulder, seeing how the cottage door was open and waiting to receive her; how a dark shadow in the golden oblong held out its arms to welcome. He felt absurdly pleased that he had seen the end of her journey.

He drove slowly through the comforting lights of cottages and houses, stopping finally in the friendly glow of the hotel. The bar was full, a place of noise and laughter. Selby sat in a corner, content to look on and, looking on, to become at one with the place. He felt tired, and the heavy warmth gave a dreamlike quality to the small room and friendly faces.

The landlord was a smiling grey-haired man whose features melted and blurred as he hovered with tray and glasses, speaking of the weather and the crops, of how things were in the valley.

"You have rooms?" Selby asked impulsively.

"But of course . . ." He seemed surprised at the question.

"Tomorrow, then," Selby told him. "I will come back tomorrow; my things are at an hotel in Cwmbach."

"Perhaps it would be better if you were to stay," the landlord offered

gently. "There may be no room tomorrow. . . ."

He hesitated, then, but borrowed night-clothes offered little attraction. Also, the landlord of the "Bryn Mawr" deserved consideration. It was only right and fair that he return, at least for the night. But afterwards—he was then prepared to spend the rest of his holiday in Pengwyn.

Mindful of the lateness of the hour, he rose and went out into the darkness. The landlord followed, standing by while he climbed behind the wheel. Then he said something which, at the time, held little sense.

"People don't usually go away again," said he, shaking his head. "There is something here that I don't understand."

"I'll be back," Selby told him sleepily, and drove away into the night.

At the top of the hill he stopped the car and turned to look back, refreshing his memory of the place. It lay there, a toy village in the dark cupped hand of the night. And as he watched, the lights winked out, one by one, until only a pool of darkness remained. The people of Pengwyn, it seemed, had gone to bed.

Back at the "Bryn Mawr", the landlord seemed pleased to see him. His eyes asked a question while his hands were busy with tankards.

"I made it as far as Pengwyn," Selby told him. "A pleasant little place, too; I think I'll move along there tomorrow." He yawned, it was getting late; the old clock above the counter was pointing to eleven.

"Just as you say, sir." The landlord



was politely disappointed. A burst of laughter came from the next room, and Selby looked pointedly at the clock. "Your patrons keep late hours," said he, "later than the people of Pengwyn."

"A special day, today," the other explained. "It is the sons of Gwan Hughes who drink to their mother's passing. It would be a pleasant gesture on your part if you were to join them. As for the licensing laws . . ." He smiled apologetically. "On such a day one turns a blind eye."

Selby went into the other room, noting in passing that a garland of flowers had been draped across the portrait of Ifor Morgan. It was like Christmas in July, but roses and lavender instead of holly.

They greeted him, three brown-faced, happy men, smiling and breaking off their singing to offer him a glass. "For you to drink to our mother," they told him, "for she has left for the other place."

There were others of the village too, men and women alike, all dressed in obvious Sunday finery, all smiling, all openly taking pleasure in the death of Gwan Hughes.

The sons were loquacious in drink, back-slapping and merry.

"And how old would your mother be?" Selby asked, to make conversation.

They discussed the matter earnestly amongst themselves, apparently never having given the matter much thought.

"Seventy-five," the taller of the three hazarded.

"Not a day under eighty," the one

next to him contradicted. "For you will remember she was putting money into the Trust right from the start. . . ."

Selby felt a quickening of interest. "The Trust?" he queried, but his words were lost in the good-natured argument that ringed the old lady's age. Comparative ages were being bandied, "Sixteen years since Trevor here paid his first. . . ." "Twenty it'll be since I started, and that makes her all of eighty-six. . . ."

Then a photograph, a thing of dog-ears and cracks, brown and faded, was produced from a bulky wallet, and Selby was invited to give his opinion. "Taken some years ago, you will understand," he was told, "but you can see that she was a fine woman indeed."

And as he stared at the placid, smiling face he knew that he had seen it before. But not quite like that. Iron away the wrinkles from mouth and eyes, drape a white shawl over the hair. . . .

"I have seen this woman before," he told them. "I have seen her this very evening. It was on the road to Pengwyn. . . ."

And then a silence fell, with all the faces turned to his. They were puzzled and surprised. But the amazing thing was, he soon discovered, that they were not questioning the fact that he had seen their dead mother, but only that he had seen her on the way to Pengwyn.

The landlord, at his shoulder, asked gently, "Tell us how you got to this village. . . . Pengwyn, you call it."

Selby told them, explaining how

he had first fallen asleep, and then driven on until he reached the place where the road forked into three. . . . And when he described this, they looked at each other, nodding wisely and significantly.

"And so you took the left-hand road, the old mountain road," the landlord said, offering it as a statement rather than a question.

Selby agreed that he had taken the left-hand road.

"Pengwyn," the other explained simply, "lies to the right. It is a mining village, a place of slag heaps and tall chimneys. A place of coal-dust and filth."

His voice was singing, his eyes aglow.

"You took the road to Morgan's village," said he, "to Llanef. And you saw Gwan Hughes on her way home. . . ."

\* \* \*

Selby Pyle lives in Cwmbach now; he has lived there for upwards of two years. Sooner or later, he believes that he will be approached to make his contribution to the Morgan Trust, and then he too will be on the list. So that when his time comes, the years will fall from his shoulders, and he in his turn will trace Gwan Hughes' steps along the road that leads to Llanef.

He has been, of course, to the fork in the road, and has seen for himself

how it divides into two, with one leading to Pengwyn and the other to two mountain farms.

But there is a third road, an overgrown memory of a road that was hardly ever made, and it leads up into the mountains. It is only the faintest of tracks, and Selby has followed it, coming to the crown of the hill, there to look down on the desolation of coarse grass and ivy-covered rubble which is all that remains of Ifor Morgan's village.

Like all the people of Cwmbach, he knows that sometimes the village is there—a place of lights and happiness—with a road that leads to an inviting, smooth highway. He knows, too, that once he has paid his deposit, he will be assured of a house in that village, and that one night the lights will shine out their welcome to him, as they did once before. But the next time he goes into the valley, it will be to stay.

And although he has finally completed his search for proof of life in the hereafter, he still feels regret that there should be a coldly impersonal thing as paying a deposit, and putting one's name down for a house.

He wonders, too, if there are likely to be mansions available, as well as cottages. But then, Selby Pyle, like most of us, is something of a snob at heart.





# THE DOCTOR'S STORY

IAN JEFFERSON

**I**T WAS A GLASS OF liqueur held up to the light in the Dentist's large white hand that set the ball rolling. The after-dinner conversation had drifted for a while before lapsing into the self-satisfied replete silence that follows an excellent meal.

The Doctor sat in the corner; his narrow high-boned face beneath the mass of white hair was turned to the fire, so that from time to time it sprang to glowing life as the flames danced and sank. He seemed preoccupied with his own thoughts, one slender, almost transparent hand playing with the fold of his tie, the other resting on his blue-clad knee.

The Dentist stretched his legs and yawned loudly, making only a token attempt to disguise the cavern of his mouth. "It's a long winter," he told the fire, and then, when we stayed silent, he turned with a gesture of resignation to take up the glass from the table by his side and hold it up to the light.

"Benedictine," he mused, rolling the stem between his fingers. "Made by cowed monks in the dark vaults of the abbey. Quite a thought. . . ."

The Doctor permitted himself the ghost of a smile, lifting his head a little so that he could meet my eyes.

"I wonder," continued the Dentist, "what makes a man give up the world for the life of a recluse."

"Perhaps 'recluse' is hardly the word," the Doctor hinted in his quiet voice. The interruption passed unheeded; the Dentist was groping for a word.

"Vocation," he told us. "They say that one must have a vocation for such a life."

"A useful word," he added with some bitterness, and eyed the Doctor. "The mysterious force that drives a man on to minister to his fellow-creatures. Charity; the Church; Medicine. . . ." He set down his glass. "For myself I find little satisfaction in probing into cavities. There are so many other things I would rather do."

"Then why?" I asked him.

"The choice was made for me. My father was a dentist; right from the start it was assumed I would follow." He looked at the Doctor again. "I suppose you were pretty much in the same boat?"

"No," said the Doctor. "No. I had to make my own decisions. There was nobody to help me. At least—" He hesitated.

