

MYSTERY

LONDON

No. 78

3/6 QUARTERLY

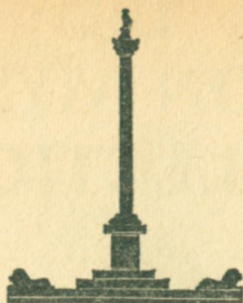
THRILLING

ORIGINAL





**THE LONDON
MYSTERY SELECTION**



THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

NUMBER SEVENTY EIGHT

7	The Cat	<i>Ralph Whitlock</i>
13	Auto-Murder	<i>Peter L. Cave</i>
16	The Switch	<i>H. J. Bradbury</i>
21	Out of the Trap	<i>Rosemary Timperley</i>
25	Good-bye, Amelia	<i>Charles Stuart</i>
37	A Night to Remember	<i>Samuel Knowles Watts</i>
43	The Twelfth Man	<i>Bliss Nielsen-Wood</i>
48	Autumn Encounter	<i>William Wannamaker</i>
52	Odds of 18,144 to 1	<i>Lionel Luckhoo</i>
56	Death Unlocked	<i>Donald Noakes</i>
61	The Housewife	<i>Beryl Whitaker</i>
67	I'll Burne my Bookes	<i>Philip Spring</i>
76	The Unseen	<i>R. G. Malin</i>
79	The Right Man	<i>Josef Foster</i>
83	Appointment at Four	<i>Norman P. Kaufman</i>
85	Poor Guy	<i>Janet Craig James</i>
93	Double-crossed by Destiny	<i>F. E. Evans</i>
100	Silent Witness	<i>John Taverner</i>
106	The Speaker	<i>Jacqueline Russell</i>
108	The Plastic Pyramid	<i>C. E. Barman</i>

(VOL. 19 NO. 78 SEPTEMBER, 1968)

CROOKS IN BOOKS

A quarterly review of some of the finest mystery and detective books recently published appears on PAGE 119

THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION



THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION
IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY
NORMAN KARK PUBLICATIONS
268-270 VAUXHALL BRIDGE ROAD
LONDON, SW1, ENGLAND

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

U.K. and Sterling Area 14s.

U.S.A. and Canada \$2

Copyright of all contents is reserved. This periodical is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be disposed of by way of trade except at the full retail price; nor in a mutilated condition, nor affixed to nor as part of any advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever

LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION published QUARTERLY

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor and business manager are: Publisher, Norman Kark; Editor, Norman Kark; Business Manager, Noel E. Williams, all of 268-270 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1
2. The owner is Norman Kark, 268-270 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1
3. There are no mortgagees, bondholders or other security holders



THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

Our September issue brings you not only several new, young writers but also a famous author, agricultural consultant and farmer—Ralph Whitlock who has written for us his first short thriller story—‘The Cat’. It is excellently constructed.

I think that the selection we give in this issue is perhaps the most diverse in interest of any we have published before, as it moves from the gentle strangeness of ‘The Twelfth Man’ in a cricketing story, through the vicious hardness of ‘The Switch’ and the taut tense spite of ‘Autumn Encounter’ to murder horrific in the computer yarn—‘The Housewife’.

On page 67 we publish the last of the late Philip Spring’s short stories ‘I’ll Burne my Bookes’. It is written, as ever, in his scholarly and careful style and we are sad indeed that he will no longer be one of our most valued contributors.

Teenage crime can perhaps be the most horrific setting of all for a short story particularly when it is combined with kind and pathetic old age. If you want cruelty and stupidity of the most modern kind, you will find it in ‘Poor Guy’ on page 85 and from a writer of great skill—Janet Craig James.

Imagination is the key to good thriller writing—imagination and a modern look at old situations. ‘The Plastic Pyramid’—a queer ‘collectors’ story of an old man and a boy turns into something weird indeed under a writer’s imagination.

Imagination that also alerts a sixth sense of impending danger makes again a most forceful piece of writing from Samuel Knowles Watts in ‘A Night to Remember’.

Finally we have of course your proper proportion of good murder detective stories all with their unexpected twist at the end, and to bring relief—those in which the would be murderer has the tables turned on him! Of these last ‘Goodbye, Amelia’ has all the right ingredients.

THE EDITOR.

“I’ve always wanted to be a dress designer. I used to do all my own clothes before the accident. Sometimes now I look at the fashions and I know I could do just as well. If I had my hands.”

(Sheila, 18)

REHAB are helping 1,500 youngsters now. Help REHAB to help many more. Your contributions will be welcomed. Write to us: REHAB, Tavistock House (South), Tavistock Sq., London W.C.1.



THE BRITISH COUNCIL FOR REHABILITATION OF THE DISABLED



THE CAT

RALPH WHITLOCK

TWO COD fillets, Olive. . . . Oh, and I'd better take a packet of corn-flakes. Yes, Mrs. Hardicott, there's something more in that old woman than meets the eye."

"True, Mrs. Burkett. That's true. Well, you know as well as I do that when my Margaret had warts and I took her along to see the old girl, all she did was to look at them and tell Margaret to go away and forget. And the warts were gone by the end of the month."

"She can charm away headaches, so they say, just by passing her hand over your head. I'd better have a pot of raspberry jam, Olive, and a tin of pineapple slices. And if you go out to the woods past her cottage pretty nearly any hour of the day you can hear her mumbling

away to herself . . . or to that cat.”

“Ah, ’tis a queer sort of cat, that. It answers the old woman back. Miaows when she talks to it. Well there, I suppose it’s company for the poor old soul, living out there all by herself.”

“And why does she live out there all by herself, Mrs. Hardicott? Why? That’s what I asks myself. What happened when she was offered a council house? Would she take it? No. Two pound of them pork sausages, Olive.”

“Has always lived there, so I suppose she wants to stay.”

“There’s more to it than that, Mrs. Hardicott. ’Tis my belief there’s some strange goings-on out there in the woods at night. Aye, some pretty strange goings-on, if you ask me. I can see her place across the fields, and more than once I’ve a-seen lights wavering about there, eleven o’clock at night.”

“Maybe she was out looking for the cat, Mrs. Burkett.”

“Cat. Old woman. They be both the same thing, if you ask me. Haven’t you ever heard, Mrs. Hardicott, of old Moll Hart, who used to live about here in bygone days? She used to turn herself into a hare, so I’ve heard say, and go out into the fields to help the boys who were poaching drive the other hares into the nets at night. A witch, she was. The last of ’em, so ’twere said . . . but it’s my belief we’ve got another out there on the edge of the wood.”

“You think so, Mrs. Burkett?”

“Ah, I do. And I’m not the only one, either. When you come to think of it, there’s that old woman living there, a mile from the village, all alone, with pots of money hid about the house. You wouldn’t say it was safe, would you? But ’tis as safe as if it were all in the bank. ’Cos who do you think would go out there at dead of night to rob her? Eh?”

“Nobody around these parts, Mrs. Burkett.”

“No, nobody round these parts. They’d be all as scared as a sparrow in a trap, for all there’s a hundred pound or more in that house if there’s a penny. . . . I’d stake my groceries here on that.”

“Is there anything more, Mrs. Burkett?”

“No, that’s the lot, Olive. . . . Oh, I see you’ve got some greetings cards there. ’Tis my Julie’s twenty-third Monday. . . . I’d better send her one, I s’pose. All right, Olive, just serve Mrs. Hardicott while I choose one.”

“How about you, Jerry? You don’t want much, I suppose?”

“No. Thank you, Mrs Hardicott . . . only a packet of fags. That’s the sort, Olive, Ta.”

* * *

It had been as neat a piece of work as could be devised. Jerry was pleased with it. He had thought of everything. It had taken him a fortnight to plan it all out, and now it had gone off without a hitch.

He had left the village, walking, by the Ledhampton road, which is at right-angles to the direction of the cottage by the woods. He had travelled by dry tracks, leaving no footmarks. He had entered the woods half a mile from the cottage and had approached it along a little-used path. On the way he had taken a rusty and heavy spanner from an old plough lying under a hedge; no one could trace that back to him. He wore kid gloves.

The door had been unlocked. He had lifted the latch and stepped quietly in. The old woman had been sitting in a straight-backed chair, looking at the fire in the black grate. One blow had been enough. He had been practising on a log till he was expert at delivering it just where it would be most effective—a slanting blow to the back of the skull. The old woman had pitched forward without a moan, half-way across the brass fender. After making sure he had done the job properly he had pulled her back to the hearth-rug. Maybe it would be a good idea to let her burn later, but not now. It would be futile to burn the cottage down before he had found the money.

He let the clammy plough-spanner lie on the floor where he had dropped it—no need to conceal it—and set about looking for the cash. In the log cupboard by the grate; in the dresser drawers; in the tea caddy and ornaments on the mantelpiece. He found four pounds and some coins in a tin box there, but nothing of any great value. The larder and lean-to where the old woman did her washing also yielded nothing and Jerry swore under his breath. This place was beginning to get on his nerves. Out here, a mile from the nearest living person . . . a living one, not the dead one on the rug . . . things seemed different from the way he had planned them back at home. Then it had seemed he had hit on the ideal method of obtaining the £110 for the motor-bike he had set his heart on. Now he was not so sure. Why couldn’t he find the money and get out of here, quick?

It must be upstairs. The old woman had a candle in an old-fashioned blue enamelled candlestick, ready to light her to bed. He struck a

match, fumbling over the task with his gloves still on, let the wick burn clear and went to the stair door. The winding stairs creaked loudly under his weight, and he sweated to hear the noise, though there was no one except himself to hear it.

In the bedroom he faced a rickety chest of drawers supporting a looking-glass and a brush-and-comb set, both brush and comb fuzzy with grey hairs, like those sticking to the plough-spanner. The mirror reflected from the opposite wall a picture of a lighthouse on a rock. He was dazedly trying to decipher the accompanying religious text from its reflections in the mirror when the fury hit him. From the bed, where she had been curled asleep, the cat launched herself at his face.

The smarting pain sent him reeling back. Protecting his eyes with one gloved hand, he endeavoured to grapple with the cat with the other. For a minute the room whirled with the wild mêlée. Then it was over. He had been able to get a lucky grip on the desperate, clawing feline and had hurled her, squawling, against the wall.

Breathing heavily and with blood trickling from the red furrows down his cheeks, he pounced in panic anger on the temporarily winded cat.

“I’ll teach you! I’ll show you, you bloody moggie!”

His groping hand felt the narrow, bootlace-like tie which proclaimed him as a lad keeping up with the fashion. It would serve as well as anything. Tearing it off he tied a slip-knot and looped it around the cat’s neck. The room was not big enough to swing a cat in, or he would have taken a savage delight in doing so. Instead, he stumbled downstairs, dangling the cat and giving it a gratuitous thump or two against the walls as he went. He had noticed large nails, for hanging ham and herbs, in the exposed beams of the living-room. From one of these he hanged the cat.

He stood back to survey his work. The cat seemed limp and dead. He hoped it was not, so that it could wriggle and squirm and feel itself slowly strangling. But it did not give him the satisfaction of a single twitch. So, with a final oath, he turned and went upstairs to resume his search.

It was fruitless. He had probed into every corner of both little bedrooms, without finding a hint of cash. He had even tested the floor-boards and the wallpaper and had felt under and inside the mattress. There was nothing anywhere.

It must be downstairs, in some hiding-place he had missed. Unless

there was no money. Unless that old gossip, Mother Burkett, was wrong, and the four pounds odd was the only money in the house.

"Damn old Mother Burkett!" he muttered, and tramped downstairs again.

Looking around to decide where to begin his new search, he was vaguely aware of something missing. Then, suddenly, he knew what it was. The cat had gone.

Now he had a double motive for his anxious investigation. He trotted feverishly around the tiny, bare rooms, bewildered as to whether to concentrate on the cash or the cat.

The door creaked. His hair bristled on his nape, and he dived instinctively for his weapon, the plough-spanner. But no one came in. He realized that he must have left the door unlatched and that the rising wind had pushed it open.

So if the door had opened, the car could have crept out—assuming, that is, that it could somehow have wriggled out of its noose. He went to the door and peered into the night, palely illuminated by the crisp, glinting, metallic light of a waning moon. He saw the cat standing in the middle of the garden path, by the cabbages. By a trick of the moonlight she looked twice her normal size . . . and from her neck still dangled his noose.

The menace of it struck Jerry like an uppercut. He had left no footprints and no finger-prints. There was nothing to associate him, in anyone's mind, with the bloodstained spanner. Some story could be concocted by a brain as clever as planning as his, to account for the scratches on his face. But of what use was all this if the cat were found with his tie around her neck?

He advanced a few cautious paces and raised his hand. The cat stood glaring at him. She waited until the spanner was flying through the air before she leapt aside and streaked for the nearest tree—the towering, ancient fir which leaned over the garden. The spanner bounced from the path where she had been standing, hit a pile of unsawn logs under the tree and dropped on the ground.

Jerry ran forward and peered up through the shaggy branches of the fir. The cat he could see quite plainly against the pewter-black sky. Clinging defiantly to the tree, she spat a challenge down at him. Fortunately fir trees, having plenty of cross-branches, were easy enough to climb. The wood-pile around the trunk gave him a good start.

Slowly they both clambered upwards. Jerry had enough experience

and innate caution not to put a foot wrong, desperate though he was to catch that cat. Whenever he raised his eyes they caught the fixed, baleful glare of the cat's, glittering in the moonlight and seeming never to move from his. There was presently nothing in the world but the cat and himself and the rough, sticky bark and needles of the fir, all swaying in a macabre harmony with the clouds and the buoyant moon.

The cat had made a mistake at last. She had moved out from the trunk towards the end of one of the branches. It was bending beneath her clutching weight. If he too moved outwards along the branch on which he stood he would be able to reach up to her. Carefully he edged along, balancing himself with the help of another branch at throat level. The cat had evidently realized her error and was looking round frantically for a means of escape.

Suddenly she sprang. Straight at his head. He leaned back involuntarily, raising one arm to shield his eyes and swinging his weight away from the menace. Unequal to the sudden stress, the branch snapped with a pistol-like crack. For a moment he hung, snatching desperately at the jagged twigs and prickly foliage. Then the branches in his hands also gave way and he plunged, doomed as Lucifer, down the dark funnel of the night.

He felt the explosion of pain as his body crashed against the woodpile, but he never knew that, when he finally crumpled on the garden in the moonbeams, his bloodied head rested upon a bloody spanner.

Indoors, the cat crept to the hearth-rug and curled up on the old woman's skirts, in front of the dying fire.



AUTO-MURDER

PETER L. CAVE

Potential murder lurked in every corner of the house . . . it was time now to move outside and do some further planning

GARETH REYNOLDS married because he was lazy and spineless. These two vices ruled his life. He took the hand of Celia Thornton not because she was attractive, not because she intoxicated him with desire, but because she was exceedingly wealthy. It seemed sensible to take a rich wife, rather than to spend the rest of his life working for a living.

Five years after the confetti had showered over his head, he decided to murder her, and laziness and spinelessness once more decreed the method he should use to achieve this end.

Gareth Reynolds was convinced that he was far more clever than other men. Murder would be a simple business—with no loose ends laying around afterwards. He felt confident. Five years had given time for a great deal of careful planning.

He had considered all the usual, well-tryed and well-proven modes of disposal, and rejected them all. Poison, blunt instruments, knives, guns and silk stockings all meant that he would have to take a *personal* part in the proceedings—and Gareth Reynolds did not quite have the necessary guts to do that.

No—his murder would be the ultimate in perfection. Perhaps, it would not even be murder at all. It would be an accident, something which happened completely independently of his own actions. Or almost independently, anyway.

Celia Reynolds would die by some mechanical means—even if Gareth had to help the mechanics of the thing along.

It was the simple things first—the obvious. Where better to start than in the house itself? Start simply, and work up to sophistication gradually, he told himself. Time was not at a premium. Reynolds had waited five long years, and a few months more would make no great difference.

First of all there was the top stair rod. A few seconds' work with a screwdriver at the top of the huge, steep staircase. One loose rod, plus

one stray foot equalled a trip—perhaps a fall, perhaps a death . . . Perhaps.

There were a dozen other little things to do as well. All the kitchen and household implements needed only that gentle touch with the electrical wiring. Nothing so crude as an actual short circuit. Just a little frayed wire, loosen the connections *just* that tiny bit . . . and maybe, one day?

Weeks passed, and the house gradually became a twelve-roomed museum of death. Potential murder lurked in every corner, every cupboard of the building. It was time to move outside.

Of course, the car was a natural. The most obvious of all, in a way. The house stood on a hill, which ran down to the village some three miles away in a provocatively, inviting way.

. . . And Celia's car. Her very own, shopping car. So easy to spend two hours underneath it with a set of tools. So easy to tamper with the brakes just that much. A loosening here, a slight torque applied here . . . there was really nothing to it.

The car was the final arrangement. Gareth Reynolds sat back to wait for an accident to happen. He made it his business to be out of the house even more than usual. How much nicer if it happened when he was out drinking with friends, or staying with any one of his numerous female sympathizers. So neat for the coroner, too.

He didn't have to wait very long. The accident came—as it must—only a few weeks later. The infra-red heater on the bathroom wall—how tragic that no one had noticed that nasty little crack appearing in the plaster around the bracket fitting. The poor woman had no chance at all. Electrocuted in the bath. A tragic accident.

"Death by misadventure," the inquest decided. Not the slightest question of foul play, of course. At least a dozen people had been at the same golf club for the whole of the same afternoon as Gareth. Indeed—he had nearly broken down, they recalled, when a club official had brought him the terrible news.

The solicitor was suitably deprecating when Gareth went to see him. He nodded understandingly as Gareth explained how upset about the business he was, how he just had to get away for a few weeks—have a holiday—to get over the terrible shock of it all.

So Gareth Reynolds went away on holiday for a month, after leaving adequate instructions as to the sale of the house, and the disposal of all his wife's personal belongings.

When he came back, his first call was to the solicitor, where he found that he was even wealthier than he had imagined he would be. The house had risen in value—adding an extra seven thousand pounds to the value of his deceased wife's estate.

The sole heir to this sizable fortune walked happily out of the solicitor's office and decided to walk up the hill to take a last, lingering look at the old house.

Gareth Reynolds was dreaming of sunny Riviera beaches, long cool drinks and tall blonde bathing beauties as he ambled up the hill.

The squeal of car tyres snapped him out of his reverie. For an instant, Gareth Reynolds stared blankly at the small red car tearing down the hill towards him at an insane speed.

A few seconds before it hit him and threw his lifeless body a hundred yards down the road, he recalled just a few of the solicitor's words.

"The sale of your wife's car and personal jewellery realized a further two thousand pounds, Mr. Reynolds."



The Dance of Death

In every clime, Death studies your devices
And vain contortions, laughable Humanity,
And oft, like you, perfumes herself with spices
Mixing her irony with your insanity!

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE



THE SWITCH

H. J. BRADBURY

As Peters began to close the drawer, the Director, a wild look in his eye, wrenched the recording spool free of the machine. . . .

MARTIN PETERS spent the day preparing his apparatus. He worked alone. The details of his process were a secret he had insisted on keeping until it was technically as perfect as he could make it. Until six months ago he had worked on it largely in his own time, in the evenings and at week-ends. A trial run had convinced Unicorn research chiefs that he had something worth-while to offer. Since then they had allowed him to work full time on development. The result was this evening's demonstration to Sir Humphrey Clarke-Finney, Managing Director of Unicorn.

Sir Humphrey was expected at seven. By six-thirty, Peters had tested and retested his apparatus. He was in room 112, a small room off the main lab. Room 112 traditionally housed Unicorn's more secret projects. It had a steel door with a triple Chubb lock and a separate alarm system.

By this time he would be almost alone in the building. He removed the spectacles which corrected a slight myopia and put them in the breast pocket of his white lab-coat. He had no qualms about facing Sir Humphrey. The last word was always with science. His apparatus would speak for itself.

At seven-fifteen the 'phone rang. It was the commissionaire with the news that Sir Humphrey was on his way up.

"What are all these damned wires?" Sir Humphrey had a bustling and flamboyant air. He wore straggling moustaches and sidewhiskers. His short bulky figure was clothed in an impeccable suit of theatrically Edwardian cut.

Peters was himself lean, stoic, and six feet two. He pushed the spectacles more firmly on his nose.

"There are three fundamental processes in wet washing," he began, "wetting, heating, and beating. I've replaced them respectively by desiccation, electrostatic oscillation, and ultrasonic vibration. On these

benches the three separate processes can be shown. On this bench they are combined in a prototype washing machine. The diluent is not water but warm air."

"Never mind the theory," said Sir Humphrey. "I want to see the thing work. I suppose you know what I hope?"

"You hope to be convinced it's a practical proposition, I imagine," said Peters.

"Nothing of the sort. I hope it's a flop. Now get on with it."

"I've used this rag to clean the bench," said Peters. "You can see how dirty it is."

"Throw it away," said Sir Humphrey. "It will prove nothing. I've brought my own washing." He took an incredibly filthy white woollen pullover from his bag and threw it at Peters. "The black marks are sump oil. The blue ones are paint. There's six months' accumulation of miscellaneous grime as well. Let's see what your machine makes of that."

"I'll show you first what can be done simply by drying the wool," said Peters.

He locked the pullover inside a transparent plastic container and pressed a switch. After two minutes he unscrewed the lid of the container, quickly took out the pullover and shook it. The wool was chemically dry and crackled violently with discharging static. Much of the dirt came away in a cloud of fine dust.

"Now for the second part of the process."

Sir Humphrey stopped him. "Let's have the complete wash. No need to waste time on details. It's the result I want to see."

Peters threw the pullover into his dry-washer, closed the lid, and switched on.

"How long will it take?" asked Sir Humphrey.

"Four or five minutes."

"You realize what it means to Unicorn if that thing comes out clean?" said Sir Humphrey, after a pause.

"There's a fortune in it for somebody," replied Peters.

"The fortunes of Unicorn are tied up with soap powder. 'BEAM', our new brand, represents a multi-million pound investment. We can't throw that down the drain. Your machine would put us out of business. Eighty-five thousand Unicorn employees would lose their jobs (including you and me, by the way). We have a responsibility, an enormous responsibility, for these people, their families, and their lives."

"I have a responsibility even greater than that," said Peters. "I have two small children. My wife is expecting a third. There's always washing on the line. Before we could afford help she had to do a weekly wash which was an insupportable drudgery, a return to the last century, a descent into hell. People talk about the benefits of modern detergents. They are out-dated. They're the most old-fashioned part of modern life. They should have gone out with the bustle and the hansom cab. Unicorn is pouring its millions into an anachronism."

"Anachronism or no, those millions are definitely committed. There can be no question of changing horses in mid-stream."

"If Unicorn doesn't put this washer on the market, someone else will."

"Obviously we shall retain full patent rights," said Sir Humphrey.

"They may not be available to you," said Peters.

"What the hell d'you mean by that?" began Sir Humphrey.

A red light glowed above the complicated array of wires, containers and glass tubes on the bench.

"Time to have a look at your washing." Peters reversed several switches and opened his machine. He took out the pullover. It was dry, uncreased, fluffy, and spotlessly clean. He threw it to Sir Humphrey.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you."

Sir Humphrey examined the wool carefully under the light. He looked at Peters. "I'm sure there's no need to remind you of your contract of employment. The patent rights are Unicorn's."

"No patent has been applied for, yet," said Peters.

"I want a draft specification in principle and in detail on my desk by tomorrow evening," said Sir Humphrey. "Thanks for the demonstration. Good night." He turned to go.

"Excuse me, Sir Humphrey."

"Well?"

"What do you intend to do with my process?"

"Unicorn can't use it. At the same time we can't afford to let anybody else use it."

"You intend to patent it and hide it?"

"If you put it that way, yes. Suppress it."

"For how long?"

"I don't know, man. Indefinitely, probably."

"In that case I shall hand in my resignation."

"Do as you damn' well please," said Sir Humphrey. "You'll still be bound by the terms of your contract to reveal to us the essentials of any process developed on our premises with our assistance. If you don't do that we sue you for every penny you have."

"Sue me and you reveal the fact that you are depriving the world of an immeasurable benefit. The idea of suppressing a development like this is ludicrous. The one irresistible force in the world today is the march of scientific progress. You would be put in a lunatic asylum."

"Rubbish! Your idea of this thing's value to humanity is a delusion. As far as I'm concerned its commercial value is nil, and in a commercial world that's an adequate reason for not manufacturing it. We should win hands down, and you would spend the rest of your life in poverty."

"I've had an offer of £150,000 for the process."

"Then you've been blabbing about it. That puts you the wrong side of your legal contract straight away. You're a fool. Who knows about it? Who made the offer?"

"I've spoken to no one about it. The offer came through a commercial espionage agency, though that's not what they call themselves. You evidently underestimate their resources. They know everything worth knowing about current industrial research. You couldn't hope to keep a secret as big as this from them, not for five minutes. A first offer like that means that someone is prepared to pay half a million. In any case I have something here which I think will make their offer a waste of time."

Peters opened a drawer in his desk. The twin spools of a tape recorder were revolving smoothly and silently.

Sir Humphrey stared at it and said nothing. As Peters began to close the drawer, a wild look came into the eye of the managing director. He made a grab at the recording spool and wrenched it free of the machine. It slipped from his hand and flew across the laboratory. The glossy brown tape lay in festoons across the benches.

"I shouldn't bother to collect it up, if I were you," said Peters. "I have a duplicate recorder working where you couldn't possibly find it." He began to dismantle the apparatus, separating glass tube from glass tube, laying them methodically in racks, turning switches, disconnecting wires.

"Look," began Sir Humphrey, "this tomfoolery has gone far

enough." In a conciliatory tone he said, "You are entitled to compensation. How much do you want? You can have your half-million. More if you want it. Anything within reason. Make your own estimate of what it's worth to us. I'll give you a blank cheque on the company's central account." He began fiddling with a heavy switch lying on the bench. It was kept in position only by its own weight. Thick cables leading to and from it were draped over the front and back of the bench. Peters saw him and recoiled violently from the apparatus.

"Don't touch that for God's sake."

"What's up, man?"

Peters was breathing heavily. "I don't want thirty thousand volts through me, thanks." He adjusted his spectacles and returned to the job of packing up. The 'phone rang. He went across to his desk and lifted the receiver.

"Peters."

"How's it going, darling? What time will you be home? Did everything go well?"

"Fine, thanks," said Peters. "Everything went more or less as expected. I'll be home soon."

"Good. Dawn wanted you to read her a story before she went to sleep, but she was too tired to keep awake. They're both asleep."

"See you in an hour or less," said Peters.

"Bye, darling."

Peters came back to the bench. He was about to carry on with dismantling when he noticed the switch. It was in the "on" position. Sir Humphrey was standing at the window with his back towards him.

"At least we're agreed on one thing," said Peters.

Sir Humphrey turned. "What do we agree on?"

