

HAUNTS, HAUNTS, HAUNTS



SELECTED BY
HELEN HOKE

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Illustrations by Charles Keeping

Helen Hoke has once again put together a collection of horrifying stories sure to make your skin crawl. These are not Halloween tales, but spine-tingling tales of footprints oozing blood, peculiar potions, terrifying happenings in isolated castles and inns, and eerie sounds of whistling and violins. Such well-known creators of terror as John Wyndham, Rudyard Kipling, Franz Kafka, H. P. Lovecraft, and A. M. Burrage are together here in this book, ready to hold you spell-bound from the first unsettling page to the last.



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From Close Behind Him

HAUNTS, HAUNTS, HAUNTS

SELECTED BY
HELEN HOKE

*Illustrated by
Charles Keeping*

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Contents

WITHDRAWN

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	6
CLOSE BEHIND HIM <i>John Wyndham</i>	9
THE HOUSE SURGEON <i>Rudyard Kipling</i>	24
THE HELMSMAN <i>Franz Kafka</i>	52
ME AND MY SHADOW <i>Eric Frank Russell</i>	54
THE WAXWORK <i>A. M. Burrage</i>	73
THE INN <i>A. M. Burrage</i>	88
THE CLOAK <i>Robert Bloch</i>	104
THE SOUL CAGES <i>T. Crofton Croker</i>	124
THE WHISTLING ROOM <i>William Hope Hodgson</i>	140
THE MUSIC OF ERICH ZANN <i>H. P. Lovecraft</i>	160
DEADLINE <i>Richard Matheson</i>	171
DON'T LOOK BEHIND YOU <i>Frederic Brown</i>	178

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Close Behind Him

JOHN WYNDHAM

In which Smudger and Spotty are caught in the act by the owner of the house they are robbing. But this man doesn't behave like an ordinary citizen awakened by burglars—he crouches, arms raised, and springs like an animal, his teeth sinking into Spotty's leg. Spotty panics and hits out with a lead pipe, killing the man. A case of murder is enough to worry about, but even more terrifying are the footprints which begin to follow Spotty wherever he goes . . . the prints of bare feet, glistening with blood!

“**Y**OU didn't ought to of croaked him,” Smudger said resentfully. “Why did you want to do a fool thing like that for?”

Spotty turned to look at the house, a black spectre against the night sky. He shuddered.

“It was him or me,” he muttered. “I wouldn't of done it if he didn't come for me—and I wouldn't even then, not if he'd come ordinary . . .”

“What do you mean ordinary?”

“Like anybody else. But he was queer . . . He wasn't—well, I guess he was crazy—dangerous crazy . . .”

“All he needed was a tap to keep him quiet,” Smudger persisted. “There was no call to bash his loaf in.”

“You didn't see him. I tell you, he didn't act human.” Spotty shuddered again at the recollection, and bent down to rub the calf of his right leg tenderly.

The man had come into the room while Spotty was sifting rapidly through the contents of a desk. He'd made no sound. It had been just a feeling, a natural alertness, that had brought

Spotty round to see him standing there. In that very first glimpse Spotty had felt there was something queer about him. The expression on his face—his attitude—they were wrong. In his biscuit-toned pyjamas, he should have looked just an ordinary citizen awakened from sleep, too anxious to have delayed with dressing-gown and slippers. But some way he didn't. An ordinary citizen would have shown nervousness, at least wariness; he would most likely have picked up something to use as a weapon. This man stood crouching, arms a little raised, as though he were about to spring.

Moreover, any citizen whose lips curled back as this man's did to show his tongue licking hungrily between his teeth, should have been considered sufficiently un-ordinary to be locked away safely. In the course of his profession Spotty had developed reliable nerves, but the look of this man rocked them. Nobody should be pleased by the discovery of a burglar at large in his house. Yet there could be no doubt that this victim was looking at Spotty with satisfaction. An unpleasant gloating kind of satisfaction, like that which might appear on a fox's face at the sight of a plump chicken. Spotty hadn't liked the look of him at all, so he had pulled out the convenient piece of pipe that he carried for emergencies. . .

Far from showing alarm, the man took a step closer. He poised, sprung on his toes like a wrestler.

"You keep off me, mate," said Spotty, holding up his nine inches of lead pipe as a warning.

Either the man did not hear—or the words held no interest for him. His long, bony face snarled. He shifted a little closer. Spotty backed up against the edge of the desk. "I don't want no trouble. You just keep off me," he said again.

The man crouched a little lower. Spotty watched him through narrowed eyes. An extra tensing of the man's muscles gave him a fractional warning before the attack.

The man came without feinting or rushing: he simply sprang, like an animal.

In mid-leap he encountered Spotty's boot suddenly erected

like a stanchion in his way. It took him in the middle and felled him. He sprawled on the floor doubled up, with one arm hugging his belly. The other hand threatened, with fingers bent into hooks. His head turned in jerks, his jaws with their curiously sharp teeth were apart, like a dog's about to snap.

Spotty knew just as well as Smudger that what was required was a quietening tap. He had been about to deliver it with professional skill and quality when the man, by an extraordinary wriggle, had succeeded in fastening his teeth into Spotty's leg. It was unexpected, excruciating enough to ruin Spotty's aim and make the blow ineffectual. So he had hit again; harder this time. Too hard. And even then he had more or less had to pry the man's teeth out of his leg . . .

But it was not so much his aching leg—nor even the fact that he had killed the man—that was the chief cause of Spotty's concern. It was the kind of man he had killed.

"Like an animal he was," he said, and the recollection made him sweat. "Like a wild animal! And the way he looked! His eyes! They wasn't human."

That aspect of the affair held little interest for Smudger. He'd not seen the man until he was already dead and looking like any other corpse. His present concern was that a mere matter of burglary had been abruptly transferred to the murder category—a class of work he had always kept clear of until now.

The job had looked easy enough. There shouldn't have been any trouble. A man living alone in a large house—a pretty queer customer with a pretty queer temper. On Fridays, Sundays, and sometimes on Wednesdays, there were meetings at which about twenty people came to the house and did not leave until the small hours of the following morning. All this information was according to Smudger's sister, who learned it third hand from the woman who cleaned the house. The woman was darkly speculative, but unspecific, about what went on at these gatherings. But from Smudger's point of view the important thing was that on other nights the man was alone in the house.

He seemed to be a dealer of some kind. People brought odd

curios to the house to sell to him. Smudger had been greatly interested to hear that they were paid for—and paid for well—in cash. That was a solid practical consideration. Beside it, the vaguely ill reputation of the place, the queerness of its furnishings, and the rumours of strange goings-on at the gatherings, were unimportant. The only thing worthy of attention were the facts that the man lived alone and had items of value in his possession.

Smudger had thought of it as a one-man job at first, and with a little more information he might have tackled it on his own. He discovered that there was a telephone, but no dog. He was fairly sure of the room in which the money must be kept, but unfortunately his sister's source of information had its limitations. He did not know whether there were burglar alarms or similar precautions, and he was too uncertain of the cleaning woman to attempt to get into the house by a subterfuge for a preliminary investigation. So he had taken Spotty in with him on a fifty-fifty basis.

The reluctance with which he had taken that step had now become an active regret—not only because Spotty had been foolish enough to kill the man, but because the way things had been he could easily have made a hundred per cent haul on his own—and not been fool enough to kill the man had he been detected.

The attaché case which he carried now was well-filled with bundles of notes, along with an assortment of precious-looking objects in gold and silver, probably eminently traceable, but useful if melted down. It was irritating to think that the whole load, instead of merely half of it, might have been his. . .

The two men stood quietly in the bushes for some minutes and listened. Satisfied, they pushed through a hole in the hedge, then moved cautiously down the length of the neighbouring field in its shadow.

Spotty's chief sensation was relief at being out of the house. He hadn't liked the place from the moment they had entered. For one thing, the furnishings weren't like those he was used to.

Unpleasant idols or carved figures of some kind stood about in unexpected places, looming suddenly out of the darkness into his flashlight's beam with hideous expressions on their faces. There were pictures and pieces of tapestry that were macabre and shocking to a simple burglar. Spotty was not particularly sensitive, but these seemed to him highly unsuitable to have about the home.

The same quality extended to more practical objects. The legs of a large oak table had been carved into mythical miscegenates of repulsive appearance. The two bowls which stood upon the table were either genuine or extremely good representations of polished human skulls. Spotty could not imagine why, in one room, anybody should want to mount a crucifix on the wall upside down and place on a shelf beneath it a row of sconces holding nine black candles—then flank the whole with two pictures of an indecency so revolting it almost took his breath away. All these things had somehow combined to rattle his usual hard-headedness.

But even though he was out of the place now, he didn't feel quite free of its influence. He decided he wouldn't feel properly himself again until they were in the car and several miles away. . .

After working around two fields they came to the dusty white lane off which they had parked the car. They prospected carefully. By now the sky had cleared of clouds and the moonlight showed the road empty in both directions. Spotty scrambled through the hedge, across the ditch, and stood on the road in a quietness broken only by Smudger's progress through the hedge. Then he started to walk towards the car.

He had gone about a dozen paces when Smudger's voice stopped him: "Hey, Spotty. What've you got on your feet?"

Spotty stopped and looked down. There was nothing remarkable about his feet; his boots looked just as they had always looked.

"What?" he began.

"No! Behind you!"

Spotty looked back. From the point where he had stepped on

to the road to another some five feet behind where he now stood was a series of footprints, dark in the white dust. He lifted his foot and examined the sole of his boot; the dust was clinging to it. He turned his eyes back to the footmarks once more. They looked black, and seemed to glisten.

Smudger bent down to peer more closely. When he looked up again there was a bewildered expression on his face. He gazed at Spotty's boots, and then back to the glistening marks. The prints of bare feet . . .

"There's something funny going on here," he said inadequately.

Spotty, looking back over his shoulder, took another step forward. Five feet behind him a new mark of a bare foot appeared from nowhere.

A watery feeling swept over Spotty. He took another experimental step. As mysteriously as before, another footmark appeared. He turned widened eyes on Smudger. Smudger looked back at him. Neither said anything for a moment. Then Smudger bent down, touched one of the marks with his finger, then shone his flashlight on the finger.

"Red," he said. "Like blood . . ."

The words broke the trance that had settled on Spotty. Panic seized him. He stared around wildly, then began to run. After him followed the footprints. Smudger ran too. He noticed that the marks were no longer the prints of a full foot but only its forepart, as if whatever made them were also running.

Spotty was frightened, but not badly enough to forget the turn where they had parked the car beneath some trees. He made for it, and clambered in. Smudger, breathing heavily, got in on the other side and dropped the attaché case in the back.

"Going to get out of this lot quick," Spotty said, pressing the starter.

"Take it easy," advised Smudger. "We got to think."