"A burning desire to help your fellow-men?"

The Doctor nodded. "I suppose it was. Only right at the start it was the urgent desire to help just one man. A man I found hurt and unconscious in a car in a country lane. It was a long time ago, when I was a young man and trying to persuade myself that I

was doing something useful with my life."

"We all go through that phase," said the Dentist. "It's part of the process of growing-up."

The Doctor stared at the fire. "My mother died when I was born," he told us. "My father died when I was eleven. I suppose he was one of the last of the landed gentry. I was brought up by an unmarried aunt, and when I was twenty-one I came into quite a sizeable fortune. Sufficient to keep me supplied with all the necessities of life and some of the luxuries.

"Because I was what was loosely termed a sickly child, I never took part in games or sports, or anything that involved physical activity. My schooldays are best forgotten; I went through my early years on a switch-back of illnesses. Each winter was a misery of continual colds. There was a time spent in Switzerland, and a year in a bleak sanatorium on the south coast. I grew up pale-faced and hollow-cheeked and envious of everybody who enjoyed reasonable health.

"In Switzerland I stayed at a hostel where some of my fellow-guests were art students. It was then that I persuaded myself that I had a flair for painting. It seemed the easiest thing to do, requiring the minimum of exertion. Back in England I took a course at a college of art. I gave myself the excuse that I was training to become a commercial artist. I had sufficient strength of character to want to do something with my life.

"As I grew older my aunt let me go much my own way, exercising only

a pretence of supervision over my movements. Frobbed in her self-contained spinsterhood, I think she never forgave my father for dying so young and leaving her with the responsibility of an ailing child.

"Because we never got on well together I spent as little time as possible in her company, using her, I'm afraid, as a convenient relative with whom to spend the winter months. For I had rented a small cottage on the outskirts of a village called Wyrash, some fifteen miles from Sevenoaks, and I spent the summer months in a kind of rural retirement, painting a little but mostly idling my time away.

"It was a pleasant little cottage with three low-raftered rooms and small lattice windows that looked out on the hills at the back and the lane and open fields at the front. The village itself was a mile or so away and hidden in a fold of the hills. To all intents and purposes I was isolated from the world. A village woman, an angular rough-boned creature, called Mrs. Tewk, came in each day to clean the place up and prepare the main meal. I had the telephone installed as a kind of insurance against my falling ill. I painted and decorated the place myself and fixed a knocker on the front door. An unusual knocker made of brass in the shape of a mermaid that I had seen and fancied in an antique shop in Switzerland. I was twenty-two at the time, still frail and sickly-looking, with a mop of uncontrollable flaxen hair and a face that was bone thin.

"Usually I stayed in the country until the end of September and then



went back to town. But this particular year my aunt died in the August, and after attending her funeral I returned to the cottage determined to stay there through the coming winter. Her death left me with no connections in London, and I didn't fancy staying in an hotel or taking a furnished flat.

"This was the winter of 1920: too far back for one to remember how cold it was and how there was fall after fall of snow, unless one refers to records or has, like I have, a particular reason for keeping it in mind. And the memory of one night is still as clear in my mind as if it had only happened yesterday.

"And yet, and here I offer you a paradox: the mental pictures are hazy. Blurred round the edges like one of those old brown prints that dotted the pianos and sideboards of the Victorians. The centre sharp and clear, but the background melting into whiteness.

"It was the first week in December. We had already had several thick falls of snow and my 'phone was still out of action, the wires not having been repaired after the previous week's fall. It had been snowing all day, feathery-fine during the daylight hours, dusting across the ice-hard lane, thickening into solid flakes with the coming of darkness.

"Mr. Tewk had braved the morning wind to come and tell me that his wife had a bad cold and that she wouldn't be able to get up out of bed for a day or two. It was a Wednesday; he said she ought to be up and about by Friday.

"I looked out of the window when I came to draw the curtains. The shape of the lane had already melted into the hedges, the trees bent under the weight of their laden branches. The wind had dropped a little and the flakes came down like white lines against a black curtain.

"I made up the fire, I remember, and then I had my supper. An early supper for it was barely nine o'clock. But in those days I tired quickly and was usually in bed soon after ten. I read for a while and then I went to the window again and drew back the curtains so that I could watch the snow. I think we all find a pleasure in watching it; for all the inconvenience it causes, there is a beauty about it that can take a man by his throat.

"One of my paintings was on the wall by the window. A pale, lustreless sunset; an attempt to portray living, driving clouds that had failed. I found myself admitting its failure, and yet, you know, I had considered it once to be one of my best works. Compared with the cold beauty outside it seemed paltry and insignificant. The thought came to me that I would never achieve anything better; that I had been wasting my time.

"Despite the warmth of the room I shivered, a cold shudder that convulsed my entire body. At the same time I was aware of a familiar dragging at the back of my throat that could only foretell yet another miserable cold on the way. Outside, the wind threw a sudden gust that rattled the door.

"I was drawing the curtains again when I heard the sound of a crash

from somewhere outside. At first I took it to be a laden branch brought down by the rising wind. But it hadn't been the sharp crack of a breaking branch. Pressing my face to the cold glass I peered into the night. The flakes were swirling and blotting out the scene, but I fancied that I could see a gleam of light through the bushes that marked a bend in the lane.

"At first I thought the light was moving, but then I could see it was the shaking of the bushes that created that impression. The light was still, and seeing that, and remembering the crash, I felt certain of what had happened. A car, obviously driven by a stranger to the district, had taken the corner too sharply and had hit the old tree stump that would now be covered by snow. There might be an injured person out there.

"I opened the door instinctively, just as I was, jacketless and in shirt sleeves. The wind caught me before I had even taken a step forward, tearing at my hair, cutting my cheeks and driving snow into my open neck. I went back inside and threw on my overcoat, letting the sleeves hang loose. Then I started off again, with the wind rising in a sudden fury and the snow all but blinding me. I fought my way down the path, struggled for frantic moments with the ice-sealed gate latch, then turned into the lane, slipping and sliding on the concealed hard ruts.

"The car was at the corner, its headlights cutting a golden swathe in the darkness, its outline already masked by the snow. The bonnet

overhung the ditch, the front mud-guard tight against the hidden tree stump. There was a man inside, slumped forward over the wheel. I looked first to see if there were any passengers, hoping for a brief moment that there might be someone to help me. But the driver was alone. I wrenched the door open in a sudden panic, putting my hand on his shoulder and trying to shake him into consciousness. He fell sideways, towards me, until his face rested on the leather seat.

"I can remember looking at that thin white face with its untidy grey hair and imagining that I had seen it somewhere before. I can remember how my hands shook and how my breath tore at my throat. His face was cold, icy cold to the touch. I told myself that he was dead, that there was nothing I could do. . . . Then my hands were groping under his armpits and I was dragging him out into the open and along the lane, his feet bumping over the ruts and leaving dark channels in the whiteness.

"There was something of the quality of a nightmare about the whole thing. It seemed to be happening to somebody else and not to me. But perhaps that was the first symptom of the fever that was already tearing through my blood causing my whole body to break out into sweat while all the time I was shivering uncontrollably. It seemed a mile or more from the car to the cottage; two, three miles. It took an hour, a day, eternity.

"Once inside some sort of reason



came back. I left him huddled on the floor while I closed the door and stripped off my coat. Underneath, my shirt was sodden, clinging to my body, clammy and icy cold. I threw the cushions off the settee and used the last of my dwindling strength to hoist him on it. Then I dragged and pulled until it was close to the fire and his coat started to steam.

"It was while I was stripping off his coat that the thought came to me that if my father had lived, then he would look much the same as this stranger; the same narrow face, high brow and shock of grey hair. I felt a certain relief in the fancy, telling myself that that was why I had thought I had seen him somewhere before.

"The fire coloured his cheeks so that it was hard to tell whether life was returning to him. But his chest moved and so I knew he was still alive. There was a dull bruise purpling above one eyebrow. Beyond that there seemed to be no damage. But I couldn't be sure; that was the horror of it. I felt a surge of affection for this stranger; I wanted to help him, and I didn't know how. I might do more harm than good; he might even be dying in front of me.