"That there's no use in further talk." He reversed the switch, looking at the other man over the top of his spectacles—a look of dispassionate scientific inquiry rather than of reproach or disgust. He began to disconnect a cable. A searing flash lit the room for an instant.

For the second time, Sir Humphrey picked up the switch by the wires attached to it and draped it the opposite way across the bench. The lever was once again in the "on" position. There was no other difference. He stepped carefully over Peters and went to the 'phone, asking for ambulance and police.

"I'm afraid there's been a fatal accident . . ."

OUT OF THE TRAP

ROSEMARY TIMPERLEY

"What am I hiding from?" She kept asking herself in that little bed-sitting room in the old house. "What am I afraid of?" She tried to work it out, this illness, or whatever it was . . .

SHE LIVED in hiding. She didn't know why she was hiding or what she was hiding from. But she had taken to creeping about the surface of the earth as fearfully and furtively as if she were some sort of criminal perpetually evading capture—shivering at a voice, fleeing from a shadow.

Sometimes she wondered why she behaved like this. What was wrong with her? After all, she had a perfect right to live in her little bed-sitting room at the top of the big old house. She paid her rent on time. And she had every right to walk down the street, enter a shop and make a few purchases, as long as she could pay for them.

She would ask herself: what am I afraid of? None of the people whom I know by sight—neighbours, shop assistants and so on—wish me any harm. They are barely even aware that I exist. And yet I dread not only being spoken to by them but even being seen by them. Why? I shrink back from my window when the man who lives downstairs is in the garden—shrink back so that he won't see me in my room. Why? I cross the road if I see an acquaintance on my side of the street and hope that he or she will not notice me. I dread the mere saying of "Good morning" or "Good afternoon," and then the artificial, uncaring "How are you?" and all that nonsense one has to go through. I go into different shops as often as possible so that I shan't get to know the assistant well and have to "pass the time of day". Self-service shops are best for this, but even there one gets to know the girl totting up the bill.

Yet *why* do I feel like this?

What am I hiding from? What am I afraid of?

She tried to work it out, this illness, or whatever it was, this pathological shyness. Her mind told her that it was ridiculous, but that knowledge didn't change her feelings or behaviour. If ever, with her mind keenly aware of her own ridiculousness, she determined to be

out-going, to meet easily anyone who crossed her path, that determination died at the first glimpse of the downstairs-man in the garden, the acquaintance across the street, the familiar shop-assistant at a counter.

One night, when all was quiet and she was utterly alone, as always, she whispered aloud to herself (she had to whisper in case, through the thin walls, someone heard her talking to herself):

"For a long time now I've been my own everything: my own parents, teacher, husband, children, nurse, doctor, priest, policeman. So now I must be my own psychiatrist. And I must try to tell him, or her, or it, why I am in hiding, why I am afraid. I'd better try to write it down, in case someone hears me and thinks I'm going off my head. Which indeed I suppose I am."

So she got pen and paper and wrote:

"I am afraid of people knowing how lonely and unhappy I am, because my pride would be hurt if they knew, and I am very proud.

"I am afraid of being a nuisance to anyone . . . of anyone's being kind to me for the sake of kindness, and then sighing afterwards and saying to a friend: 'What a damned nuisance that woman is. But, poor thing, one must be kind to her.'

"I am afraid of people whom I don't like taking an interest in me, forcing their unwelcome company on me. For, all my life, the only people who have ever liked me were the ones who bullied me or bored me, one or the other. The people whom I have liked have been indifferent to me. The people whom I have loved have never loved me back. That sort of pain can be borne for just so long, and then one has had enough. Now I have had enough. Now I hide from everyone.

"Once I lived for love. The penalties of living for love, living, as it were, with a naked heart vulnerable to every blow, are so severe that I refuse even to give myself the opportunity to love anyone again. By staying alone and keeping out of people's way, I can avoid that sort of pain.

"This is why I spend my time in my little room very quietly, pretending to be out; and I spend my time out very quietly, pretending to be invisible.

"It is a strange, comic, Pirandello-like way to live.

"But then it isn't a way to *live* at all.

"So, Mr. Psychiatrist—you who do not exist and yet who do, or how else could I write these notes for you?—I am trapped in my own web. With each passing day and night, the strands grow stronger."

"Anyway, I have tried to explain. Read into this what you like. You can hardly read into it any more than I can since I invented you. Do you now exist because I invented you? If so, what can you do for me? I am listening."

And she actually sat and listened for an answer. She heard the silence. It was so intense that it made her ears ache.

Then there was a knock on the door. She jumped as nervously as a criminal in hiding. For a second she sat petrified. Then she opened the door.

A man was standing there. The passage outside her door was dark, so she couldn't see his face clearly, only a paleness lit by sympathetic dark eyes. "Here I am," he said. "Let's see them."

"See what?"

"The notes you've been writing for me."

"For *you*? But I don't know you."

"You know me fairly well—although not as well as you think. Sorry if my turning up like this has given you a shock. Naturally it has, as you've never made this discovery before."

"What discovery?"

"That when you think you've imagined or invented someone, you haven't at all. You've contacted someone who really does exist, in a different dimension. It's quite an ordinary thing to happen. You mustn't let it frighten you just because it hasn't crossed your mind before that this is so."

"I'm not frightened," she said.

"Good. Then may I see what you've written?"

"Don't you know already?" she asked bravely.

"No," he said. "You wrote it for me to read when it was finished. You didn't write it with the idea of my looking over your shoulder. Now please let me see it. I might be able to help you."

"Here you are then, Mr. Psychiatrist," and she fetched her paper confession from the table and handed it to him. She didn't ask him in, nor did he make any move to enter. He stood there in the apparent dark, reading, then handed the papers back to her.

"I thought so," he said. "You're not doing any good here, are you? I doubt very much whether you'd be able to go back now, even if you really wanted to. So you'd better go forward. Come along with me." His voice was very kind. And she felt a surge of loving, so strong and strange that it made her feel dizzy.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"You'll see. It may not be paradise, but you'll like it better than this place. You've finished with all this," and he made a movement with his hands which indicated not only the little room but the little world.

"Come along," he said, holding out his hand.

And she came.

* * *

The man in the downstairs flat had heard her voice on the stairs. She had seemed to be talking to herself, for he heard no other voice. Then there was a thud. He hurried up to the top bed-sitter in case the old woman had fallen and needed help.

He found her door open, and herself lying on the floor just inside her room. Around her was a scatter of papers covered with handwriting. He spoke her name, and bent over her. She was dead.



I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
And if I die, no soul will pity me:
Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
Find in myself no pity to myself?

King Richard III
SHAKESPEARE





GOODBYE, AMELIA

CHARLES STUART

AT ABOUT nine o'clock in the evening Robert Fenwick glanced at the clock in the saloon bar, and uncoiled his handsome seventy-three inches. "Well, must be off," he said affably. "Got a lot to do before morning. Here's to 'old acquaintance'."

Smiling, he listened without surprise to the answering chorus, for it was well known in the village that he and his wife Amelia were emigrating in the morning. Good humouredly, he shook off the detaining hands of his friends, settled his hat on his iron-grey hair, and strolled towards the door of the pub.

He felt curiously moved. You would never have guessed, he thought, listening to the shouts of farewell, that the Fenwicks had only come to live in the village six months ago. What a pity he had to leave it all; everyone had been so sorry to hear that he and Amelia were going. A shame they had to lose such a popular couple, everybody had said sadly—and one so well suited too.

If only they had known.

For Robert Fenwick, truth to tell, had not the least intention of taking Amelia anywhere; was, in fact, planning to murder his wife before the night was through.

But, of course, this was something no one would ever know, Fenwick thought as he stepped out into the last of the summer sunshine. He sniffed appreciatively at the soft Sussex air. It was going to be a fine night, he noted with satisfaction; warm and dry—a fact he had been careful to discover.

Whistling quietly between his teeth, he set out on foot for his house, 'The Beeches', half a mile outside the village. With his long, athletic stride he covered the ground quickly, and soon the last of the houses were behind him. A few yards farther on he turned off the road, taking the short-cut through the churchyard.

It was a route with which, lately, Fenwick had become very familiar: at the far side of the church was a path, somewhat overgrown, which ran along the edge of the graveyard, flanked on its other side by thick woods. From the graveyard the path continued for a hundred yards or so through the woods and back to the road again, emerging at a point only a few yards from his house.

It was really very handy, he thought. Indeed, if one were so minded, it was possible to step straight from the back-garden into the woods and on to the path. Nor was it a route many people would choose, especially at night and in the dark, which, for his purposes, made it all the handier.

Just now though, there was still plenty of daylight. Thirty yards along the path Fenwick stopped, and leaned over the low stone wall of the graveyard. About ten feet away Harkness, the temporary sexton, was digging a grave. At least, the muffled sounds of his spade could be heard coming from the bottom of the yawning hole among the head stones; Harkness himself was invisible.

Fenwick smiled. The sexton had made good progress in the last two hours, he thought; judging by the huge mound of earth at the side of

the hole, there couldn't be very much left to do. The grave would be ready in plenty of time to receive the village's former 'oldest inhabitant', a dear old lady who had expired peacefully two days earlier.

Perhaps she would not have been quite so peaceful, Fenwick thought, had she known she would be having company.

The sound of Harkness's digging ceased and a moment later he emerged from the hole, grunting with the effort of climbing his wooden stepladder. He bent down and pulled it up after him, then stood back and mopped his bald head.

"All finished, have you?" Fenwick said cheerfully.

The sexton spun round, staring. A short, thickset man with soft, womanish features, he seemed just a little startled at finding himself observed. "Just about," he said shortly.

"Nothing left to do in the morning then?" Fenwick persisted, his voice deliberately casual.

The sexton stared at him, blinking against the sunlight. Then he smiled slowly, as though something amusing had occurred to him. "No, it's all ready," he said at last. He gestured impatiently and, turning away, began to cover the hole with some rough planks which were lying in the grass.

Fenwick straightened up and dusted the sleeves of his jacket. Funny chap, Harkness, he thought as he continued his walk. Not at all the sort one would have expected to find in a job like that. For one thing, the fellow was too obviously an educated man. And then again, there was this feeling he'd had before—that there was something familiar about the man. It was worrying, to say the least.

He shrugged. Why worry, he thought. On the contrary, he ought to be grateful to Harkness. Granted, it was mysterious the way the chap had suddenly turned up in the village a few weeks ago, and then taken on the sexton's job when the regular man fell ill, but he was positive he had never actually met him before. No, he should be grateful to Harkness; after all, if he hadn't stopped to wonder about the fellow that first day he had seen him in the graveyard, he might never have found a way of getting rid of Amelia.

He had been standing watching Harkness, he remembered. Standing watching, and wondering, and looking down at the hole—not this one, of course, another, but the principle still applied—and he had wondered idly why they had always to be so deep. After all, it seemed such a lot of room for just one dead body. And then the idea had come

to him, a thought so fantastic it must surely be unique: *Why not put Amelia down there too—underneath?*

It was so simple it seemed ludicrous; surely, there must be a snag somewhere, he had thought. But there wasn't; he had checked. This particular sexton never left his finishing-off to be done on the morning of a funeral. So, all he had to do was to dig out another couple of feet the night before, put her down there, and tramp the earth flat again. Goodbye, Amelia.

* * *

He had never intended to kill her, of course, in the beginning. Fenwick smiled reminiscently as he pushed his way into the woods. He had been wintering on the continent, seven or eight months ago; in Monte Carlo he had enjoyed an unusually lucky streak at the tables and, no amateur, had walked away with his winnings. The following day he had bought himself a Mediterranean cruise and wasted no time in looking round for richer pickings; he had struck oil immediately.

The boat had been crowded with unattached women, most of them fortyish and fighting a losing battle with their waist-lines, but all of them filthy rich and looking vainly for the romance the brochures had promised.

After carefully surveying the field he had selected the widow Lister, by repute one of the richest, as being the most likely to succumb to his own special brand of charm.

And so it had proved. A small, plumpish woman, but not without a certain sex-appeal despite her age, she had been successively puzzled, intrigued, and then delighted by his constant attentions. He had courted her assiduously, escorting her on every excursion ashore, showering her with small, inexpensive presents; she had been the envy of every ageing spinster aboard.

In the end he had accomplished his purpose only too well; the moonlit nights, the gentle breezes off the ocean, the strolls on deck under the stars, all had combined completely to overwhelm her. Delight had developed into adoration. Obviously, her late lamented husband could have been nothing like so romantic as her mature courtier with the handsomely curling moustache; Amelia had taken on a new lease of life.

As for himself, he admitted it now, he had allowed the ship-board atmosphere to affect his judgment. Posing as usual as a rich man with extensive business interests, he had been all prepared to develop his

favourite routine: having gained Amelia's confidence, he had intended to separate her from the stocks and bonds which her first husband had left her—around fifty thousand pounds' worth according to his researches—by promising to re-invest them to much greater advantage. Usually, greed alone was sufficient to guarantee this method success.

But not this time. Apparently, he had overdone the romantic approach; Amelia had been able to think of only one thing: marriage. She had seen absolutely no point in talking about money, so he hadn't been able even to begin on any of his other routines. "Darling," she had said mistily, more than once. "When we're married, everything I have will be yours."

Once they were married.

So, he had thought. Why not? It might not be such a bad idea at that. Marriage it is.

But it had not worked out like that. Oh, they had got married all right and returned rapturously enough to England. Amelia had bought the house after carefully choosing the locality—she had always wanted to live in the south apparently—that part of it was fine. In fact, to begin with, he had revelled in the life; the Country Club; the leisurely round of golf; the week-end parties; it was the way, he felt sure, he had always been meant to live. After all, he was not an unreasonable man. He would have been quite content to allow Amelia to keep him in comfort, if she had been prepared to do so. That was the trouble though, she wasn't.

She had proved most reluctant to hand over her stocks and bonds. Not only that, she had very soon begun to quibble over minor expenses, even expecting him to contribute half towards everything, and this despite the fact that her income alone should have been ample for both of them. The truth was, she was mean.

Of course, Amelia still believed in his story of having large investments of his own. That was the snag. At first, he had kept up the fiction intending to make the rude awakening as gentle as possible. Then, as the months passed and his own small hoard dwindled, he had begun to see that things were not going to be so easy. If she had niggled before, what would she be like once he was forced to admit that he really didn't have any money? Once she realized that it had all been a sham, well, life simply wouldn't be worth living. She might even insist that he get a job.

Night after night he had lain awake, sweating it out. Obviously, he would have to do something, and quickly too before he was forced to go to her, cap in hand. He could always have left her, of course—would have done if there had seemed half a chance of getting his hands on even part of the money, but there hadn't been. Amelia was far too tight-fisted, and he hadn't dared to press too hard in case she should become suspicious. And then again, even if he had succeeded in getting hold of the bonds, he had a feeling Amelia would be vengeful somehow, she would find him.

So, much against his will, he had decided on the only course open to him: Amelia would have to go.

Having made the decision, for any ordinary man the rest would have been easy: simply arrange an accident and wait to inherit everything. Except for a brother in Australia to whom she wrote interminable letters, Amelia had no relatives, and in any case she had never made a will—didn't believe in them she said. So it would have been only a matter of waiting.

But accidents were chancy, and with his record he couldn't afford chances. The thought of a possible investigation had made him shudder. No, they would both have to disappear, Amelia without trace, and himself elsewhere with the bonds. But how?

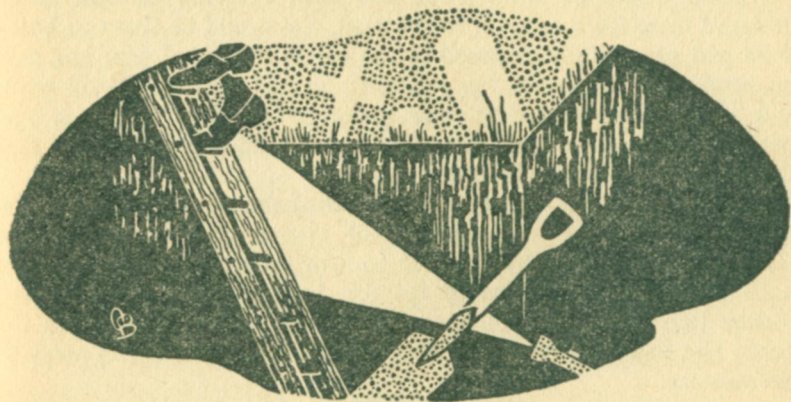
Strangely enough, the answer had arrived in the shape of their first real quarrel, about four months after their marriage. One week-end he had been enjoying a harmless enough frolic at the tennis club with Karen, his doubles partner. Amelia didn't play and so he had been spending quite a bit of time with Karen one way and another. She was a doe-eyed, supple creature of about eighteen, youthful vitality personified in a figure of almost edible perfection, and he had known for some weeks that she was attracted to him. They had been the last to leave the club that day. Amelia hadn't yet arrived to collect him and so, when Karen had trouble with her zipper, one thing inevitably led to another. The first he had known of Amelia's presence was when she struck him savagely over the ear with his tennis racket.

He had never hated her quite so much as at that moment. Her face distorted, her tightly corseted stomach heaving, she had stood over him, lashing him with words so that, even now, he writhed whenever he thought of it. "You filthy beast," she had hissed finally. "If you ever have anything to do with this tart again, I swear I'll kill you." Then she had spun about and left him to walk home.

He would not have been surprised if Amelia had decided to leave him. With her nasty, suspicious nature, nothing would convince her that he hadn't been having a regular affair with Karen—poor Karen, who had run away, terrified, and hadn't come near him since—but Amelia, as he had discovered to his cost, was nothing if not possessive. What she had, she was determined to hold, and that in the end had proved her undoing.

For a week or so things had been distinctly awkward, with Amelia even going to the extreme of banishing him from her bedroom but, if not exactly in a forgiving mood, at least she could be won over. So, grimly, he had set himself to the task of worming his way back into her good graces.

He had stopped spending so much time at the Country Club—which was really no hardship as he was embarrassingly behind with his bar bill—he had given up his golf, he had stopped drinking entirely, and he had even begun to woo her again in the manner of their first meeting. In short, he had been a model husband from that day forward.



Slowly, the old magic had begun to work. All right, Amelia had said eventually, she would forgive him just this once. And then she had made her mistake.

She had decided, she said, that they should leave this place; Sussex had lost its charm. If he really loved her he would take her somewhere far away, so that they could begin again. The poor fool.

She was terrified, of course, that if they stayed he would begin to see Karen again. So, cunningly, he had seized his chance. He had agreed, reluctantly at first, but then with increasing eagerness. To prove his good intent, he had said, why not emigrate? Australia ought to be far enough away for anyone, and it would give her a chance to see her brother again. Besides, he had always had a hankering to buy another farm—it was from farming, he had told her, that he had made his first money. Glowingly, he had enlarged on the possibilities—the solitude, the fact that they would be miles from their nearest neighbours—they would be able to live just for each other.

Amazingly, Amelia had swallowed it. She had been so pathetically eager to keep her illusions, to be able to believe in him again, that she had even offered to realize her holdings if he would do the same, so that, pooling their resources, they would have the money ready to use as soon as they found a place they liked.

Then, a week later, he had seen Harkness digging in the graveyard, and that had clinched it.

* * *

Amelia would be waiting for him now, Fenwick thought as he emerged from the woods on to the road; she would be eager to know if he had successfully disposed of the car to the friend who had said he would like to have it. He chuckled; he had sold the car all right, and immediately rented another under an assumed name—it was parked now in a lane not far away—Amelia, of course, thought that they would be travelling by train.

He let himself into the house and flicked the light-switch. Nothing happened. Then he remembered; of course, the man from the electricity-board had already been to turn everything off. The house itself had been sold furnished the day before; Amelia had put the money into the bulging envelope which she had collected from the bank. She had displayed it to him proudly before locking it away in her suitcase.

“Is that you, Robert?” Amelia called as he hung his hat and coat on the stand in the hall.

“Yes dear, I’m back.”

“Oh good.” She came scurrying from the kitchen to meet him, a welcoming smile on her round, silly face. “Did you manage to get everything done?”

“Of course.” He tapped his breast pocket reassuringly and smiled.

"Old Harris gave me far more than the car was worth. It's all there with the rest of the money and the tickets. We'll put it all in with yours tomorrow. You can be the banker if you like."

"Oh, darling, you are clever." Amelia followed him into the lounge and sat down beside him on the arm of his chair, in front of the fire. "Did you say goodbye to all your friends?"

"Oh yes." He put his head back and closed his eyes, simulating tiredness. "They wanted me to stay longer, but I'd really much rather have been with you."

"I'm glad," Amelia said fondly. She began to prattle on about the busy time she'd had and the fact that the house was without electricity. "There's some supper for you in the kitchen," she finished. "But it's cold I'm afraid. Just sandwiches and a glass of milk."

"That's all right dear," he said. "I'll eat it later." He squirmed inwardly as he felt her stroke his forehead. Thank God it was nearly over, he thought. He really couldn't stand much more of Amelia, even in her present mood.

Amelia stood up and stretched, yawning. "Oh well, I think I'll go on up to bed. Must get my beauty sleep. You come when you're ready dear. Don't forget to eat your supper."

"No dear, I won't."

Fenwick sat for a long time in the chair after she had gone. He was thinking hard, wondering if he had forgotten anything. Better not to do it too early; give her a couple of hours to get well off to sleep. He could strangle her before he went to the grave, of course. But there was just the faint possibility that he might be discovered there, so the less time her body was actually with him the better. Then again, if he left the body in the house whilst he was digging, and was surprised at the grave, inevitably she would still be found. No, far better to take the risk of her waking up whilst he was out. And after all, it was a very small risk. He knew from experience that once Amelia was asleep only an earthquake would awaken her.

At midnight he got up and stubbed out his cigarette, surprised to find that it was his tenth in two hours. He went to the bottom of the stairs and listened. There was no sound, had been none, in fact, since Amelia had called out plaintively to ask if he was coming to bed over an hour earlier. He went quietly up the stairs and entered the bedroom; she was sprawled out on her back, snoring steadily.

After that, he moved quickly. He let himself silently out of the

house, collected a spade from the garden-shed, and stepped into the woods. He had no difficulty in finding the path, nor any need of a torch, for the moon was up, silvering the ground through the interlaced branches of the trees. Not much danger of discovery tonight, he told himself firmly as he walked in an eerie silence through the grass; twice, he had to stop and steel himself after disturbing small, unseen creatures in the undergrowth.

He negotiated the path safely and stopped beside the graveyard wall. God, how bright it was he thought, only half prepared for the sight of the head stones silhouetted starkly in the moonlight, and the long shadows in between. Oh well, in for a penny . . .

He wriggled over the wall, clutching the spade, and approached the boarded over grave. Good, Harkness had left his stepladder behind—that would help considerably. He pulled the boards aside and stared down into the hole. Lord, it was deep. Hardly any need to dig any more really. Still, better be safe; it wouldn't do for the grave to look different in the morning.

He took off his jacket and put it on the ground beside the hole. Then, taking the stepladder, he knelt down and lowered it carefully until he felt it touch bottom. He descended gingerly into the blackness, switching on his torch as he stepped off the ladder, for the moonlight was shining into the grave slantwise and didn't extend quite far enough. So far so good, he thought. He stuck his torch at an angle in the soft earth wall, and began to dig.

It was very cold down there in the bottom of the hole and the earth had a dank, unhealthy smell. Nevertheless, he was soon sweating profusely; he had never realized before how difficult it would be for a man like himself, unaccustomed to heavy manual work, to throw earth more than a few feet above his head. He would have done better to have brought a bucket, he thought, even though that would have necessitated a few trips up the ladder.

Doggedly, he continued, trying hard not to make any noise, moving awkwardly in the confined space. Gradually he slipped into a routine.

Tread in the spade, lift, and throw. Tread, lift, throw—wincing every time the soil and stones showered back again, striking painfully on the head. Tread, lift, throw—stop and listen, wipe away the sweat. Tread, lift, throw . . .

He would drive north, he decided, by-pass London, drive until he was tired, then abandon the car and take a train south. Not that anyone

would be looking for him immediately, but it would confuse the trail when, eventually, Amelia's brother became suspicious. He had never actually made any arrangements about emigration, though he had shown Amelia plenty of brochures. There weren't really any tickets so it would be a long time before official inquiries began.

From London he would take the train to Liverpool, then a boat to Northern Ireland. Not exactly the South of France to be sure, but it was summer, and you could have a good time anywhere with nearly sixty thousand in cash and negotiable bonds in your pocket. Be easy to slip over the border too, if necessary. It would do for the time being.

He leaned the spade against the side wall and stood back, panting. Squinting, he measured the distance from the torch to the newly-dug floor. Good, it was almost finished. He looked at the luminous dial of his watch and frowned; he had reckoned on forty-five minutes for this part of it and already he had been stuck down here for over an hour. God, he would be glad to get out of it though. The place was beginning to get on his nerves.

He turned to pick up the spade and stopped. What was that? He could have sworn he had heard something. He stood rigid for a full minute, his nerves stretched, listening. Nothing. Slowly, he relaxed, shivering as the sweat dried on his skin. To hell with it, he thought suddenly. It would have to do. Better go before he started imagining things.

He was two steps up the ladder when he heard it again, this time quite distinctly, just above his head. Something up there was *chuckling*.

The torch and spade clattered out of his hands. Shaking, Fenwick clung to the ladder. His flesh crawled as the chuckling went on and on, horribly.

"Oh God, no," he whispered. "It can't be. There's no such thing."

"Who is it?" His voice was a hoarse croak. "For God's sake, who is it?"

A pale hand appeared over the edge of the grave. It beckoned twice, and withdrew.

"What the hell. . . ." Fenwick threw himself furiously up the ladder. Ghostly voices were one thing, but a hand wearing rings that he recognized was quite another.

* * *

Harkness hit him scientifically in the neck with a plank as he came up out of the hole. Fenwick choked, teetered crazily on the ladder, and

fell backwards into the grave. Harkness stepped forward, bent down, and flicked on a torch.

"Dead as a door-nail," he said professionally.

Amelia smiled at her brother; seen together, the family resemblance between them was strikingly obvious. She looked down at Fenwick, who was lying face downwards with his head at an unnatural angle. "Well, that saved us a bit of trouble," she said calmly. "If he'd eaten his sandwiches we should have had to have carried him. I wondered what he was up to, sneaking about the house like that. Never did trust him."

Harkness went down into the grave, straightened out Fenwick's limbs, and came back up carrying the spade. He began to throw earth down into the hole, then stopped and leaned on the spade, watching Amelia as she went through the pockets of Fenwick's jacket.

"All I hope," he said in a grumbling tone, "is that he left a bit more than the last one. I'm getting a bit too old to keep on doing this sort of thing time after time."



A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

SAMUEL KNOWLES WATTS

He was not a superstitious man, but the vision, or manifestation seemed so real that every drop of blood drained from his brain

LET ME say at the very beginning, I am not a man given to superstition; yet the happenings which I am about to relate are so inexplicable, and so unacceptable in this twentieth century, that I have been reluctant to write about this before for fear of being held to ridicule.