But Spotty was in no thinking mood. He got into gear, jolted out of hiding, and turned down the lane.

A mile or so farther on Smudger turned back from craning



out of the window.

“Not a sign,” he said, relieved. “Reckon we’ve ditched it—whatever it was.” He thought for some moments, then he said: “Look here, if those marks were behind us all the way from the house, they’ll be able to follow them by daylight to where we parked the car.”

“They’d’ve found the car marks anyway,” Spotty replied.

“But what if they’re *still* following?” Smudger suggested.

“You just said they weren’t.”

“Maybe they couldn’t keep up with us. But suppose they’re coming along somewhere behind us, leaving a trail?”

Spotty had greatly recovered, he was almost his old practical self again. He stopped the car. “All right. We’ll see,” he said grimly. “And if they are—what then?”

He lit a cigarette with a hand that was almost steady. Then he leaned out of the car, studying the road behind them. The moonlight was strong enough to show up any dark marks.

“What do you reckon it was?” he said, over his shoulder. “We can’t both’ve been seeing things.”

“They were real enough,” Smudger looked at the stain still on his finger. . .

On a sudden idea, Spotty pulled up his right trouser leg. The marks of the teeth were there, and there was a little blood, too, soaked into his sock, but he couldn’t make that account for anything.

The minutes passed. Still there was no manifestation of footprints. Smudger got out and walked a few yards back along the road to make sure. After a moment’s hesitation Spotty followed him.

“Not a sign,” Smudger said. “I reckon—hey!” He broke off, looking behind Spotty.

Spotty turned around. Behind him was a trail of dark, naked footprints leading *from* the car.

Spotty stared. He walked back to the car; the footprints followed. It was a chastened Spotty who sat down in the car.

“Well?”

Smudger had nothing to offer. Smudger, in fact, was considerably confused. Several aspects of the situation were competing for his attention. The footsteps were not following *him*, so he found himself less afraid of them than of their possible consequences. They were laying a noticeable trail for anyone to follow to Spotty, and the trouble was that the trail would lead to him, too, if he and Spotty kept together.

The immediate solution that occurred to him was that they split up, and Spotty take care of his own troubles. The best way would be to divide the haul right here and now. If Spotty could succeed in shaking off the footprints, good for him. After all, the killing was none of Smudger's affair. . .

He was about to make the suggestion when another aspect occurred to him. If Spotty were picked up with part of the stuff on him, the case would be clinched. It was also possible that Spotty, in a bad jam with nothing to lose, might spill. A far safer way would be for him to hold the stuff. Then Spotty could come for his share when, and if, he succeeded in losing the telltale prints.

It was obviously the only safe and reasonable course. The trouble was that Spotty, when it was suggested to him, did not see it that way.

They drove a few more miles, each occupied with his own thoughts. In a quiet lane they stopped once more. Again Spotty got out of the car and walked a few yards away from it. The moon was lower, but it still gave enough light to show the footprints following him. He came back looking more worried than frightened. Smudger decided to cut a possible loss and go back to his former plan.

"Look here," he suggested, "what say we share out the takings now, and you drop me off a bit up the road?"

Spotty looked doubtful, but Smudger pressed: "If you can shake that trail off, well and good. If you can't—well, there's no sense in us both getting pinched, is there? Anyway, it was you as croaked him. And one has a better chance of getting away than two."

Spotty was still not keen, but he had no alternative to offer.

Smudger pulled the attaché case out of the back and opened it between them. Spotty began to separate the bundles of notes into two piles. It had been a good haul. As Smudger watched, he felt a great sadness that half of it was going to benefit nobody when Spotty was picked up. Sheer waste, it seemed to him.

Spotty, with his head bent down over his work, did not notice Smudger draw the piece of lead pipe out of his pocket. Smudger brought it down on the back of his head with such force and neatness that it is doubtful whether Spotty ever knew anything about it.

Smudger stopped the car at the next bridge and pushed Spotty's body over the low wall. He watched as the ripples widened out across the canal below. Then he drove on. . .

It was three days later that Smudger got home. He arrived in the kitchen soaked to the skin, and clutching his attaché case. He was looking worn, white, and ready to drop. He dragged a chair away from the table and slumped into it.

"Bill!" his wife whispered. "What is it? Are they after you?"

"No, Liz—at least, it ain't the cops. But something is."

He pointed to a mark close inside the door. At first she thought it was his own wet footprint.

"Get a wet cloth, Liz, and clean up the front step and the passage before anyone sees it," he said.

She hesitated, puzzled.

"For God's sake, do it quick, Liz," he urged her.

Still half bewildered, she went through the dark passage and opened the door. The rain was pelting down, seeming to bounce up from the road as it hit it. The gutters were running in torrents. Everything streamed with wetness save the doorstep protected by the small jutting porch. And on the step was the blood-red print of a naked foot . . .

In a kind of trance she went down on her knees and swabbed it clean with the wet cloth. Closing the door, she switched on the lights and saw the prints leading towards the kitchen. When she had cleaned them up, she went back to her husband.

“You been hit, Bill?”

He looked at her, elbows on the table, his head supported between his hands.

“No,” he said. “It ain’t me what’s making them marks, Liz—it’s what’s followin’ me.”

“Following you? You mean they been following you all the way from the job?” she said incredulously. “How did you get back?”

Smudger explained. His immediate anxiety, after pitching Spotty into the canal, had been to rid himself of the car. It had been a pinch for the job, and the number and description would have been circulated. He had parked it in a quiet spot and got out to walk, maybe pick up a lift. When he had gone a few yards he had looked back and seen the line of prints behind him. They had frightened him a good deal more than he now admitted. Until that moment he had assumed that since they had been following Spotty they would have followed him into the canal. Now, it seemed, they had transferred their attentions to himself. He tried a few more steps: they followed. With a great effort he got a grip on himself, and refrained from running. He perceived that unless he wanted to leave a clear trail he must go back to the car. He did.

Farther on he tried again, and with a sinking, hopeless feeling observed the same result. Back in the car, he lit a cigarette and considered plans with as much calmness as he could collect.

The thing to do was to find something that would not show tracks—or would not hold them. A flash of inspiration came to him, and he headed the car towards the river.

The sky was barely grey yet. He fancied that he managed to get the car down to the towpath without being seen. At any rate, no one had hailed him as he cut through the long grass to the water’s edge. From there he had made his way downstream, plodding along through a few inches of water until he found a rowboat. It was a venerable and decrepit affair, but it served his purpose.

From then on his journey had been unexciting, but also



uncomfortable. During the day he had become extremely hungry, but he did not dare to leave the boat until after dark, and then he moved only in the darkest streets where the marks might not be seen. Both that day and the next two he had spent hoping for rain. This morning, in a drenching downpour that looked like it might continue for hours, he had sunk the boat and made his way home, trusting that the trail would be washed away. As far as he knew, it had been. . .

Liz was less impressed than she ought to have been.

“I reckon it must be something on your boots,” she said practically. “Why didn’t you buy some new ones?”

He looked at her with a dull resentment. “It ain’t nothing on my boots,” he said. “Didn’t I tell you it was following me? You seen the marks. How could they come off my boots? Use your head.”

“But it don’t make sense. Not the way you say it. *What’s* following you?”

“How do I know,” he said bitterly. “All I know is that it makes them marks—and they’re getting closer, too.”

“How do you mean closer?”

“Just what I say. The first day they was about five feet behind me. Now they’re between three and four.”

It was not the kind of thing that Liz could take in too easily.

“It don’t make sense,” she repeated.

It made no more sense during the days that followed, but she ceased to doubt. Smudger stayed in the house; whatever was following stayed with him. The marks of it were everywhere: on the stairs, upstairs, downstairs. Half Liz’s time was spent in cleaning them up lest someone should come in and see them. They got on her nerves. But not as badly as they got on Smudger’s . . .

Even Liz could not deny that the feet were stepping a little more closely behind him—a little more closely each day.

“And what happens when they catch up?” Smudger demanded fearfully. “Tell me that. What can I do? What the hell can I do?”

But Liz had no suggestions. Nor was there anyone else they

dared ask about it. . .

Smudger began to dream nights. He'd whimper and she'd wake him up asking what was the matter. The first time he could not remember, but the dream was repeated, growing a little clearer with each recurrence. A black shape appeared to hang over him as he lay. It was vaguely manlike in form, but it hovered in the air as if suspended. Gradually it sank lower and lower until it rested upon him—but weightlessly, like a pattern of fog. It seemed to flow up towards his head, and he was in panic lest it should cover his face and smother him, but at his throat it stopped. There was a prickling at the side of his neck. He felt strangely weak, as though tiredness suddenly invaded him. At the same time the shadow appeared to grow denser. He could feel, too, that there began to be some weight in it as it lay upon him. Then, mercifully, Liz would wake him.

So real was the sensation that he inspected his neck carefully in the mirror when he shaved. But there was no mark there.

Gradually the glistening red prints closed in behind him. A foot behind his heels, six inches, three inches . . .

Then came a morning when he woke tired and listless. He had to force himself to get up, and when he looked in the mirror, there *was* a mark on his throat. He called Liz, in a panic. But it was only a very small mark, and she made nothing of it.

But the next morning his lassitude was greater. It needed all his will-power to drag himself up. The pallor of his face shocked Liz—and himself too, when he saw it in the shaving mirror. The red mark on his neck stood out more vividly . . .

The next day he did not get up. . .

Two days later Liz became frightened enough to call in the doctor. It was a confession of desperation. Neither of them cared for the doctor, who knew or guessed uncomfortably much about the occupations of his patients. One called a doctor for remedies, not for homilies on one's way of life.

He came, he hummed, he ha'ed. He prescribed a tonic, and had a talk with Liz.

"He's seriously anaemic," he said. "But there's more to it than that. Something on his mind." He looked at her. "Have

you any idea what it is?”

Liz's denial was unconvincing. He did not even pretend to believe it.

“I'm no magician,” he said. “If you don't help me, I can't help him. Some kinds of worry can go on pressing and nagging like an abscess.”

Liz continued to deny. For a moment she had been tempted to tell about the footmarks, but caution warned her that once she began she would likely be trapped into saying more than was healthy.

“Think it over,” the doctor advised. “And let me know tomorrow how he is.”

The next morning there was no doubt that Smudger was doing very badly. The tonic had done him no good at all. He lay in bed with his eyes, when they were open, looking unnaturally large in a drawn white face. He was so weak that she had to feed him with a spoon. He was frightened, too, that he was going to die. So was Liz. The alarm in her voice when she telephoned the doctor was unmistakably genuine.

“All right, I'll be around within an hour,” he told her. “Have you found out what's on his mind yet?” he added.

“N-no,” Liz told him. . .