"But I had to do something, anything. I brought a cloth from the kitchen and dried his hair. Then I tried the 'phone, knowing all the time that it was dead. After a while I went in the kitchen again and set a pan of milk on the stove. While I was waiting I poured whisky into two cups, leaving one ready to receive the milk and carrying the other through to

the fire. His teeth were clenched; the spirit ran down his chin and dripped on his shirt. The milk boiled over while I was struggling to get a few drops into his mouth.

"Blind panic came over me while I was pouring out the milk, causing my hand to shake and the hot liquid to splash on the table. Even this might be wrong, I thought: can a man choke when he is unconscious? He might be hurt internally, in which case I might be doing the wrong thing in even giving him anything at all. Perhaps he shouldn't have been moved at all; perhaps I'd done more harm to him by dragging him bodily across the snow.

"I stared at the steaming milk and I knew that I had to find out about such things. It was in that moment that I knew I wanted to become a doctor.

"When I returned to the other room his eyes were open and staring. He looked at me, made as if to speak, then raised one hand for the cup. He gulped the contents, seeming to be oblivious to its scalding heat. Then he tried to speak again, and I bent to listen. But no sound came. The colour was obviously coming back to his face, his breath coming easier. He smiled, looked up at me again and then closed his eyes and fell fast asleep.

"With the knowledge that no real harm seemed to have come to him, I stood back and let relief flood through me. And then the shivering came, turning into waves of shudders that wracked me from head to foot. An iron-hard band tightened round

my chest, cutting off my breath. Then the room started to spin and darkness came in a rushing cloud. The last thing I can remember was the crackling of the fire.

\* \* \*

"When I came round again it was morning. I was undressed and lying in my bed. Cold sunlight streamed through the window. The branches I could see were clear of snow. I felt weak, but the shivering and tightness had gone. I slid my legs from under the blankets and came to my feet. I felt better than I had in a long time.

"It's strange how I took so much for granted; how I searched for and found reasonable explanations for everything that had happened. It was a few minutes before I remembered the stranger. I went into the other room. It was empty, the settee was in its usual place, the fire built up and blazing away. I stood for a while trying to arrange my thoughts. It was as if the stranger had never existed. Perhaps it had all been my imagination; perhaps I had become delirious. The snow had all gone, the ground sodden from the thawing. There were no signs that could be left of my nightmare struggle. I could see through the tangle of bushes at the corner. There was no car there.

"Mrs. Tewk hustled in while I was considering the question of something to eat. She eyed my pyjamas with cold disapproval. I went into the bedroom and slipped into a dressing-gown. When I came back she was taking off her rusty black coat with its draggle of fur round the collar.

She said, "'Well, it's nice to see it all gone; we can do without that stuff anytime. I hope you managed all right; I'm sorry I couldn't up 'ere on Friday like I said, but Jos said as 'ow I'd better not risk it.'

"'Friday,' she had said. And yesterday had been Wednesday. She hadn't been able to get up on Friday.

"'What day is it today?' I asked her.

"She looked back over her shoulder from where she was hanging her coat behind the door. 'Lorst track of time?' she wondered with a display of blackened teeth. She held up her hand. 'Listen. . . .' The church bell was tolling steadily.

"'Sunday?' I wondered in amazement.

"'Sunday it is,' she allowed. 'And me givin' up early service to come up an' do for you.'

"So, in all, I had lost three days.

"But I found them again, only many years later.

"The only thing that made sense of the whole affair was my resolution to study medicine. The rest of it, including the stranger, I put down to imagination, the first stirrings of the delirium that had kept me in bed for three days. I must have undressed myself and put myself to bed when I felt it coming on. Then I had dreamed. What had happened to me during that period of forgetfulness I didn't know. But I must have got up from time to time; I must even have built up the fire. The thought of the things that a person might do unawares while in a high fever only served to strengthen my conviction



to learn about such conditions. I returned to London and took a flat. Then I started my studies. I never returned to live in the cottage.

"I found a great personal satisfaction in my new work. The time passed quickly and pleasantly. I qualified as a doctor nine years later. Then I went on the staff of a London hospital, spending the next twenty years there.

"Despite the city environment my health had tended to improve. Perhaps it was because now I was more concerned with the health of my patients and had less time to think about my own weakness. But for all that I was far from robust, still subject to occasional vicious colds and attacks of asthma. It was one of my colleagues, a new doctor to the hospital, who suggested that I may find life easier in a clearer atmosphere. Although I had never thought of returning to live in the country up to that time, the idea appealed to me. Twenty years in the one place, I told myself, is long enough. Then I thought that if I were to go into private practice I could take a more personal interest in my patients. I started to study the advertising sections of the medical journals.

"The first three practices that sounded interesting turned out to be disappointing when I went down to view them. All three were on the fringes of development areas and likely to be engulfed as time went on. I had set my heart on a rural practice that would remain unspoiled. With open country all round, a few gentle hills to climb and streams to be fished. The financial side was of

secondary importance. All I wanted was a place in which I could do my work, be contented and have pleasant off-duty hours. I found what I was searching for in a small village not far from Grinstead.

"After an interchange of letters I drove down and had a chat with the retiring doctor. He was nearly seventy and just getting over an operation. Once we had come to terms he was anxious for me to replace him as soon as possible. Although I would rather have waited until the spring, I fell in with his suggestion that I take over in December.

"I left the hospital in November, spent a few days in town in settling my affairs, then, on the Wednesday in the first week in December I set off on the final journey to my new job. Not by any means the best time of the year for one to travel who doesn't enjoy the best of health and whose car has seen better times.

"I left London in clear sunshine but with the clouds piling up ahead and threatening the snow that started to fall before I had cleared the suburbs. By the time I was in the country, with night coming down fast, the flakes had thickened sufficiently to reduce my speed to little more than a crawl. And to make matters worse the heater packed up and I could feel a damp chill creeping up from the floor.

"It was quite dark by this time, getting on for eight o'clock I should imagine, for I was making very poor time, reduced to little more than walking pace for most of the way. I kept my eyes open for a likely pub

in which to spend the night, but the road was lonelier than one would have thought. I toyed with the idea of retracing my steps, but the mileage indicator told me that I had come over half-way to my destination.

"The last time I had driven this way had been only a week or so before, but in broad daylight. Now the countryside was changed, unlighted, dark and forbidding. I wavered at an unsignposted junction, took the left fork and found myself climbing a hill. And a few minutes later when the road swept across a viaduct I knew that I had taken a wrong turning somewhere.

"And now the cold had become intense. I stopped the car once and, after beating my arms, tried without success to stir the heater to life. A more desolate part of the world I had never seen. The snow came down like a curtain, there was not a flicker of light, not a farmhouse or cottage to be seen. My vision was restricted to the glow from the headlights.

"I had to fight down cold-induced waves of nausea. I rested my arms on the wheel for a moment while the spasms passed. Then I started off again, knowing that they would return. The lanes turned and twisted as if laid down by a madman. I tried singing aloud to keep myself awake, by my throat was dry.

"In the same moment that I felt my grasp on consciousness slipping I spotted a faint light through the trees, over on the left. I forced myself upright, searching for the source of the glow, then the car slipped sideways, the wheel twisting in my numbed

grasp. I fought the wheel for a brief moment, then came the crash. The last thing I remember was the wheel coming up to meet me.

"When I came round again I was lying on a settee in front of a roaring fire. A young man was standing looking down at me, his face furrowed with obvious concern. He had a cup in his hands, and there was a reek of whisky under my nose. I tried to speak, to reassure him, but my throat was too constricted. I reached up for the cup, taking it from him and drinking the hot milk and whisky thankfully. The warmth flew through my body, loosening the cold, hard grip on my chest. I tried to thank him, but now utter weariness combined with the warmth of the room and the spirit swept over me. I fell asleep as suddenly as if I had been pole-axed.

"When I awoke the fire had embered to a dull red and a chill had started to creep into the room. But I was refreshed and feeling almost myself. An oil-lamp on the mantelpiece had burned low but there was still enough light for me to see my surroundings. I climbed from the settee and came to my feet. I almost stumbled upon the body lying in the shadow behind the settee. It was the young man, his arms outflung, his face to the floor.

"I knelt to feel his pulse and listen to his chest. He was running a high temperature with all the makings of pneumonia. From then on I worked quickly, not knowing how long he had been lying there, fighting against time to prevent his becoming worse.