For my part, I only know I owe my life to this strange manifestation.

The incident took place just after the war, November 1947 to be precise; my firm, anxious to expand their export trade, and to renew agreements with old customers which the war had interrupted, commissioned me to conduct a series of demonstrations of their products; and in this respect, I can claim with all modesty, to have been most successful.

This business campaign meant, of course, my being away from my wife and family for several months. But now, it was nearly over, just one more exhibition to hold, and I must confess I was looking forward immensely to reunion with my family.

During this period of overseas travel I had visited the Scandinavian countries, France, Holland, Portugal, Spain, South Africa and lastly Algeria.

In each of these countries, and usually in the evening I would telephone my wife, inquire after the children and give her my news. So it was in Algiers on that final evening when my work was finished; I rang my wife, gave her my flight number and approximate arrival time.

The airport at Maison Blanche is about five kilometres from Algiers, and as the plane was due to depart at 0800 hours I thought I would have an early night. Having made arrangements for an early call, I paid my bill and retired to my room.

The Alletti Hotel is credited as being one of the most fashionable in Algiers, and one which I always patronized when visiting the city. The hotel was situated quite near the sea, and from the balcony outside

my room I had a wonderful view of the ornamented gardens which led down to the water-front. Now, however, with the approach of winter, the gardens looked drab and rather sad, but one could easily envisage how beautiful they must look when all the flowering shrubs were in full bloom; until then, the only colour which was to be seen was that of some tall evergreen bushes.

I stood for a short time at the open french-windows enjoying a last cigarette, before turning in, and admiring the scene before me. The twinkling lights of the passing boats fascinated me, and I found myself wondering where they could be going, and what their business was. Having finished my smoke I turned and closed the window, for the night air was a trifle chilly. This time tomorrow I would be in my own bed, I told myself as I undressed. I felt happy and relaxed.

I must have fallen to sleep almost immediately; though for how long I slept I had no idea. All I knew was that suddenly I was awake—something or somebody had awakened me. As I lay there listening, every muscle tense and every sense alert, I allowed my eyes to rove slowly round the room. Some sixth sense, it seemed, warned me of impending danger: but all I could hear was the gentle lapping of the waves on the shore, and the noise of the pebbles being pushed to and fro by the movement of the sea.

With an audible grunt of annoyance and impatience at being disturbed, I turned over and prepared to go to sleep again. Then, suddenly, it came again. This time a little louder. There was no mistaking it now, and I sat upright in bed straining my ears to the utmost in an effort to determine from which direction the noise came. It was just like someone dragging some heavy object over the ground, and it seemed to be getting closer to my room.

Suddenly it became apparent to me that the noise came from outside, and more curious than frightened I sprang from the bed and darted to the window.

It was a bright, starry night, fleecy white clouds scurried across the face of the moon, which illuminated the terrace below me, its fitful light conjuring up weird shapes and creating an eerie atmosphere to the scene.

At first I could see nothing to account for my being disturbed, and was about to turn away from the window, when I thought I saw something move; then came that strange noise again. Yes! there it was, my eyes, I felt sure, had not deceived me. Something was out there—but

what? Something within me took possession of my faculties and dictated my movements, while a little voice pierced my brain, forcing me to investigate. Quite involuntarily I wiped my hand across the window which had become misted, and for the first time I realized that my breathing was laboured. Without really knowing what I did I donned my dressing gown, then, opening the french-windows—stepped outside.

For perhaps a full minute I stood there on the balcony leaning over the iron rail, and not really knowing what I was looking for; then, quite suddenly, I saw it. A dark shape, moving slowly and laboriously was coming towards me, and I found myself peering intently at this object unable to move a muscle, conscious only of my heart beats which seemed to be pounding against my ribs. There was no doubt about it now; something was moving out there in the shadows and would pass right by where I was standing. Whether he, or whatever it was had lawful right to be there, and whatever it was he was taking, I did not know.

At that moment the moon broke free of clouds and I was able to discern quite clearly the figure of a man. He was dressed entirely in black. His head was bent slightly forward, and his hands clutched at a rope which trailed over his right shoulder and fastened to the object which he pulled along.

As I gazed at this spectacle I suddenly realized the man wore the clothes of an undertaker, even to the top hat and black gloves, and this object he pulled along was a coffin.

A mixed feeling of horror and fear possessed me. I wanted to turn and run away from this sight, but I could not, my legs would not let me. All I could do was stand and stare—and wait. But wait for what? My numbed brain could not supply the answer. It was as if I were under some form of mesmerism by this horrible apparition.

He was now directly under my window, and as if to add to my apprehension, he stopped and looked up at me; as though expecting me to be there.

The face I gazed at was one I shall never forget. The eyes were jet black, and seemed to be sunken in their sockets, while the deathly whiteness of the face was pitted with pock marks and seemed deprived of all expression. I wanted to do something, even if it were only to shout at him to go away, and though I did succeed in opening my mouth, no sound emerged. My limbs too, remained immovable. A

sudden dryness of my throat and mouth became apparent, as though every drop of saliva had been drained from the glands.

For perhaps a full minute we looked at each other, then, presently he turned and picking up one end of the coffin, held it tilted so that I could read the inscription on the plate. I felt every drop of blood drain from my body, as with horror-stricken eyes I read my own name: and the date of my death, which was to be the following day.

With a supreme effort born of fear and anger I managed at last to utter some sound, but the voice was not mine, it was harsh and sounded more like a croak.

“Who are you? What do you want?”

Barely had the words escaped my lips than I realized the futility of my demand; he was hardly likely to tell me. Nor did he. Instead, my tormenter, as though pleased with his night's work, turned away and, still dragging his gruesome object with him vanished from sight behind some tall bushes. Simultaneously with the disappearance of this spectacle I came out of this trance-like posture, and returning to my room I sought solace in a cigarette.

As I have said, I am not by nature a superstitious man, but this vision, or manifestation, or whatever it was, seemed so real, yet so uncanny, that try as I might I could find no satisfactory answer. A sceptic would have said that such things were a figment of the imagination, and before tonight I would have been inclined to agree, but having these strange happenings myself I was not so sure.

The possibility of a practical joke occurred to me: but who but a lunatic would do such a thing? Besides, there was no one here who really knew me. My watch showed the time to be three o'clock, so I decided to put the whole thing out of my mind and return to bed. Not that I expected to get any sleep, I was too keyed-up for that, but at least I should be resting. However, in this respect I was to be proved very wrong, for my exhausted mind and body, unable to fight against the demand of nature for sleep, responded almost immediately.

The next thing I remembered was being awakened by a loud hammering on my door, and an excited female voice telling me I had overslept, and if I didn't hurry I would miss my plane. At first it seemed to me that I had been asleep for only a few minutes, but a glance at my watch showed me it had really been several hours.

Fortunately, I had previously prepared all my packing, and now had to add only my dressing gown and pyjamas, and these I bundled

unceremoniously into the case. I was well accustomed to making hurried departures, an experience gained through events of the last war, but in this instance I must have broken all records.

I did not even wait for breakfast, much to the consternation of the hotel manager who accompanied me quickly down the steps to the waiting taxi. This had been previously ordered for me, and with the profuse apologies of the manager ringing in my ears, we moved off.

The taxi had seen better days and should have been put on the scrap-heap long ago, but replacements were hard to get in those early years after the war. My fervent hope was that it would get me to the airport in time, and every time the engine misfired my agitation increased. However, once clear of the city and the numerous obstacles caused by the Arab vendors and their dilapidated vehicles, we made fairly good progress. It was as we commenced to climb the slight rise to the airport that my nervous tension increased; I thought we would never make it, for though only a slight gradient, it was of some considerable length, and the extra strain caused the engine to develop a series of splutterings. Once it gave a terrific back-fire, and a great cloud of black smoke ejected itself from the exhaust.

This caused some Arab children who were squatting by the roadside to jump, and scatter like a lot of frightened animals, then presently, they came chasing after the vehicle, laughing and shouting at the driver. Fortunately the wheels kept turning, and with the engine still firing spasmodically, we eventually turned into the main gates of the airport, and with only a few minutes to spare before take-off.

The authorities were very courteous and helpful, and hurried me through. A jeep was provided to take me out to where the aircraft was waiting, its engines already warming-up preparatory to take-off.

Owing to the terrific rush of the past hour, my mind had not once returned to the experience of the previous night; had it done so I might have been more prepared for what was to follow.

It happened as I was about to climb aboard. With one hand on the hand-rail, something compelled me to look up. There, standing at the top and looking down at me was a member of the crew: but it was his face which caused me to halt abruptly, for it was the same that I had seen outside my window last night. As I held his gaze for a fleeting second, I thought I detected a look of sadness about the eyes; then, like a drunken man I staggered down the steps and muttered something to the official about not feeling well.

I must have looked it too, for he supported me with his arm and helped me into the jeep. A short while later the plane taxied out to the runway.

Now having plenty of time to spare, and feeling hungry, I made my way to the restaurant. I felt annoyed with myself for allowing this incident to take such a grip of me, all the same a strange prescient feeling of disaster possessed me. I felt I wanted to do something, to speak to someone and tell them of my uncanny experience, yet all the time I knew that nobody would attach any importance to such a story. And so, fear of being embarrassed forced me to remain silent, and with a heavy heart, I just picked at the food before me.

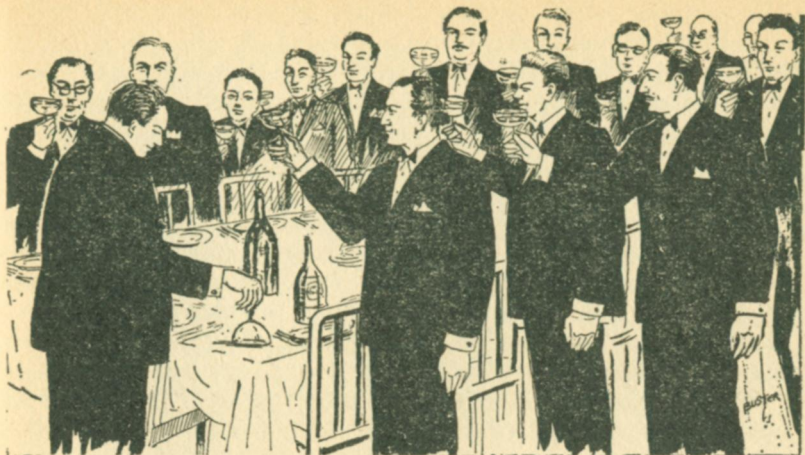
Then, with a suddenness which startled everyone, the emergency sounded, and the fire engine, followed closely by an ambulance, raced across the runway.

The scene now was one of confusion and panic, as excited officials, their arms gesticulating wildly, shouted out orders to others who went dashing away in various directions. With no apparent reason, for I felt I already knew the answer for this excitement, I joined a small group of people on the balcony, from which it was possible to see the entire stretch of runway and the ploughed ground beyond. The plane had crashed out there, I was told, and as I gazed with tightening jaw muscles a pall of black smoke was plainly discernible against the pale blue sky.

Sometime later I learned everyone had been killed in the crash, the same plane that I should have been on; and but for the intervention of my strange visitor I too, would have been included amongst the dead. The thought of how narrowly, and by such strange circumstances I had escaped death, left me badly shaken.

Suddenly a thought occurred to me. I would make inquiries regarding that member of the crew, whose face resembled so vividly that of my strange visitor. Perhaps there might be some relatives I could contact. But though I searched through photographs of the crew, I could not find anyone bearing the slightest resemblance to the face I had seen outside my window.

Many years have now passed since that night of horror and mystery which to this day has remained unsolved. The authorities were able to satisfy themselves as to the cause of the crash; but for my own experience, and the question—why was I the only one saved?—I am convinced no living being can supply the answer.



THE TWELFTH MAN

BLISS NIELSEN-WOOD

EVERYONE KNOWS what cricket means to many men. It was explained to me by a fine cricketer who played for England at one time as “an *art* as well as a sport. It is a law, not a rule.”

This story was told to me by this particular cricketer whose name I shall not use as he disliked publicity of any kind and, although he died three years ago, I respect his memory. His story is authentic, and John (his first name) told me the following facts which impressed me and caused me to write his strange experience. I had asked for basic information as I am no cricketer. I am a female, with a strong distaste for sitting in the hot sun for long days watching beautiful young men in immaculate flannels walking about casually and, seemingly, doing damn all! But John had told me cricket was both an art and a sport and, although I did not understand what he meant then, I do now. So I quote his facts, although it is possible that just about everyone else, other than myself, knows them.

He said that a team consists of eleven players, but usually twelve are chosen (the twelfth man to act as a substitute who can, in certain circumstances, such as injury during the game, play in place of one of the original eleven). He said that if one plays cricket, or any sport, for one's country, e.g. England, one is awarded an England cap, distinctive, with the right to wear it. If one plays six times for England it is said that one has been "capped" six times.

He told me much of his passion for the game and the joy and interest and I marvelled, as I confess I had agreed with Kipling and his description of the "uannelled fools." Then John explained yet again that it was *both* an art and a sport, and I began to understand.

John said he had once had a strange experience and had never been able to explain it, even to himself. He had captained an eleven on a tour, all highly enthusiastic and well-known young cricketers, but his committee's trouble and, of course, his, was to find the suitable twelfth man, and this was taken very seriously by all. Naturally, the choice was that of the committee for this particular tour, but equally naturally he was consulted as he was, after all, the man who took the responsibility for what they hoped would be a successful tour.

Then he was contacted, "out of the blue" as he said, by a young man named Hugh Prestwich, whom he knew to be first-class at the game as he had known him fairly well before he was involved in a bad motor smash, but had not heard either from him or of him since that time, now a year ago. Hugh asked to be the twelfth man and the committee accepted him without question, as did the team and, of course, John who was delighted at this good fortune.

I said: "What did he look like?" John replied: "He was the best looking young man that I have ever seen, being very tall, thin but beautifully built, elegant and very fair. But the chief thing about him were his eyes, a pale, bright green—never seen eyes of that colour before or since. But what I liked about the chap was his complete disregard of his amazing looks and charm. I had frequently seen him play before his accident and was delighted to have him as our twelfth man, as I have said."

But on the tour Hugh Prestwich was apart, retiring after the end of each game although he served the chosen eleven with cool drinks at the allocated times, as is the custom. John said he was efficient, but very quiet, liked by all although he never once entered any bar with the others when the festivities, after a successful match, took place.

He said it seemed to him that every woman present had eyes only for the twelfth man whenever he appeared!

I was interested, and said: "Can you define his particular charm? For instance, why was he so attractive to females whom, according to you, he hardly noticed or dated?" John replied: "Difficult to nail it down. I would say a combination of dignity, control, youth, assurance with no arrogance and extreme good looks. But something more than that. Perhaps it could be summed up thus: Hugh was a gentleman in every sense and I use that word sparingly, I assure you."

* * *

The tour continued, but not very successfully, although the chosen eleven battled hard. John said he couldn't understand, they were simply not "on form" despite his efforts, warnings, lectures—the lot. Then Jameson, the wicket keeper, was hurt badly, and Hugh was called in to take his place. It seems that from then on everything went their way, success after success, they couldn't be beaten. They played as never before, controlled unobtrusively, he knew, by the twelfth man. I said: "Did this man Hugh change now? I mean, did he celebrate with the boys?"

John shook his head. "Never—not even once. He was polite, restrained, never judged any mistake but merely explained—if asked. But the boys had made a hero of him by then, and the press and photographers were always trying to photograph him and 'write him up'. That was the only thing that upset him, so I made it my business to protect him by deliberately putting myself forward, introducing the rest of the team, thus enabling him to slip away unnoticed, which he did. Never once did he speak of himself, only of cricket, and then only when asked."

He continued: "I wondered if the boy were in love, or if the car accident had affected his nature, because I remembered clearly that he had been something like a gay, gallant film star when I first met him, seeming to relish the hero worship from both sexes, particularly the female one! Why this complete change? But one could not question or get near this silent, apart young man; no one. I had a feeling that he was doing a job, admittedly with perfection, but it was a *job*, not a game.

"I admit I was baffled, but content, as we won every time.

"Our highly successful tour had come to an end, and all were jubilant at our success. A large farewell party had been organized and

celebration was in the air. But when we sat down to the banquet, enhanced by the presence of many celebrities, I saw with amazement that the twelfth man's chair was empty. So did everyone, and I hastily said I would go to his room as he might have fallen asleep or forgotten tonight. Laughter from all. Imagine the hero of the hour forgetting!

"I raced up the stairs, not waiting for the lift. The whole banquet was waiting for the twelfth man, damn it. I knocked fiercely on his door, and as there was no reply I tried the handle and the door opened, and I entered a room that looked as though it had not been occupied for weeks, or even months, so airless and impersonal it was.

"I looked round wildly, one can usually sense a person's presence in a place where he has been, even when he has gone, but there was nothing. I rang the bell and a page entered, looking surprised at seeing me there. I said: 'Where is the gentleman who has occupied this room for the last two days?' He looked puzzled and suspicious. 'No one has occupied this room for the last two days, sir,' he said. I rang for the maid who confirmed the page's statement. Then I called for the manager and heard the same tale from him. I said desperately: 'For God's sake, answer truthfully. A man named Hugh Prestwich slept in this room for the last two nights. Admittedly, I signed your register for the whole team as they were busy changing as we were late for the match because of some delay in some fool train. But *he was here*. He played on those two days and returned to this room.'

"The manager's eyes were cold as he said: 'Come down with me sir, and I can prove to you that although you signed in for *eleven* men two days ago, only *ten* of them slept here. The other did not even enter this room, he must have slept elsewhere.' After more talk and having pored over the register I knew the manager was correct. Where then had Hugh slept? Where had he gone? The bill, which had been made out for our accommodation, charged for ten not eleven men.

"I returned to the banquet, apologizing for the delay, called for champagne and explained that Hugh had been called away unexpectedly on urgent private business and sent his deepest apologies. I did not meet the puzzled eyes of the team, but when the champagne came, I asked them to stand for a moment and drink a toast to 'The Twelfth Man'. They did, and I sensed a sadness in everyone that he was not present, although he had never joined them before in their celebrations. But this night was special, somehow.

"Unobtrusively, I turned down an empty glass. I don't know why.

“When we arrived home, I made it my immediate business to enquire about Hugh Prestwich, beginning at the hospital to which he had been taken after his accident a year ago. I was informed that he had died that night.

“I cannot explain this, no one can, but I think that for some unknown reason Hugh Prestwich was sent—or returned—for that twelve weeks’ tour. Could it be that he had to learn to be the *twelfth man* and not the *first man* as he had hitherto always been?”



AUTUMN ENCOUNTER

WILLIAM WANNAMAKER

He wondered what she would be doing up there. It must be a lonely life, all by herself in a little flat over an antique shop in Brighton. There must be lots like her, once you got old, nobody wanted you

THE TALL young man in the jeep-jacket with the fur collar, stood on the corner in the darkening light. The sun had set but it was not yet dark. Early November is like that in Brighton.

It had been a beautiful afternoon and he'd made the best of it. Sitting on the front, the sun shining and the sea as smooth as a sheet of plate glass, it could easily have been mid-summer.

But it hadn't been the weather that attracted his attention. Sitting near him had been this elderly lady, the one he now watched in the lighted window across the street.

About sixty, he guessed, perhaps a little younger. It was hard to tell these days, the way women dressed. Anyway, she wasn't bad looking and even more interesting, she had some right good rocks on her fingers.

Must be worth a few hundred nicker, he thought.

He had soon got into conversation with her and learned she lived above a small shop in one of the streets near by and running up from the seafront. "I'm a widow," she told him. "My husband died twelve years ago."

Like so many, she was lonely and it hadn't been difficult to chat her up. The young man wasn't slow in telling her something of himself either. "I'm alone too," he said. "Left home when I was only fifteen and that was near on twenty years ago."

He told her how he'd run away and never gone back. "Couldn't get on with my father," he explained. "He was a right bastard, was me dad!"

She showed interest, even sympathy, and he felt he was on a soft touch. Then something he said seemed to upset her and getting up, she walked away.

It was strange really. Without even a goodbye or anything, she'd just got up and left.

The young man in the jeep-jacket had waited a moment, then got up too. Keeping some fifty yards behind her, he followed. He had seen her enter the green door at the side of the little antique shop and a minute later a light go on in the front upstairs room. Now, as it grew dark, he watched.

Presently, an elderly man came out of the antique shop, locked the door and walked up the street. A sudden gust of chill wind reminded the watcher that winter wasn't far away. He turned up the fur collar of his jacket and moved into a convenient doorway.

He wondered what she would be doing up there. It must be a lonely life, all by herself in a little flat over an antique shop in Brighton. "There must be lots like her," he muttered to himself. Funny, really, he thought. Once you got old, nobody wanted you. People just didn't want to know you when you were old.

He hoped he would never be like that, in that position, not wanted. Then again, to himself he muttered: "There's always the pub. Men can go to the pub. Always someone to talk to there."

He looked up and down the street. There were few people about and none seemed to notice him. "Must be different in the summer," he thought aloud. "Most probably crowded, this bloody street."

Then almost suddenly it was dark, and looking up, for an instant he saw her as she came to the windows to draw the curtain. Then she was gone and only a thin chink of light escaped round the edges of the red material from which they were made.

The young man walked down the street and turned on to the front. Entering a newsagent he bought a packet of cigarettes and retracing his steps, stood again outside the antique shop.

He lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply and blew a thin cloud of smoke across the pavement. He coughed softly, then spat into the gutter.

He stayed there in the doorway perhaps another ten minutes. Twice again he spat into the street. Then, striking a match, for it was now quite dark, he held it over his watch. It was almost six o'clock.

Dropping the short but still burning stump of his cigarette, he ground it out with his foot. Then, looking swiftly up and down the street, he emerged from the doorway and crossed to the green door opposite. He knocked and waited. Then he knocked again.

A minute went by before the door opened. "It's you," she said,

seeming scarcely surprised. "What do you want?"

"I wanted to talk to you," the young man told her, "I was upset when you went off like that . . . can't I come in?"

She hesitated, put her hand up to pat her hair, seemed about to refuse, then slowly, "All right," she said.

He followed her up the narrow stairs and into the room above. It looked warm and comfortable, larger than he expected and too full of furniture.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" she asked almost shyly.

"Thanks!" the young man said.

"Make yourself comfortable," she invited and he sat down on the large settee pulled up before the electric fire.

She left the room and he heard the rattle of crockery. Deep in his memory something stirred, then as quickly went. Suddenly he got to his feet and, treading softly, went out through the doorway on to the landing. Another door stood ajar and he could hear the hiss of a gas stove.

Drawing a pair of black cotton gloves from his pocket, he pulled them on. Quietly moving across the landing he peered into what he now knew to be the kitchen. In an instant he was inside.

She never knew what happened. She was standing at the sink, her back towards him as he came in. With the speed of a panther he threw his hands about her neck and pulled her backwards.

Harder, harder he pressed with all his strength. Then he slipped his forearm beneath her chin and brought it close against his chest. A cup fell from her hands into the sink and shattered. There was a gurgle and a kind of high-pitched humming. But it lasted only seconds. Then she sagged and he dropped her to the floor.

Quickly he removed the rings from her nerveless fingers, the brooch from her dress, a chain and locket from about her neck. Then, straightening up, he moved to the stove and turned off the gas beneath the already singing kettle.

He went back into the sitting-room. Then into the small bedroom leading off it. He searched carefully, even skilfully and without panic, picking up any small item of value and dropping it into his pocket.

Finally he went over and switched off the electric fire. He looked around. Everything was orderly. It was very quiet. For a moment he stood absolutely motionless, listening. Then, walking out on to the landing, he descended the stairs.

At the front door he stood again listening. A moment later the lock clicked softly and he passed out into the street.

Later that night, safely in London, he sat down on the side of his bed.

It was a dingy and dirty room. A washstand with a tin jug standing in a chipped enamel bowl, stood over against the wall. A scrap of cheap soap lay on the grey and white speckled marble top. In the corner, a varnished deal wardrobe with gaping door leaned crazily, and lined against the other once green-papered wall, a chest of drawers piled high with old newspapers, comics and lurid paperbacks.

Over the bed, torn from a magazine, were pasted two large photos of a famous film star in varying stages of undress. Beside the bed and at its head, a dilapidated armchair with cigarette burns along its arms.

It was a sordid and an ugly room. Bare, cold and unfriendly. And the grimy, half-faded curtains failed to hide the dirty window panes and the peeling paint of the surround.

He was tired, terribly tired. Falling back, he half sprawled across the bed. Then, assailed by a desire to look again at his haul, he sat up and taking first one piece then another from his pockets, he examined them. "Not bad," he muttered, mentally assessing the value of the rings and other trinkets.

Lastly he looked at the chain and locket. Both were gold. The locket was one of those old-fashioned heart-shaped affairs, so popular half a century ago. He thumbed it open with his nail. It was stiff and his nail broke, causing him to utter a filthy word, but the locket lay open.

He sucked his thumb, then looked closely at the locket. Inside was a tiny photo. Something about it looked familiar. That school cap, that face.

Suddenly realization came. "My God!" he said. "It's me."



All spirits are enslaved which serve things evil

Prometheus Unbound
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

ODDS OF 18,144 TO 1

LIONEL LUCKHOO

He took out his notebook and carefully wrote down the names of the horses, then tore the newspaper to pieces. Fortune was on its way

SOME PEOPLE seem to exude reliability. A fixed settled way of life. An orderly code of conduct. Such a man was John Ebenezer Flatford. J. E. F. he was referred to by his friends. Even if it were not for his striped trousers, well tailored black coat, white shirt, sombre grey tie and bowler, he would look the dependable City type.

Every morning at 8.04 a.m. he caught the express, non-stop from Whitford to London. Always he positioned himself on the platform to be near to the non-smoker and invariably he was alone. He liked being alone. It gave him time to review the work he had to do that day as Assistant Accountant to Reilley & Sampson, Chartered Accountants. John Ebenezer Flatford was no chartered accountant, but he loved figures. His neat calculations were always correct and his work was always up to date. He was always so meticulous, so careful. Maybe this was the reason why after fifty years he was unmarried and likely to remain so.

And so on Friday, 13th May, as he once again boarded his train, he heaved a sigh of relief. He could read his *Telegraph* without fear of any interruptions or inane remarks about the weather. The weather was deemed either good or bad. No one had ever said "What ordinary days we are having". It was always "What a marvellous day", or "What a shocking day!"

He carefully wiped the upholstered seat, sat down and turned to the front page of the *Telegraph*. To read the paper from front to back, page by page was his custom. He just could not stand anyone who read the front page and then the back page. As the train sped on he became curiously conscious that he was not alone. He looked up from his newspaper and there, opposite him was a decrepit old man. His unwashed and unshaven face was in harmony with his tattered spring coat. He looked so insignificant, yet his presence was commanding.

But what was he doing there? And how had he entered? The door

was closed and to open it was to set in motion the squeak which welcomed J. E. F. when he had entered. How? How? How?