When he came he told her to stay downstairs while he went up to see the patient. It seemed to her that an intolerably long time passed before she heard his feet on the stairs and she went out to meet him in the hall. She looked up into his face with mute anxiety. His expression was serious, and puzzled, so that she was afraid to hear him speak.

But at last she asked: “Is—is he going to die, Doctor?”

“He's very weak—very weak indeed,” the doctor said. After a pause, he added: “Why didn't you tell me about those footprints he thought were following him?”

She looked up at him in alarm.

“It's all right. He's told me all about it now. I knew there was something on his mind. It's not very surprising, either.”

Liz stared at him. “Not—?”

“In the circumstances, no,” the doctor said. “A mind

oppressed by a sense of sin can play a lot of nasty tricks. Nowadays they talk of guilt complexes and inhibitions. Names change. When I was a boy the same sort of thing was known as a bad conscience.

“When one has the main facts, these things become obvious to anyone of experience. Your husband was engaged in—well, to put it bluntly, burgling the house of a man whose interests were mystic and occult. Something that happened there gave him a shock and unbalanced his judgment.

“As a result, he has difficulty in distinguishing between the real things he sees and the imaginary ones his uneasy conscience shows him. It isn’t very complicated. He feels he is being dogged. Somewhere in his subconscious lie the lines from *The Ancient Mariner* :

*Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread*

and the two come together. And, in addition to that, he appears to have developed a primitive, vampiric type of phobia.

“Now, once we are able to help him dispel this obsession, he—” he broke off, suddenly aware of the look on his listener’s face. “What is it?” he asked.

“But, Doctor,” Liz said. “Those footmarks, I—” She was cut short abruptly by a sound from above that was half groan and half scream.

The doctor was up the stairs before she could move. When she followed him, it was with a heavy certainty in her heart.

She stood in the doorway watching as he bent over the bed. In a moment he turned, grave-eyed, and gave a slight shake of his head. He put his hand on her shoulder, then went quietly past her out of the room.

For some seconds Liz stood without moving. Then her eyes dropped from the bed to the floor. She trembled. Laughter, a high-pitched, frightening laughter shook her as she looked at the red naked footprints which led away from the bedside, across the floor and down the stairs, after the doctor . . .

The House Surgeon

RUDYARD KIPLING

In which the M'Leod family buy a house which is haunted by strange depressions. A guest, on being shown to his room, is immediately aware of a little grey shadow floating at an immense distance in the background of his brain. An intense depression overtakes him, such as he has never experienced before, and he is conscious of a desire on somebody's part to explain something on which some tremendously important issue hangs . . .

ON an evening after Easter Day, I sat at a table in a homeward bound steamer's smoking-room, where half a dozen of us told ghost stories. As our party broke up, a man, playing Patience in the next alcove, said to me: "I didn't quite catch the end of that last story about the Curse on the family's first-born."

"It turned out to be drains," I explained. "As soon as new ones were put into the house the Curse was lifted, I believe. I never knew the people myself."

"Ah! I've had *my* drains up twice; I'm on gravel too."

"You don't mean to say you've got a ghost in your house? Why didn't you join our party?"

"Any more orders, gentlemen, before the bar closes?" the steward interrupted.

"Sit down again and have one with me," said the Patience player. "No, it isn't a ghost. Our trouble is more depression than anything else."

"How interesting! Then it's nothing any one can see?"

"It's—it's nothing worse than a little depression. And the odd part is that there hasn't been a death in the house since it

was built—in 1863. The lawyer said so. That decided me—my good lady, rather—and he made me pay an extra thousand for it.”

“How curious. Unusual, too!” I said.

“Yes, ain’t it? It was built for three sisters—Moultrie was the name—three old maids. They all lived together; the eldest owned it. I bought it from her lawyer a few years ago, and if I’ve spent a pound on the place, first and last, I must have spent five thousand. Electric light, new servants’ wing, garden—all that sort of thing. A man and his family ought to be happy after so much expense, ain’t it?” He looked at me through the bottom of his glass.

“Does it affect your family much?”

“My good lady—she’s a Greek by the way—and myself are middle-aged. We can bear up against depression; but it’s hard on my little girl. I say little; but she’s twenty. We send her visiting to escape it. She almost lived at hotels and hydros last year, but that isn’t pleasant for her. She used to be a canary—a perfect canary—always singing. You ought to hear her. She doesn’t sing now. That sort of thing’s unwholesome for the young, ain’t it?”

“Can’t you get rid of the place?” I suggested.

“Not except at a sacrifice, and we are fond of it. Just suits us three. We’d love it if we were allowed.”

“What do you mean by not being allowed?”

“I mean because of the depression. It spoils everything.”

“What’s it like exactly?”

“I couldn’t very well explain. It must be seen to be appreciated, as the auctioneers say. Now, I was much impressed by the story you were telling just now.”

“It wasn’t true,” I said.

“My tale is true. If you would do me the pleasure to come down and spend a night at my little place, you’d learn more than you would if I talked till morning. Very likely ’twouldn’t touch your good self at all. You might be—immune, ain’t it? On the other hand, if this influenza—influence *does* happen to affect

you, why, I think it will be an experience.”

While he talked he gave me his card, and I read his name was L. Maxwell M’Leod, Esq., of Holmescroft. A City address was tucked away in a corner.

“My business,” he added, “used to be furs. If you are interested in furs—I’ve given thirty years of my life to ’em.”

“You’re very kind,” I murmured.

“Far from it, I assure you. I can meet you next Saturday afternoon anywhere in London you choose to name, and I’ll be only too happy to motor you down. It ought to be a delightful run at this time of the year—the rhododendrons will be out. I mean it. You don’t know how truly I mean it. Very probably—it won’t affect you at all. And—I think I may say I have the finest collection of narwhal tusks in the world. All the best skins and horns have to go through London, and L. Maxwell M’Leod, he knows where they come from, and where they go to. That’s his business.”

For the rest of the voyage up-channel Mr M’Leod talked to me of the assembling, preparation, and sale of the rarer furs; and told me things about the manufacture of fur-lined coats which quite shocked me. Somehow or other, when we landed



on Wednesday, I found myself pledged to spend that week-end with him at Holmescroft.

On Saturday he met me with a well-groomed motor, and ran me out in an hour-and-a-half to an exclusive residential district of dustless roads and elegantly designed country villas, each standing in from three to five acres of perfectly-appointed land. He told me land was selling at eight hundred pounds the acre, and the new golf links, whose Queen Anne pavilion we passed, had cost nearly twenty-four thousand pounds to create.

Holmescroft was a large, two-storied, low, creeper-covered residence. A verandah at the south side gave on to a garden and two tennis courts, separated by a tasteful iron fence from a most park-like meadow of five to six acres, where two Jersey cows grazed. Tea was ready in the shade of a promising copper beech, and I could see groups on the lawn of young men and maidens appropriately clothed, playing lawn tennis in the sunshine.

“A pretty scene, ain’t it?” said Mr M’Leod. “My good lady’s sitting under the tree, and that’s my little girl, in pink, on the far court. But I’ll take you to your room, and you can see ’em all later.”



He led me through a wide parquet-floored hall furnished in pale lemon, with huge cloisonné vases, an ebonised and gold grand piano, and banks of pot flowers in Benares brass bowls, up a pale oak staircase to a spacious landing, where there was a green velvet settee trimmed with silver. The blinds were down, and the light lay in parallel lines on the floors.

He showed me my room, saying cheerfully: "You may be a little tired. One often is without knowing it after a run through traffic. Don't come down till you feel quite restored. We shall all be in the garden."

My room was rather close, and smelt of perfumed soap. I threw up the window at once, but it opened so close to the floor and worked so clumsily that I came within an ace of pitching out, where I should certainly have ruined a rather lopsided laburnum below. As I set about washing off the journey's dust, I began to feel a little tired. But, I reflected, I had not come down here in this weather and among these new surroundings to be depressed, so I began to whistle.

And it was just then that I was aware of a little grey shadow, as it might have been a snowflake seen against the light, floating at an immense distance in the background of my brain. It annoyed me, and I shook my head to get rid of it. Then my brain telegraphed that it was the forerunner of a swift-striding gloom which there was yet time to escape if I would force my thoughts away from it, as a man leaping for life forces his body forward and away from the fall of a wall. But the gloom overtook me before I could take in the meaning of the message. I moved toward the bed, every nerve already aching with the foreknowledge of the pain that was to be dealt it, and sat down, while my amazed and angry soul dropped, gulf by gulf, into that horror of great darkness which is spoken of in the Bible, and which, as auctioneers say, must be experienced to be appreciated.

Despair upon despair, misery upon misery, fear after fear, each causing their distinct and separate woe, packed in upon me for an unrecorded length of time, until at last they blurred

together, and I heard a click in my brain like the click one hears when one descends in a diving bell, and I knew that the pressures were equalized within and without, and that, for the moment, the worst was at an end. But I knew, also, that at any moment the darkness might come down anew; and while I dwelt on this speculation precisely as a man torments a raging tooth with his tongue, it ebbed away into the little grey shadow on the brain of its first coming, and once more I heard my brain, which knew what would recur, telegraph to every quarter for help, release, or diversion.

The door opened, and M'Leod reappeared. I thanked him politely, saying I was charmed with my room, anxious to meet Mrs M'Leod, much refreshed with my wash, and so on and so forth. Beyond a little stickiness at the corners of my mouth, it seemed to me that I was managing my words admirably, the while that I myself cowered at the bottom of unclimbable pits. M'Leod laid his hand on my shoulder and said: "You've got it now already, ain't it?"

"Yes," I answered. "It's making me sick!"

"It will pass off when you come outside. I give you my word it will then pass off. Come!"

I shambled out behind him, and wiped my forehead in the hall.

"You mustn't mind," he said. "I expect the run tired you. My good lady is sitting there under the copper beech."

She was a fat woman in an apricot gown, with a heavily-powdered face, against which her black, long-lashed eyes showed like currants in dough. I was introduced to many fine ladies and gentlemen of those parts. Magnificently appointed landaus and covered motors swept in and out of the drive, and the air was gay with the merry outcries of the tennis players.

As twilight drew on they all went away, and I was left alone with Mr and Mrs M'Leod, while tall men-servants and maid-servants took away the tennis and tea things. Miss M'Leod had walked a little down the drive with a light-haired young man, who apparently knew everything about every South American

railway stock. He had told me at tea that these were the days of financial specialization.

“I think it went off beautifully, my dear,” said Mr M’Leod to his wife; and to me: “You feel all right now, ain’t it? Of course you do.”

Mrs M’Leod surged across the gravel. Her husband skipped nimbly before her into the south verandah, turned a switch, and all Holmescroft was flooded with light.

“You can do that from your room also,” he said as they went in. “There is something in money, ain’t it?”

Miss M’Leod came up behind me in the dusk. “We have not yet been introduced,” she said, “but I suppose you are staying the night?”