"I carried him through to the bedroom, undressed him and put him between the sheets. Then I found a hot-water bottle in the kitchen, and after putting a kettle on the stove I went out to the car. The snow had stopped, the sky was filled with stars. The world was quiet and still. I took time off to test the starter and surprisingly the engine roared into life. I took my bag from the back seat and ran back to the cottage.

"Then I set to work on my patient. I had all the advantages on my side. My case contained all the necessary drugs and antibiotics. He opened his eyes from time to time but I knew that he didn't see me. He swallowed when I held a glass to his lips. I set the hot-water bottle at his feet and then found a brick which I heated in the oven before wrapping in a piece of blanket. I worked on him without even stopping to think who he might be or where the cottage was. I forgot about the people who would be anxiously awaiting me at the new practice. I was a doctor with his patient.

"Daylight was just breaking when I left his side. He was asleep and breathing easily. I felt that the worst was over. In the other room I built up the fire and set about scraping a meal together. Until now I had been working automatically. Now I had time to think and look about me. There was a telephone on a small table in one corner. I picked up the receiver but the line was dead. It was when I was replacing the instrument that my dormant memories stirred into life. I had been in this room before, a long time ago. I remembered

the furniture, the paintings on the walls, the old-fashioned upright telephone.

"I sat on the settee and tried to think it all out in cold, rational terms. This was most certainly the same cottage in which I had once lived. I even went to the door and opened it, running my fingers over the well-remembered mermaid knocker.

"I tried to persuade myself that it was all a coincidence, but all the time I knew it was something different from that. My mind refused to accept the other alternative.

"I sat in front of the fire with my hands held to the blaze while I tried to reduce the thing to its simplest terms. But my mind went in an endless circle that had no beginning and no ending. I fell asleep finally without reaching any conclusion.

"It stopped snowing the next day, and on Friday the sun came out and the thaw started. By Saturday night the snow had all gone and my patient's temperature was down, the fever broken, all danger past. I had no hesitation in leaving him sleeping there. I knew—don't ask me how—that Mrs. Tewk would soon be coming up the lane.

"In the bedroom I stood for a while looking down at myself as I had been thirty years before. Then I built up the fire for the last time, put on my coat, collected my things and went out into the morning. I drove away without looking back. Two hours later I reached my destination. The next day I took over the practice; I still run it. From time to time I take a few days off and come up to

town. Like I have today. Tomorrow I shall drive back there again. I shall take the left fork at an unsignposted junction and go the long way round. Thirty miles or more out of my way, just so that I can stop and look at a ruined cottage. Where the windows are broken and the roof rafters show through the thatch; where the door stands open and the mermaid knocker is missing. And where, once, a long time ago I made up my mind to become a doctor just so that thirty

years later I could save my own life."

He smiled at us for the first time since starting to tell the story. "Quite a thought, you know."

The fire blazed in the grate, bringing his face to life. The Dentist caught my eye, made to speak, then thought better of it.

"Which came first," I mused. "The chicken or the egg?"

Nobody answered me. Which, privately, I thought a pity; I felt that it fitted the case admirably.





# SHEEP MAY SAFELY GRAZE

PHILIP SPRING

*Illustrated by Derek Herdson*

“**I** WANT TWO HUNDRED *now*. You understand?” Dasya smiled crookedly as Quarles stared at her teeth marks on his wrist.

He knew then he would have to get rid of her. She would go higher and higher. Money was her driving force, stronger even than her passion. He knew that now. Dasya had always been ruthless and fast.

In less than a month this exotic girl, a Polish outcast who had entered his house as a servant, had trapped him under his own roof and while his wife slept. This shocking event had taken place in Quarles' study at midnight. It was the first of many, each bolder than the last, and contrived in the face of danger through the girl's own *diablerie*.

Yet circumstances favoured this dark affair. Quarles and his wife slept in separate parts of the large old house. As a writer, Quarles was in the habit of working into the small hours. His wife, a cold, fanatical woman devoted to social and missionary work, was often absent from home. Though Quarles in his wife's presence affected not even to notice the girl, he and Dasya were soon deeply involved.

Then taking fright, and fearing his wife's fury and disgust, he paid Dasya a larger sum than usual to

bind her to secrecy. It was a mistake. Dasya wanted money more than anything. Quarles had been terrified by her transformation. Her red lips had offered love. Now they demanded blood. Blood of that vital sort which flows thinly in some men. And Dasya had bled him to the limit.

\* \* \*

Steadily, quietly, Quarles planned every detail of the murder. Dasya would simply “leave without explanation” one night when his wife was absent. The girl's bedroom would be seen to be stripped of her meagre possessions, showing that she had gone for good. Nothing else would be “taken” from the house, for Quarles dreaded his wife's malice, so easily capable of setting up a hue and cry.

Dasya's disappearance would chime with his wife's occasional sharp treatment of the girl. Smarting each time under this, the reckless Dasya had herself threatened trouble. But she had no home and no relations. The only home she had known had been a shabby Nissen hut, crazily buttressed with concrete blocks, in a Polish resettlement centre about thirty miles from the Quarles home. Her father and mother had died, leaving Dasya to fend for herself. This background of anonymity and squalor gave Dasya her overpower-

ing desire for money. But Quarles could now see it as an additional safeguard against the detection of his crime.

There was to be no weapon, nor a single spot of blood to betray him. He had examined the matter of fingerprints, and mentally noted for obliteration when the time came the only vital ones which could link him with the crime. His own person would show no sign of violence. Tools, implements, clothing, particularly the turned-up edges of his trousers, would yield no incriminating evidence.

He had a half-new set of tyres to replace the fully-worn set now on his car. He also intended to use a pair of worn galoshes without treads—which would falsify the size of any footprints he might leave—then to destroy them immediately.

Carefully he examined the huge anthracite stove in the kitchen. He estimated that in about one hour it would consume the girl's possessions, with her suitcase. Then his galoshes—and one nylon stocking. The old tyres would be jettisoned next day in a chalk pit where he had already noticed the rusted wrecks of cars and several discarded tyres.

He had selected two possible nights, both moonless. These were both dates on which his wife was engaged to lecture, in the county town, on her social work; she would not return from these distant engagements till near midnight.

Quarles spent much time on the matter of an alibi. He had several ideas worked out, but these depended for timing on the place where, if

things went wrong, the body was likely to be found. But then he thought: If the body never *is* found, what need for an alibi? And who would report Dasya as missing? His wife would simply be exasperated at the girl's fecklessness and leave it at that. Casual helps had flitted in and out like moths before this. Nobody else would miss Dasya. Wanton, nomadic, she had come like water and like wind had gone.

Quarles rubbed his chin, thinking hard. "That's the whole point," he told himself, "the covering up. Blot the whole thing out for ever. The perfect murder rounded off with the perfect hiding-place." He reached an Ordnance Survey map from his shelves. "Whin Moor? That's a desolate place. And two hours away by car. . . . No, too far. Besides, there's forestry going on there. . . . The Balcombe brick-pond, then?" He pored over the map. Suddenly he stared. "The Slack Howe tunnel. That's it!" He sat back, excitedly remembering a discovery he had made some years ago.

Not more than twenty miles from his home was a low range of hills. About 1887 this had been pierced by a railway tunnel to allow a small cross-country line to link two market towns. But by 1949 this line had become uneconomic. Its rails were taken up for scrap, its sleepers rooted out, its stations closed down and both ends of the tunnel sealed up with brickwork. The whole line, its stations and its depots had become derelict.

Later, walking the lonely hilltops above the tunnel, Quarles had come



across a thicket enclosing what he took at first to be a disused kiln or wide chimney. Closer examination, and a reference to his map, showed this to be a ventilation shaft for the tunnel below. He had passed by and quite forgotten it till now.

"That's it!" Quarles muttered excitedly. "Go and look. Take this map. And my binoculars. Time myself from the house here to Slack Howe. Keep the car steady at forty."

The tunnel shaft was at the top of the hill. But Quarles, taking deliberate thought, left his car at a field entrance half a mile distant, then walked to the top. "Thirty-eight minutes to that gate, in daylight, but with traffic. Reckon thirty-five, at night, direct to the top."