J. E. F. coughed and sought to catch the eye of his companion. But his companion, as if sensing a question in being, pulled out a newspaper from his coat pocket and stuck it in front of him. Well, this settled it, J. E. F. was not going to make any inquiries.

He returned to his *Telegraph* and had reached page 3 when, on folding the newspaper over, he glanced across to the seat opposite. Incredible! Amazing! No one was there. J. E. F. rubbed his eyes. He glanced at his watch—8.17 it said. This meant another 13 minutes to London. He was awake. Yet where had this character gone? He looked around him. Yes, this certainly was a mystery. He was not superstitious. "Old wives tales", he would retort if asked if he believed in any of the commonplace superstitions. Yet here he was, face to face with a mystery. What had happened to the old man? What could—look, there, there on the floor near to the doorway was the newspaper which the old man had pulled out from his coat.

J. E. F. pounced on it. It was not a morning paper. It was an evening paper, the *Evening Standard*, Final Edition, and the date was Friday, 13th May. This was too much even for J. E. F. He sweated as he turned the pages. This paper, an evening paper, was reporting what had not yet taken place that day. . . . He turned page by page as if in a dream, then on to the back page and the banner head hit him squarely "Black Tom wins Classic Trial".

Now J. E. F. was no racing man, but he was not ignorant of the facts of the day. He always read what the *Telegraph* had to say about racing. He always read what the London teams were doing in the Cup and the League, and now, here he was, reading the results of the six races at Windsor to be run on that very day. There were the winners Silk Cut 3 to 1, Grosvenor 5 to 1, Black Tom 20 to 1, Cyprus Lad 2 to 1, Red Glove 2 to 1, and Paymaster 3 to 1.

As he looked at the odds, he did a rapid mental calculation; a £1 accumulator would bring him in £18,144. A fortune! This was not the time to inquire, this was the time to act. J. E. F. took out his notebook, carefully wrote the names of the horses, then equally carefully tore the newspaper into many pieces. Fate or Fortune had selected him to make him a present and he was accepting the bequest without questions.

As the train pulled into Victoria, he came out and hailed a taxi.

“Take me”, he said, “to the biggest betting shop, the most reliable you know.”

The taxi driver knew all the answers. Away he drove and deposited J. E. F. outside of a household name in the betting world in Old Bond Street. The doors were not yet opened to the public for the day, but he spoke to the man behind the counter and stated he wanted to leave a bet as he was due at work. How much was it? A one pound accumulator. The manager of the betting shop smiled. Another mug! To win an accumulator one had to select every single winner. Six selections, six winners. To be sure, he would certainly oblige the gentleman. So the bet was written out and stamped and the £1 changed hands.

“If I were to win, could I collect this afternoon?” he asked. “Certainly, just as soon as the all clear goes after the last race. That would be at about 5 p.m.”

J. E. F. knew—he just knew he would win. As the hours went by he did his work with the same meticulous care as always. He never even paused to inquire or buy a paper to see what had won the two o'clock. At 5 p.m. as usual he closed his desk, said good evening and left the office, but instead of going to Victoria, he went on to Old Bond Street, and into the betting shop where the winners were all displayed on the black board.

Yes, absolutely correct. Every detail correct. Every selection a winner and the prices were exactly the same. Incredible, but true!

It took somewhat longer to receive the cheque. The manager had to ring head office. Then his bets were scrutinized, checked and re-checked. Eventually, his cheque for £18,144 was handed to him. The time was now 7 p.m. As he went to Victoria, J. E. F. was quietly planning for his future. £18,144 invested at 6½%. Yes, this would bring him in a reasonable income. He would not give up his job. He would continue. He wanted no publicity on his win and he so warned the manager of the betting shop. His name was not to appear on any advertisements. At Victoria Station he bought an *Evening Standard* and there it was, an identical copy of the one he had seen some eleven hours earlier at 8.15 a.m. that morning.

He boarded the 7.30 p.m. to take him back home. How fortunate the carriage was again empty. He sat down. The train moved off. He closed his eyes and prepared to have a nap. He had hardly had more than a few minutes' repose when almost against his will he opened his eyes. There, there opposite to him was the same character, the same

unwashed face, the same ragged spring coat. J. E. F. shook his head. He knew he was awake. This was real. He moved forward. He must speak to this man, but once again the old man pulled out a newspaper and put it in front of him. This time it was the *Daily Mirror*. Funny, but J. E. F. automatically looked for the date. Yes, there it was "Saturday, 14th May". This had hardly sunk in when his eyes were reading the front page spread: "Man Wins Fortune then Dies in Crash in Train". In bold capitals, the paragraph began "John Ebenezer Flatford died yesterday. . . ." J. E. F. read no more. He sprang up. He must stop the train. At once. At once. He rushed towards the emergency cord and pulled it furiously. The train, choked of its speed, spluttered and jolted to a stop. But with the sudden stop, J. E. F. was thrown violently forward. His head crashed against the metal of the door. He died instantly.

The *Daily Mirror* of Saturday, 14th May, carried the front page story: "John Ebenezer Flatford died yesterday after winning a fortune for £1, odds of 18,144 to 1. For some unknown reason he pulled the emergency cord, brought the train to a sudden stop. This resulted in his death. . . ."



DEATH UNLOCKED

DONALD NOAKES

*There was no reason why he should not decide to sit in an easy chair.
It was suicide all right and the widow took it well*

THE SPLINTERED door and smashed french windows were the only remaining evidence of the tragedy. The body of Julian Vellamy had been removed from the easy chair.

The narrow study was crowded with too much furniture. A gas fire (the cause of Vellamy's death) stood at an angle in the corner to the left of the door. The wall between the fire and the french windows was taken up by a bookcase and a four-drawer steel filing cabinet. The cabinet was sideways to the wall, so that the drawers opened towards the window. Even so, there was barely sufficient room for the desk, at an angle to the french windows. Four chairs added to the congestion.

"They usually block up the keyhole and lay down in front of the fire," said Sergeant Bates. "But the door and window are draught-proofed, and I suppose there's no real reason why he shouldn't decide to sit in an easy chair. It was suicide all right."

"Mm!" Inspector Patterson frowned at the hammer on the terrace outside the broken window. He picked up a manilla folder from the desk. Newspapers. Singapore newspapers. Fifteen years old.

"No note?"

Bates shook his head.

"But it *must* have been suicide. I can't see it as an accident, and he was alone in this locked room—"

"Oh yes, it looks like suicide," Patterson conceded. "I'd better have a word with the widow. How is she taking it?"

"Pretty well—better than his sister."

Jane Vellamy surprised Patterson. The dead man was sixty-five. His widow was in her late thirties. With her crisp blue and white dress, and trim, compact figure, she had an efficient, faintly nautical, air.

She answered Patterson's questions in a pleasant, calm voice.

No, her husband had never threatened suicide, but he had seemed depressed recently. He was not satisfied with the autobiography he was writing, and his health was not good. No—nothing seriously wrong, but he was subject to catarrh. He had developed a heavy cold the day before, and should have been in bed.

For the first time, there was a break in her voice.

“If only I’d insisted on him staying in bed . . .”

As for the events of the afternoon—Julian had gone in to his study immediately after lunch. He had, she supposed, locked the door. He always did. Alarmed when he failed to reply to her calls and knocks at five o’clock, she had broken down the door, and had found him dead, with the unlit gas fire turned on.

“There was a folder of old Singapore newspapers on the desk,” said Patterson. “Does that mean anything to you?”

“The filing cabinet is full of them. Julian spent most of his life in the Far East, and he referred to the newspapers in writing his book.”

“I see. Was the cabinet ever locked?”

“It was usually. The key was kept in one of the desk drawers.”

Patterson thanked her, and then conferred with Bates.

“I’m not happy about it, Bates. I’m going to see Miss Vellamy, I want you to have another look at the study. Search the desk and filing cabinet.”

Miss Mary Vellamy proved the antithesis of her sister-in-law. Large and shapeless, she constantly brushed from her eyes a rebellious strand of grey hair with an air of vague annoyance.

Immediately after lunch she had started to make fudge for a Women’s Institute fête. She had been busy in the kitchen all the afternoon until Jane had shouted. Jane had fetched an axe and a hammer from the fuel store. She was sure that the study door was locked on the inside, for she had tried it, and had also attempted to look through the keyhole. They smelled the gas as soon as the door split. Jane had told her to take the hammer and to smash the french window, in order to get a draught through the room.

By the time that she had reached the outside of the window, Jane had got the door open, and was inside the study.

Mary dabbed her eyes.

“When I got back to the hall, Mary was stretched out on the floor of the study. She had turned off the gas, and had tried to drag Julian out, but had been overcome by the gas. I thought that she was dead,

too. Mr. Synden arrived as I was dragging her to the hall. He telephoned to the doctor and the police station."

Synden, she explained, was a neighbour. He had gone in to the study, and had found that Julian was dead. After that, he had insisted that no one go in to the room until the police arrived.

"Did anyone *want* to enter the room?"

"Jane did. She was extremely agitated—almost hysterical. She was unwilling to accept the fact that Julian was beyond help."

"I believe that it was your brother's habit to lock the study door when he was working?"

Mary gave a sad, half-smile.

"Yes. He said that he hated to be disturbed. Actually, he usually fell asleep within a few minutes of starting to read. He would never admit it, but I know he did. It was usually just a cat nap . . ."

No—she had no idea that her brother had contemplated suicide. No—he had not seemed depressed or worried.

"Mrs. Vellamy thought he was."

Colour stained Mary's cheeks.

"Oh! So she told you! I would have expected her to feel too ashamed . . ."

Patterson's face remained impassive.

"So he *was* depressed."

"Naturally."

"Mm. Mrs. Vellamy is a good deal younger than your brother," he suggested tentatively.

"Seventeen years. But she knew that when she married him. I'm not suggesting that she has done anything wrong—but the attraction was here. Julian was no fool—it couldn't have been pleasant for him. He did not subscribe to the modern ideas of morality and divorce."

"No," said Patterson.

He wondered who the man was—the neighbour, Synden?

Synden, tall, good looking, about forty, appeared to answer Patterson's questions with frankness.

He'd known the Vellamys for about nine months. Since he moved to the village, in fact. He confirmed Mary Vellamy's story.

Yes, Jane had been very distraught. Wanted to go in to the study. She was loath to accept his assurances that her husband was dead. and that she could do nothing.

Back in the study, Patterson looked down at the results of Sergeant

Bates's efforts. A small pair of scissors and three feet of nylon fishing-line.

The scissors had been under the bookcase, and in groping for them, Bates had found the fishing line.

"It was murder," said Patterson. "But how? Miss Vellamy was using the gas cooker in the kitchen so it wasn't done by manipulating the main supply. Nothing in the desk or cabinet?"

"No, sir."

Bates took a key from the desk. The brass column at the top of the filing cabinet shot out with a click as he turned the key.

"Folders full of newspapers in the top three drawers. Folders of manuscripts in the bottom one."

Half-an-hour later, Patterson confronted Mrs. Vellamy in the study.

"Are these your scissors, Mrs. Vellamy?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me why they were under the bookcase?"

"They must have fallen from my pocket when I fell. I had been doing some embroidery this afternoon."

"Why did you fetch a hammer as well as an axe from the fuel store?"

"To break open the door."

"You used the axe to break the door. You gave the hammer to Miss Mary to smash the window. Did you know that the gas was turned on?"

"Certainly not! How could I have known?"

"You were most anxious to get in here again before the police arrived, Mrs. Vellamy."

"I—I couldn't believe that Julian was really dead."

"That wasn't the reason. You wanted to recover the fishing line." Jane Vellamy's eyes closed.

"So you know."

"Yes, I know. I suspected when I realized that you had anticipated the need for the hammer. The need for a witness to the locked door, yet the need to get the witness out of the way when you first entered the room."

"After the scissors and the fishing-line, I found the small hole in the back of the filing cabinet. When I found the piece of line still inside the cabinet, I knew the answer."

"It's an ingenious arrangement. The fishing-line is virtually invisible as it passes behind the bookcase to the tap of the gasfire. When you

cut the line at the back of the cabinet, you dropped it. It was difficult to locate it on the carpet, but I don't suppose this worried you."

He walked to the steel cabinet.

"If only Synden had not arrived when he did, you could have removed the piece of line still inside the cabinet—the piece attached to the end of the brass column."

"Your husband unlocked death when he unlocked the filing cabinet—like this."

He turned the key. The brass column shot out with a click, pulling the fishing line so that the tap of the gas fire turned, as if by its own volition.



The skies they were ashen and sober;
The leaves they were crisped and sere—
The leaves they were withering and sere;
It was night in the lonesome October
Of my most immemorial year.

Ulalume

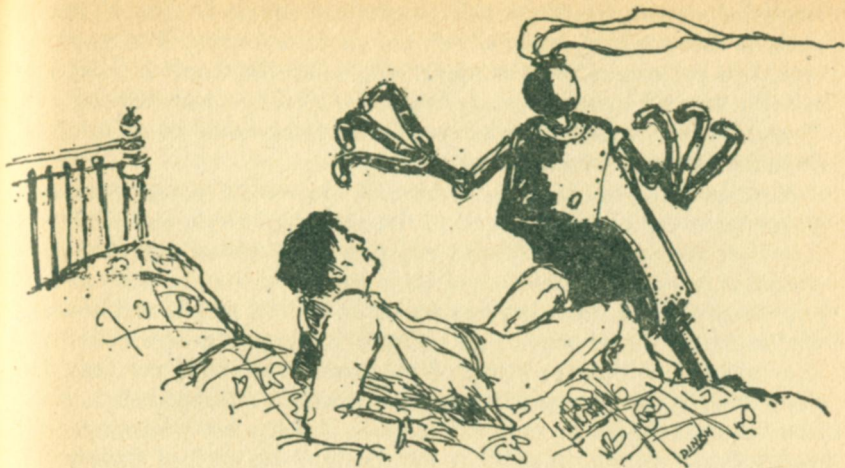
EDGAR ALLAN POE



Most women have no characters, at all.

To Mrs. Martha Blount

ALEXANDER POPE



THE HOUSEWIFE

BERYL WHITAKER

THE YOUNG man surveyed his newspaper pensively. Then he set it aside, and drained the last of the whisky into his cracked teacup. Without a doubt something would have to be done, and soon. Otherwise—a depressing thought—he would have to go on to beer, and that in opening-time only.

He took up the paper once more, and as he re-read the paragraph that had attracted his attention another unaccustomed smile relaxed the somewhat sullen contours of his gloomy, Byronic face. He glanced briefly at the photograph which accompanied the news item, and the smile vanished, for Norman Ellis was fastidious about his women. The compelling appeal of his undeniable good looks had placed him in the position of being able to pick and choose. However . . .

“Something Newer than New for the Housewife” announced the heading. The article went on to relate details of the treat in store, and of the young woman scientist who had prepared it. “It” was a robot: a

home-help which would be able to perform simple household duties such as dish-washing, bed-making and carpet-sweeping. The machine would be programmed by example: the housewife would instruct the robot in its work by switching on its photographic eye, and allowing it to "watch" her while she did whatever the machine would be required to do in the future. It sounded feasible.

Norman Ellis was no scientist himself. He was an out of work engineer who very much preferred to remain out of work, and who was moreover an expert in the art of cashing in on the toil of others. It now occurred to him that here might be a great opportunity. The article had stated that the invention was not yet in its final stages, and he concluded that it would require an ultimate framework whose construction might lie within the scope of his own talents. Five per cent, he asked himself, sipping speculatively at his whisky? But scientists were notoriously helpless in business matters. Twenty-five? Suppose she took a fancy to him, though? A partnership? He studied the photograph more closely, gave a delicate shudder of distaste, and finally pitched the paper across the room.

"Needs must," he told himself firmly, "when the devil drives."

It took him a couple of days to run to earth the journalist who had written the article. In order to furnish the necessary blandishments he produced his last five pound note and handed it resignedly over the bar. But with its assistance he was able to obtain all the information he required. The robot was as yet a mere collection of entrails. When completed the cost of retail to the housewife—an important point—would not exceed a hundred pounds. The young inventor's name was Walpurga Smith, and she lived in a small flat in Putney, the address of which emerged with the coincidental emergence of a final pound note.

His subsequent courtship of Walpurga Smith ran, to use a suitably Byronic phrase, as merry as a marriage bell. Only, happily, there was no talk of marriage. Walpurga was "advanced" in her ideas, and an advocate of free love. When she explained this to him Norman felt actually grateful to her, but not for very long, since during his pursuit of her he had suffered greatly. Certainly she had magnificent eyes, large, deep, slanting, and brilliant: but their soulful lustre could not hope to redeem the horrid, Eskimo cheek-bones, the lumpy nose, the coarse skin and the thick, pursed-up, almost porcine lips. Her figure, too, was unwieldy. Every time Norman took her in his arms he shut his eyes and whispered to himself, "Partnership".

Meanwhile the robot progressed. Sentimental Walpurga alluded to it as "our baby", which sent cold shivers down his spine. He managed to assemble a suitable frame for it, and when the prototype was completed it had assumed a vaguely human shape. There was a small, knob-like, featureless head, the function of which was to receive the wires that connected the machine to an overhead power-point, the robot having insufficient intelligence to avoid entangling its legs in an underfoot flex. The legs themselves were based on circular plates, for balance, and the arms terminated in long, blunt claws.

Norman insisted jocularly that the robot was female, for it had a prodigious bosom which housed all its machinery, and the frontage of this displayed a couple of switches, one on either side. They resembled nipples, and were the source of his unpleasant witticism.

On the day of the preliminary trial the robot worked beautifully. It understood two words only, "action", and "cut", and it operated in four stages—right-hand switch, "action", "cut", and then left-hand switch. When the right-hand switch was depressed the machine became receptive, and the hypothetical housewife—in this case Walpurga—positioned herself at the job that the machine required to imitate. At the word "action" it began to record. Walpurga had decided to test the home-help on bed-making. The robot, humming purposefully, "watched" her as she plumped up the pillows and tucked in the blankets. Then "Cut!" cried Walpurga, in that guttural, semi-foreign, semi-Cockney intonation which Norman found so offensive. The robot ceased its humming, and, its programme completed, lapsed into a brooding silence. Walpurga unmade the bed, shambled back to the machine, and turned the left-hand switch. Then she had to skip out of the way as smartly as her cumbersome bulk would allow, for the robot was already on the move.

Hand in hand they watched it from the sofa. It was quite uncanny to see the "steel maiden", as Norman called it, perform the operations that it had recorded, and almost impossible to believe that it had no intelligence of its own. It—she—made the bed in exactly the same way as she had been shown, and rather more quickly. When she had finished she ceased abruptly, frozen in the attitude of smoothing down the counterpane, as Walpurga had been when she had called out "cut". During her labours she had simultaneously recorded the task on a cylinder which would be extracted after she was switched off, and could be played back. A poor recording could be scrapped, a satis-

factory recording could be stowed away for future reference. But clearly any housewife who invested in the machine would need to set her own programmes to suit the lay-out of her personal surroundings

The next few days were happily occupied in making experimental recordings, and in compiling a fool-proof leaflet of instructions for prospective customers. By the end of the week it appeared conclusive that the steel maiden was fool-proof too. She was ripe for production.

Although she was unaware of it this was naturally the end of the road for Walpurga. Norman, on an unaccustomed pretext of wanting to "stretch his legs", absented himself, went to the Patents Office, and registered the robot in his own name. The official who attended to him was mildly intrigued. He had, he said, read of the invention in a newspaper some weeks back; only he had had an impression that the inventor had been a woman.

"That's quite correct," Norman countered. "She sold it to me. I have the agreement, if you'd care to see it."

The official glanced through the document, and idly surveyed the space where *Walpurga Dolores Smith* had signed. For sign she had, having been led to believe that the form related to insurance.

"I'm sure I wish you every success with it," he remarked somewhat briskly, for the hour of his coffee-break was at hand.

Walpurga made a tremendous fuss, transcending Norman's worst fears. But as he watched her wringing her fleshy paws and mopping her streaming eyes he came to the not unwelcome realization that she didn't care twopence for the loss of her invention. It was the loss of his love that she minded. Amid the contemptuous irritation that he felt for this fatuous point of view a vast optimism swelled.

"By God," he thought, "she isn't going to make trouble about the patent after all. I'm going to get away with it if I handle her right." He waited until she was calmer, then he began to wheedle.

"Please don't try to contest my claim," he begged. "It—would spoil the memory of—what has been."

"This is already spoiled," Walpurga said throatily. "And how can I contest your claim when you tell me that I have—what is it?—no leg to stand upon?"

Norman lowered his gaze to her billiard-table legs, and suppressed a guffaw.

"That is true, Walpurga. But I feel that production of the robot might be delayed if you were foolish enough to bring an action."

Walpurga's drooping head came up sharply at the last word. She stared deeply into his eyes, then she looked slowly at the steel maiden. He wondered a little uncomfortably what was passing through her mind. But she merely said.

"I do not feel so well. Will you please to fetch a glass of water?" When he returned she was standing in front of the machine.

"Come," she said. "I make you a bargain."

He handed her the water, and waited suspiciously.

"It is this," she continued simply. "You love me once more, the last time, you understand. And then I will bring no action."

Norman, concentrating upon the distasteful embarrassment of his position observed neither the stress on that final word, nor the discreet humming of the machine. Walpurga drank the water, and threw the empty glass over her shoulder, a gesture as ridiculous as it was theatrical. Then she pushed him gently towards the bed. He sat gingerly on its edge, prepared for argument.

"I don't see any point—" he began. But already Walpurga had him tight in her embrace, her hands locked behind him, her snouty face peering into his, her unshapely bosom pressed close.

"Ah, you are unwilling," she whispered. "One kiss, then, that is all."

Reluctantly he permitted her to advance her puckered lips. They brushed his own, and withdrew a fraction.

"So," Walpurga murmured—almost light-heartedly, it seemed to him—"this way it matters not that I do not get my cut."

Women were incomprehensible, Norman mused, as he watched her pack her belongings. She wanted nothing. He could have the robot, he could even have possession of the flat until the lease ran out. All she wished was to forget the whole business, and to make a fresh start in a new environment where she might turn her attention to inventing something else. He sighed with relief, and he eyed her final preparations for departure with ill-concealed impatience, for he longed to be alone with the steel maiden.

When she had gone he walked over to the machine and surveyed it proudly. Then all at once he noticed that the right-hand programming switch had been turned on. Now how had that come about? He recalled that Walpurga had been standing there when he had brought her the glass at water. She must have done it to annoy him. He clicked his tongue with vexation. The machine would now have to make an unnecessary recording before it could be switched off.

“Action!” he snapped sharply. There was no response. Unwilling to believe that the steel maiden had erred, he searched his mind for an explanation—until he suddenly remembered that the word “action” had already cropped up by chance in the conversation. He smiled in admiration for the wonderful sensitivity of the robot. But meanwhile he must hasten to terminate the abortive recording.

“Cut!”

Nothing happened. Norman was by now a little confused. Something should have happened, shouldn't it? Yes, the humming sound ought to have stopped. Only there had been no humming sound. Why? He was not a particularly clear thinker, and it was some minutes before he realized that this was because the word “cut” had also been used previously.

“Oh, well, then,” he told himself, “that's simple enough. Operate the left-hand switch, let the thing get whatever chance observations it's recorded out of its system, and then we're back to normal.”

He stepped forward and pressed down the switch.

At first he could not imagine what she was up to. He watched, bewildered, as the metal claws rose to the metal head and remained poised there. Then the hand jerked sharply across the chest towards the opposite shoulder. A vague apprehension seized him as it dawned upon him that the steel maiden had raised to her imaginary mouth an imaginary glass. He turned away. The robot pushed him gently enough, but he was off balance, and stumbled forward on to the bed. Before he had time to recover the long, inflexible claws had met at the back of his waist, and he was clamped to the metal torso, its nipples digging painfully into his flesh. He screamed as the metal face advanced towards his own, he writhed at the cold kiss as though it burnt him. Then the face withdrew a couple of inches, and the steel maiden froze. Her task was completed, and there she would remain until she was switched off.



I'LE BURNE MY BOOKES

PHILIP SPRING

"This is hellish stuff, Hugh," said the doctor. "It rots the soul. Stop reading all this tosh. It's just dabbling in ancient darkness"

HEAVENS, man, you look frightful. Why don't you get out a bit? Sun, air, exercise. They'll do you more good than all this—*this* creepy stuff."

Dr. Quarton glared with rough affection at his brother, and with a disdainful finger stirred the medieval records and black-letter pamphlets on Hugh Quarton's desk.

Though hearty in manner and with an assumed lightness of tone, the doctor was alarmed by the wasted figure of his brother. Both were in their middle fifties, yet the country doctor had in his person the suggestion of cold baths and rugged fields, whereas the bibliophile was sunken-eyed and prematurely old.

"Oh, I'm all right, Robbie. Once a student, always a student. It runs that way." Professor Quarton leaned back in his study chair and smiled wanly. "Life must be most uncomplicated for you, with your motto: 'Don't you believe it!' and your reading confined to *The Lancet* and *The Times*. It's different with me. It will be a long time before I can sit back and write at the foot of my work: 'Nunc scripsi totum, pro Christo da mihi potum.'"

"And what's all that about?"

"'Now I've written everything, for Christ's sake give me a drink.' The medieval scholar's way of packing up. However, what brings you to town?"

"Oh, just passing through. Staying at the Astoria. Thought I'd drop in." Dr. Quarton gazed round his brother's book lined study. "And what do I find? You, smothered in antiquarian dust. Air full of the smell of rotten morocco bindings. Your ashtray a disgrace . . . there must be thirty dog-ends there. Your breathing all wrong, your posture terrible. Devitalized, nervy. What the hell's this?"

He picked up a sinister-looking book bound in red and black. "*Malleus Maleficarum: The Hammer of Witchcraft*. Well . . . boil me in toad's venom. This is 1968, Hugh. Haven't you noticed? I bet you've

bookworms in your soup and medieval creepy-crawlies under that shiny dome. I do wish you'd get out and about."

"You were always a nice bully, Robbie. But I'm happy. A bit tired. But all right, really."

"Huh." Dr. Quarton walked across to the bookshelves and in silence stared at the titles.

"Good grief, still at this stuff too? Psychic phenomena . . . and the—what d'you call it—subliminal self? It'll drive you potty." He stooped, peering at the lower shelves. "Tck. Necromancy . . . alchemy . . . the occult. Hellish stuff, Hugh. It rots the soul. Small doses, of one sort only, don't harm anybody. But here you are, hogging both sorts. All Harley Street and the Church of England won't be able to straighten you out soon."

"How you do fulminate, Robbie. Every man to his trade. . . ."

"No, listen to me. I'm warning you. Stop reading all this tosh. It's not your livelihood. It's just dabbling in ancient darkness. It's a steep drop into that pit. And there's no crawling out. Get away from the brink. Now, That's a medical order."

The Professor smiled bleakly. "I know. You want me to say, 'Come not, Lucifer! I'll burne my bookes!'"