“Your father was kind enough to ask me,” I replied.

She nodded. “Yes, *I* know; and you know too, don’t you? I saw your face when you came to shake hands with mamma. You felt the depression very soon. It is simply frightful in that bedroom sometimes. What do you think it is—bewitchment? In Greece, where I was a little girl, it might have been; but not in England, do you think? Or *do* you?”

“I don’t know what to think,” I replied. “I never felt anything like it. Does it happen often?”

“Yes, sometimes. It comes and goes.”

“Pleasant!” I said, as we walked up and down the gravel at the lawn edge. “What has been your experience of it?”

“That is difficult to say, but—sometimes that—that depression is like as it were”—she gesticulated in most un-English fashion—“a light. Yes, like a light turned into a room—only a light of blackness, do you understand?—into a happy room. For sometimes we are so happy, all we three—so very happy. Then this blackness, it is turned on us just like—ah, I know what I mean now—like the headlamp of a motor, and we are eclipsed. And there is another thing—”

The dressing gong roared, and we entered the over-lighted hall. My dressing was a brisk athletic performance, varied with outbursts of song—careful attention paid to articulation and

expression. But nothing happened. As I hurried downstairs, I thanked Heaven that nothing had happened.

Dinner was served breakfast fashion; the dishes were placed on the sideboard over heaters, and we helped ourselves.

"We always do this when we are alone, so we talk better," said Mr M'Leod.

"And we are always alone," said the daughter.

"Cheer up, Thea. It will all come right," he insisted.

"No, papa." She shook her head. "Nothing is right while *it* comes."

"It is nothing that we ourselves have ever done in our lives—that I will swear to you," said Mrs M'Leod suddenly. "And we have changed our servants several times. So we know it is not *them*."

"Never mind. Let us enjoy ourselves while we can," said Mr M'Leod, opening the champagne.

But we did not enjoy ourselves. The talk failed. There were long silences.

"I beg your pardon," I said, for I thought someone at my elbow was about to speak.

"Ah! That is the other thing!" said Miss M'Leod. Her mother groaned.

We were silent again, and, in a few seconds it must have been, a live grief beyond words—not ghostly dread or horror, but aching, helpless grief—overwhelmed us, each, I felt, according to his or her nature, and held steady like the beam of a burning-glass. Behind that pain I was conscious there was a desire on somebody's part to explain something on which some tremendously important issue hung.

Meantime I rolled bread pills and remembered my sins; M'Leod considered his own reflection in a spoon; his wife seemed to be praying, and the girl fidgeted desperately with hands and feet, till the darkness passed on—as though the malignant rays of a burning-glass had been shifted from us.

"There," said Miss M'Leod, half rising. "Now you see what makes a happy home. Oh, sell it—sell it, father mine, and let us

go away!”

“But I’ve spent thousands on it. You shall go to Harrogate next week, Thea dear.”

“I’m only just back from hotels. I am *so* tired of packing.”

“Cheer up, Thea. It is over. You know it does not often come here twice in the same night. I think we shall dare now to be comfortable.”

He lifted a dish-cover, and helped his wife and daughter. His face was lined and fallen like an old man’s after debauch, but his hands did not shake, and his voice was clear. As he worked to restore us by speech and action, he reminded me of a grey-muzzled collie herding demoralized sheep.

After dinner we sat round the dining-room fire—the drawing-room might have been under the Shadow for aught we knew—talking with the intimacy of gipsies by the wayside, or of wounded comparing notes after a skirmish. By eleven o’clock the three between them had given me every name and detail they could recall that in any way bore on the house, and what they knew of its history.

We went to bed in a fortifying blaze of electric light. My one fear was that the blasting gust of depression would return—the surest way, of course, to bring it. I lay awake till dawn, breathing quickly and sweating lightly, beneath what De Quincey inadequately describes as “the oppression of inexpressible guilt”. Now as soon as the lovely day was broken, I fell into the most terrible of all dreams—that joyous one in which all past evil has not only been wiped out of our lives, but has never been committed; and in the very bliss of our assured innocence, before our loves shriek and change countenance, we wake to the day we have earned.

It was a coolish morning, but we preferred to breakfast in the south verandah. The forenoon we spent in the garden, pretending to play games that come out of boxes, such as croquet and clock golf. But most of the time we drew together and talked. The young man who knew all about South American railways took Miss M’Leod for a walk in the

afternoon, and at five M'Leod thoughtfully whirled us all up to dine in town.

"Now, don't say you will tell the Psychological Society, and that you will come again," said Miss M'Leod, as we parted. "Because I know you will not."

"You should not say that," said her mother. "You should say, 'Good-bye, Mr Perseus. Come again'."

"Not him!" the girl cried. "He has seen the Medusa's head!"

Looking at myself in the restaurant's mirrors, it seemed to me that I had not much benefited by my week-end. Next morning I wrote out all my Holmescroft notes at fullest length, in the hope that by so doing I could put it all behind me. But the experience worked on my mind, as they say certain imperfectly understood rays work on the body.

I am less calculated to make a Sherlock Holmes than any man I know, for I lack both method and patience, yet the idea of following up the trouble to its source fascinated me. I had no theory to go on, except a vague idea that I had come between two poles of a discharge, and had taken a shock meant for someone else. This was followed by a feeling of intense irritation. I waited cautiously on myself, expecting to be overtaken by horror of the supernatural, but my self persisted in being humanly indignant, exactly as though it had been the victim of a practical joke. It was in great pains and upheavals—that I felt in every fibre—but its dominant idea, to put it coarsely, was to get back a bit of its own. By this I knew that I might go forward if I could find the way.

After a few days it occurred to me to go to the office of Mr J. M. M. Baxter—the solicitor who had sold Holmescroft to M'Leod. I explained I had some notion of buying the place. Would he act for me in the matter?

Mr Baxter, a large, greyish, throaty-voiced man, showed no enthusiasm. "I sold it to Mr M'Leod," he said. "It 'ud scarcely do for me to start on the running-down tack now. But I can recommend——"

"I know he's asking an awful price," I interrupted, "and atop

of it he wants an extra thousand for what he calls your clean bill of health.”

Mr Baxter sat up in his chair. I had all his attention.

“Your guarantee with the house. Don’t you remember it?”

“Yes, yes. That no death had taken place in the house since it was built. I remember perfectly.”

He did not gulp as untrained men do when they lie, but his jaws moved stickily, and his eyes, turning towards the deed boxes on the wall, dulled. I counted seconds, one, two, three—one, two, three—up to ten. A man, I knew, can live through ages of mental depression in that time.

“I remember perfectly.” His mouth opened a little as though it had tasted old bitterness.

“Of course *that* sort of thing doesn’t appeal to me,” I went on. “I don’t expect to buy a house free from death.”

“Certainly not. No-one does. But it was Mr M’Leod’s fancy—his wife’s rather, I believe; and since we could meet it—it was my duty to my clients—at whatever cost to my own feelings—to make him pay.”

“That’s really why I came to you. I understood from him you knew the place well.”

“Oh, yes. Always did. It originally belonged to some connections of mine.”

“The Misses Moultrie, I suppose. How interesting! They must have loved the place before the country round about was built up.”

“They were very fond of it indeed.”

“I don’t wonder. So restful and sunny. I don’t see how they could have brought themselves to part with it.”

Now it is one of the most constant peculiarities of the English that in polite conversation—and I had striven to be polite—no-one ever does or sells anything for mere money’s sake.

“Miss Agnes—the youngest—fell ill” (he spaced his words a little), “and, as they were very much attached to each other, that broke up the home.”

“Naturally. I fancied it must have been something of that

kind. One doesn't associate the Staffordshire Moultries" (my Demon of Irresponsibility at that instant created 'em) "with— with being hard up."

"I don't know whether we're related to them," he answered importantly. "We may be, for our branch of the family comes from the Midlands."

I give this talk at length, because I am so proud of my first attempt at detective work. When I left him, twenty minutes later, with instructions to move against the owner of Holmescroft with a view to purchase, I was more bewildered than any Doctor Watson at the opening of a story.

Why should a middle-aged solicitor turn plover's-egg colour and drop his jaw when reminded of so innocent and festal a matter as that no death had ever occurred in a house that he had sold? If I knew my English vocabulary at all, the tone in which he said the younger sister "fell ill" meant that she had gone out of her mind. That might explain his change of countenance, and it was just possible that her demented influence still hung about Holmescroft; but the rest was beyond me.

I was relieved when I reached M'Leod's City office, and could tell him what I had done—not what I thought.

M'Leod was quite willing to enter into the game of the pretended purchase, but did not see how it would help if I knew Baxter.

"He's the only living soul I can get at who was connected with Holmescroft," I said.

"Ah! Living soul is good," said M'Leod. "At any rate our little girl will be pleased that you are still interested in us. Won't you come down some day this week?"

"How is it there now?" I asked.

He screwed up his face. "Simply frightful!" he said. "Thea is at Droitwich."

"I should like it immensely, but I must cultivate Baxter for the present. You'll be sure and keep him busy your end, won't you?"

He looked at me with quiet contempt. "Do not be afraid. I

will handle it well. I shall be my own solicitor.”

Before a fortnight was over, Baxter admitted ruefully that M’Leod was better than most firms in the business. We buyers were coy, argumentative, shocked at the price of Holmescroft, inquisitive, and cold by turns, but Mr M’Leod, the seller, easily met and surpassed us; and Mr Baxter entered every letter, telegram, and consultation at the proper rates in a cinematograph-film of a bill. At the end of a month he said it looked as though M’Leod, thanks to him, was really going to listen to reason. I was many pounds out of pocket, but I had learned something of Mr Baxter on the human side. I deserved it. Never in my life have I worked to conciliate, amuse, and flatter a human being as I worked over my solicitor.

It appeared that he golfed. Therefore, I was an enthusiastic beginner, anxious to learn. Twice I invaded his office with a bag (M’Leod lent it) full of the spellicans needed in this detestable game, and a vocabulary to match. The third time the ice broke, and Mr Baxter took me to his links, quite ten miles off, where in a maze of tramway lines, railroads, and nursery-maids, we skelped our devoted way round nine holes like barges plunging through head seas. He played vilely, and had never expected to meet anyone worse; but as he realized my form, I think he began to like me, for he took me in hand for the two hours together. After a fortnight he could give me no more than a stroke a hole, and when, with this allowance, I once managed to beat him by one, he was honestly glad, and assured me that I should be a golfer if I stuck to it. I was sticking to it for my own ends, but now and again *my* conscience pricked me; for the man was a nice man. Between games he supplied me with odd pieces of evidence, such as that he had known the Moultries all his life, being their cousin, and that Miss Mary, the eldest, was an unforgiving woman who would never let bygones be bygones. I naturally wondered what she might have against him; and somehow connected him unfavourably with mad Agnes.