The field in which the shaft stood was, in fact, a sheep walk, extending over rough and scrubby ground for a great distance on all sides. So there were not likely to be any farming operations going on at any time. This part of the hill stood higher than neighbouring ground, and the horizon dropped all round so that he could not be seen from any higher elevation. He looked round, rapidly taking in further detail. The road approach was so steep that vehicles could be heard coming up. Those going down would make less noise, but in any case the shaft could not be seen from the road unless one climbed up the grass bank and peered through the hedge. A thicket of gorse and hawthorn round the shaft itself made an additional screen.

All this he took in leaning over the field gate. Then, spreading out his

Ordnance Survey map, he studied the environs. The only nearby habitations had been the station and two railway cottages, all now stripped and ruinous. The nearest village was two and a half miles away. The nearest farm was over a mile away, tucked out of sight from here.

In fact, the only living beings likely to see him, even in the daylight hours, were the hill sheep, nibbling at a distance and, after their first questioning glances, now quite oblivious of his presence.

"Only a lot of silly sheep. But they're innocent—and *happy*," thought Quarles bitterly, thinking of Dasya's red mouth contorted with fury.

He stared again at the map. The tunnel was marked as a dotted double line. It ran for eight hundred yards through the hill, and as near as he could estimate, about two hundred feet beneath him.

He walked stealthily towards the conical earthwork in which the shaft was set. Ascending this with ease of effort, he was careful to add theoretically to that effort a further nine stones of weight. He remembered her green eyes that night he picked her up in his arms, and her taut, viperish body.

He came to the top of the earthwork. The gorse and hawthorn hedge circled it completely. Unthinkingly he pushed a vertical stake out of position to force his way through.

"Damn!" he cried. To his dismay he now saw that the shaft was set within a deep saucer-like depression,

a cylindrical tower in a circular dry moat. From the rim of the earthwork where he stood to the opening of the shaft was about twelve feet in a horizontal plane. Even to approach nearer to the shaft, he would have to descend into the moat, and then, touching the shaft with his hand, its opening would be twelve feet or so above him in the vertical plane.

But worse than this, the opening to the shaft itself was heavily barred over with a rusted cast-iron grating. The bars were as thick as two fingers, and the distance between bars only the breadth of a hand. "Impossible, after all," he muttered angrily. "And the very place. An impenetrable tomb."

A plover screamed derisively at him overhead. Anger and fear surged through him. He frowned at the shaft. Ladders and ropes . . . useless! The engineers of 1887 were either cynical or careful men.

He smote his fist in his hand. "Fool! What use would even a plank be? There's still that infernal grating. I'd have to cut through four bars at least, at both ends, with a hack-saw. Take me hours. And the noise!" He frowned again at the shaft, gnawing his lip. It appeared, to judge by its rim, to be brick-and-a-half thick. The outer course was laid with the brick ends facing outwards, and the inner course at right angles.

Then suddenly he gripped his fist with surprise. "Got it! Of course!" Excitedly he peered through the hedge circling the rim of the earthwork. Nobody within miles. He listened intently. Not even the faraway

barking of a dog broke the silence of the deserted landscape.

He plunged down the inner side of the earthwork and stood shakily fingering the brickwork of the shaft. The mortar was rotten and loose with age. Carefully he prised out three- and four-inch lengths with his penknife, then just as carefully replaced them.

"Yes. An extra bit of mortar, fresh mixed, and a trowel. That'd do it." He stood back, screwing up his eyes. "Take out a square, say four bricks by four, down at ground level here. Then smash the inside course inwards and down. Need something like a crowbar—no, that packing-case lever on the garage shelf. When the job's done, forget about the inside course. Just seal up this outer course. Cover it up with a bit of grass or brush. That's it."

He climbed back up the inside of the earthwork to the rim, looked all round carefully. Nobody. He pushed his way back through the gap, and coming down into the field began to estimate distances. There would be a "carry" of about forty yards from the field gate to the earthwork. With suppressed excitement he strolled casually out of the field.

There were still things to be done.

First, check both entrances to the tunnel to make certain they *were* bricked up. This took him over an hour. One end he could see through the binoculars, and that was completely sealed up. The other end was more difficult to get at, but that too was bricked up.



A grave eight hundred yards long and two hundred feet deep.

He drove home, thinking hard, checking all likely snags. His purchase of mortar. Could that be traced? Possibly. Better use a little cement, which he had, mixed with earth and water to make a stiff compound. That would harden in a slightly friable condition. The trowel he had. He made a mental note to destroy it after use.

Arriving home, he took down the packing-case lever. He tested it on his garden refuse tip surrounded by low brick walls. It served well.

He avoided Dasya for the rest of the day. But at night he found a note tucked inside his folded pyjamas. "I am losing patience," it read. "Your wife, she has plenty of money. You will ask her." Horribly the girl had impressed her rouged lips to this in the oval shape of a kiss. Quarles shuddered. He could almost hear her crazed laugh as she had done that.

Driven now, Quarles lost no time. Next day he went by car to the tunnel shaft again. He had with him his binoculars, a nine-in-one set of fine tools, the heavy steel lever.

He left his car in a different position, approaching the shaft from a new direction. Apart from the aimless sheep the landscape was deserted. He raked it in every direction through his glasses, scenting points of danger but finding none. He paced the ground carefully. He imagined himself carrying his burden for the last time. What had frightened him before didn't frighten him now.

Coming at length to the shaft, he

crouched at its base in the moat. Using the compact tools and with relatively small effort he prised away the outer course. He kept the large lengths of mortar carefully piled together, until he had made an aperture roughly eighteen inches square. Then he went up to the rim of the earthwork, looking and listening intently.

Hastening down again to the shaft, he drew the lever from his inner pocket and worked feverishly at the inner course. In twenty minutes he had broken a corresponding aperture through the inner lining of the shaft. Only faintly, once or twice, did he hear the loosened bricks crashing and rebounding to the depths in the tunnel beneath.

Then restoring the outer brickwork and carefully replacing the longer lengths of mortar in the higher courses, he covered the whole with tussocks of torn grass.

Now that all was prepared he had only one other thing to do—to fend Dasya off for another two nights.

\* \* \*

The night he had chosen was black, with few stars and no moon. His wife left the house at six. He checked at the front door that she had her lecture notes with her; drove her rapidly to the station. Returning at 6.10, he noted that the few houses in the neighbourhood were lit but silent, the road deserted. He drove back up the drive into his garage noisily so that Dasya would hear him return.

Swiftly he got out of the car. Though the night was dry, he crammed on his worn goshes. With





shaking hands he stowed the ready-mixed mortar and the trowel in the car. He took a nylon stocking from his breast pocket. "Dasya!" he called, through the door connecting the garage with the house.

Silently, his face thickened with fear and rage, he wound an end of the stocking round each hand and waited tensely behind the door. This was the first chance he had given Dasya of speaking to him all day.

But it was the last. Her mouth was scarlet, her ear-rings glittered. An animal scent was in her hair. She fell silently, almost without a struggle, only a few inches from the rear door of the car, exactly as he had planned.

Quickly he wiped her fingerprints from the knob and the jamb of the door through which she had come, then applied his own to obliterate the signs of wiping.

He clenched his teeth as he drove. Watching for any mischance which might betray him at the last moment, he checked backwards and forwards in his mind. "Not one shred of suspicion, even," he muttered. "Get that money back—find it. In her room somewhere. Case . . . mattress . . . stitched in her clothes. Wait—if I *had* to, how would I explain all my extra drawings from the bank? Oh, forget it. How can she ever be found?"

It had just turned seven when he reached the top of Slack Howe. He switched off his lights, looked and listened. No sound. He coasted downhill with his lights off, quickly and silently swung into the sheep-walk. The car's momentum saved him twenty precious feet and put the car

itself into the deep cover of the hedgerow.

He got out stealthily, peered all round, listened till his ear drums sang. The darkness was paled only by the frigid stars. There was no sound anywhere. Even the night air seemed to have held its breath.

Now came the part he had dreaded. He sickened. Through his brain seemed to vibrate a mass of fine tendrils, snapping one by one. . . .