"Quicker than that. That was Faustus, wasn't it? He was too late."

* * *

Professor Quarton put down his note pad and looked about him uneasily. He could see nothing in his lamplit study to unsettle him. Yet something gave him a vague sense of disquiet.

"Robbie's lecture, I suppose. That's the cause," he told himself. "He's so penetrating." Quarton smiled wryly, then glanced at the two books on the table by his side. He had bought them second-hand that afternoon. Possibly it was these, not yet properly examined, which were merely distracting his attention. He picked up the top one.

But now he felt a dull pain in the centre of his chest. It was *not* Robbie's warning which had upset him. Subtly but certainly, it was here. Like the presence, to a blind man, of someone in the room. But there was nothing, nothing at all, to be seen in the shadows there.

He stared fixedly at the book in his hand. It was a treatise on Alchemy, being the earlier writings of Paracelsus in a rare edition. He read the details on the title-page. The book had been edited and printed at Paris in 1555 by the scholar-printer Michael Vascosan.

The volume was a small thick quarto. Its rather unusual binding was of tooled and gilded calf. The workmanship, to Quarton's expert eye, was unmistakably French, but it had one blemish which disappointed and puzzled him. The front cover was quite badly disfigured by two large stains at the foot.

These must have occurred when the book was fairly new, deeply impregnating what would then have been light-coloured and porous calf. Over the centuries the binding had matured, but it was evident that these two stains had been present almost from the start. Had they been caused by some mishap in an early laboratory? Quarton shrugged the question off.

The half-title page bore an inscription in faded brown ink:

Hic sunt. . . (the rest of the phrase was obliterated)

MARTINUS HERRSCHAFTUS RHOTOMAGENSIS .

1578

This was written in a crabbed and monkish hand, and Quarton had already noticed that the margins were profusely annotated by the same hand. These annotations had been mainly the reason why he had bought the book.

He could make little of them, for they appeared to be keyed or coded references to other works, some German but mainly classical. There were also nativity dates and hours, horoscopes, obscene sketches, cabalistic signs and spidery nothings which may have been a rudimentary shorthand.

Quarton sat for some time absorbed in speculation. "Who were you, Martin Herrschaft of Rouen?" he asked himself. "Was it not odd for you, a German, to be living in Rouen? Twenty-three years elapsed between the publication of this book and the year you possessed it. Why? Paris and Rouen are not so far apart."

And the name Herrschaft, signifying mastery, or even higher than that—dominion! Again and again that name, with its Faustian undertones, gripped Quarton and sent Robbie's warning echoing through the dim-lit study.

"Damn." Quarton laid the book down and closed his eyes. "Robbie, with his Philistine scorn, has irritated me. . . . No: it's not that. Some sort of emanation is around me. Something is working on my conscious-

ness. It's like a whisper in the twilight galleries of an ancient house. . . . Surely it can't be this book. . . .?"

Impatiently he rammed a reading lens into his eye and carefully examined the two stains on the front cover. The subsequent scratches and marks had obviously been made over the stains. And now he noticed for the first time that part of the fore-edge of the book was also stained, being of a brown hue on the yellowed edge.

Unable to deduce anything from this, Quarton began lazily to read the book at random. But it was less the text of Paracelsus than the marginal notes of Martin Herrschaft which began to communicate themselves to him in that silent room.

Presently, the clock on his mantelpiece struck two. The two chimes startled him. He felt fagged, ill, disinclined to move. His mouth was dry. Behind his eyes was a dull pain.

Often, to relax from deep study, he used an exercise which was always soothing. This was to stare into a mirror, with gaze fixedly on his eye pupils, at the same time smoothing his brows towards the temples. He got up stiffly, feeling as though he struggled against ether, and glanced into the mirror.

There was nothing there.

Quarton remained rooted to the spot. He seemed disembodied, incapable of anything but not-being. He had once stood within the vast, neutral bowl of Jodrell Bank telescope when turned upwards to outer space. He had then seen and felt nothing but nothing. Now it was the same. A cool, clean knife had severed him from being. He was now simply non-entity.

But his consciousness, displaced from its position of control, was now apprehending on a different plane. He now saw that it was not his mirror but one of Renaissance design with elaborate wrought-gilt surround. Cornucopia, egg and strap moulding. No mantel. A horn, yellowed. Ink blotches on curling velum. A quill pen.

Beyond the position where his image ought to have been, wall and furniture were not his. Draped bookshelves—not his. Bureau, gone. In its place, a heavy coffer of yew or oak. Linenfold design. On it, an astrolabe.

Quarton felt no fear, nor curiosity, nor desire. He was air, a cloud, a speck of algae in an ocean of nothingness, suspended between the surface and the floor of the sea.

Without panic, tranquilly, he gazed at the room not his. The low,

exposed rafters, crude and twisted. The floor naked, with flowered brown tiles. Dark drapings on the walls. A refectory table covered with green brocade runner. On it, four new books in brown leather bindings. A heap of parchment manuscripts. Scattered, tossed.

"I have been fooling about with *cannabis indica*," said a little voice in Quarton's brain. The voice was a million light-years distant. "It will take me a hundred years to walk over this floor, to open that door. . . . No. This is something different. . . ."

In the corner, an immense four-poster bed. Canopied top. Draped with thick blue hangings. Partly opened. Pillows, coverlet. An old man, asleep. Without surprise, Quarton gazed at him.

"Look. Watch. Wait," came Quarton's voice from some burned-out star. "I have been here before."

The old man was on his back, his forked white beard flowed askew. Black cross-lacing at the breast of his thick, loose gown. A cap, fringed with fur, smothering his hair and brow. Near the bed, a charcoal brazier. From somewhere, a soft mellow light.

"But from where? Not from a disordered mind. My mind is Hugh Quarton's *Mens sana*. This is an actual man, an actual room. I am in it, but not of it. I cannot make my presence known. My will and my body are not mine. Only my consciousness drifts free. Time, space, consciousness—what are they? A cat's cradle. Ever changing. Of infinite form."

He felt compelled to watch the iron latch of the ledged-and-braced door. It was slowly being lifted. He sighed. "It will take me a thousand years to walk over there, to stop that latch from lifting."

The door opened, slowly and silently. Beyond the threshold Quarton glimpsed a shape, dark, crouched, menacing. And then soon, a face. That thick-lipped, swinish sort of face that leers at one from the fevers of Hieronymus Bosch, from the sometimes brutal engravings of Albrecht Dürer.

"Now I see this beast. A loutish serving-man. In rough breeches and a jerkin. A cord round his waist. His feet muffled. . . . Stop! . . . Useless, he will not stop . . . It is all written in the stars. . . ."

Uncouth, crouching, the man gained the bedside. He straightened his back. He stood motionless. He looked down at the sleeping man. Stealthily, from the jerkin, he drew forth a long knife.

"I am hamstrung. There is lead in my spine. I have no power to prevent this. Like night, like blood, it *will* be."

The knife struck with dreadful force into the sleeper's breast. An appalling scream rang out. The corners of the room shuddered. Somewhere below a dog barked.

The old man started up, coughing, groaning. His white beard was flecked with crimson. The murderous oaf flung down the knife. His scrim-covered feet were thick on the tiled floor. Frantic, like two black toads, his hands swept curled vellum and spiked manuscripts from the table.

"Fled. Hue and cry. . . . How can there be?" sighed Quarton. "My bones are water. Watch. Soon I shall know."

The old man struggled weakly out of bed, clutching his breast. Pain, stark death. The forked beard heavy with blood. A madness, a fear. The books. O God, the books. . . .

He grasped the uppermost one from the table as he fell. He tried to hide it within his gown. The green brocade snaked off the table, glistening, wet. Partly it covered the old man's face as he crumpled to the floor, and lay very still. . . .

Quarton gazed in a trance, for aeons, at the book thrust partly into the old man's gown. It was the Paracelsus. This was the revelation, not the murder itself, which after an eternity burst through the time-space cocoon that had enwrapped him.

He swayed dizzily, with closed eyes. Tumult filled his ears, a silent thunder that had white, jagged edges. Then, as though snatched by the hair from drowning, he reopened his eyes.

He was still on his own hearth-rug. Around him was his own room and furniture. In the mirror over the fireplace he saw his own face. The mirror, too, was his own mahogany-framed mirror. And amazedly he noticed that his clock showed two minutes past two.

"My God, how did that happen to me? It was so clear. I was there!" Exhausted and shaking, he groped for brandy in the sideboard. "The Paracelsus. It was his. That very one on my table."

With moist hands he picked the book up. The same unusual binding. The same gilt tooling. But now with the two dark stains on its cover.

"Who was the old man?" thought Quarton wildly. "Why murder him? When and where did it happen. It *did* happen. I know in my very soul it happened. But why was *I* dragged, for two minutes of time, into pre-existence?"

"No, that was not me. It was my subliminal self. Or I had temporarily acquired para-normal powers. Perhaps given some ultra-perception, like

horses and dogs. There's that dog whistle, for instance, that only dogs can hear.

"That could be it. Extra-sensory perception. To heighten that sense you first hold in the hand some treasured object of one now dead. The book. That sensitized me. By touching his Paracelsus I touched hands with him in the past.

Quarton rose shakily, lit a cigarette, and stared at the mirror. "But how do I account for that? Must have been in some sort of trance. Not seeing with these eyes, but with in-sight. Or my normal consciousness suddenly dissociated. My vanished image suggests that. Let's think. . . . If my image *had* been there, as it exists in the present, I could not *perceive* it. Why? Because for that short time I was existing in the past."

More startled than ever, Quarton went over to the window, parted the curtains a little and looked over the sleeping city. "If only I could forget this, and sleep. It frightens me. . . . But then, most people *are* frightened at two in the morning. Keep on thinking.

"Let me suppose that my normal consciousness was suspended or displaced. Why, God knows. But with that there was a corresponding increase in my supra-normal faculties. That could be. But that is what hallucinations are! They occur even to healthy, normal people. And Robbie thinks I'm unhealthy and abnormal. No: I'm not saddling myself with hallucinations, thank you. I *saw* it, flesh and blood."

Quarton paced his study, sending the cigarette smoke in eddies about him. "Call it clairvoyance. That's better. That's what it *was*—clear seeing. Every horrid detail. That room, its furnishings, that swinish face from a Bosch canvas. . . . Ha, but that may be it. I'm already familiar with such things. My much learning doth make me mad. What if . . . Oh, Robbie, I could do with you now. . . ."

He pretended Robbie was there. That great, bluff voice was derisive. "Of course, you've been influenced by these beer stains on the book, laddie. A couple of aspirins and a bit of sleep will put you right."

"Well, all right, call it that. Retrocognition. That's our name for it. *But*—here, two yards from me, in some bedchamber, a murder was done in the distant past. Outside the range of my memory or knowledge. It came to me unsought. Non-inferential. Did those two brown stains give me inferential knowledge? I think not. How could they?"

"Easy. You see two stains. You don't ask yourself *consciously* what they are, whether beer or dripping or KP. But *unconsciously* you think: Blood. And your maggoty imagination gets to work."

Quarton sighed. It would be useless to argue with Robbie. He shivered and poked the fire. Defeated, cold inside, weary, he tried to gain sanity by drawing on the rude virtue of Robbie's mind, by some form of telepathy.

"Telepathy! That might be it. Could that old man be the agent or originator of some message? With me as the receiver? Possibly. But now we're on to apparitions. Apparitions have a telepathic cause, and a telepathic content. My God, what's the old man trying to tell me? Is his message in this book—or in those manuscripts I saw stolen. *Hic sunt. . .!*"

Quarton seized the Paracelsus, rushing through its pages, staring at the faded marginalia. For two hours he poured over each likely annotation. But all proved to be dry, pedantic stuff four hundred years out of date.

"Gibberish!" he cried petulantly. "If I'm not mad now, I soon will be. Old man, you were just some forgotten, doddering, fork-bearded pedant. Like Browning's *Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis* :

'Plague take all your pedants, say I.
He who wrote what I hold in my hand,
Centuries back was so good as to die,
Leaving this rubbish to cumber the land. . .! "

Quarton hurled the book from him.

He rose stiffly from his study chair and drew wide the curtains. Then he noticed the second of the books he had bought the previous day, still unexamined on the table. Of course—he remembered now with a sudden cold tension—it was a black-letter work on Apparitions.

He opened it at the title page. It had been printed at 'Ye Signe of ye Goblin, Little Britain, London, 1627.' Abstractedly, Quarton turned the leaves. He was just about to lay it wearily aside when one passage caught his eye. It read :

"Some doe hold that this Intercourse of like Myndes, conjured by the Touching of Bookes, Jewells, Gloves, Apparel and the like, oft goeth beyond the Bounds of Nature—yea, sometimes over-rideth Death and Tyme."

To this was added a marginal note in crabbed Latin, and from it leapt a name. Freely translating, Quarton read:

"This opinion was held by the exiled German alchemist Martin Herrschaft, banished for practice of the black arts and for summoning the dead. He was attacked by those who sought to steal his secrets, and slain at his dwelling in Rouen, Anno 1598."

* * *

When Dr. Quarton came, in response to his brother's message, he found the wreck of a man, the colour of putty, with a thread pulse and reflex vaso-dilation.

"I have had one foot over the threshold, Robbie. I dread to step wholly beyond." Then Quarton smiled wanly, "In any case, I have advice against it, from one Dr. Martin Herrschaft."

"Who the hell's he?" boomed Robbie.

"Oh, you won't find him in any of your directories. I believe—and certainly hope—that he died for the last time at 2 a.m. today."

His brother gave him a long look and heaped coal on the fire. "Bed, sedatives and a long holiday for you, my lad. Good thing you've this fire going."

"Why?"

"Because," roared the doctor, "if you don't burn those damn books, I will."



The Spanish Tragedy

Duly twice a morning
Would I be sprinkling it with fountain water.
At last it grew, and grew and bore, and bore,
Till at the length
It grew a gallows and did bear our son,
It bore thy fruit and mine; O wicked, wicked plant.

THOMAS KYD 1557

THE UNSEEN

R. G. MALIN

"You get the money," said the voice. "I don't care if you have to beg, borrow or steal it . . . and if you're thinking of going to the police . . . don't"



MANIAC KILLER CLAIMS ANOTHER VICTIM. So read the press report. "Yet another victim has fallen under the knife of the vicious homicidal maniac who is still at large.

This makes a total of NINE to date.

Robert Downs, 28, was found early this morning on an embankment of a canal in Middletown, his head almost severed from his body . . ."

John Harper had begun to read this report in the evening newspaper when he found himself interrupted by the telephone on the table beside him. It rang abruptly. He lowered the newspaper to his knees, sighed irritably, and picked up the receiver.

"Hello?" he said tiredly. "Middletown 247."

"Mr. Harper?" It was a man's voice, deep and guttural.

"Yes?"

"Mr. John Harper? The playwright?"

"Yes, yes . . . Who is that calling?"

"A friend, Mr. Harper. A very good friend. To you, that is."

There was an unmistakable note of malice in the voice. Harper stiffened and said sharply: "Now look here! . . ."

"Now, now, Mr. Harper," said the voice. "Don't let us lose our temper, shall we? I mean now, if you lose your temper with me it might put my back up. And I might just get angry and vindictive enough to tell someone—everyone—a certain little tale about you. About what you did a few years back in Bradford. It would be very bad for your image, you know. It might even ruin your career."

"What the devil do you mean? What *are* you talking about? What certain little tale?" Harper frowned. It was some crank, obviously. Or someone trying to blackmail him with a fictitious story. He fretted.

"Now, come on, Mr. Harper. Please don't act the innocent. I know all about it. That young girl—remember? The one you said you

believed to be eighteen at least? If that story got around in the right places, Mr. Harper, your name would be mud!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Harper sharply.

There was a snigger at the other end of the line. "All right, Mr. Harper. We'll have it *your* way. You *don't* know what I'm talking about. You don't know anything about a young girl. It's a prefabrication on my part. Let's just say I'm making up a story to try and blackmail you with, but you're not going to fall for it. You'll stand your ground, and the truth will out. That sounds very fine, Mr. Harper, but it won't work out that way. . . . You see, you're a public figure, and you're a success. And success makes a lot of enemies, Mr. Harper, because there are always a lot of people who are jealous of the person who gains it.

"If there's any hint of a scandal that might bring you down off your perch, then those jealous people will back it up all the way. You ought to know that, Mr. Harper? So just think of the damage my story could do to your career, especially when I've got a reporter friend you snubbed completely a while back. He needed that interview, Mr. Harper. He needed it badly. And now he's just dying to pay you back."

There was a short silence as the man let Harper think it over, then: "Well, Mr. Harper?"

"You filthy, lying swine!" Harper was boiling with anger. He could see what effect on his career such a story could have, even though there was not an ounce of truth in it. The man might have been trying to bluff him, but he could not take the chance of such a tale getting about. Not now that he had made a name for himself. He knew that he would have to pay him. "How much do you want?" he asked after a long pause.

He heard a chuckle. "Well? I'm not greedy, Mr. Harper. Let's say two hundred, shall we? For a start. . . ."

"Two hundred!" Harper was furious. "Two——?"

"Yes, Mr. Harper. Two hundred. And the first payment tonight."

"I don't have that much——" Harper began.

"You don't have that much money on you," mimicked the voice. "Then get it, Mr. Harper. I don't care if you have to beg, borrow, or steal it. I want it tonight. I'll give you two hours. I don't want to give you the privilege of seeing me, so I've picked out a place where we can meet which won't give you that advantage. Halfway up the High Street there's a short narrow road that branches off to the left by the bank. Towards the end of it, on the right, there's a short alley behind the

shops. There are no lights there, Mr. Harper, so you won't see me. But I'll be waiting."

"All right," said Harper, beaten. "I think I might be able to borrow the money."

"You do that, Mr. Harper," replied the voice. "But before you hang up, there's just one other thing."

"Yes?"

"If you're thinking of going to the police—don't. My reporter friend will have the story in the paper tomorrow morning if I should get arrested. So the damage will still be done."

Two hours later, Harper parked his car in the High Street only a few yards away from the bank. There was no one about. He made his way up to the bank and around the corner, and along the short street until he found the alley. It was in complete darkness. He peered into the shadows, but could see nothing.

"Is that you, Mr. Harper?"

The voice startled him for a moment, and he stared in the direction from which it came. "Yes," he said finally.

"Have you got the money?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, bring it over, Mr. Harper."

Harper stepped into the alley, his shoes crunching ash, and walked in the direction of the voice. He saw, but only vaguely, the outline of the figure in front of him. It was small, but bulky. He stopped when he came within a few feet of it.

"All right. Hand it over, Mr. Harper."

A hand reached out and touched his arm, and instantly Harper moved into action. With surprising speed, he gripped the other's wrist and jerked the arm forward, then drove his fist into the man's solar plexus. The man gasped and fell to his knees, fighting for breath. Harper released his wrist and then reached up to take a handful of the other's hair, gripping it in his fingers and pulling the head backward.

"You scum!" he hissed. "Did you think I was going to take it lying down? Did you think that I'd be no match for you? Well, you were wrong. Very wrong. You're not the first to try that bit of blackmail on me." His eyes blazed. "There *have* been others. . . . You're just the tenth!"

The man gave a twisted sob, as if pleading. But to no avail, as the maniac killer buried the long glinting knife into his throat!

THE RIGHT MAN

JOSEF FOSTER

Why the hell hadn't he picked some other building . . . Good God, there were plenty of high buildings about . . . why pick on this hotel?

THE SLIGHT figure strode purposefully across the thick carpeting of the hotel foyer and came to a halt inside the escalator.

"Top," he mumbled incoherently, his shoes emitting a loud squelching noise as he moved from one foot to another in a strangely nervous fashion.

Pressing the necessary buttons to transport them to the building's upper regions, the long-haired lift-boy glanced discerningly at his companion.

The man's face was pale and drawn, his blue eyes expressionless, whilst his hair, presumably fair, was plastered to his scalp in evidence of a long exposure to the heavy showers which had fallen incessantly all that afternoon on the city of Liverpool.

"Lousy weather . . . sir."

The blue eyes continued to stare unseeingly into the lift gates in obvious ignorance of the words.

Absently the youth pursed his lips as if to whistle, but having second thoughts he refrained from making any sound.

"Lousy weather . . . sir." He tried again.

The lift gates flew open on reaching their destination, and the stranger walked quickly out, ignoring the boy completely.

An inquisitive expression had crept across the youth's pimply face, and his large brown eyes keenly followed the visitor's progress along the corridor.

"An old twit!" he mused to himself, as the man halted at a window and stood peering out into the evening dusk and rain.

Finally the wet head turned about and the pale face flashed a contented smile back at the boy. Then without any warning, and with one swift movement the slim figure released the catch and threw open the window, and jerking himself up on to the sill he quickly made his exit along the ledge outside.

The inquisitive expression on the youth's face had alternated to one of complete surprise. Hastily he rushed to the open window and thrust his head and shoulders out into the driving rain, his hand instinctively moving protectively to his lengthy locks.

"Hey! . . . Hey! . . . Mister. It's rainin'!"

Standing some twelve feet away precariously on the ledge, the man ignored the words.

"Wat'cha' doin'?"

"I'm going to . . . *jump!*"

Because of his situation the stranger's voice appeared to the boy to be calling to him from the heavens themselves, and terrified of the man's intentions, he rushed blindly for the sanctuary of his lift.

Out on the ledge the rain continued to fall persistently upon Pendleton, alone with his thoughts and a panoramic view of the brightly lit city below.

Not surprisingly, his mind began to wander back to Maureen.

He realized now that the news shouldn't really have surprised him. Hadn't he had his suspicions about her for some time now. But! . . . Oh God! . . . how he'd hoped and prayed that he was wrong and the whole thing would pass away like some horrible nightmare.

But it never did.

That morning had put an end to all the lies and cheating, when he'd discovered the letters and photos, and now the whole sordid business had been brought into the open.

After seven years she was leaving him for another man. He'd had ideas about another man . . . but leaving him!

God! . . . How she'd boasted about her lover to antagonize him. "A real man," was how she described him, tossing her red head defiantly.

All her words came back to him now, and he recalled the sickness he'd felt in his stomach from just being near her.

A record of a pop group, their rough accent more than a little over pronounced, suddenly blared out at him. A window close by had opened, but was quickly closed again as the room's occupants shut out the foul weather.

"What's the matter?" a cool, authoritative voice called from the open window.

"Everything's . . . the bloody matter!" Pendleton yelled back hysterically.

Harvey Waldron, the hotel's detective, leaned his handsome frame

through the open window, and peered out into the murky evening at the would-be-suicide.

Anxiously he pulled at his neatly groomed black beard, as thoughts of the repercussions which would follow if the man kept his promise and jumped, filled his mind.

Why the hell hadn't he picked some other building . . . Good God, there were plenty of high buildings about . . . why pick on *this* hotel?

Things hadn't been going too well for the detective at the hotel of late. Only that morning he'd made one of his regular appearances before the management over complaints made against him by some stupid over-sexed woman . . . now this!

They couldn't very well blame a suicide on him . . . still, he didn't like it.

Perhaps if he could get the man to come back inside . . . it would certainly do him a lot of good with the management.

He cursed as the rain beat in on him. Why in hell hadn't the crack-pot picked some other building?

"I know how it is friend. . . Family and money troubles," the detective called out in the most understanding voice he could produce.

"But this isn't the way to solve any problem. . . Now is it?"

Waldron continued talking consolingly, as best he could, under the conditions, and as he studied the man, the lights from the neon signs lit up the pale face and he began to regret sending the boy so hurriedly for the police.

Time was running out . . . the police would be arriving soon. Furtively he glanced over his shoulder but all remained silent. He grinned to himself, that stupid kid would probably finish up by going to the station to find a policeman.

"Why don't you come in friend . . . come on, we can talk things over?"

"I can't get back! . . . *Hell!* . . . I can't get back!"

The stranger's words had an immediate invigorating effect on the detective. His grey eyes lit up eagerly as he clambered energetically up on to the sill.

"*Hold it! . . . Don't panic! . . . I'm coming!*"

That he was the right man for such a situation, Waldron had no doubt.

A former paratroop sergeant, to whom heights naturally held no fears. But besides . . . it wouldn't be the first time he'd moved from

room to room of the hotel of a night, via the outside ledge, to suit his own ends.

"Take it easy. . . . You'll soon be inside."

The proffered hand was gripped eagerly and tightly. A little too tightly Waldron thought, as both men looked into each other's eyes.

"Come on now, pal . . . it's a wide ledge. Just you follow me nice and slowly, and you'll be fine."

Calling the words as clearly as possible, the detective fixed his gaze upon the neon sign on the building opposite. Attentively he watched as the glass filled with beer and the letters of the advertisement lit up individually, but slowly, very slowly, he began to edge back along the ledge to the window.

"You were taking Maureen away from me. . . . You *Swine!*"

The muscles in Waldron's stomach tightened nervously, and for the first time in his life a positive fear gripped him.

Instinctively he endeavoured to free his hand, but the stranger, whose identity he now knew, kept a determined and rock-like hold.

"*No! . . . No! . . .*" The detective spluttered.

"I was only playing about with her . . . I wasn't going away with her, honest! You've got to believe me!"

The lights from the beer advert. lit up his companion's face, and he knew his pleading had fallen on deaf ears.

"Every one of your filthy letters I read. . . . Every blasted one!"

From the open window voices called to the two men.

The police had arrived. . . . But they were too late.



The wind blows out of the gates of the day
The wind blows over the lonely of heart
And the lonely of heart is withered away.

The Land of Heart's Desire, W. B. YEATS

APPOINTMENT AT FOUR

NORMAN P. KAUFMAN

To the blonde receptionist he was just a Mr. Somebody-or-other

PERHAPS you're one of the untold millions who shrivel up with fear at the very sound of the word "dentist", and so have a very slight inkling as to how I felt as I walked up that path and stuck my thumb on the bell. Somewhere in the gloomy depths of this converted house, I could hear the endless jangling, its imperious summons seeming to echo and echo. . . . With an immense effort of will, I forced my feet to stay where they were; that is, attached to a pair of trembling, jellied legs.

In normal circumstances, the girl who answered the door would probably have rated my keenest scrutiny. I got a vague impression of a face topped with blonde hair, a body of obviously feminine characteristics, and the whole lot stuck on a pair of long legs that were doubtless used to a lot more attention than I felt like giving them. "What name is it, please?" she asked me in a voice that would have melted granite, and when I told her, she ushered me into a waiting-room and swayed out.

Right away, that room was no good for me. Central heating pipes lined the walls, and in a matter of seconds, perspiration was literally pouring from my forehead. I was alone in the room, which was perhaps some comfort, for I could give full rein to my feelings by swearing determinedly for a minute or so. I knew that the sweat was caused as much by fear as the intense heat, and I mopped halfheartedly at my face and neck as I waited for the door to open, for my name to be called. . . .