“People ought to forgive and forget,” he volunteered one day between rounds. “Specially where, in the nature of things,

they can't be sure of their deductions. Don't you think so?"

"It all depends on the nature of the evidence on which one forms one's judgment," I answered.

"Nonsense!" he cried. "I'm lawyer enough to know that there's nothing in the world so misleading as circumstantial evidence. Never was."

"Why? Have you ever seen men hanged on it?"

"Hanged? People have been supposed to be eternally lost on it." His face turned grey again. "I don't know how it is with you, but my consolation is that God must know. He *must*! Things that seem on the face of 'em like murder, or say suicide, may appear different to God. Heh?"

"That's what the murderer and the suicide can always hope—I suppose."

"I have expressed myself clumsily as usual. The facts as God knows 'em—may *be* different—even after the most clinching evidence. I've always said that—both as a lawyer and a man, but some people won't—I don't want to judge 'em—we'll say they can't—believe it; whereas *I* say there's always a working chance—a certainty—that the worst hasn't happened." He stopped and cleared his throat. "Now, let's come on! This time next week I shall be taking my holiday."

"What links?" I asked carelessly, while twins in a perambulator got out of our line of fire.

"A potty little nine-hole affair at a Hydro in the Midlands. My cousins stay there. Always will. Not but what the fourth and the seventh holes take some doing. You could manage it, though," he said encouragingly. "You're doing much better. It's only your approach shots that are weak."

"You're right. I can't approach for nuts! I shall go to pieces while you're away—with no one to coach me," I said mournfully.

"I haven't taught you anything," he said, delighted with the compliment.

"I owe all I've learned to you, anyhow. When will you come back?"

“Look here,” he began. “I don’t know your engagements, but I’ve no one to play with at Burry Mills. Never have. Why couldn’t you take a few days off and join me there? I warn you it will be rather dull. It’s a throat and gout place—baths, massage, electricity, and so forth. But the fourth and the seventh holes really take some doing.”

“I’m for the game,” I answered valiantly, Heaven well knowing that I hated every stroke and word of it.

“That’s the proper spirit. As their lawyer I must ask you not to say anything to my cousins about Holmescroft. It upsets ’em. Always did. But speaking as man to man it would be very pleasant for me if you could see your way to——”

I saw it as soon as decency permitted, and thanked him sincerely. According to my now well-developed theory he had certainly misappropriated his aged cousins’ money under power of attorney, and had probably driven poor Agnes Moultrie out of her wits, but I wished that he was not so gentle, and good-tempered, and innocent-eyed.

Before I joined him at Burry Mills Hydro, I spent a night at Holmescroft. Miss M’Leod had returned from her Hydro, and first we made very merry on the open lawn in the sunshine over the manners and customs of the English resorting to such places. She knew dozens of Hydros, and warned me how to behave in them, while Mr and Mrs M’Leod stood aside and adored her.

“Ah! That’s the way she always comes back to us,” he said. “Pity it wears off so soon, ain’t it? You ought to hear her sing ‘With mirth, thou pretty bird’.”

We had the house to face through the evening, and there we neither laughed nor sang. The gloom fell on us as we entered, and did not shift till ten o’clock, when we crawled out, as it were, from beneath it.

“It has been bad this summer,” said Mrs M’Leod in a whisper after we realized that we were freed. “Sometimes I think the house will get up and cry out—it is so bad.”

“How?”

“Have you forgotten what comes after the depression?”

So then we waited about the small fire, and the dead air in the room presently filled and pressed down upon us with the sensation (but words are useless here) as though some dumb and bound power were striving against gag and bond to deliver its soul of an articulate word. It passed in a few minutes, and I fell to thinking about Mr Baxter’s conscience and Agnes Moultrie, gone mad in the well-lit bedroom that waited me. These reflections secured me a night during which I rediscovered how, from purely mental causes, a man can be physically sick; but the sickness was bliss compared to my dreams when the birds waked. On my departure, M’Leod gave me a beautiful narwhal’s horn, much as a nurse gives a child sweets for being brave at a dentist’s.

“There’s no duplicate of it in the world,” he said, “else it would have come to old Max M’Leod,” and he tucked it into the motor. Miss M’Leod, on the far side of the car, whispered, “Have you found out anything, Mr Perseus?”

I shook my head.

“Then I shall be chained to my rock all my life,” she went on. “Only don’t tell papa.”

I supposed she was thinking of the young gentleman who specialized in South American rails, for I noticed a ring on the third finger of her left hand.

I went straight from that house to Burry Mills Hydro, keen, for the first time in my life, on playing golf, which is guaranteed to occupy the mind. Baxter had taken me a room communicating with his own, and after lunch introduced me to a tall, horse-headed elderly lady of decided manners, whom a white-haired maid pushed along in a bath-chair through the park-like grounds of the Hydro. She was Miss Mary Moultrie, and she coughed and cleared her throat just like Baxter. She suffered—she told me it was the Moultrie caste-mark—from some obscure form of chronic bronchitis, complicated with spasm of the glottis; and, in a dead flat voice, with a sunken eye that looked and saw not, told me what washes, gargles, pastilles, and

inhalations she had proved most beneficial. From her I was passed on to her younger sister, Miss Elizabeth, a small and withered thing with twitching lips, victim, she told me, to very much the same sort of throat, but secretly devoted to another set of medicines. When she went away with Baxter and the bath-chair, I fell across a major of the Indian army with gout in his glassy eyes, and a stomach which he had taken all round the Continent. He laid everything before me; and him I escaped only to be confided in by a matron with a tendency to follicular tonsillitis and eczema. Baxter waited hand and foot on his cousins till five o'clock, trying, as I saw, to atone for his treatment of the dead sister. Miss Mary ordered him about like a dog.

"I warned you it would be dull," he said when we met in the smoking-room.

"It's tremendously interesting," I said. "But how about a look round the links?"

"Unluckily damp always affects my eldest cousin. I've got to buy her a new bronchitis-kettle. Arthurs broke her old one yesterday."

We slipped out to the chemist's shop in the town, and he bought a large glittering tin thing whose workings he explained.

"I'm used to this sort of work. I come up here pretty often," he said. "I've the family throat too."

"You're a good man," I said. "A very good man."

He turned towards me in the evening light among the beeches, and his face was changed to what it might have been a generation before.

"You see," he said huskily, "there was the youngest—Agnes. Before she fell ill, you know. But she didn't like leaving her sisters. Never would." He hurried on with his odd-shaped load, and left me among the ruins of my black theories. The man with that face had done Agnes Moultrie no wrong.

We never played our game. I was waked between two and three in the morning from my hygienic bed by Baxter in an

ulster over orange and white pyjamas, which I should never have suspected from his character.

“My cousin has had some sort of seizure,” he said. “Will you come? I don’t want to wake the doctor. Don’t want to make a scandal. Quick!”

So I came quickly, and, led by the white-haired Arthurs in a jacket and petticoat, entered a double-bedded room reeking with steam and Friar’s Balsam. The electrics were all on. Miss Mary—I knew her by her height—was at the open window, wrestling with Miss Elizabeth, who gripped her round the knees. Her hand was at her throat, which was streaked with blood.

“She’s done it. She’s done it too!” Miss Elizabeth panted. “Hold her! Help me!”

“Oh, I say! Women don’t cut their throats,” Baxter whispered.

“My God! Has she cut her throat?” the maid cried, and with no warning, rolled over in a faint. Baxter pushed her under the wash-basins, and leaped to hold the gaunt woman who crowed and whistled as she struggled towards the window. He took her by the shoulder, and she struck out wildly.

“All right! She’s only cut her hand,” he said. “Wet towel—quick!”

While I got that he pushed her backward. Her strength seemed almost as great as his. I swabbed at her throat when I could, and found no mark; then helped him to control her a little. Miss Elizabeth leaped back to bed, wailing like a child.

“Tie up her hand somehow,” said Baxter. “Don’t let it drip about the place. She”—he stepped on broken glass in his slippers, “she must have smashed a pane.”

Miss Mary lurched towards the open window again, dropped on her knees, her head on the sill, and lay quiet, surrendering the cut hand to me.

“What did she do?” Baxter turned towards Miss Elizabeth in the far bed.

“She was going to throw herself out of the window,” was the

answer. "I stopped her, and sent Arthurs for you. Oh, we can never hold up our heads again!"

Miss Mary writhed and fought for breath. Baxter found a shawl which he threw over her shoulders.

"Nonsense!" said he. "That isn't like Mary"; but his face worked when he said it.

"You wouldn't believe about Aggie, John. Perhaps you will now!" said Miss Elizabeth. "I *saw* her do it, and she's cut her throat too!"

"She hasn't," I said. "It's only her hand."

Miss Mary suddenly broke from us with an indescribable grunt, flew, rather than ran, to her sister's bed, and there shook her as one furious schoolgirl would shake another.

"No such thing," she croaked. "How dare you think so, you wicked little fool?"

"Get into bed, Mary," said Baxter. "You'll catch a chill."

She obeyed, but sat up with the grey shawl round her lean shoulders, glaring at her sister. "I'm better now," she crowed. "Arthurs let me sit out too long. Where's Arthurs? The kettle."

"Never mind Arthurs," said Baxter. "*You* get the kettle." I hastened to bring it from the side table. "Now, Mary, as God sees you, tell me what you've done."

His lips were dry, and he could not moisten them with his tongue.

Miss Mary applied herself to the mouth of the kettle, and between indraws of steam said: "The spasm came on just now, while I was asleep I was nearly choking to death. So I went to the window. I've done it often before, without waking any one. Bessie's such an old maid about draughts. I tell you I was choking to death. I couldn't manage the catch, and I nearly fell out. That window opens too low, I cut my hand trying to save myself. Who has tied it up in this filthy handkerchief? I wish you had had my throat, Bessie. I never was nearer dying!" She scowled on us all impartially, while her sister sobbed.

From the bottom of the bed we heard a quivering voice: "Is she dead? Have they took her away? Oh, I never could bear the

sight o' blood!"

"Arthurs," said Miss Mary, "you are a hireling. Go away!"

It is my belief that Arthurs crawled on all fours, but I was busy picking up broken glass from the carpet.

Then, Baxter, seated by the side of the bed, began to cross-examine in a voice I scarcely recognized. No one could for an instant have doubted the genuine rage of Miss Mary against her sister, her cousin, or her maid; and that the doctor should have been called in—for she did me the honour of calling me doctor—was the last drop. She was choking with her throat; had rushed to the window for air; had near pitched out, and in catching at the window bars had cut her hand. Over and over she made this clear to the intent Baxter. Then she turned on her sister and tongue-lashed her savagely.

"You mustn't blame me," Miss Bessie faltered at last. "You know what we think of night and day."