But in fifteen minutes all that remained was the final mortaring. To remove all traces of fingerprints and to deaden any noise he twisted a rag round the tip of his trowel. He replaced rag and trowel in his pocket. In great handfuls he tore up grass and threw it in heaps against the sealed aperture that would keep his secret for ever.

\* \* \*

Yet even as Quarles lay sleeping that next dawn a sheep bleated piteously with a broken leg somewhere on Slack Howe. The shepherd bent his head to gauge the direction of the sound. He looked down at his dog, its tongue lolling, ready for action.

"It's ovver theer, Mose," he said, pointing in the direction of the tunnel shaft. "Go seek her." The dog raced off, and the shepherd followed, wondering.

Soon he heard the dog barking excitedly. "One gotten i' the moat," the shepherd told himself. As he drew nearer he was looking at the protective hedge of gorse and hawthorn round the rim of the earthwork. "Ay.

Some dang fool's been through theer.  
Moved that stake."

He could see the trampled grass all the way up the earthwork towards this gap. Climbing to the top of the earthwork he saw a sheep laid awkwardly against the brickwork of the shaft. Though its leg was broken, it was stupidly nibbling tussocks of torn grass.

The shepherd clambered down into the moat, puzzled. Obviously the sheep had got through the gap, then fallen down the inner side of the earthwork. But why had someone moved that stake? And how did this heap of grass come to be torn up?

Then he noticed, behind the sheep's head, how the brickwork had been remortared. It looked so new, finished off better than all the surrounding brickwork.

"Summat queer been goin' on here," he muttered. His eyes scanned the flattened grass as he gently splinted the sheep's leg. The dog was sniffing about excitedly. The shepherd got up, stood back a little, eyed the remortared brickwork. It was the shape of it which seemed to send cold fingers across his face.

The dog looked up at him, its brown eyes bright with intelligence. "If tha's thinkin' what I'm thinkin', Mose," said the shepherd, "this is a job for the p'lice. Sit, then." The dog sank panting to the ground beside the sheep.

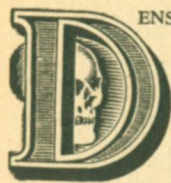
Heavily the man climbed up out of the moat. He didn't want any more sheep lamed. He noted carefully how he had found the stake before he thrust it into the gap in the hedge.





# HASTY HUGHIE

DONALD NOAKES



DENSE MIST covered the Mendips. The ancient saloon car towing a caravan travelled through a forgotten world. Ahead, the grey cotton-wool reluctantly receded, only to close in at the rear as the car struggled up the steep, winding hill. On either side the mist swirled just beyond the grey, dry-stone walls, occasionally making a foray, as if testing its strength before swallowing car and caravan.

Hugh Maggs, hunched over the steering-wheel, peered with narrowed eyes into the mist. Beside him, his wife's face displayed utter disgust with the weather. Her rasping voice conveyed an equal displeasure with her husband. Insulated by his private thoughts, Hugh ignored her. He had heard it all before—so many times. He was a fool, a waster. He had ruined her life. He never thought before he embarked on his scatter-brained ventures. "Hasty Hughie," she called him, derisively.

Hugh chuckled silently. This time he had not been hasty. It was eight months since the worn pawl of the hand brake had slipped. Luckily, it had happened when the car was standing only a few feet from a large tree. The only damage was a further dent in the rear bumper. More important, it had happened during one of Lil's visits to her mother. He had

put in a new pawl before she returned.

Since then, he had waited for the right time and place. The car, caravan and contents had always been insured. He had been unable to afford increased ordinary life insurance, but had taken out an accident policy. The sum payable on death by accident was extremely good value for the modest premium.

The road swung left, then ran straight at a gradually decreasing gradient. Hugh counted the telegraph poles; blurred fingers that loomed up and then disappeared like ghostly gallows trees. He pulled up at the third pole.

"Shut up!" he snapped at his wife. "Get into the van and make some tea."

"What do you want to stop here for?" Lil shivered. "This mist gives me the creeps. Let's get on."

"I'm not moving until I've had some tea."

Lil grumbled, but scrambled from the car. Hugh sat motionless until he heard her moving in the caravan, then slipped from the driving seat. He patted the pockets of his trench coat; screwdriver, monkey wrench and key to the caravan.

Lil was banging crockery, her back to the door. Hugh locked the door and returned the key to his pocket.

He held his breath as he released the hand brake. The car remained

stationary. His earlier reconnaissance proved its worth. Lil would soon learn that he was not always hasty. He had taken out the pawl on the hand brake and had replaced it with the old, worn one, by the time that Lil realized that she could not get out of the caravan.

"Stop banging and shouting," he called. "The door isn't stuck. It's locked."

"Then unlock it, you fool."

"Shut up and listen!" he shouted back.

The banging stopped, and he moved round to the door of the caravan. He did not want to shout, even though they were alone on the top of the mist-enshrouded hill.

"The hand brake has packed up. If you bang about, you're liable to start rolling down the hill."

"Well, unlock the door and let me out. Put stones under the wheels."

There was no alarm in her voice. She did not understand.

Pent up hatred and venom thickened Hugh's voice.

"Listen, you hell-cat. This is where we finish. You're always saying I've ruined your life. What the hell do you think you've done for me? You're a dead loss, Lil."

"Hugh! Hugh!" There was panic in her voice. "Don't be stupid. For God's sake think——"

"Think! What do you imagine I've been doing for months past? Hasty Hughie, am I? Not this time. I've got it all buttoned up."

A strangled sob came from the other side of the locked door.

"Listen, Lil. I know every inch of

this road. From here, it runs straight for about eighty yards, then it curves right. It's quite steep by the time you reach the bend. The van and car won't follow the curve. They'll hit the wall. Do you remember the low stone wall? It won't stop the van. You couldn't see in the mist, but at the other side of the wall is an old quarry. A drop of sixty feet, I should think."

"No, Hugh, no!" Lil's voice was a hoarse whisper. "Hugh, you can't——"

"Can't I? No one can see us in this mist. It will be a tragic accident."

He moved to the front of the caravan and put his shoulder to it.

There was silence now in the locked caravan. The thin walls and small windows enclosed silent, frozen fear. Outside, the cold mist deadened Hugh's grunts as he pushed; it absorbed the whisper of the tyres. Slowly, the wheels turned. Suddenly, as if eager for the leap down to the floor of the quarry, the car and caravan gathered speed. Hugh jumped aside.

A pause to regain his breath, and the hurtling death trap was beyond recall. Hugh started to run.

No sound from Lil, only the clash as the caravan scattered the grey stones of the wall. An interval of seconds sped into eternity, and then came a splintering crash.

Hugh scrambled down the steep path. Two things remained to be done. First, to find the lock of the caravan door and unlock it. Second, to drop the screwdriver and monkey wrench into the wreckage.

He reached the floor of the quarry.



"No! No! It can't be!" he gasped, checking his stride.

A figure rose from the tangled mass of wood and metal.

"She can't still be alive!"

Slowly now, he advanced through the mist. He struggled to choke down hysterical laughter. The figure was that of a man. He called as he again hurried.

"My wife—in the caravan——"

"I shouldn't come any nearer, sir," replied a soft, country voice. "You can't do anything for her."

"Are you sure? A doctor—I must get a doctor."

Hugh saw the man was about his own height, but twice as broad. A farm worker, from his appearance.

"You stay here, sir," said the man. "I'll get across to the doctor's house and bring him over: 'tis only a short scramble through the woods."

Hugh nodded. He could quickly do what was necessary during the man's absence.

Half-way round the wreckage, the man halted.

"Hey! What's this?"

Hugh hurried to stand behind him. The man pointed.

"What's that writing on the trunk? Looks like blood!"

On an old, black, tin trunk, blood-red letters screamed, "MURDER—HUGH DID." The letters of the last word were shaky and uneven, but decipherable.

So that was the reason for Lil's silence in the last seconds. Retribution; not fear. Now he, too, must think quickly. If the stranger had

been in the quarry he could have been killed by the caravan.

The man's head had barely started to turn from the accusing words, when the monkey wrench flew up in Hugh's hand. One moment the man's head presented an easy, unprotected target, the next it disappeared. A searing crash exploded and blotted out the man, the wreckage, the quarry, the world.

Hugh struggled to consciousness through sickening waves of crimson and grey. The crimson of Lil's lipstick on the black box; the grey of the mist, of utter despair. He peered through lowered eyelids to see two pairs of legs.