It occurred to me then that this room was next door to the surgery itself, and I found time to bless my good fortune: the walls and door were soundproof, although whether this had been a deliberate forethought on the part of a compassionate dentist or not, I didn't really know. But I was certainly thankful for it. Otherwise I would no doubt have had to listen to that whining, malevolent drill and the sufferings of its victims. I reached forward and lifted a magazine from the table in front of me. It was up to me to make some effort, at least, to keep that . . . that man in the next room out of my mind.

Incidentally, if you get the impression that I'm an out-and-out coward, then I'm not arguing. Dentists always have scared me, ever since I was a little boy, when I first felt the hot bite of the needle in my gums. All I can say is, if you're not scared of going to the dentist, then either you've never been in your life, or else you should get a special medal for Bravery Beyond All Belief.

This particular magazine was one of these woman's papers from about the middle of the early nineteen-hundreds, and very soon I found myself reading the words without having any idea what the article or story or whatever, was all about. And then the door swung open and the blonde girl in the white overall stood there, a sweet smile on her face. "Would you mind stepping this way?"

It was a polite enough request, and certainly there were no undertones of violence in her voice. To this girl, I was merely a Mr. Somebody-or-other, a name she would forget in a matter of minutes. I was just another in the long line of patients; a tall, round-faced man with a walrus moustache and a pair of spectacles.

She pushed his door open to allow me through, then pulled it closed behind me, going about her business with a spring in her step, and not a care in the world.

It was really no different from the average dentist's surgery, with its grim walls glistening whitely, and the setting sun gleaming on the highly polished chrome of the drill . . . but I hadn't come to admire the scenery.

The fellow had his back to me: he was washing his hands in the sink, and humming some pop tune to himself. I fixed my eyes on his spotless white overall, and cleared my throat, loud and long. His head swivelled round. "Ah, sit down, will you?" he began. "I won't be too long if you'll——"

He never finished what he was saying. Never. He watched me as I bent to unlace the built-up shoes, as I peeled the moustache from my upper lip and the tuft of hair from my chin; and his eyes opened wider as I took the glasses off my nose and removed the rubber suckers from inside my cheeks. I took a pistol from my inside pocket and smiled into his handsome face.

"For taking my wife away from me," I said, and made a neat hole between his sea-blue eyes. Then I walked out, through the back entrance, thus avoiding my blonde friend.

I was home before teatime.



POOR GUY

JANET CRAIG-JAMES

FERN ASPINALL lifted her head and listened. She could hear it in the air. The vicious drone that reminded her of what she and Oswin had come to America years ago to forget—war and the buzz bombs. But of course the sound wasn't buzz bombs. Just the unrelenting roar of motor cycles being "gunned" (*wasn't that what they called it?*). Within a few minutes the black-jacketed riders, like hard, shiny beetles, would be invading the autumn-shrouded cottage.

Fern pushed a greying wisp out of her eyes and tried to relax over her knitting, but dropped a stitch in the Fair Isle sweater as she stared at Oswin's thickset back. He was peering through the window that was smudged with smoke from the fire that didn't draw very well. (*So few Americans could build a fireplace that really worked.*) He was waiting to greet their guests.

Despite her uneasiness, she let her nearsighted, middle-aged eyes rove lovingly around the room. From the inside, "Grove Cottage" in a secluded suburb of New York, might just as well have been "The Willows" in Farmwell, a suburb of London. She and Oswin had done an admirable job of bringing England with them: the heavy mahogany furniture, the Royal Albert tea service arranged on the hammered brass tray they had brought from Africa when Oswin worked on the experimental tea plantation there. There were the eccles cakes and Chelsea buns placed symmetrically on the cake plate. There were two glassy-eyed, black and white china dogs on the hearth, and there was Oswin in his shabby-genteel tweeds, military moustache bristling over acrid smelling pipe, and she in her mauve flowered cr pe and arch support shoes sent direct from London.

Outside, the Empire simile was even more pronounced. There was a rustic toolshed camouflaged behind the shrubbery. Oswin had imported glossy rhododendron bushes. There was a "wild" corner where bluebells and violets flourished in the spring; crazy paving walks between the precise flower beds; a rose garden, and severely clipped low privet hedges.

Fern smiled indulgently. She knew Oswin was not only looking for their guests but was gloating over the outlines of his garden.

The menacing drone of the cycles drew nearer. She shuddered, then mentally shook herself. The war was a generation away, she reminded herself firmly. The sound she now heard was harmless.

She thought again of Oswin's garden. It had actually been the innocent cause of their acquiring this persistent, glowering, uninvited collection of young friends. Yes, that's what they were—a peculiar collection. With no surnames, just tags like Jerky, Rock, Boo-Boo (she was a girl, but you'd never suspect it from her figure and the way she dressed); there was Baby-Doll, and an almost silent one who seemed to be their leader. They called him Creeper.

About a month ago Oswin had been out in the garden mulching up the roses and planning where he would plant the daffodil bulbs. Suddenly, just like now, the air had been alive with a staccato hum, and down the narrow road, which few people detected from the highway, they came. Monstrous, mechanized kangaroos, smashing through and bounding over the privet hedges, circling and then crushing the rose bushes.

She had been inside making Welsh rarebit for supper, and alarmed

by the hub-bub she had watched panic stricken, through the window. For a moment Oswin had been frozen there, bending over a bush, and then as one of the cycles careered towards him he had sprung into action, just as he had with the Wogs—as he called them, in Africa. His spade caught the handlebars of the machine squarely in the centre, sending bike and rider sprawling. As the figure scrambled to its feet, Oswin followed his successful manoeuvre with another, a hefty kick in the backside. That was another thing he always believed in with the Wogs, “give them a kick in the backside. That shows them who’s boss”. This approach had proved very effective, also, with unwary smokers, strolling the lanes of Farmwell in the blackout, when Oswin was a fire warden during the war.

But the recipient of this particular kick crashed face downwards on the edge of one of the crazy paving stones, and turned out to be a girl—Boo-Boo, as a matter of fact.

There had been a silent dismounting from the other bikes, the black-jacketed, black-booted riders forming a circle around Oswin as he picked up the girl and brought her into the house.

Fern had made tea. That was all she could think of under the circumstances. That’s what they’d always done after the buzz bombs struck. Their visitors sprawled there in the sitting-room, saying nothing, clutching the Royal Albert cups in their leather paws, their facelessness hidden behind thick goggles or dark glasses.

It had shaken Oswin to find he had used violence on a girl, regardless of the provocation. It was the kind of thing that just wasn’t done. To cover his agitation he launched on a recital of his own youthful escapades on a motor bike. He had gone on at length about his hero, Lawrence of Arabia, who had been killed on a similar machine.

Within an hour Boo-Boo was fully recovered and there was no reason for them to stay on, but they did, making no apology for the wreckage they had made of the garden. Glad of an audience, Oswin rattled on about England, while Creeper flicked through a stack of overseas newspapers. Oswin still got the *News of the World*.

“Say!” Creeper was reading something avidly. Looking over his shoulder Fern saw it was an account of the Yorkshire Moors Murders. She hadn’t read it herself because it made her sick thinking about it. But when the silent contingent finally rose and filed out, Creeper took the paper with him, and even Oswin who hoarded every issue did not protest.

The following week they had returned. Not molesting the garden, just propping their bikes against the toolshed wall, and marching in, unannounced. Oswin hadn't said anything, so that it could not have unnerved him the way it did her. He welcomed them almost gleefully. He had obliterated the damage in the garden, and with it any animosity he might have felt towards "the chaps with high spirits" as he called them. While Fern fed them tea and buns, Oswin filled their silence with stories of British history and derring-do.

"Do you think they're really interested?" she had asked after they left. "They seemed to enjoy bloodthirsty things like the Inquisition, and the Princes in the Tower. But you can't tell what they're thinking behind those goggles and dark glasses."

Oswin had it all figured out. He answered her as he emptied the overflowing ashtrays, evidence of his cigarettes they had smoked.

"Underneath, people like that are all the same—like the Wogs, Fern. They pretend to be unimpressed, but underneath, they crave our kind of life, our traditions, our culture. It is our duty to give it to them. . . ."

"They're here, Fern. Get the tea ready." She was roused by Oswin's voice as he turned from the window and walked towards the front door. He kept his right hand in his jacket pocket—a habit he'd acquired since one of the Wogs accidentally turned on the circular saw Oswin was demonstrating to the natives, and cut off three of the white man's fingers.

Fern turned on what she hoped was a bright, welcoming smile, and moved from her rocking chair. Creeper preferred that one and she automatically relinquished it as the leather jackets took over the room. As they seated themselves, she felt like a fly under a barrage of headlights. The goggles and dark glasses might be focusing on her. On the other hand, they might be innocently contemplating the plate of cakes she started handing around hurriedly.

Creeper cleared his throat, and as if it were a signal, the group unmasked their eyes. Fern wished they hadn't. What the goggles and glasses had been hiding was worse than the goggles and glasses themselves. The eyes which contemplated her and Oswin were as dead as the fish eyes she'd seen at the greengrocer's in Farmwell. Creeper cleared his throat again. When he spoke it was as if his voice was rusty, unused.

"What was that celebration you were telling us about, Mr. Aspi-

nall? The one you said they have in England. Like our Fourth of July you said. With fireworks and all.”

Oswin beamed as he poked the fire and then stood warming his back against it, and no one else could see it.

“Glad you remembered, Creeper. Gun Powder Plot you mean. Yes, we got rid of those traitors in a hurry. Going to blow up the Houses of Parliament! Every year the people over there celebrate on the 5th of November. They have bonfires and fireworks——”

“You said they burned something or other on the fire, didn’t you?” Boo-Boo leaned forward and her shoulder-length, dank hair hid her face and the red scar where her forehead had hit the crazy paving.

“Yes. They make an effigy of Guy Fawkes. A dummy, you know, out of an old suit and hat, and a mask. The last thing they do, when the fun’s about over, they throw him on the bonfire and burn him.”

“It’ll be the 5th next week,” Creeper’s voice was a croak. “We’ve been here three times, so next week we’d like to give you and Mrs. Aspinall a party. We’ll bring stuff to eat, and fireworks, and make a dummy. Just like home.”

“Just like home,” echoed Oswin, and being touched, his face flushed a brick red. “I say, that’s a ripping idea. Do you hear that, Fern? The young people want to give us a party. . . .”

Creeper permitted himself a chuckle. “We’ll bring everything else, but you’ll have to give us an old suit, Mrs. Aspinall. Don’t think old Guy Fawkes ever wore a leather jacket, did he?”

“Now’s your chance to get rid of that mustard-coloured Harris tweed you hate so much, Fern!”

Fern wanted to refuse. Suddenly that worn suit of Oswin’s had become very dear to her. She couldn’t bear the idea of Creeper’s gauntleted hands touching it. She went and got it because she knew she’d make a fool of herself if she protested. Creeper held it at arms length, training his goggles on it, then digging in the back pocket of his skin-tight jeans he brought out the copy of the *News of the World* and gave it to Oswin. “Can’t understand goofs like that,” he commented, referring to the Moors murders. “Well, see you on the 5th. Remember, it’s *our* party. Don’t make any cakes or things, Mrs. Aspinall. *We want to do everything.*”

The fifth was cold, raw and windy. Oswin spent the day in the garden, girded within his old army trench coat, a battered trilby hanging jauntily on one ear. He selected and cut logs for the bonfire and

arranged them in a geometric pyre. Indoors, Fern pattered around. Oswin had forbidden the eating of supper because, "you couldn't insult those youngsters by losing your appetite before they get here."

At dusk she heard the familiar, angry buzz, and the slamming down of the bikes beside the tool shed, and then there was silence for a few minutes before they came stomping into the house. They weren't wearing their goggles on their rubber-stamp faces and Fern thought this must mean that in their alien way they really felt at home here.

Creeper had a bottle in either hand. Jerky and Rock toted bags of firecrackers with rocket sticks sprouting out of them. Boo-Boo and Baby-Doll, identical in their stretch pants, tight sweaters, and eye-concealing bangs, brought up the rear with the others who were bearers of potato chips and peanuts.

Boo-Boo found glasses in the china cabinet and Creeper poured.

"Scotch for you, Mr. Aspinall?" Creeper had doffed his leather gloves, and his skinny, dirt-ingrained fingers poured a generous stream of golden liquid into the tumbler.

"Nothing like that for me. Maybe just a little ginger ale," whispered Fern. "The strongest thing I've ever had is sherry."

"Ginger ale coming up! Fix it in the kitchen, Baby-Doll."

Pretty soon they were all sitting around. Creeper in the rocking chair. Oswin, eyes a-sparkle, downing his drink in front of the fire, and Fern sipping on the most tingling ginger ale she had ever tasted in her life. For the first time since Grove Cottage had been "invaded" she felt at ease. This was going to be fun. All these young people around. It had always been a disappointment they had no children of their own to carry on the Aspinall tradition. She blinked her eyes. The lids wanted to stick together, but she could see how impressive Oswin was, standing up there, recounting once more, for Creeper's benefit, all the implications of Gunpowder Plot, and the rôle of Guy Fawkes.

"Poor Guy," muttered Creeper, his eyes fixed on Oswin.

"Served the bounder right!" countered Oswin, helping himself to another drink and cramming his mouth with potato chips. "Mistake to waste sympathy on a blighter like that."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" There was a pulse of excitement behind Creeper's question. "Let's get this party on the road, Mr. Aspinall. You get the bonfire going. We've brought potatoes to roast—and toffee—isn't that the junk you said they have in England? Let's go!"

Fern wanted to stay right where she was. It was warm by the fire.

She could curl up in the rocking chair, now that Creeper had abandoned it. She wanted to sleep, sleep, sleep. But she couldn't do that. She was a guest tonight. She struggled into a pair of heavy brogues and ankle-length tweed coat she had brought to the States with her.

Even outside in the wind, the warmth didn't leave her. The black jackets moved around her silhouetted against the blaze like elongated ravens. She loved them all. But now she couldn't tell one from another. They were wearing their goggles again and they were helping Oswin pile more logs on the bonfire.

What a bonfire it was! Oswin had prepared it carefully, with just the right amount of paper and dry kindling, then small, crisp logs, and finally, a great tree trunk like a Yule log. She didn't even mind that Oswin was still clutching the bottle of Scotch as he helped Jerky fix the rockets in the ground, and usually she couldn't bear to see him drink. Somehow it always reminded her of the Wogs and the day he got his fingers cut off. Now the fire was really roaring. It was magnificent. She felt like a girl, and poked twigs in it and ran around with the rest, a burning brand sparkling in her hand. Rockets were exploding overhead and the smell of roasting potatoes tinged the air. Her brogues felt like ballet slippers, and when she faced the smoke and it filled her eyes and lungs, she whispered, "Just like home. It's just like home!"

Time passed in a whirl of pinwheels, a shower of sparklers, and a machine-gun blast of whizz-bangs. The fire was beginning to die down.

"The Guy! What about the Guy!" someone yelled.

"Yes, you've forgotten Guy Fawkes!" bellowed Oswin from somewhere near the shrubbery.

"Oh, no, we haven't. That's our surprise," Creeper's voice was unusually clear. "He's in the tool shed. Come and help us carry him, Mr. Aspinall."

They all seemed to be reeling away from her, and though Fern wanted to follow them, she decided to dig in the white ashes and see if there was another roast potato somewhere. She was *hungry*! Maybe if she ate something her head wouldn't feel so light.

"Here comes the Guy!" she heard them screaming, and they came marching towards the fire, bearing the effigy aloft. It was funny to see Oswin's old tweed suit stuffed with something, and an old hat rammed over the dummy's head. She started to laugh, and couldn't stop. Now they were all laughing. No wonder. The cardboard mask they'd put on the effigy was so silly. The limbs dangled and slumped as they bore it

along. "Throw it in! Throw it in!" she cried. She had been right about wanting to see the last of that old suit.

Creeper, Jerky, and Rock tossed their burden on to the pyre and the flames shot skyward again.

"Poor Guy!" screeched Boo-Boo, and gave the dummy a vicious kick.

Giggling, Fern remembered what Oswin had said, and she hiccupped, "Serves the bounder right. Mistake to waste sympathy on the likes of him!"

But they weren't listening to her. They were turning away, adjusting their goggles, pulling on their gauntlets. They were going towards their bikes. She tried to run after them, calling as she did so, "Don't go *now*. This is the best part of it. Wait. Oswin hasn't seen the guy yet. He'll want to thank you for the party . . ." her voice trailed off, drowned by the gunning of the machines as they sped into the night.

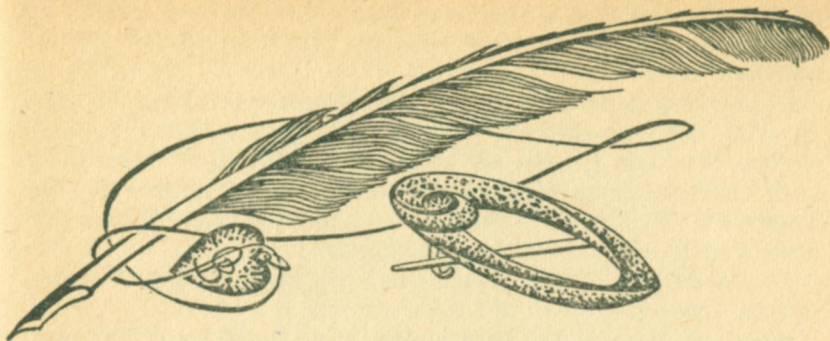
Fern turned back to the fire. Would they come back? She didn't even know their names or where they came from. The tweed suit was really burning now.

"Oswin," she called, "hurry up or it'll be too late."

There was a strange smell in the air. It wasn't gunpowder or roasting potatoes. She was close to the fire now and she felt a little annoyed, a little insulted that the visitors should have mocked Oswin by stuffing the right sleeve of the suit into the pocket—like Oswin always did.

She was alone. The queer smell was filling her nostrils, and as she stared in horror, a curl of flame started to eat through the cardboard mask.





DOUBLE-CROSSED BY DESTINY

F. E. EVANS

AS HE DROVE his car across the fens Walter Judson for a moment had a strange feeling, as though he were floating through the air. Then he realized the reason for it. The narrow, ruler-straight road along which he was travelling had no hedges and was raised on a causeway some feet above the ground. This stretched around the incredible flatness for unbelievable distances. Even the sky . . . Judson had previously thought of it as something above him; here it began far away at ground level, curved enormously overhead, then came down to ground level again.

To anyone unfamiliar with fenland, as Judson was, the scene was almost eerie. He felt tired, too, frustrated as he thought of his unprofitable visit. Part of the job, I s'pose, he muttered. Being a dealer in houses, furniture, cars anything—you name it—you had to accept long journeys, wasted time, money. But there were good pickings sometimes . . . specially if you weren't too scrupulous, honest even. But this time there'd been no profit and some loss. Now he still had a long journey back. It was evening—won't be home till early morning, he groused to himself.

He saw ahead a small inn crouching under a grassy bank. Could do with a rest, he thought. He parked the car, then scrambled up the bank; behind it he saw water, a dyke stretching to the horizon. He

saw something else—the water was higher than the land around. No wonder the inn seemed to be looking back over its shoulder . . . watching.

He sought solace for his feelings in his constant comforter, his pipe. As often, it was blocked. He pulled a strong grass stem and poked at it, then went into the inn and ordered beer. Wanting company, he made conversation to the landlord; who was tall, lean and with the lantern jaw and high cheekbones of the typical fenman. "Strange part of the country this. World of its own, almost."

The landlord nodded. "Aye. With our own language . . . words, sayings. Other folk speak of a flood; we call it a 'drown'."

Judson thought of the giant waters, lying caged across the land. "You might well."

"Our own customs, going back for centuries. Traditions, now, some of 'em. But there are people left who still follow them. Fen folk. A chap died recently, nearby. His wife put a coin on his forehead to show that his sins were paid for and the Devil couldn't have his soul."

Judson sipped his beer. The landlord leaned on the counter. "Strange people have been here, long back. Vikings, Romans, as well as our own folk." He jerked his thumb at a beam above the bar. "We dig things up sometimes." Judson looked up and saw two coins fastened to the beam. His business instinct leapt to life; his face remained expressionless. He saw that the coins were seventeenth century, worth some shillings but not more. In his mind thoughts began to run around like ferrets in a dark warren. There might be money to be made here . . . these people wouldn't know. He could—even in his own mind he avoided the word "swindle." He could outwit them, he substituted. Casually, "I suppose other things are found?"

"Oh, yes—the wife's got an old brooch. Battered old thing." He called "Mary!"

A middle-aged woman came from a back room. "Show this gentleman your brooch."

"Of course." She went out and Judson heard her feet tramping up wooden stairs and moving across a room just above. Then she came back and put a small object on the counter. Judson glanced at it, then felt his heart miss a beat. It was of metal and dingy but his experienced eye saw through the thick patina with which the centuries had covered it. He knew that the metal, tarnished on the surface, was in fact gold. And something more important even than that made itself evident as

he studied the brooch, keeping his expression casual and only superficially interested as he did so. This was that the article was of rare workmanship. He wasn't an expert in ancient ornaments; that was a specialized field. But he'd taken a careful look at any that had come up at sales and he'd looked them up at times in reference libraries.

Don't get the chance to pick up Chippendale chairs or fine porcelain these days, he'd said to himself as he did so. But other things, that had been lying around for hundreds of years—in the soil, for example—they were a different matter. A chap with a sharp eye and some knowledge, he might come across something like that, someday.

And he had done, this time. He was sure of that. Perfectly certain.

Cupidity flared up in him. There was a lot of cash to be made out of this brooch. But it was going to be made by him, not by anyone else.

He said disparagingly: "Rather dull." Then after a pause: "But I've enjoyed seeing this unusual part of the country. I'd like a souvenir of my visit. Would you care to let me have it . . . I'll give you ten bob, say?"

"I couldn't really," the landlord's wife said. "It's not much of a thing, I suppose. But you see my old father dug it up in his garden. And he gave it to me, only a day or so before he had the stroke that took him off. So it's, well . . . sentimental. Just for his sake." She looked sad for a moment then picked up the brooch. "I was very fond of him."

A motor-horn sounded a fanfare outside. She said to her husband "That's Jack and Lucy. I must be off, Bob. I'll just put this away." She hurried upstairs then came down and went out.

Impassive outwardly, inside Judson seethed with frustration and, as his feelings developed, anger. There was money . . . a lot of it, and just out of his reach. All because a silly woman started sniffing when she thought of her old father. Greed uncoiled inside him like a spring. Determination followed; if he couldn't get the brooch any other way, he'd take it. He tossed off his drink, said, "Well, I must be off, too," and went out.

He took a pocket-torch from his car and then slipped round to the back of the inn. He looked up; he could identify the room the landlord's wife had gone into. The window was slightly open. Good. There was a low roof beneath it, an outhouse, with a rainwater-butt beside it on which he could climb. No time to lose—and there was little risk.

The landlord was in the bar; he wasn't likely to leave it. And his wife had gone out. Judson swiftly gained the outhouse roof and pushed open the window. He stepped into the room and swung the torch around. He saw a dressing-table . . . good again. That was a likely place. He pulled open drawers; in one he saw an old glove-box.

Inside was a small jumble of objects. Two faded photographs, an old locket, a quill pen, battered and with its grey feather cut down one side. The things people keep, he muttered—perhaps it had signed some old wedding register. Then he saw the brooch . . . and then he slipped up—metaphorically and literally. Because he thrust his finger-tips into the box to pick out the brooch and at the same time turned quickly round so that he could push the box back into the drawer. And in doing so he stumbled over a small stool that he hadn't noticed in the dim light and he fell full-length with a crash that seemed to shake the whole building.

There was a moment of utter silence; then as Judson scrambled to his feet he heard startled voices below and the clattering of a man's footsteps on the stairs. Cold with fear Judson thrust the glove-box complete with its contents inside his coat and leaped for the window. He was straddling the sill when the door opened and the landlord burst in.

The moon which had been shining fitfully between drifting clouds sailed clear of them and for a brief, but to Judson seemingly unending moment, illuminated him fully. The landlord lurched across the room and lunged forward to grasp him by the leg which Judson still had inside the room. "Got you!" he mouthed breathlessly. "Come in here!" and he tugged.

Partly to free himself, partly to thrust the landlord back. Judson kicked out desperately. He succeeded better than he had expected for his flailing foot caught the landlord on the chest. Already off balance, the man fell sideways and as he did so his head hit the corner of the dressing-table with crushing force. There was a sudden horrible sound; the kind a cardboard box makes when someone steps on it. Then the landlord lay sprawled across the floor. He didn't move again and Judson had no need to look at him a second time to realize what had happened.

Now he was panic-stricken indeed. Theft . . . that was one thing. But this—this was another. This was manslaughter; the law might, in fact, call it murder.

Judson scrambled though the window, down the outhouse roof, and raced round to his car. Inside the inn footsteps pounded and a man, one of the customers, appeared in the doorway as Judson started the car. He reached for the door-handle but was just too late; the car accelerated away but Judson knew that the man had seen him and remembered him from the time he had spent inside the inn. Voices shouted and Judson heard, like a menacing valediction as he sped away, one of them calling "The Police! 'Phone the police!"

Heart thudding, he flattened the accelerator pedal. One mile, two, at breakneck speed—then disaster. The car slewed across the road and Judson fought it to a halt with a flat front tire. For a minute he thought desperately. The car was old; the rusted wheel-nuts would take long to unscrew. He knew that from previous wearying experience. He daren't spend the time. He got out, picked up his over-night bag and thrust the glove-box into it. The car's number-plates were detachable; he had found it convenient to substitute others on some of his shadier deals. He tossed them into a dyke, then ripped the licence off the windscreen. The car was a common make and there was nothing on it now by which he could be traced. Across the flatness of the fenland he saw distant headlights approaching a cross-roads ahead. He went to them and as the vehicle, a van, came up he waved it to a halt.

The driver, elderly and as lean-faced and high-cheekboned a fenman as the inn landlord had been, listened to his hasty story of a breakdown and his urgent need, for business reasons, to get to the town some miles distant. That, Judson had decided, was his one hope. It was a stopping-place for fast trains and although police-stations would be warned it would be his car that they would be watching for, at least for the immediate time being.

The driver shook his head. "Sorry. I've got the wife sick at home, a mile down the road. Take you that far?"

Judson got in. Better than nothing, he thought. Better at all events than standing in this lonely area hoping that another car would come along—and meanwhile getting caught, probably. As the van drove along everything, to his overwrought mind, had a frightening aspect. On a dyke a water-fowl made a sudden clucking noise and it brought back horribly to Judson the sound that the landlord's head had made when it hit the dressing-table. Across the moonlit surface of the land great black cloud-shadows drifted from the infinitely distant horizon, growing bigger with each moment as they approached and as the van

drove towards one it seemed like a pit into which, Judson felt, he and the van would fall and go on falling for ever.