"I'm coming to that," said Baxter. "Listen to me. What *you* did, Mary, misled four people into thinking you—you meant to do away with yourself."

"Isn't one suicide in the family enough? Oh, God, help and pity us! You *couldn't* have believed that!" she cried.

"The evidence was complete. Now, don't you think," Baxter's finger wagged under her nose—"can't you think that poor Aggie did the same thing at Holmescroft when she fell out of the window?"

"She had the same throat," said Miss Elizabeth. "Exactly the same symptoms. Don't you remember, Mary?"

"Which was her bedroom?" I asked Baxter in an undertone.

"Over the south verandah, looking on to the tennis lawn."

"I nearly fell out of that very window when I was at Holmescroft—opening it to get some air. The sill doesn't come much above your knees," I said.

"You hear that, Mary? Mary, do you hear what this gentleman says? Won't you believe that what nearly happened to you must have happened to poor Aggie that night? For God's sake—for her sake—Mary, *won't* you believe?"

There was a long silence while the steam kettle puffed.

“If I could have proof—if I could have proof,” said she, and broke into most horrible tears.

Baxter motioned to me, and I crept away to my room, and lay awake till morning, thinking more especially, of the dumb Thing at Holmescroft which wished to explain itself. I hated Miss Mary as perfectly as though I had known her for twenty years, but I felt that, alive or dead, I should not like her to condemn me.

Yet at midday, when I saw Miss Mary in her bath-chair, Arthurs behind and Baxter and Miss Elizabeth on either side, in the park-like grounds of the Hydro, I found it difficult to arrange my words.

“Now that you know all about it,” said Baxter aside, after the first strangeness of our meeting was over, “it’s only fair to tell you that my poor cousin did not die in Holmescroft at all. She was dead when they found her under the window in the morning. Just dead.”

“Under that laburnum outside the window?” I asked, for I suddenly remembered the crooked, evil thing.

“Exactly. She broke the tree in falling. But no death had ever taken place *in* the house, so far as we are concerned. You can make yourself quite easy on that point. Mr M’Leod’s extra thousand for what he called the ‘clean bill of health’ was something towards my cousins’ estate when we sold. It was my duty as their lawyer to get it for them—at any cost to my own feelings.”

I know better than to argue when the English talk about their duty. So I agreed with my solicitor.

“Their sister’s death must have been a great blow to your cousins,” I went on. The bath-chair was behind me.

“Unspeakable,” Baxter whispered. “They brooded on it day and night. No wonder. If their theory of poor Aggie making away with herself was correct, she was eternally lost!”

“So you believe that she made away with herself?”

“No, thank God! Never have! And after what happened to

Mary last night, I see perfectly what happened to poor Aggie. She had the family throat, too. By the way, Mary thinks you are a doctor. Otherwise she wouldn't like your having been in her room."

"Very good. Is she convinced now about her sister's death?"

"She'd give anything to be able to believe it, but she's a hard woman, and brooding along certain lines makes one groovy. I have sometimes been afraid for her reason—on the religious side, don't you know. Elizabeth doesn't matter. Brain of a hen. Always had."

Here Arthurs summoned me to the bath-chair, and ravaged face, beneath its knitted Shetland wool hood, of Miss Mary Moultrie.

"I need not remind you, I hope, of the seal of secrecy—absolute secrecy—in your profession," she began. "Thanks to my cousin's and my sister's stupidity, you have found out——" She blew her nose.

"Please don't excite her, sir," said Arthurs at the back.

"But, my dear Miss Moultrie, I only know what I've seen, of course, but it seems to me that what you thought was a tragedy in your sister's case, turns out, on your own evidence, so to speak, to have been an accident—a dreadfully sad one—but absolutely an accident."

"Do you believe that too?" she cried. "Or are you only saying it to comfort me?"

"I believe it from the bottom of my heart. Come down to Holmescroft for an hour—for half an hour—and satisfy yourself."

"Of what? You don't understand. I see the house every day—every night. I am always there in spirit—waking or sleeping. I couldn't face it in reality."

"But you must," I said. "If you go there in the spirit the greater need for you to go there in the flesh. Go to your sister's room once more, and see the window—I nearly fell out of it myself. It's—it's awfully low and dangerous. That would convince you," I pleaded.

“Yet Aggie had slept in that room for years,” she interrupted.

“You’ve slept in your room here for a long time, haven’t you? But you nearly fell out of the window when you were choking.”

“That is true. That is one thing true,” she nodded. “And I might have been killed as—perhaps—Aggie was killed.”

“In that case your own sister and cousin and maid would have said you had committed suicide, Miss Moultrie. Come down to Holmescroft, and go over the place just once.”

“You are lying,” she said quite quietly. “You don’t want me to come down to see a window. It is something else. I warn you we are Evangelicals. We don’t believe in prayers for the dead. ‘As the tree falls’——”

“Yes. I daresay. But you persist in thinking that your sister committed suicide——”

“No! No! I have always prayed that I might have misjudged her.”

Arthurs, at the bath-chair spoke up. “Oh, Miss Mary! you *would* ’ave it from the first that poor Miss Aggie ’ad made away with herself; an’, of course, Miss Bessie took the notion from you. Only Master—Mister John stood out, and—and I’d ’ave taken my Bible oath *you* was making away with yourself last night.”

Miss Mary leaned towards me, one finger on my sleeve.

“If going to Holmescroft kills me,” she said, “you will have the murder of a fellow-creature on your conscience for all eternity.”

“I’ll risk it,” I answered. Remembering what torment the mere reflection of her torments had cast on Holmescroft, and remembering, above all, the dumb Thing that filled the house with its desire to speak, I felt that there might be worse things.

Baxter was amazed at the proposed visit, but at a nod from that terrible woman went off to make arrangements. Then I sent a telegram to M’Leod bidding him and his vacate Holmescroft for that afternoon. Miss Mary should be alone with her dead, as I had been alone.

I expected untold trouble in transporting her, but to do her justice, the promise given for the journey, she underwent it without murmur, spasm or unnecessary word. Miss Bessie, pressed in a corner by the window, wept behind her veil, and from time to time tried to take hold of her sister's hand. Baxter wrapped himself in his newly-found happiness as selfishly as a bridegroom, for he sat still and smiled.

"So long as I know that Aggie didn't make away with herself," he explained, "I tell you frankly I don't care what happened. She's as hard as a rock—Mary. Always was. *She* won't die."

We led her out on to the platform like a blind woman, and so got her into the fly. The half-hour crawl to Holmescroft was the most racking experience of the day. M'Leod had obeyed my instructions. There was no one visible in the house or the gardens; and the front door stood open.

Miss Mary rose from beside her sister, stepped forth first, and entered the hall.

"Come, Bessie," she cried.

"I daren't. Oh, I daren't."

"Come!" Her voice had altered. I felt Baxter start. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

"Good heavens!" said Baxter. "She's running up the stairs. We'd better follow."

"Let's wait below. She's going to the room."

We heard the door of the bedroom I knew open and shut, and we waited in the lemon-tinted hall, heavy with the scent of flowers.

"I've never been into it since it was sold," Baxter sighed. "What a lovely, restful place it is! Poor Aggie used to arrange the flowers."

"Restful?" I began, but stopped of a sudden, for I felt all over my bruised soul that Baxter was speaking the truth. It was a light, spacious, airy house, full of the sense of well-being and peace—above all things, of peace. I ventured into the dining-room where the thoughtful M'Leods had left a small fire. There

was no terror there, present or lurking; and in the drawing-room, which for good reasons we had never cared to enter, the sun and the peace and the scent of the flowers worked together as is fit in an inhabited house. When I returned to the hall, Baxter was sweetly asleep on a couch, looking most unlike a middle-aged solicitor who had spent a broken night with an exacting cousin.

There was ample time for me to review it all—to felicitate myself upon my magnificent acumen (barring some errors about Baxter as a thief and possibly a murderer), before the door above opened, and Baxter, evidently a light sleeper, sprang awake.

“I’ve had a heavenly little nap,” he said, rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands like a child. “Good Lord! That’s not *their* step!”

But it was. I had never before been privileged to see the Shadow turned backward on the dial—the years ripped bodily off poor human shoulders—old sunken eyes filled and alight—harsh lips moistened and human.

“John,” Miss Mary called, “I know now. Aggie didn’t do it!” and “She didn’t do it!” echoed Miss Bessie, and giggled.

“I did not think it wrong to say a prayer,” Miss Mary continued. “Not for her soul, but for our peace. Then I was convinced.”

“Then we got conviction,” the younger sister piped.

“We’ve misjudged poor Aggie, John. But I feel she knows now. Wherever she is, she knows that we know she is guiltless.”

“Yes, she knows. I felt it too,” said Miss Elizabeth.

“I never doubted,” said John Baxter, whose face was beautiful at that hour. “Not from the first. Never have!”

“You never offered me proof, John. Now, thank God, it will not be the same any more. I can think henceforward of Aggie without sorrow.” She tripped, absolutely tripped, across the hall. “What ideas some people have of arranging furniture!” She spied me behind a big cloisonné vase.

“I’ve seen the window,” she said remotely. “You took a great

risk in advising me to undertake such a journey. However, as it turns out . . . I forgive you, and I pray you may never know what mental anguish means! Bessie! Look at this peculiar piano! Do you suppose, Doctor, these people would offer one tea? I miss mine.”

“I will go and see,” I said, and explored M’Leod’s new-built servants’ wing. It was in the servants’ hall that I unearthed the M’Leod family, bursting with anxiety.

“Tea for three, quick,” I said. “If you ask me any questions now, I shall have a fit!” So Mrs M’Leod got it, and I was butler, amid murmured apologies from Baxter, still smiling and self-absorbed, and the cold disapproval of Miss Mary, who thought the pattern of the china vulgar. However, she ate well, and even asked me whether I would not like a cup of tea for myself.

They went away in the twilight—the twilight that I had once feared. They were going to an hotel in London to rest after the fatigues of the day, and as their fly turned down the drive, I capered on the doorstep, with the all-darkened house behind me.

Then I heard the uncertain feet of the M’Leods, and bade them not to turn on the lights, but to feel—to feel what I had done; for the Shadow was gone, with the dumb desire in the air. They drew short, but afterwards deeper, breaths, like bathers entering chill water, separated one from the other, moved about the hall, tiptoed upstairs, raced down, and then Miss M’Leod, and I believe her mother, though she denies this, embraced me. I know M’Leod did.

It was a disgraceful evening. To say we rioted through the house is to put it mildly. We played a sort of Blind Man’s Buff along the darkest passages, in the unlighted drawing-room, and little dining-room, calling cheerily to each other after each exploration that here, and here, and here, the trouble had removed itself. We came up to *the* bedroom—mine for the night again—and sat, the women on the bed, and we men on chairs, drinking in blessed draughts of peace and comfort and cleanliness of soul, while I told them my tale in full, and

received fresh praise, thanks, and blessings.