"You were right, Tom," said a crisp voice. "She's dead. I 'phoned for the police and an ambulance. We can only wait until they arrive."

"How about the chap? Will he be all right, doctor? I gave him a tidy clout."

"You certainly did, but he'll soon come round."

"I don't see why he should try to bash my brains out. I only asked him what was written on the box."

There was a dry chuckle.

"Well, as he's a stranger, he couldn't know your reputation as a boxer, Tom. Nor that you can't read."

Laughter echoed through the quarry. "Hasty Hughie! Hasty Hughie!" The laughter and the hated nickname swelled until the noise deafened Hugh; swelled until he realized that the laughter and the words came from his own bursting throat.

# SOMETHING OF A MYSTERY

ROSEMARY TIMPERLEY

**J**OHN DIDN'T EXACTLY try to kill himself—nor was it exactly an accident. It was all something of a mystery.

It began because John, a writer of short stories, couldn't resist using his friends as "copy". When people talked to him about things that were happening to them, he would use these real characters and experiences to start off a story, then finish the tale in his way.

That was what happened after Gerald, over a pint at the "local", confided in him about his marital troubles. Gerald, having been married for fifteen years to an intelligent but cold-hearted wife, had fallen in love. He was in a turmoil. Should he make a last grab for happiness and live with the woman he loved? Or should he stay with his wife and give happiness up for lost?

John gave no advice in the matter; he simply listened. But when he got home he went straight to his typewriter and began a short story.

In the story the man leaves his wife, lives with his mistress, they are guiltily happy—then happy without guilt, for the wife finds fulfilment in becoming a career woman, which she should have been from the start: she'd been as frustrated by trying to be a good wife as the poor husband had in being married to her.

It was a neat little story. An even-

ing paper accepted it and John received seventeen guineas.

A few weeks later he met Gerald again. He intended to tell him about the story, but before he could get a word out, Gerald said:

"I've done it."

"Done what?"

"Left Alice. I'm living with Moira now. Alice is going to divorce me in due course."

"Is she very upset?" John asked.

"It's distressing for both of us," said Gerald. "Fifteen years is a long habit to break. But I think I'm doing the right thing. As a matter of fact, Alice has got a job as P.R.O. to some big manufacturer. She's liking it very much. I met her the other day, to talk about the divorce, and really I've never seen her look better. She must have been a suppressed career woman all the time."

So John didn't tell him about the story. He felt unnerved by the way he'd unconsciously prophesied the couple's future, but his sense of uneasiness soon passed.

It was shortly afterwards that his landlady confided in him about how difficult her husband was—how really she'd be better off without him—she did all the work—he was just a lay-about, drinking the profits.

That set John's imagination working, and his next story dealt with a landlady whose alcoholic husband died and, after the conventional show of grief, she married a brisk, indus-



trious man who did all the work about the place and left her idle. The denouement of the story was that the woman became as discontented with her second husband as she had been with her first: "He treats me like a doll," she complained.

This story, too, was accepted and paid for. John was delighted—until his landlady's husband died of a stroke after a bout of drinking, and within three months she married a brisk, hard-working man, led a life of ease for a while, then came to John's room one day and said: "I miss the good old days when I felt useful about the place. *He* does everything. He treats me like a doll."

John couldn't sleep that night.

He became almost afraid to visit his friends for fear they'd give him an idea for a story—for he knew he wouldn't be able to resist using it: he had an uncanny feeling that somehow he was influencing their lives.

The only way to break the jinx, he thought, was to get an idea from a pal and write a story in which the things happening were so fantastic that they couldn't possibly come true.

So when, again at the "local", he met Percy, who told him how worried he was about his teenage daughter's staying out at night with her boy friend, John wrote a story about a father who was worried about his daughter's morals, but in the end it was his wife who suddenly announced she was going to have an illegitimate child. This, thought John, just couldn't happen to Percy's prim-looking wife. So he felt quite safe. . . .

Until he learnt that Percy's wife

was going to have a child and Percy, in a whisper, told him: "As a matter of fact, old boy, it isn't mine—but don't let on. I've agreed to accept the little b. Not the kid's fault, after all."

Now John was really scared. These things could still be coincidence.

But he decided to make a final and dangerous test which would prove the matter one way or the other. He'd write a story in which he was the main character and end it with his own death.

He did this simply by making his "hero" a short story writer who wrote prophetic stories and finally wrote a story in which he himself was victim of a road accident.

While working on this, John felt a bit windy when riding in buses and trains. His heart beat very fast when other vehicles came suddenly round corners, when a train stopped too long in the Underground tunnel, or when there was fog on the surface line. But there was no accident, either to him or near him, so his spirits rose.

On the night he finished the story, he typed it out neatly, wrote a brief note to the editor of his favourite magazine and slipped out to post it.

On the following morning that editor had a visit from the police. They told him there had been an accident. A man had been found dead in the road near his home. He'd been run over by a lorry. In his pocket the police had found this envelope, addressed to the editor. He opened it and there was John's story. It began:

"John didn't exactly try to kill himself—nor was it exactly an accident. It was all something of a mystery. . . ."

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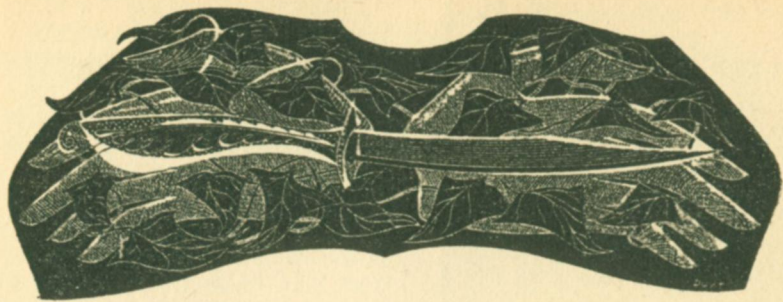
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## CROOKS IN BOOKS

*A review of some recent crime, mystery and detective books*

STEVE AUSTEN

"ARMS FOR ADONIS", by Charlotte Jay (*Crime Club*, 10s. 6d.).

I rate Charlotte Jay among the best half-dozen of today's thriller writers and her books give double value: all the suspense of an ingenious craftsman together with the colourful excitement of travel in remote places. This time the setting is the Lebanon—the plot gets under way with an explosion in a Beirut *suk*; and the sun, the tempo, the people and the political shennannigans of the never exactly stable Levant all come convincingly to life. Entertaining and satisfying.

"THE SCARF", by Francis Durbridge (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

This was a notably successful TV serial. As a book, it's a great deal less than successful. The story line, the development of plot and so forth,

are competent enough but none of the characters seem to have been able to survive the translation from electronic screen to static page with their reality intact. The writing, too, lacks punch and distinction. "A suspicion of a smile played about Marian Hastings's mouth. She just perceptibly raised her eyebrows and tapped her handbag significantly: the gesture was not lost on Morris." Good old Morris, just the chap for distinguishing a perceptible hawk from a significant handsaw.

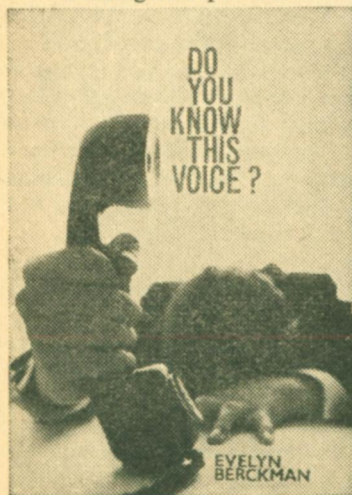
"CUT ME IN", by Hunt Collins (*Boardman*, 12s. 6d.).

Fast-moving American bed-and-murder complex, taking in a literary agency, a luxurious writer of Westerns and a sequence of dolls and deaths. Good for train journeys and the night the sheep won't jump.

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"THE EXPLOITS OF ARSENE LUPIN"  
and "THE HOLLOW NEEDLE", by  
Maurice Leblanc (*Bodley Head*,  
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There is little point in describing these classics of Edwardian thriller-dom, now elegantly reissued with introductions by Maurice Richardson. Either you met Arsène Lupin, the Gentleman - Cambrioleur, at prep school, in which case you'll be delighted to discover how remarkably well he wears, or you have an iniquitous gap in your education. The remedy is at hand, the French answer to Raffles with the rather heavy-handed parody, Holmlock Shears thrown in. Arsène Lupin is worth 12s. 6d. any day of the week.