Nerves . . . he must steady himself. He thought of his constant solace, his pipe. He drew it out. It was partly full and he lighted it—or tried to; the grass-stalk he'd used previously hadn't cleared it properly. Damn, he thought. He must smoke it; must calm himself or his agitation would be noticed. He fumbled in his pocket but he'd nothing he could use, then he remembered the old quill-pen in the glove-box. Slipping it out he saw that it had no point as a pen would have but was just a grey feather which had been split down one side. Still, the end was pointed: it would serve. Poking into his cupped hand with it he felt the van slow down and saw that the old fenman was staring at the feather. For a moment Judson was alarmed, then he realized that the other man couldn't have heard of what had happened at the inn in the short time that had elapsed.

The driver said in a changed tone: "I'll drive you on to my son-in-law's house. It's a mile or so away. And he owes me a favour, so if I press him he'll drive you into the town."

For a minute Judson could scarcely believe his good luck. This would make his escape certain. But the sudden change in the man's attitude . . . why that? He kept his face impassive, said, "That's very kind."

"No," came the reply. "I know my duty. I'm an old fenman and I live by our old customs." He gestured at Judson's hand. "You've got the grey goose feather, split in the right way. You've the right to any help you need."

Looking as though he knew just what was meant, Judson nodded.

"Aye," the other went on, "there was poverty here, hunger, for many of those past years. When the Bishop of Ely wanted his dues, and the King did too, and both of them more than we could grow or give. Then the soldiers came and took everything we'd got; and our folk as well, to jail and worse. And other need there's been too, in this hard land; and not so long ago some of it."

His first surprise changing slowly to delight, Judson realized the situation. That the feather was a relic, a piece of folk-lore, which the landlord's wife had kept because of some family reason in the past, perhaps. But that it was a symbol which was still believed in, still acted upon, by some people in this remote, timeless land. And by stealing it from her, in the course of stealing her brooch, he was going to benefit

and he was going to escape. Because the person with the grey goose-feather must be helped.

He said, keeping his tone natural, "Yes—but there aren't many people who still act on the old beliefs."

"No," the driver said, "but there's a few. Some just for the sake of it; others . . . well, superstition, perhaps. This is a strange land and it seems to have ways of its own, sometimes. Ways of working things out."

And that suits me, thought Judson to himself, his relieved mind rejoicing at the way in which he was being helped to escape. To become completely safe, for there was nothing by which he could be traced once he was out of the area and back in his own part of the country.

The van stopped before an isolated house. The driver said: "I'll go in and fix things." A minute or so passed then the driver called to him "All right—come in." Judson hurried the few steps to the shadowed house. The van driver turned and with a brief "Good night!" went away. A woman in the doorway beckoned him into a living-room.

Then the door opened and a man came in. Nodding, he began a brief greeting, then stopped suddenly. His previously casual glance became a hard stare as he took in details of Judson's face and clothes.

And Judson, looking back at him, took note of *his* clothes. Of the blue uniform trousers and tunic and, dangling from the man's hand, the policeman's helmet. He realized then where he was—in the home of the old fenman's son-in-law, certainly. In a little house in the country, yes, but one which was also a rural police-station. He saw the policeman's eyes flicker to one side of the room and his own, following them, saw a telephone and beside it a pad scribbled with notes which were undoubtedly a description of him and of the crime he had committed.

He realized something else, too. That he had been delivered right into the hands of the law by a sheer trick of chance.

Chance? He thought of the way in which things had happened. Of the woman he had robbed of her brooch and, irreplaceable loss, of her husband. He thought of her grey goose-feather, symbol of a tradition that was part of fenland. And he thought of that land itself, all around him outside . . . remote, mysterious. What was it the old fenman had said? That it seemed to have ways of its own, sometimes. Ways of working things out.

"Chance? I wonder?" murmured Judson. But that, he knew, was something he would *never* know.

SILENT WITNESS

JOHN TAVERNER

He watched in sickened horror as the two men attacked his wife. She reeled back and collapsed into the grate. He could do nothing. . . .

THE ROOM was dimly illuminated by the blue glow from the lamp on the wall, and the Major lay quiescent in his padded basket on the bed. He was gazing through the open french windows into the summer night. It was warm, and the air was scented by the freshly-mown hay in the fields surrounding the old house.

He yearned for the solace of dreamless sleep, but knew this was impossible. Sleep was a succession of horrific nightmares from which he surfaced in a bubble of cringing fear, sweating and exhausted. Tonight, like every night, he struggled to stay awake, and the nocturnal sounds of the countryside helped to divert his entombed mind from the miseries of introspection.

A night-jar piped eerily, and then he heard scuffings accompanied by sounds of panting from the wall outside. Two dark shapes swarmed over the balcony rail; two men, one tall, the other short and stocky.

They padded into the room, and stood at the foot of his bed. He glared angrily at them; interpreting the expressions in their eyes. The tall man had tanned, square-cut features with pale-blue eyes. His stockily-built companion was pockmarked and with a slack mouth.

"Good evening, Major," said the tall man in near-perfect public school accents. "Sorry to break in on you this way, but we've called to see your wife."

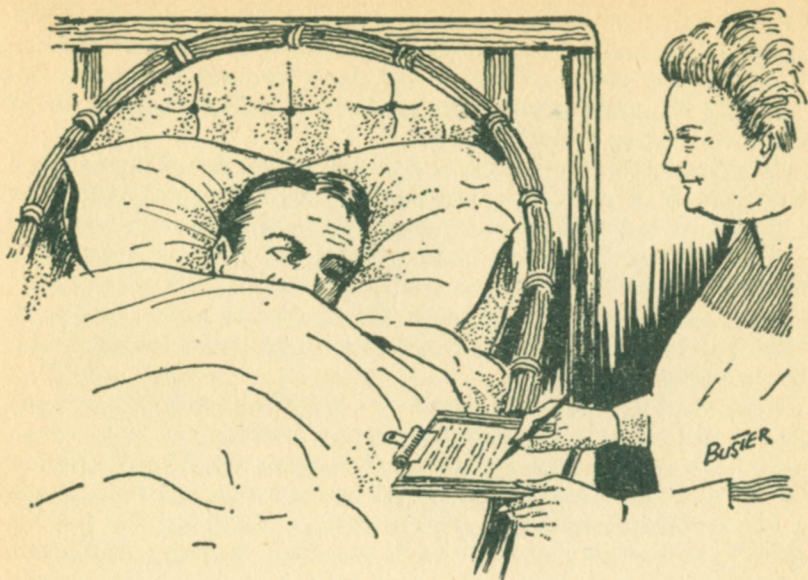
"Cut the chatter, Dermot," muttered the short man uneasily.

"Just observing the courtesies, my dear Willy!" said the man called Dermot.

Willy grunted, and began to work his hands into a pair of silk gloves.

Dermot glanced at his watch, and said: "I'm sorry you must witness the coming scene, Major, but I'm afraid there's no alternative."

He felt confused and lost. He was not used to strangers. Who were these men? Why had they broken into the house? And what did they



want to see Celia about. But she'd be coming to him shortly, and she'd explain everything.

He heard her footsteps coming along the passage outside; the tip-tap of her stiletto heels echoing on the marble floor. The two intruders flattened themselves against the wall beside the wardrobe.

The door opened and Celia, elegant in her black frock and single strand of pearls, came into the room. She closed the door, and stepped lightly across to his bed. For a moment she gazed down at him; her green eyes mirroring both compassion and bitterness. She bent and kissed him on his brow, and he sniffed hungrily at the fragrance of her expensive perfume; a fragrance adulterated with whisky from her breath.

"Hello, Celia!" drawled the man called Dermot.

She gasped, and spun around.

"What—what the hell are you doing here, Dermot?" she stammered, and he heard the tremor of fear in her voice.

"I've come to deliver a final demand notice, old girl," said Dermot, and Willy, his back to the door, chuckled.

He saw his wife's eyes grow huge, and her hand plucked nervously

at the pearls. Oh, Celia! he thought wildly. What is this all about? What is there between you and these men? Why don't you explain?

"I can't pay you yet, Dermot. And that's the truth," she said.

"I told you to go to your father-in-law," said Dermot. "He's richer than Croesus, and he'd settle for you."

She glanced at him quickly, and then her eyes shut tight as though with a spasm of pain. She opened her eyes, and turned back to Dermot.

"Must we talk in front of my husband?" she whispered.

"Where else? You won't come to the Club, and you've dodged a meeting with me for nearly a month," said Dermot. "I've been keeping tabs on you for the past fortnight. This is the one night of the week when you take over from the night-nurse. It has to be tonight, and it has to be here."

"But what do you hope to gain out of it?" she said. "I can't pay you—and I refuse to approach my father-in-law!"

"I think we can persuade you to change your mind," said Dermot. "You lose nearly three thousand quid on the tables, and I'm left with a bunch of lousy IOU's! I don't expect to collect tonight, but I'm going to administer a taste of what is to come if you don't settle within a week!"

"A taste of——"

"Yes," said Dermot softly, and his lips peeled back in a humourless smile. "Do you know what can be done to a pretty woman's face with a silk glove, Celia?"

She shook her head dumbly.

"Show her, Willy," said Dermot, and Willy moved towards her.

He watched in sickened horror from his basket. Willy feinted with his left fist, and crossed with his right. The blow exploded on her left cheek, and an ugly gash opened on the flawless skin to release a scarlet flood. She reeled under the impact and Willy, his loose mouth wet with saliva, struck again. Celia plummeted backwards, and her head struck the empty fire-place with a sodden sound. She collapsed into the grate, and, with welling nausea, he saw that her head lay at an odd angle to her perfect body.

Willy's eyes were glazed, and he panted. Dermot stared down at her shape, and then looked at Willy with rage-filled eyes.

"You bloody ape!" he whispered. "You've killed her!"

"I—I didn't mean to! It was an accident!"

"Never mind what you meant!" snarled Dermot. "Let's get away

from here! We're going to need the help of a dozen friendly witnesses!"

Willy looked towards the bed with frightened eyes, and said: "What about him?"

"Forget him!" said Dermot. "He'll never give evidence against us, poor devil!"

Inspector Lucas slumped into the chair facing his Superintendent, and ran his hand over his unshaven chin. He was in a foul mood, a condition aggravated by aching feet and a nagging ulcer.

"Chop it as fine as you can, Lucas. I'll get all the details from your written report," said the Superintendent.

"The victim's name was Celia Irving. Aged thirty-two. Very attractive. Lived with her husband and father-in-law in an old place called the Manse. Property of the father-in-law," said Lucas in a monotone. "Surgeon places time of death at between 11.30 p.m. and 1.30 a.m. last night. Cause of death—broken vertebrae sustained by falling against iron fire-place. Fall probably caused by two blows to the face. Two large facial lacerations. Lacerations caused by fists of assailant wrapped in a silk scarf or gloves. Silk fibres found in lacerations."

"Who reported it?"

"The only servant at the Manse. Old male retainer. Mrs. Irving had asked him to make her a plate of sandwiches and a pot of coffee. He waited until 1.30 a.m. When she didn't turn up, he went to look for her. He doesn't know anything. No one called at the front door all evening."

"So there are no witnesses?"

"One. Her husband. But he can't help us," said Lucas sourly.

"Why not?"

"The husband, Major Charles Cedric Irving, is a basket case. Multiple amputee, and lost one eye and lower jaw. Bought this when a Chinese shell blew up his command post in Korea," said Lucas grimly. "His father, who's very rich, had him brought home. He laid on a day-nurse and a night-nurse to look after his son. Haven't managed to contact either of the nurses yet, but the old manservant tells me it was the night-nurse's time off from duty last night."

The Superintendent's lips tightened.

"The husband saw all this?"

Lucas nodded, and said: "Must have done. It happened in his room."

"Has the father been informed?"

"He's on a fishing trip in Ireland. I sent him a wire. He could be back by this afternoon."

"Nothing else?"

Lucas glanced at his watch, and stood up on his aching feet.

"The day-nurse comes on duty in about fifteen minutes. I'll trot along now and see her."

Lucas nodded to the uniformed policeman standing outside the front door of the old house, and begun to pace to and fro on the terrace. A haze over the landscaped grounds gave promise of another fine day, and Lucas remembered he'd promised his wife a holiday in Cornwall this year. But now . . .

He heard a car coming up the gravelled drive. A taxi emerged from between the rows of chestnut trees, and stopped at the bottom of the wide, stone stairway. A stout elderly woman dressed in nurse's uniform climbed out, and started briskly up the steps.

"Nurse McAlister? I'm Inspector Lucas," he said, showing his warrant.

A pair of kindly grey eyes regarded him curiously.

"And what brings the police here this fine morning?" she said in a rich Scottish burr.

"Mrs. Celia Irving is dead," said Lucas.

The lines in her pink-scrubbed face deepened.

"An accident?"

"She was murdered!" said Lucas shortly.

"Oh, I see!" she said, shaking her head.

"You don't seem particularly surprised, Nurse?"

Her lips curled in distaste, and she said: "I don't think I am, Inspector. Not really. But—"

"But what, Nurse?"

"Charles and Celia were sweethearts from childhood, and marriage followed as inevitably as the sun comes up," she said slowly. "They had everything. Youth, money and happiness. And then came the tragedy of Korea. It's been a living hell for them ever since. You couldn't really blame her, I suppose. . . ."

"Blame her for what, Nurse?"

"She stayed by his side for the first two years after they brought him home. And then she found she was still a woman," said the old nurse, sighing. "She went off the rails completely. Wild drunken parties, and she mixed with all the wrong sort of people. Long-haired,

gamblers, womanizers and the like. She had some dreadful rows and scenes with Charles's father about it all. . . . But she still lived on here despite everything. I think she still loved Charles—but it was a hopeless, frustrated love.”

“I see,” said Lucas thoughtfully.

Suddenly, she said: “Where did you find her?”

“In Major Irving's room,” said Lucas. “I got the police surgeon to give him a sedative——”

“Oh no!” she cried in dismay, and ran into the house.

Lucas ran after her. She flew up the stairs, and pounded along the corridor with Lucas at her heels.

They burst into the room, and she went over to the bedside. Once again, Lucas repressed a feeling of shock and distress as he met the steady gaze of the one clear blue eye staring out of the ruined face.

The old nurse fussed with the sheets, and crooned: “You've taken so much—and now this dreadful thing!”

When the basket had been tidied to her satisfaction, she went over to a small table and picked up a pencil and pad. She sat down beside the bed, and looked at her patient.

“This is Inspector Lucas,” she said, her pencil poised over the pad. “Now, dear, tell us all about it.”

The lid of the clear blue eye flickered and blinked rapidly, and she began to write.

“What's going on?” said Lucas stupidly.

“He and I learnt the Morse code together,” she said quietly. “It's his only means of communication.”



Ill news hath wings, and with the wind doth go
Comfort's a cripple and comes ever slow.

The Barrons' Wars
MICHAEL DRAYTON

THE SPEAKER

JACQUELINE RUSSELL

His eyes started lazily to move over his audience, picking out the pretty girls and undressing them in his mind. Steadily, deliberately his eyes moved towards me. Then it was over and I could plan my moves . . .

THE MOMENT he came in I knew I had seen him before. Not the face with the fine straight nose; not the insolent set of his head perhaps, but the something inside that was him. That I had seen, and the tingling started up and down my spine.

He sat himself in the speaker's chair waiting for the introduction to begin, and while he waited his eyes started lazily to move over his audience. Picking out the pretty girls and undressing them in his mind. Steadily, deliberately, row by row, his eyes moved towards me. . . . Then it was over and my heart could grow steady again while my head planned the next move.

I knew where his car would be, and I knew just what to do to it. I could not have him going like that, speeding home to his wife or mistress and leaving me behind.

The introduction was over. He stood up, flicking a smile at us, his audience, his slaves. There was a pause, all eyes were fixed on his face. Then he started, his words dropping like a shining waterfall into the pool of silence. After the first sentence I did not hear a word, I was too busy planning our next meeting.

He would need a garage when I had finished with the car, and if I had judged him right he would be more than willing to walk to it up our long dark drive. If he had the right type of companion to show him the way, that is.

I had always loved the old drive. It was a causeway really, between two fields, with big oak trees growing on either side of it, like gnarled old sentries from another age, still faithfully keeping watch. I liked to picture all the things they had seen over the long long years.

"And, tonight," I thought with a little smile, "they will see one of the oldest scenes in history played out yet again."

I would have to be careful, though. No one must see me talking to

him in the car park, or leaving with him afterwards. In a community of women, like this, gossip spreads like wildfire, and no one likes those sort of stories being said about them—whether they are true or otherwise.

By the time his speech was over I had it all worked out. Now it was planned I knew nothing would go wrong. The idea was simple, that was the charm of it. The timing must be dead right, but then I could manage that—I always had before.

I waited for him to leave the platform. The Principal would give him coffee now as she always did to our speakers. Then I joined the surge of girls at the door. . . .

I was very late going to bed that night. I stretched out between the sheets and kept very still. The mouse that lived behind my wainscot pattered over to the box of sweets I had left on the table, and I lay staring into the darkness, picturing its bright little eyes darting and peering, but seeing nothing in the dark. Then I laughed, for my mind went back to those eyes I had seen earlier in the evening, and the way they had searched.

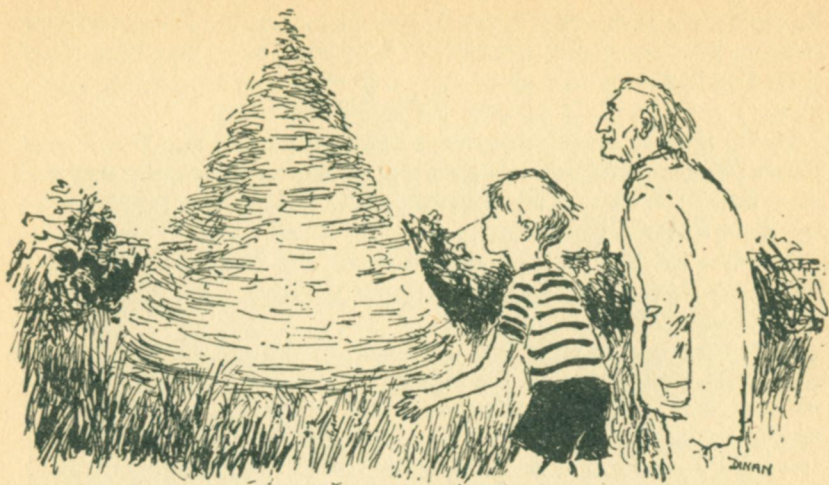
I also thought of the long drive, and the way we had walked up it together. I remember the sob he had made as the knife sank into his back, like that of a small child who had seen something he is afraid of.

They would find the body tomorrow and then the fuss would start. I wondered what the headlines would be, but I was too tired to bother for long. His eyes had worried me; they would worry the police more. Would they find them, I wondered? Those eyes that had undressed every pretty girl in the hall—but passed me over.



He gave way to the queer, savage feeling that sometimes takes by the throat a husband twenty years' married, when he sees, across the table, the same face of his wedded wife, and knows that, as he has sat facing it, so must he continue to sit until the day of its death or his own.

The Bronckhurst Divorce Case, RUDYARD KIPLING



THE PLASTIC PYRAMID

C. E. BARMAN

THE OLD man muttered to himself as he wandered round the noisy fairground; and Peter, the boy, wandered after him, trying to hear what he was saying, but trying not to be noticed at the same time.

"Litter," mumbled the old man. "Dirty rubbish. Can't they see how it spoils the look of the place?"

Peter, hands in pockets, stood silent behind him and stared at his stooping back.

"And all this polythene stuff, it's the worst of the lot. They don't know what they're doing, throwing it down everywhere."

He picked up an orange-stained plastic cup with his long, grey fingers, and stuffed it into a big polythene bag which he held in his other hand. Then he darted across to the left, nearly tripping up two nondescript ladies as he did so, and pounced on a shredded wisp of a plastic wrapper; that went into the bag too, so did a collection of six more cups, idly thrown down by a group of boys.

He ignored a swirl of ice-cream papers and a half-eaten toffee-apple which lay in his path, but continued drifting hither and thither through the fairground, scooping up any and every bit of discarded polythene that he could see, until eventually the bag was full, right up to its floppy brim. Then he placed a lonely plastic straw on the top, gave a quick glance round, and meandered away towards the main road.

Peter, still eaten up with curiosity, meandered discreetly behind him.

Past the traffic lights, down a side street, twice to the left, and once to the right, until they came to a blue gate set in a dull brick wall. The old man pushed the gate open, walked up the path, and unlocked the front door which confronted him at the top.

Bang! and the door had closed behind him.

"Bang!" thought Peter. He looked over the gate and stared at the door; it was blue, like the gate; and it was shut, very shut.

Peter scratched the back of his neck with a grubby, small boy's hand, and then turned to go home.

He hopped for the first part of the journey, then when his legs got tired, he shuffled, so that he left a dragging pattern behind him; after that, he took big steps, as big as he possibly could. But he wasn't really noticing what he was doing at all, as his mind was still thinking about the strange old man.

Why, oh why, did he spend nearly every day collecting rubbishy bits of plastic? What did he want them for? What did he do with them?

Saturday now, and the fair was busier than ever. The noise was horrific; and the whole area exuded that strange, warm smell of popcorn, hamburgers and greasy hot dogs.

Peter sat on the stone steps opposite the roundabout, the jumble of sounds dinning through his head. He hugged his bare knees tight under his chin, his pale blue eyes peering intensely out from underneath the soft, fly-away fringe of his hair.

There was his old man, stalking around clutching his bag. Mr. Hammond, he was called. Peter had discovered that from the greengrocer. He lived all alone, and that's all anybody knew about him.

Peter waited and watched. At first he had amused himself by drawing pictures in the dust with an old matchstick; but now it would soon be time for him to put his plan into operation.

Suddenly Mr. Hammond appeared from behind the roundabout, the bag almost overflowing. Peter jumped up, and walked straight across to him.

"Sir," he said; his voice sounded squeaky, and his knees felt dithery. "Sir, may I carry it for you?" He held out his thin arms questioningly.

Mr. Hammond stood still and looked at him. He didn't look cross, he didn't smile either. He just looked, and the summer breeze flapped his ancient macintosh lazily against his knees, as though it was telling him not to wait too long. Then at last he spoke.

"Yes," he said, in the palest, thinnest voice Peter had ever heard. "Take it, it's not heavy, just awkward."

Peter took the bag; the polythene felt warm and stuck to his arms; it didn't smell very nice either.

"You'd better follow me," said Mr. Hammond, still speaking in the same dull voice.

"That was easy," thought Peter, his heart thumping with excitement, "easier than I imagined. I wonder if he'll let me into his house too?"

He walked along carefully, immediately behind the old man, and very shortly they'd arrived at the blue gate. Mr. Hammond held it open for Peter to go through. He held the front door open as well; then he led the way down a tiny passage into a stale little kitchen, and out through a side door into a walled garden.

The borders were overgrown, the trees hung low, and the grass needed cutting. But Peter noticed none of these, for in the corner of the garden, dominating it entirely, was a strange mound.

His mouth dropped open. He'd never seen anything like it. It was enormous, and it was formed by masses and masses of dull, grey polythene bags, swollen full with all the litter that Mr. Hammond had collected.

It wasn't a mound at all really, Peter thought; that was insulting it, because it was shaped like a pyramid, all neat and symmetrical.

Mr. Hammond took Peter's bag, and stretching up his long spidery arms, he patted it carefully into place near the top.

"I'll have to make it wider at the base now," he observed, "I can't fit any more in up there without spoiling the shape."

He moved away, and came and stood beside Peter. He didn't say anything for almost five minutes, but just stood, admiring his pyramid.

Peter wiggled his toes inside his old sandals, and wondered impatiently whether he dared ask what it was for.

"Litter," said Mr. Hammond, Perhaps he'd seen the sandals twitching. "Terrible thing is litter." He paused for another slow minute; then

he turned suddenly, saying: "Want to know why I collect it?"

Peter nodded. Mr. Hammond gave him a quick green-eyed stare and began to explain.

"Well," he said, "that litter's not ordinary litter; you've noticed that, I expect. It isn't just any odd bits of toffee paper and what have you. I leave that for the road sweepers. No, it's only plastic stuff I collect, nothing else, just plastic." He stopped, and peered at the boy down his bony white nose. Peter looked expectant.

"Do you realize what happens to plastic?"

"No," said Peter, beginning to shuffle his wigglesome toes again. What on earth was the old man getting at?

"Well, young man. Nothing happens to it. Nothing. You can't get rid of it, did you know that? Burn it, and it makes a nasty smell and melts into a different shape, but it's still there. Put it on to the compost heap, and it won't rot down, not like ordinary garden refuse; it's with us for ever. It lies around behind hedgerows where people throw it down. It floats around in the sea like dirty jellyfish when it's been dropped overboard from boats. And even on the rubbish tips it stays the same; gets a bit dusty perhaps, but it doesn't disintegrate. Other sorts of litter spoil the countryside enough. But plastic, it's a real crime to throw plastic down. It'll spoil the whole world in time. The farmers will be turning it up with their ploughs, the sailors will be churning it up with their propellers. . . ." He stopped all of a sudden, mainly because he'd run out of breath.

Peter was most impressed; his round blue eyes looked thoughtfully up at the old man's face. All those bits of plastic, just lying scattered around for ever and ever. One of these days it would be ankle deep, and then . . . knee deep.

"But why are you collecting it in your garden?" he said tentatively, "you can't collect up *all* the plastic; and people always throw more down anyway."

Mr. Hammond straightened his long body. "Young man." He looked down at Peter. "When I first began collecting it, nearly two years ago, I felt I was making a gesture. I felt I was doing my bit towards saving civilization from the menace of plastic. Trouble was, I seemed to be the only person who was bothered about it at all. I went to the town council. They were very nice to me." His voice sounded sad. "I wrote to the papers, wasn't even printed. I even thought I might be able to invent some satisfactory way of disposing of it. But now . . ."

Something in his tone of voice made Peter look sharply at Mr. Hammond's crinkled face. It had taken on an odd, almost ardent expression.

"Now I collect it because I *have* to collect it."

Peter opened his mouth and then shut it rather quickly, because a warning light flashed on in his mind, telling him not to speak again, not to say: "But that's not a proper reason? Surely you can't work every day at it with a reason like that?"

Instead, he looked at the pyramid again. And a curious emotion suddenly surged over him; it tugged at his heart, making it thump unbearably, and giving him a sort of bursting with pride feeling.

He stared, puzzled. And a picture stuck itself on to his mind. It was a picture of himself, standing on the station last winter, feeling small, cold and thin, and waving goodbye to his mother when she went off to spend a week in London. His heart had suddenly thumped and hurt then, just like it did now. And that had been because he loved his mother, and had suddenly realized that she was going to be away for a whole week. And mixed with the hurt had been just the same proud feeling, because his mother had looked so beautiful and nice, and somehow mother-ish.

The picture went. Peter opened his eyes wider, and devoured the pyramid with them.