When the servants, returned from their day's outing, gave us a supper of cold fried fish, M'Leod had sense enough to open no wine. We had been practically drunk since nightfall, and grew incoherent on water and milk.

"I like that Baxter," said M'Leod. "He's a sharp man. The death wasn't in the house, but he ran it pretty close, ain't it?"

"And the joke of it is that he supposes I want to buy the place from you," I said. "Are you selling?"

"Not for twice what I paid for it—now," said M'Leod. "I'll keep you in furs all your life, but not our Holmescroft."

"No—never our Holmescroft," said Miss M'Leod. "We'll ask *him* here on Tuesday, mamma." They squeezed each other's hands.

"Now tell me," said Mrs M'Leod—"that tall one I saw out of the scullery window—did *she* tell you she was always here in the spirit? I hate her. She made all this trouble. It was not her house after she had sold it. What do you think?"

"I suppose," I answered, "she brooded over what she believed was her sister's suicide night and day—she confessed she did—and her thoughts being concentrated on this place, they felt like a—like a burning-glass."

"Burning-glass is good," said M'Leod.

"I said it was like a light of blackness turned on us," cried the girl, twiddling her ring. "That must have been when the tall one thought worst about her sister and the house."

"Ah, the poor Aggie!" said Mrs M'Leod. "The poor Aggie, trying to tell everyone it was not so! No wonder we felt Something wished to say Something. Thea, Max, do you remember that night——"

"We need not remember any more," M'Leod interrupted. "It is not our trouble. They have told each other now."

"Do you think, then," said Miss M'Leod, "that those two, the living ones, were actually told something—upstairs—in your—in the room?"

"I can't say. At any rate they were made happy, and they ate a

big tea afterwards. As your father says, it is not our trouble any longer—thank God!”

“Amen!” said M’Leod. “Now, Thea, let us have some music after all these months. ‘With mirth, thou pretty bird’, ain’t it? You ought to hear that.”

And in the half-lighted hall, Thea sang an old English song that I had never heard before.

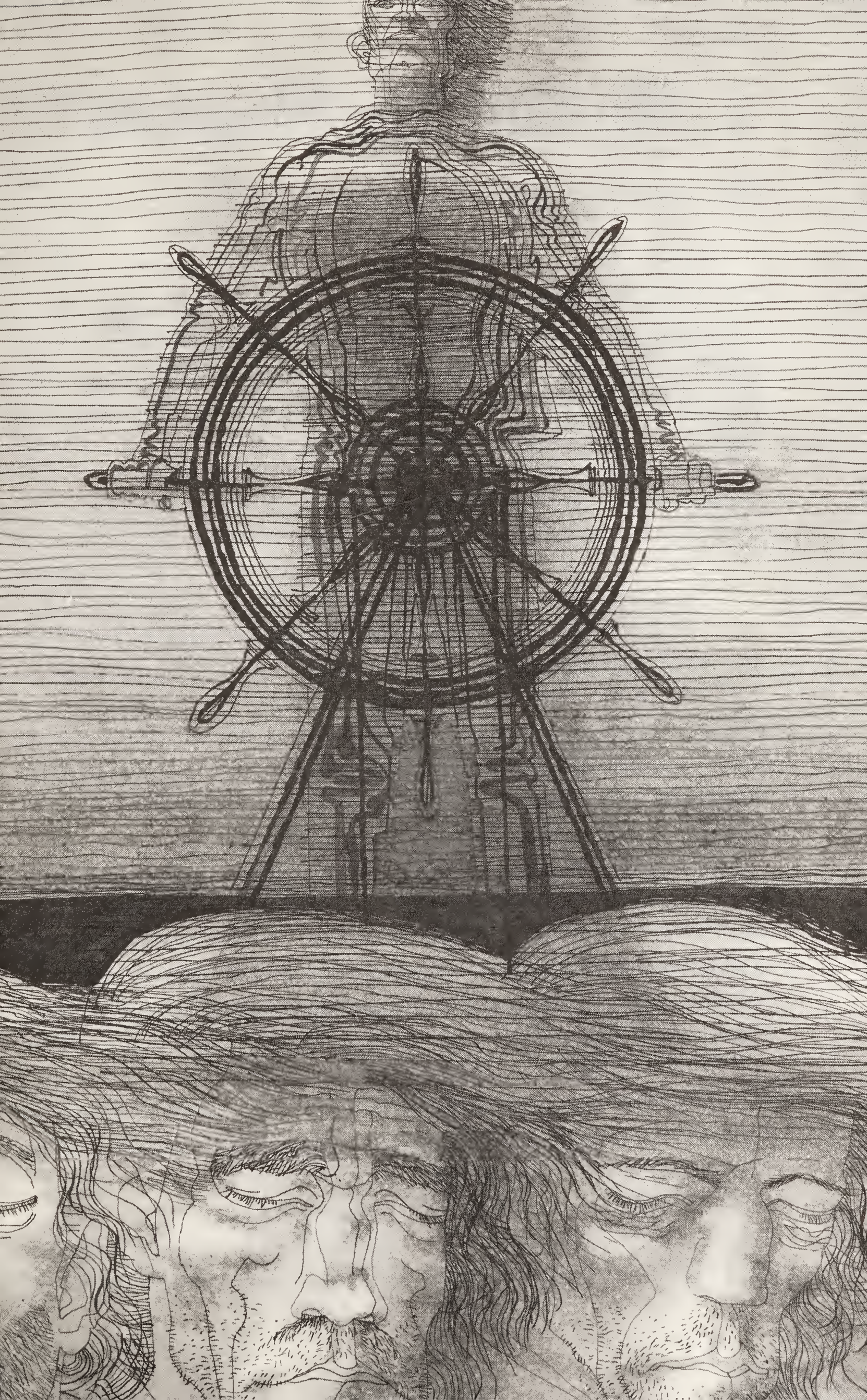
*With mirth, thou pretty bird, rejoice
 Thy Maker’s praise enhanced;
 Lift up thy shrill and pleasant voice,
 Thy God is high advanced!
 Thy food before He did provide,
 And gives it in a fitting side,
 Wherewith be thou sufficed!
 Why shouldst thou now unpleasant be,
 Thy wrath against God venting,
 That He a little bird made thee,
 Thy silly head tormenting,
 Because He made thee not a man?
 Oh, Peace! He hath well thought thereon,
 Therewith be thou sufficed!*

The Helmsman

FRANZ KAFKA

In which the ousting of the helmsman's authority by a nocturnal visitor assuming his role is described, posing disturbing questions whose answers are obscurely individual . . .

“Am I not the helmsman here?” I called out. “You?” asked a tall dark man and passed his hands over his eyes as though to banish a dream. I had been standing at the helm in the dark night, a feeble lantern burning over my head, and now this man had come and tried to push me aside. And as I would not yield, he put his foot on my chest and slowly crushed me while I still clung to the hub of the helm, wrenching it round in falling. But the man seized it, pulled it back in place, and pushed me away. I soon collected myself, however, ran to the hatchway which gave on to the mess quarters, and cried out: “Men! Comrades! Come here, quick! A stranger has driven me away from the helm!” Slowly they came up, climbing the companion ladder, tired, swaying, powerful figures. “Am I the helmsman?” I asked. They nodded, but they had eyes only for the stranger, stood round him in a semi-circle, and when, in a commanding voice, he said: “Don’t disturb me!” they gathered together, nodded at me, and withdrew down the companion ladder. What kind of people are these? Do they ever think, or do they only shuffle pointlessly over the earth?



Me and My Shadow

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

In which hen-pecked little Trimble, constantly nagged by his wife, and unable to stand up for himself, drinks a vial of iridescent green liquid given him by a strange little white-haired man. Suddenly he finds he has a ghost, and this ghost shows him how to change his personality. After which Trimble finds life is very different indeed . . .

LITTLE Trimble lowered a shaking apron, blinked his weak apologetic eyes.

“Now, now, Martha! Don’t be like that!” he quavered.

Resting a beefy arm athwart her end of the breakfast table, Martha spoke slowly and viciously. Her voice was harsh with emotion, her features red with wrath, her expression venomous.

“For fifteen years I’ve lectured you, instructed you, commanded you. For seven hundred and eighty weeks of seven days each I’ve tried to do my duty as a wife by knocking some spark of manhood into your miserable body.” She slammed a huge, horny hand upon the table, made the milk jump in its jug. “And what’ve I got?”

“Aw, Martha!”

“What I’ve got,” she bellowed, “is exactly what I had right at the start—a crawling, quivering, undersized, cowardly, spineless and gutless little worm!”

“I ain’t as bad as that,” he protested feebly.

“Prove it!” she shouted. “Prove it! Go and do what you haven’t found the nerve to do in fifteen shivering years. Go and

tell that boss of yours you've got to have a raise."

"*Tell* him?" Trimble blinked at her, aghast. "You mean *ask* him?"

"I said to *tell* him." Her voice was bitingly sarcastic, and still loud.

"He'll fire me."

"Of course, you would think of that!" Down came the hand again. The milk went over the top with fixed bayonets, flopped, made a spatter in No Man's Land. "*Let* him fire you. It'll be your chance. Tell him you've waited for it fifteen years, then hand him a poke in the gizzard. Find another job."

"What if there *ain't* another job?" he asked, almost tearfully.

"There're plenty. Dozens of them." She stood up, her mighty bulk still awing him despite years of familiarity. "Unfortunately, they're for men!"

He flinched, reached for his hat.

"I'll see," he murmured.

"You'll see! You were going to see a year back. And the year before that."

Her voice followed him out the front door and a hundred yards down the street. "And the year before that, and the one before that. Pfah!"

He mirrored himself in a window farther down. There he was, well under average height, paunchy, flabby, insignificant. Guess everybody was pretty well right about him. Just a fat little slob.

A downtown bus came along. He reached the door, got boosted in by a brawny hustler behind. The hustler rough-housed past him while he stood dumbly tendering the driver a quarter.

Trimble didn't say anything when a hard, heavy elbow dented the flabbiness over his ribs. He was used to it.

The driver slapped five nickels into his hand, scowled, shoved his machine in gear. Dropping a coin into the box, Trimble wandered to the back.

There was a vacant seat blocked by a blue-jowled individual.

The sitter undressed Trimble with one contemptuous rip of his eyes, made no attempt to move.

Stretching himself, Trimble inserted pudgy fingers in a swinging handle, hung on without remark.

Dismounting ten blocks down, he crossed the road, his path including a deep safety curve around the backside of a policeman's horse. Trotting along the sidewalk, he reached the office.

Watson was already in. Trimble said, "Good morning!" and Watson growled, "Humph!" Every day their exchange was the same—good morning, and humph.