"THE SLENDER THREAD", by P. J. Merrill (*Macdonald*, 15s.).

This is one of the best suspense novels I have read in the last few years. It is immensely readable, very exciting, gripping, frightening and, consequently, unputdownable. The protagonist is a slightly infuriating—he grows on you—pernickety author with his own psychological worries who is suddenly invaded by a small boy, undernourished, maltreated and uneducated: a boy who is virtually unable to talk since his vocabulary runs to no more than a dozen words: Against police, F.B.I. and a sadistic and moronic group of thugs, the author, a man of hitherto selfish sensibility, fights to save and keep the boy. Nothing is perfect; but *The Slender Thread* deserves a solid alpha plus rating.



"MR. DIABOLO", by Anthony Lejeune (*Macdonald*, 12s. 6d.).

Ancient college, with tradition of witchcraft and devilry, becomes meeting-place for Anglo-American literary and political convention. Assorted Angles and Americans plus chap from F.O. and another from the War Office, plus police, get involved in locked gate vanishing tricks and murder. Cosy and pleasantly competent, if limited in scope and emotion.

"TIGER ON MY BACK", by The Gordons (*Macdonald*, 12s. 6d.).

The Gordons have developed an effective formula of building in to their thrillers a solid and real background of local knowledge and esoteric lore. This time the locale is Morocco and Algeria, where the guerilla war continues year after year. Secret agents, gun-running, sudden death in the desert or the oasis, it all rings reasonably true, although disconcertingly the F.L.N. is Englished into F.N.L. Girls, grenades and money keep the wheels moving in what amounts to a fairly exciting but average book; only the professional spy, Guido Mikell, achieves the distinction of a third dimension and his appearances are rare.

"A HAMMER IN HIS HAND", by Whit Masterson (*W. H. Allen*, 13s. 6d.).

What seems to be a Californian variant of Jack-the-Ripper, only he uses a hammer and isn't so particular about what type of women he at-

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tacks, throws townspeople and police into anxious confusion. The unravelling is seen from the police end by plain-clothes sergeant (male) and uniformed constable (female). The investigation is somewhat disjointed—but so is life—and the atmosphere of cops and Elsie (L.Cs. for Lady Cops) is both credible and entertaining. Good enough for a dull night when both channels are pushing the lowest popular denominator—but not quite good enough to be memorable.

"THE WAYWARD WIDOW", by William Campbell Gault (*Boardman*, *12s. 6d.*).

Joe Puma, the paisan P.I., let loose on what turns into a murder investigation in a millionaire's town not more than two hours in a Cadillac from Los Angeles. The usual good touches: sketches of police, sympathetic and unsympathetic, musclemen, delinquents, elegant women, immoral and amoral; and an acceptable plot make a pleasantly readable but undistinguished book.

"THE BODY IN THE BED", by Stewart Stirling (*Boardman*, *12s. 6d.*).

Gil Vine is chief detective of a luxury New York Hotel. Trouble and murder arrive with a South American tycoon and his followers, including a vicious spider monkey. After a little mayhem, say two-thirds of the book, right triumphs; surprise, surprise. You can take it or leave it; next time, Gil Vine can do his stuff without my support.





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"PRICE TAG FOR MURDER", by Spencer Dean (*Boardman*, 12s. 6d.).

Trouble at the Big Store, Manhattan, with wholesale (literally) theft and (figuratively) murder. Rather involved and slightly tedious, this rates no more than an average commuting divertisement between snoozes and stations.

"MURDER IN THREE MOVES", by Rutherford Watters (*Figgis, Dublin*, 15s.).

Nice, fresh Irish murder-thriller with poet on the loose as narrator and chess problem composer as reincarnation of M. (rather than S.) Holmes. Gay, literate, eminently readable, amusing and compelling, Rutherford Watters deserves notice and the plaudits of the discriminating not-so-few. Good.

"THE ANGEL OF DEATH", by Philip Loraine (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

This is a novel rather than a *roman policier*, a novel concerned with the evolution of an amoralist into a criminal and with the evolving of his crime. The book includes murder and sudden death, but these are almost incidental to the main theme, corruption by material ambition. The central character, the anti-hero, is a well-conceived study in the subtle depravity of uncontained, and in his case uncontrollable, desire—the desire for great wealth. The method of acquiring this wealth is the theft of a great Leonardo hanging in a Florentine museum and the selling of it to



an international multimillionaire who, it goes without saying, is successfully ruthless and without morals.

*The Angel of Death* starts rather quietly, perhaps a little too quietly, but once under way it provides its own kind of momentum, compulsion and fascination. Florence, Bologna and Cannes, a handful of lesser characters, ranging from gifted drunken painters to amorous Italians, provide a competent and colourful background.

Unhappily, the end seems the weakest part, as though in the final convulsion, the last twist of the plot's tail, the sting got lost. Nonetheless, Philip Loraine deserves recognition as a good, readable craftsman with his own brand of off-beat suspense.

"DROWN HER REMEMBRANCE", by Susan Gilruth (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 15s.).

This is another of those holiday murder operations, set this time in Majorca. It's a cosy world of upper middle-class tourists, youngish couples living back home in smart mews cottages with window-boxes and gaily painted doors in London's more fashionable districts, a world in which people from the F.O. know people from Chelsea's theatrical starland who in turn know Scotland Yard Chief Inspectors who in turn are members of the same club—anyway, they all read *The Times* and qualify as Top People.

Surprisingly, the greater part of the book is set in London where the I-heroine tries to uncover the mystery

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of a filmstar's wife's death by drowning which happened when she was in the Balearics, sopping up sun and olive-oil. And eventually justice is done. Alas, I thought it took too long. My interest began to flag with the return to the too-cosy world of Belgravia-Knightsbridge-Chelsea, and the ending was signalled so far ahead that it became something of an exercise in ingenuity to imagine how the heroine could be prevented from seeing the solution for another ten chapters.

Susan Gilruth writes pleasantly and amusingly, and if her soufflé does not always rise to a chef's perfection, it is never soggy. But next time, a better plot, please.

"DEADLY WELCOME", John D. Macdonald (*Robert Hale*, 10s. 6d.).

A warning first: ignore the dust-jacket, which is quite enough not only to suggest the wrong sort of book but to put off the right kind of reader/buyer. This said, I recommend this excellent American suspense story as a highly competent, exciting and compelling study of small-town crime set between the bayou swamps and the beaches of Florida.

The hero, who has made good in the army and as a State Department investigator, is sent back to his hometown, where he was white-trash and had been railroaded out, to clear up a tangled and unsolved murder with complications that concern the Pentagon. He goes reluctantly, and almost everything he fears and anticipates comes to pass. The characters are all convincing and well-

drawn, and Mr. Macdonald has a gift of alert honesty and perception, beyond the superficial level, that makes his books far better than the average crime-suspense fiction. His writing is well-disciplined, his plots well-conceived and his characters and background exceedingly well-observed. Alpha.

"THE WONDERFUL ONE", by Robert Wade (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 12s. 6d.).

A good, if occasionally overwritten, story of an "unethical" advertising campaign which includes the creation of beauty (feminine) through endocrinology, exposed by crusading Fleet Street magazine journalist. At times, compulsively readable; at others, amiably off-beat.

"SOME LIKE THEM DEAD", A Crime Writers Association Anthology (*Hodder & Stoughton*, 15s.).

Such as Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh, Stanley Ellin, Julian Symons, Mary Fitt, Edmund Crispin, Michael Gilbert, Anthony Gilbert, Roy Vickers, Janet Green, Anthony Boucher, Ellery Queen and Cyril Hare.

"THE DEVIL'S OWN", by Peter Curtis (*Macdonald*, 15s.).

Good beta-plus suspense thriller set in inbred East Anglian village. Witches and warlocks of assorted sizes are opposed by intelligent ex-missionary schoolmistress, sans glamour, sans youth. Clever, well written and almost consistently gripping, this is a book altogether above average.





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