All through the summer holidays the old man and the boy collected up masses and masses of plastic rubbish, mainly from the fairground. Mr. Hammond would plod along, looking deceptively as though he was going nowhere in particular; whilst Peter would scamper like a puppy, sometimes in front, sometimes behind; sometimes exuberantly chasing an airy-fairy slither of polythene bag, that always seemed to puff itself indifferently just out of his reach.

Once he found a plastic toy train; it had lost itself amongst the oily dusty bits and pieces right underneath the smallest merry-go round; Peter just managed to grip it with the very ends of his small fingers. He pulled it out triumphantly; it was red and blue, and very very dirty, and it must have been there for a long, long time.

Peter started off to show it to Mr. Hammond; he scurried along, in and out, in and out between the slow-moving crowds, clutching the dirty train to his tummy.

Suddenly he stopped, a look of consternation on his face. This was a train he was holding, a beautiful, beautiful train; he couldn't possibly

put that on the pyramid.

He found a quietish corner to sit down in, got out his hanky, and began cleaning it. Red bodywork, efficient blue wheels, and a neat yellow funnel. He turned it upside down, and looked inside; once it must have had a clockwork motor, you could see the slots where it had fitted in; maybe that was why its previous owner had thrown it down; Peter turned the wheels lovingly.

All at once he felt cold, somebody was standing in front of him, blocking off the sunlight. He looked up to see Mr. Hammond smiling down at him. Involuntarily he hugged the train tightly against his chest.

Mr. Hammond's gentle smile grew bigger, curling up the crinkles round his eyes. "I think," he said in his slow way, "that it would be a pity to add that to the collection, don't you?"

The same evening, after their plastic bags had reverently been put in place, they both stood outside the kitchen window gazing solemnly at the pyramid, just as they always did; and the now customary blissful feeling of loving pride gradually swept over them both, like a great warm wind.

Peter still held his train, but loosely, as he was no longer thinking about it. Suddenly, he glanced down at it, then, with a funny little look on his face, he lifted it up and put it firmly in one of Mr. Hammond's hands.

The old man's expression didn't change, but he understood perfectly what Peter wanted, and walked forward. Very carefully, he eased a little hole in the side of the pyramid, and pushed the train in, so that its flat red nose formed a tiny spot of brightness. Then he moved back to Peter's side again.

Still as statues they stood, time flowing obliviously by, until Peter remembered uncomfortably that he would be late for tea. He glanced at Mr. Hammond's absorbed face, and then faded unobtrusively from his side. Once out of the house he ran, his sandals making a flip-flapping noise along the dusty pavement.

The pyramid grew. It grew so huge that Mr. Hammond had to use a ladder to reach the top; and the base had grown bigger and bigger, inching itself farther and farther over the sad little garden.

Peter always marvelled at its neat shape. How did Mr. Hammond do it? But somehow the old man always seemed to know exactly where to place each new squashy bulgy bag, so that the lines of the pyramid

remained straight and true.

September. Peter went back to school. The fair ground closed, and development of the pyramid came almost to a standstill.

Every day, on his way home, Peter would drop in to see the pyramid. He had to. He felt he knew what it must be like to be a compulsive gambler; for he was a compulsive plastic pyramid gazer. And so, of course, was Mr. Hammond.

As the evenings grew shorter, the light from the setting sun glowed slant-wise on to the pyramid, and instead of appearing as its usual ugly grey self, it would most unexpectedly reflect the light, till it had an almost beautiful, translucent look.

It was on one of these sunset evenings that Mr. Hammond interrupted their gazing session by saying abruptly:

"What colour is it?"

"Colour?" replied Peter thoughtfully, "sort of warm blue."

"Is it?"

"Purple, then."

"It isn't, you know." Mr. Hammond spoke earnestly. "It isn't, it ought to be red, bloody red, like the sunset; but it isn't that either." He paused. "I think it's a new colour, a completely new colour."

Their sense of loving pride changed a little, now it was edged by a feeling of awe.

Christmas came, and because of it, Peter was unable to leave home for three whole days. Then on December 27th he was free once more. He dashed out of the house, and ran round to Mr. Hammond almost faster than his legs could carry him.

He stood for a second on the doorstep. Then he knocked, but there was no reply. Gently he turned the handle; the door was unlocked, so Peter went in. There was no one in the house. Peter walked uncertainly out into the garden.

There was the pyramid. And there was Mr. Hammond. He had his ear pressed to its side, and seemed to be listening to something.

Peter tiptoed across the garden, and carefully laid his ear against the side too. Very faintly, as though coming from an immense distance, he could hear a high pitched pipping sort of noise. "It's rather like morse," he murmured, "only kind of musical."

He listened entranced to the strange sound. Like morse, it was all on one note; but such a melodious note, such a meaningful note, with a weird, syncopated rhythm that seemed to thrum hypnotically right

through his head. He felt he wanted to cry.

All at once, it stopped. Peter pressed his ear frantically against the dusty polythene. Nothing.

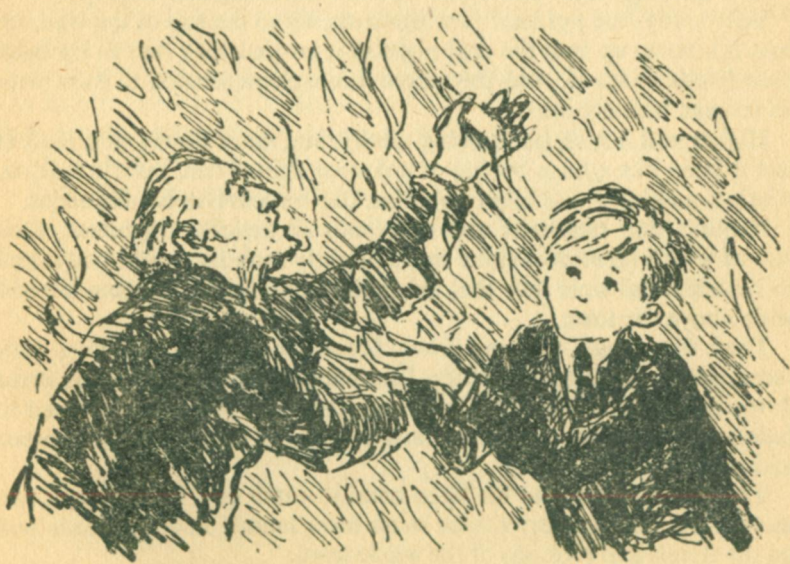
Feeling absolutely bereft, he walked slowly back to the house, scarcely noticing that Mr. Hammond was walking slowly back beside him.

Neither spoke, there was nothing that needed to be said. Peter went into the kitchen; he went straight across to the window, because he simply had to look into the garden again.

He blinked; for one second he thought that the pyramid had vanished, but it hadn't. All the same, there was something different about it.

"What's the matter?" said Mr. Hammond.

"I don't know," replied Peter. "I think, yes, I think I can't see any more where it begins and where it ends." He tried to make his eyes focus better, so as to see it more clearly, but he couldn't.



The next evening Mr. Hammond was waiting at the door when Peter came. Grabbing his arm, he stumbled him excitedly down the garden. "Touch it! touch it!" said the old man feverishly.

Slowly, Peter lifted his hand and touched the pyramid. It was sticky; not sticky like treacle, but sticky like sellotape. And another thing, it felt warm; more than warm, it was getting hot. Quickly he unstuck his hand, and then they both had to step backwards because the heat was intensifying still further.

Then everything seemed to be happening to the pyramid at once. It began to glow, even though it was long past sunset. The indescribable bluish tint seemed more indescribable than ever, but fantastically, hauntingly beautiful. At the same time, it began to throb with its peculiar morse song. A thin tear trickled down Mr. Hammond's old grey cheek.

They listened, enraptured, timeless, whilst the strange pyramid seemed to boil with blended sounds and colours before them. Then all at once, both sound and colour built up to a weird indistinguishable crescendo.

"It's moving," mouthed Peter. "Look! it's rising into the air."

Very softly, the pyramid rose upwards, up to the top of the wall, up past the trees, up into the dull night sky; so that they had to tip back their heads to see it. And the whole atmosphere seemed to burn with its strange blue colour.

Higher still it rose, but moving slowly, and more slowly still, until at last it hung like a huge bubble of coloured light. Then, bubble fashion, it burst, making a tiny blip of a noise, like a rocket on bonfire night.

It burst into hundreds and thousands of delicate fragments, each one of which seemed to shine more brightly than its parent body; and so insubstantial were they that the moist night air spread them far and wide above the town.

Then they began to come down. Some danced and whirled as they came, some spiralled gracefully like autumn leaves, and some came down in slow straight lines. And as they came, the colour seemed to fade and burn away, so that on finally reaching the earth they dimmed and went out like sparks.

The old man held out his large hand to catch one, Peter caught two more. And many, many others must have landed in the gardens and on the streets and rooftops of the whole town.

Very carefully, they carried them inside. Peter uncurled his hand and looked. He was holding two little wisps of polythene, ordinary, transparent, stretchy polythene. No colours glowing from them, no sound either, not even the tiniest, remotest ghost of a sound.

But there was one thing that was still different. Peter tried to pick them up with his other hand. But he couldn't, for they had stuck on to him, firmly and glue-ily.

He tried harder, and just managed to ease up one tiny floppy corner.

He stretched it, he pulled, and then . . . then he tried to let go, as fast as he could, and a shudder slithered down his back like a wet snake; a scream stuck in his young throat and he stepped back convulsively, his pink hands held stiffly in front of him.

The polythene was stretching on its own.

It writhed and bubbled and grew on his hands. It humped itself up into a point, and all at once it flowed spinelessly upwards into the air, twisting and bending and winding, like seaweed in the tide. But not like seaweed, because it seemed to have a mind of its own.

The whites of Peter's eyes showed, his body shook. This wasn't their polythene, it wasn't the harmless impersonal rubbish they had collected so patiently. It wasn't part of their beautiful glowing pyramid either; that had somehow contained goodness. But this, something had gone wrong with this.

He shuddered again, then without looking to see what was happening to Mr. Hammond, he fled, with a fearful clattering of his frightened feet. He fled, through the door and into the garden.

Then he stopped, aghast.

The plastic serpent writhed on his hands, and writhing up from the ground in every place were the others. Misty tenuous forms strangling round the trees, spreading in strange viscous shapes across the lawn, and sliding in treacly curtains over the roof and down the sides of the house.



The time has been my senses would have cool'd
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
As life were in't. I have supp'd full with horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me.

Macbeth, SHAKESPEARE



FINGERPRINT BOOKS

THE BIG SLEEP
by Raymond Chandler *21s*

THE HIGH WINDOW
by Raymond Chandler *21s*

THE SEAT OF THE SCORNFUL
by John Dickson Carr *21s*

THE WAXWORKS MURDER
by John Dickson Carr *21s*

THE LORD HAVE MERCY
by Shelley Smith *21s*

MAIGRET RIGHT AND WRONG
by Simenon *21s*

THE NARROWING CIRCLE
by Julian Symons *21s*

DEATH TAKES A WIFE
by Anthony Gilbert *25s*

A CASE TO ANSWER
by Edgar Lustgarten *21s*

To be published in September:

MALICE AFORETHOUGHT
by Francis Iles *25s*

FAREWELL MY LOVELY
by Raymond Chandler *25s*

DEATH OF MY AUNT
by C. H. B. Kitchin *21s*

HAMISH HAMILTON



CROOKS IN BOOKS

A review of some recent crime, mystery and detective books

“THE PRIVATE WOUND”, by Nicholas Blake (*Collins*, 18s.).

This most brilliant and classical crime story begins in “that marvellous summer of 1939 in the West of Ireland” and from the first paragraph holds our engrossed attention.

Beginning as it does with a seduction, the author turns the story into a most unusual love theme in which the three main characters develop their own high drama against the soft background of the hills and waters of the Irish western sea coast.

Most astonishing character of all is perhaps the priest—Father Bresihan who remains right to the last page both credible and poignant.

As for the quality of the writing nothing need be said for the splendour of the poet laureate’s language is known to us all.

“I’M TRYING TO GIVE IT UP,” by Desmond Skirrow (*Bodley Head*, 21s.).

The more thrillers one reads the more greedy one becomes. At first when very young, a murder or two, some smart detection and the answer on the last page but one will suffice. But then one starts to ask for quality of writing and plot. Next for an exotic setting and some politics. Finally one asks for the lot—thrills, plots, settings, politics, suspense and a firm dash of humour as well! And that is what advertising director Desmond Skirrow is now doing for us in his writing. The book goes with a dash, a great many laughs and dangers and ends with the hero back to his ‘golden girl’.

* * *

I don’t think any more could be asked for in good holiday reading.

Faber books

Faber & Faber 24 Russell Square London WC1

Hell is Where You Find It

JOHN WELCOME

'escapist entertainment that has pace and variety . . . The action moves smartly from a background of aristocratic England to some of the seedier parts of Paris . . . The book is at its best when it is concerned with racehorses and the people who gather round racehorses.' *Ken Gray, The Irish Times* 21s

A Comeback for Starke

HAMISH READE

'Hyper-sophisticated, homicidal, nightmarish yet farcical London spy-thriller in which nearly everybody is perverted enough to be blackmailed all the way from Soho to Vladivostock . . . Mr Reade can write, and is often funny.' *Maurice Richardson, The Observer* 21s

Best Crime Stories 3

edited and with an introduction by

JOHN WELCOME

21s

Best Mystery Stories

edited and with an introduction by

MAURICE RICHARDSON

'A satisfying collection.' *Punch* 21s

"CONQUEST CALLS THE TUNE", by Berkeley Gray (*Robert Hale, 16s.*).

A new hero emerges in the crime and detection world—that of a young and rather pleasant young man called Norman Conquest, complete with pretty little wife.

The blackmail of a number of smallish tradesmen is the crime to be detected and throughout the tale moves quickly along with perfectly credible background and characterisation. These things indeed might be happening in any great city in England today. Which makes the book so much more enthralling reading.

I rather like Norman Conquest and his pretty little wife and I look forward to his next adventure and the perhaps hardening and tightening of some of the dialogue—and certainly some of the descriptive passages.

"HELL IS WHERE YOU FIND IT," by John Welcome (*Faber & Faber, 21s.*).

There is no doubt at all that this new book of John Welcome's will be a winner from the first furlong. It has all the ingredients of steeplechasing, horse doping and downright wickedness that "Richard Graham" can handle so brilliantly—and at times so poignantly.

Apart from horses and the thrills of amateur racing there is a rather remarkable girl, Virginia Bryson, who does more than just sleep around. To this add national security and a French setting of the master mind at evil work and you have a book that just has to be read at one sitting.

CRIME CLUB

Andrew Garve

THE LONG SHORT CUT

'Highly ingenious . . . Mr Garve's best for several books'

EDMUND CRISPIN, SUNDAY TIMES

'A most rewarding entertainment'

PETER PHILLIPS, SUN

Crime Club Choice 18s

George Davis

CRIME IN THREADNEEDLE STREET

'Just the thing for a wet Saturday afternoon' YORKSHIRE POST

Crime Club Recommendation 18s

Anthony Gilbert

NIGHT ENCOUNTER

'Masterly plot' SUN. TELEGRAPH

Crime Club Recommendation 18s

Roderic Jefferies

A TRAITOR'S CRIME

'Really good stuff' GUARDIAN

'Refreshingly different, and with an ingenious legal twist'

H. R. F. KEATING, TIMES

Crime Club Choice 18s

Robert Hale

*a selection of new
thrillers*

**james hadley
CHASE**

an ear to the ground

**john d.
MacDONALD**

one fearful yellow eye
a key to the suite
darker than amber

**peter
CHAMBERS**

no peace for the
wicked
speak ill of the dead

**bernard
NEWMAN**

the jail-breakers

16/- each

Robert Hale

"THE LONG, SHORT CUT", by Andrew Garve (*Collins, 18s.*)

Sometimes one buys a thriller to while away a journey or to forget the dull routine of the day. Then indeed one needs the normal "readable" plot, counterplot, suspense and tidying up of the mystery. And this is exactly what Andrew Garve gives us once again in splendid measure in his new book *The Long, Short Cut*.

Anthony Bliss meets the girl who is to become his partner in the profession of "conning" in a gambling club, but as he leaves the club he becomes the witness of a shooting and from then on is in dire peril from a dangerous gang of criminals. This, however, is but challenge and Bliss's scheme as carried out by Corinne and himself, provides the proper amount of engrossing reading with its sequence of fantastic turns and twists.

"DEADLIGHT," by Archie Roy (*John Long, 22s. 6d.*)

When a Scots doctor of astrophysics spends his summer holiday on the Island of Arran and turns to thriller writing, we can expect something quite unusual. And that is exactly what this first novel of Dr. Roy's is—something quite excitingly unusual, well written and well planned.

The story opens with the Buchanan-like theme of a young widow persuading her late husband's friend to investigate an inexplicable and tragic death. What the friend does eventually find on the Island of Arran involves

him in much violence and danger.

The investigation and its perils is not, however, sufficient for Dr. Roy with his scientist's love of "new leads" and quite suddenly the story takes on a very powerful theme indeed—that of a secret that could change the whole future of mankind. A most excellent first novel, vital and inventive.

* * *

Good for bedtime, excellent for travel reading.

"THE OLD MAN DIES", by Georges Simenon (*Hamish Hamilton*, 18s.).

August the elderly owner of a celebrated restaurant in the Halles district of Paris collapses and dies

dramatically leaving no will but with the hinted possession of a million francs hidden away.

Into this situation Simenon weaves his fatal character studies of all the most unpleasant human qualities. The studies are of course brilliant, but how one longs for just one kind and good human being—indeed a witty or humorous portrait to break the macabre gloom.

For the many thousands of Simenon fans I would, however, reassure them that brilliant plot and action are there and the hand of the master in the weaving of them. Many times though, I have felt that Simenon should be better translated so that some subtle touches of characterisation could come through more clearly.

The Evil People 25s

'A high octane diet for even the most sophisticated connoisseurs of the macabre'
EVENING NEWS

The Midnight People 30s

Bram Stoker, Ray Bradbury, Basil Copper –
the greatest vampire stories of them all

Both compiled by Peter Haining
Both enough to keep you awake and gibbering

leslie frewin

'WHEREVER GOOD BOOKS ARE SOLD'

CRIME IN FACT

MURDER BY WITCHCRAFT

Donald McCormick
A study of the Lower
Quinton and Hagley
Wood murders.



Illus 30s

CRIME IN FICTION

ANTONY BROWN

Slay Me Suddenly

22s 6d



ERIC BAILEY

Leave of Absence

22s 6d

ALFRED TACK

The Spy Who Wasn't
Exchanged

18s

PETER ALDING

Circle of Danger

22s 6d

BILL KNOX

The Klondyker

22s 6d

HAMILTON JOBSON

Therefore I Killed Him

18s

JOHN LONG

"THE DEEP, DEEP FREEZE", by
William Garner (*Collins*, 21s.).

Divided Europe forms the background of this highly complex narrative. Double agents, a Nazi war criminal, people with long memories involved in World War II and action on the East/West German border keep one guessing, at times, as to who is working for whom.

William Garner, a professional writer since he left the RAF at the end of the war, had great success with his first "who-dun-it", "Overkill" and it may well be repeated with this story. His service experience is evident—the official situations have an authentic ring to them.

If you like to concentrate on international espionage for your light reading, this is for you.

"ROMAN RING", by C. P. Bracken
(*Cassell*, 16s.).

A young devotee of literary treasures finds herself caught up in an international racket, when she goes to Rome to catalogue a collection of valuable books. Intrigue develops into a situation which leads to two murders.

Despite a string of complicated events, the story is presented in a lucid way—easy to follow, easy to read; this mark of professionalism is quite surprising, as it is the author's first book. In this instance, her own background of work in various countries of Europe, plus a personal interest in antiques and rare books, have helped to formulate the story.

Let us hope this is the first of

many, many more from Miss Bracken, if she can maintain this standard.

"NICK THE CLICK", by G. K. Wilkinson (*Cassell, 18s.*).

Described on the dust jacket as the "funniest crime story to come out of London's underworld" Nick the Click is the tale of a pornographic photographer who finds he has peep-holes into the apartment in which a crime is being planned. Pornography is disappointed this time, but Nick takes his pictures of the strange actions of Gloria and the man visiting her and the tale is now set for a crime farce full of good laughs, fast action and plenty of thrills.

The climax is success to—Nick, a

place in the sun oodles of lolly—but for whom? And it's *almost* credible. And certainly very, very funny.

"THE BIRD WATCHER," by Joe Alex Morris (*Cassell, 25s.*).

This book of space programme sabotage is not at all easy to read—*except at the opening of each chapter.* For the style is part journalistic reporting, part documentary pen-picture and the rest very staccato dialogue. The result is that it is necessary to keep putting the book down and having another read another day. To most suspense readers this is a disadvantage but on the whole the *Bird Watcher* is a very good sabotage book indeed and if it takes you several days to read then you are really getting your money's worth.



Colin Watson

CHARITY ENDS AT HOME

In the latest 'Flaxborough' story Inspector Purbright finds himself investigating a case of murder strangely involved with the lively and competitive local charities, and the indefatigable Miss Lucy Teatime makes another appearance. 22s 6d

EYRE & SPOTTISWOODE

L. P. DAVIES *The Alien*

"No ordinary 'chase and espionage' story, for L. P. Davies has a number of clever and unexpected twists for the incautious reader . . . moves at a fierce pace throughout." TOM BOARDMAN, *Books and Bookmen* 20s.

WILLIAM COUGHLIN

The Dividend Was Death

"Of course Daddy was mad and screamed murder when his lovely daughter was featured in the nude in a girlie magazine. And murder followed. But was it Daddy?" *Evening News* 21s.

SCOTT MITCHELL

Double Bluff

"Mr. Mitchell fills his plot with plenty of incident and character. His style is simple, but clear, and gets to grips immediately with the fast-moving action of the story." *South Wales Echo* 21s.

A new Sam Durell adventure

EDWARD S. AARONS

Assignment Manchurian Doll

"The assignments of Sam Durell are among the best modern adventure stories." *New York Sunday Times* 15s.

Herbert Jenkins

THE NARROWING CIRCLE, by Julian Symons (*Hamish Hamilton*, 21s.).

As one reads this story of *Gross Enterprises* who turn out three hundred novels a year all written on the premises, I began to wonder if indeed it might not be actually happening at this moment. For the number of repetitive fiction that reaches the reviewers' hands is quite remarkable to-day.

However, the story though set in this—to a reviewer horrific background—is about a murder and the possible upgrading of an Editor.

It is an ingenious thriller with some very funny passages and I am not at all sure that Mr. Symons is not perhaps describing what is just about to happen—at any rate in the thriller and suspense world!

In its way *The Narrowing Circle* is a brilliant study of the writers' world and it should rank as quite outstanding in its skill.

"FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE", by Barry England (*Jonathan Cape*, 21s.).

Quite the most fantastic and heroic escape story I have ever read.

Two captured soldiers—one MacConnachie a strong, crude and forceful character makes the break after selecting a younger and more intelligent man—Ansell to accompany him on the desperate enterprise.

Slowly—so terribly slowly, the men creep on—their objective a mountain range four hundred miles away.

Then into the pursuit comes a helicopter whose pilot becomes a third

in the drama—watching, tracking and eventually dropping incendiaries to burn the two men out.

The climax on the drenched mountain side is a shout of triumph—the triumph not of success, but of courage, discipline and eventual love between the two men surpassing their appalling suffering and oppression.

"Figures in a Landscape" is a first novel and we hope it augurs many more as penetrating and compelling.

"THE VIVERO LETTER", by Desmond Bagley (*Collins, 25s.*).

Quite one of the most enjoyable and well written adventure thrillers I have read for many months.

It starts with the rude rejection of a young man by his girl friend at a party as "a grey little man in a grey

little job—I'll drop him when I find someone more interesting."

But the grey little man is a stern individualist and when his farming brother is murdered, he sets off to track down the murderer himself in no "small, grey way".

The trail moves off to the South Americas with a strange gold tray as the possible key to unimaginable riches.

There is courage, brilliant characterisation and a splendid sense of development in the book. My only quarrel is that I would have liked the hero to return to his Devon farm, go on with his plans there and tell us about it. I could just have followed the little, grey man for many, many more chapters. Impossible to praise the book highly enough.

The funniest crime story to come
out of London's underworld

NICK THE CLICK

by G. K. WILKINSON

The Great Jewel Robbery was the perfect crime, first conceived in America by Gloria Schmitz and carried out in Bond Street. That it failed was not her fault: she picked on Fanny Bracegarter completely at random and, not being a citizen of Soho, she could not know that an artist in the erotic, one Nick the Click, had peepholes in Fanny's apartment. The delightfully amusing story of Nick's manipulations in Soho's murkier depths builds up to an hilarious climax. 18/-

FILM RIGHTS BOUGHT BY RONALD KAHN, PRODUCER OF
"PRUDENCE AND THE PILL"

CASSELL

MACDONALD the Cream of Crime!

STANLEY ELLIN

THE VALENTINE ESTATE

The latest mystery-thriller, set in London, by the author whose *House of Cards* was described by novelist JOHN BRAINE as "... the only book I've read which one can compare with John Buchan's *The Thirty Nine Steps*" 25s

MICHAEL UNDERWOOD

THE MAN WHO KILLED TOO SOON

One of young solicitor Richard Monk's toughest cases. "Strongly recommended..." EDMUND CRISPIN *Sunday Times* "... a whacking great surprise at the end." FRANCIS ILES *Guardian*. 21s

BEST AMERICAN DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR: 17th Series

Edited by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The fifth collection of the best writing in mystery and suspense compiled by the late *New York Times* critic.

26 September/28s

LAURENCE ORIOL

A MURDER TO MAKE YOU GROW UP, LITTLE GIRL

The second psychological thriller by the author of the prize-winning *Short Circuit*.

31 October/21s

"A CASE TO ANSWER", by Edgar Lustgarten (*Hamish Hamilton*, 21s.).

One might think that a lengthy account of an Old Bailey trial would be dull reading, but presented as it is by a first-class writer and noted criminologist, it keeps one's curiosity aroused until the end. Not that the trial alone is the whole story, there are the events which lead up to it; the discovery in Soho of a murdered woman in sordid circumstances triggers off enquiries that end in the arrest of Arthur Groom, a rather insignificant young London clerk who—most of the time—leads a narrow and ultra-respectable life in his equally rather insignificant home.

"A Case to Answer" has stood the test of time well—as do most of the factual and fiction works of Edgar Lustgarten.

"SKIN FOR SKIN", by Douglas Rutherford (*Collins*, 18s.).

You have but to read the first three pages of this book to know that you are on to a fast-moving and enthralling story. Not a word is wasted, not a movement without purpose—nor a character without impact.

The central plot is around car thefts in Great Britain—of which it appears 7,583 last year were so recorded officially.

This car theft is noticed by a young girl—Linda—from her sitting-room window and is duly reported. Then Linda disappears and the story takes on a sinister tinge, for Linda has been too observant and the criminals are not going to risk another murder charge.



THE LONDON
MYSTERY SELECTION