The others came in later. One replied to Trimble's greeting with what might have been, "Marn!" or "Garn!" The rest grunted, snorted, or grinned as if at a secret joke.

At ten, the boss made his advent. He never just turned up, or arrived, or landed. He always made an advent. This time was the same. The boss entered with the air of one about to lay a foundation-stone, or launch a battleship, or something. Nobody greeted him. They tried to look extremely respectful and very busy at one and the same time. Except Trimble, who managed to depict servile idleness.

He gave the boss an hour to get through the morning mail, then prayed for strength, knocked, went in.

"Excuse me, sir."

"Hey?" The bison head came up, savage eyes transfixed the petitioner. "Well, what d'you want?"

"Nothing, sir, nothing," assured Trimble, his blood turning to water. "It wasn't important, and I've forgotten it."

"Then get out!"

Trimble got out. Twelve o'clock came, and he tried to steel himself once more. There seemed to be a shortage of steel. He sat down again wearily.

At ten minutes to one, he tried for the third time, stood outside the boss's door, lifted his knuckles, and then changed his mind. He'd leave it until after lunch. The food would fortify him.

There was a bar on the way to the cafeteria. He'd passed it a thousand times, but had never gone inside. This time, it struck him that a shot of whisky might help. He'd heard it called Dutch courage, and any sort of courage—Dutch or Zulu—was something he could do with aplenty.

Warily, his gaze went up and down the street. If Martha caught him in this sink of iniquity she'd fell him in his tracks. Yes, another Indian would bite the dust. But there wasn't any Martha. Greatly daring, he entered the bar.

The clients, or inmates, or whatever they're called, stared at him with open suspicion. Six of them were propped against the lengthy counter, their eyes summing him up as a barley-water addict. He'd have gone back if it hadn't been too late.

A bartender came along, said curtly, "What's yours?"

"A drink."

Somebody's snicker brought home to Trimble that one couldn't very well ask for a drink. One had to be more specific. For the life of him, he couldn't think of anything but beer. He didn't want beer.

"What's good?" he asked brightly.

"It depends."

"Depends on what?"

"Whether you've got a thirst, a yen, or a woe!"

"I have," said Trimble fervently, "got a woe!"

"Leave it to me." With an assured flick of his cloth the bartender went away. He did things with bottles, came back, placed before the customer a glass of cloudy, yellow liquid. "That'll be forty."

Trimble paid, sat and stared at the glass. It fascinated him. It frightened him. It was as full of invitation and terror as an uncoiled cobra. He was still looking at it five minutes later when his neighbour, a hefty six-footer, casually put out a hairy hand, took the glass, drained it at a gulp. On no one but Trimble could such a breach of saloon etiquette be perpetrated.

"Always glad to help a pal," jeered the speaker's mouth, while his eyes said, "Well, d'ya want to make anything out of it?"

Offering no retort, no protest, Trimble went out. The contempt on the bartender's face was a hurtful thing. The others' raucous laughter was a dancing flame that scorched his neck and ears.

Safely outside, he communed with himself. What was the matter with him that he should be at the receiving end of all the kicks and butts? Could he help it that he was not a rip-roaring tough? Wasn't it the way he was made? Most important of all, what could he do about it—if anything?

There were these something-analysts to whom one could appeal. But they were doctors of a sort. He was terrified of doctors with their background of hospitals and operations. Besides, he feared appealing to anyone lest his reward be ridicule. He'd had plenty of ridicule ever since he was a kid. Was there a thing he didn't fear—just one, single thing of which he wasn't scared?

Somebody spoke close by him.

"Now don't be frightened. Maybe I can help you."

Turning, Trimble saw a little, white-haired man with a shrivelled form topped by a parchment face from which peered eyes of the clearest blue. The clothes this man wore were old-fashioned, curious, but his general appearance served to strengthen his expression of amiable understanding.

"I saw what happened in there." The little man nodded toward the bar. "I appreciate your position."

"Why should it interest you?" asked Trimble, guardedly.

"I'm always interested in people." His friendly hand took Trimble's arm and they walked along side by side. "People are infinitely more interesting than things." The blue eyes twinkled gently. "It is an iron rule that everybody has one outstanding fault, or, if you prefer, one fundamental weakness. The commonest one is fear. The man who fears no man may yet fear cancer. The dictator fears hidden thoughts. Many people fear death, and those who don't, fear life."

"True," conceded Trimble, thawing in spite of himself.

"You are a slave of fear," went on the ancient. "Your case is

made malignant by your own consciousness of it. You are too aware.”

“Don’t I know it!”

“That’s exactly what I’m telling you! You know it. And it is always with you. You cannot forget it.”

“I wish I could,” said Trimble. “Maybe someday I shall. Maybe I’ll get guts. Heaven knows I’ve tried!”

“I’m sure you have.” The wizened one smiled happily. “All a trier needs is the support of an ever-present friend. He craves encouragement, and, if need be, assistance. Every man has a friend of his own.”

“Show me mine,” challenged Trimble lugubriously. “I’m a hell of a pal to myself.”

“You shall have the support gained only by a favoured few,” promised the other.

He looked around very cautiously, then felt in the depths of a pocket.

“You shall quaff from a fountain in nethermost Tibet.”

He produced a long, thin vial filled with liquid of iridescent green.

“This,” he whispered, “will give you ears to hear the voice of darkness, a tongue to talk in tones of a ghost.”

“It’ll *what*?”

“Take it,” urged the other. “I give it because it is the law of Shan that grace shall beget grace, and strength shall father strength.” Another gentle smile. “You have now only one fear to conquer—the fear to drink!”

He was gone. How he went was a mystery to the astonished Trimble. First, the little man was there, the next instant his wraithlike form had merged with distant pedestrians. Trimble stood, stared up the street, then at the vial clenched in plump fingers. He put the thing in his pocket.

Ten minutes to spare outside the time required to get back to the office. Trimble exited from the cafeteria, his stomach only half filled, his soul troubled. The choice lay between a scene with the boss or a scene with Martha. He was between the devil

and the deep blue sea and the fact had spoiled his appetite.

Detouring around the block, he found a vacant lot free from scurrying people. Seeking the comparative privacy of the space's farthest corner, he took out the shining vial, had another look at it.

The contents were brilliantly green and looked oily. The stuff might be a drug, or even poison. If a drug could make gangsters hold up banks, what could it make him do? Or, if it was a poison, would it make him die peacefully and without pain? Would Martha weep when she saw him lying stiff and cold, a saintlike expression upon his waxen face?

Uncapping the vial, he put his nose to it, got a whiff of dreamy, elusive odours. He stuck in the tip of his tongue, licked it around his mouth, absorbing the flavour. Strong, aromatic, enticing. Putting the vial to his lips, he swigged the contents to the last drop. It was the first chance he had ever taken, the most reckless thing he had ever done.

"And about time, too!" commented an eerie voice.

Trimble looked around. There wasn't anybody near him. He threw away the empty vial, decided he'd been deluded.

"Down here," hinted the voice.

"Uhm?" Trimble stared in a circle. Nobody! Gosh, that must have been a potent brew—he was imagining things already.

"Down here," urged the voice with sudden impatience. "On the floor, you barrel-shaped lump of stupidity!" A pause, then complainingly: "I'm your shadow."

"Oh, suffering snakes!" mouthed Trimble, covering his face with quivering hands. "I'm talking to my shadow! I've got the rats on one drink!"

"Don't be such a damned dope!" reproved the shadow. "Every man's got his black ghost, but not every guy can use or understand shady language." Silence, while the shade pondered, then the blunt command: "Come on—we're going places."

"Where?"

"We're going to beat up that man in the bar."

“What?” yelled Trimble, at the top of his voice. A couple of pedestrians stopped dead on the sidewalk, gaped across the lot. Trimble took no notice. His mind was a whirl of wild confusion, his whole being tormented by fear of the strait-jacket and the padded cell.

“Don’t be so all-fired noisy.”

The ghost faded slightly as a cloud crossed the sun, then came back at full strength. “Now that we can pow-wow, I reckon I’d better have a name. You can call me Clarence.”

“Cl . . . Cl . . . Cl . . .”

“Sure! Anything wrong with it?” demanded the other aggressively. “Shut up! Get over here, nearer the wall—that’s right! See me sitting up? See me big—bigger’n you? Now bend that right arm. Okay, take a look at mine. A humdinger, huh? What wouldn’t Dempsey give for a limb like this!”

“God!” groaned Trimble pitifully, his arm bent, his eyes turned appealingly to the sky.

“You’n me,” went on Clarence, “can now co-operate. You do the aiming, and I’ll hand the wallops. You’ve got to make sure you get the right side of the light to make me big and strong, then we’ll lash out together. Just take good aim, remembering that I’m with you. Every time you hand a guy a prod, I’ll paste him one that’ll hang him on a ledge twelve floors up. D’you understand?”

“Y-yes,” admitted Trimble, his voice almost inaudible. He cast a leery glance at his rear, saw that the number of onlookers had increased to ten.

“Turn around so’s I’ll be behind you,” ordered the shadow. “Take a swipe by yourself, then another one with me. You’ll be surprised at the difference.”

Obediently, Trimble turned, faced the grinning audience, plunged his pudgy fist into thin air. It was a futile effort, and he knew it. Drawing back, he swung again, using all his strength and weight. His arm shot out like a piston, dragging his body off balance. He stumbled forward. The spectators laughed.

“See? What did I tell you? Not one guy in ten knows his own

strength.” Clarence permitted himself a ghostly chuckle. “Now we’re all set. How about laying those kibitzers in a row, just to get our hand in?”

“No!” shouted Trimble. He wiped perspiration from a crimson half-crazed face. The audience went up to fifteen.

“Okay, have it your own way. Now let’s get back to the bar, and remember, I’m always with you!”

With his feet dragging more and more reluctantly, Trimble reached the bar. He stood outside, knees knocking, while his bellicose shade gave quick instructions.

“Nobody can hear me but you. You’re one of the favoured few who can hear and speak the language of the dark. We’ll go in there together, and you’ll do what I tell you to do, say what I tell you to say. Whatever happens, don’t get scared—I’ll be with you, and I could flop a bull elephant.”

“You b-bet,” agreed Trimble with total lack of enthusiasm.

“All right. What are you waiting for?”

Like a condemned criminal pacing the thirteen fateful steps, Trimble moved through the doors and into the bar. The same gang was still there, the same beefy hijacker lounging at the nearer end.

The bartender took one look at the entrant, smirked, then jerked an informative thumb. The hijacker sat pat and scowled. Still smirking, the bartender came up.

“What can I do for you?”

“Switch on the lights,” gasped Trimble in an unearthly voice, “and I’ll show you something.”

Now he’d done it! He’d committed himself beyond withdrawal. He’d have to go through with the whole whacky affair right until the interns came and bore him away.

The bartender considered. Whatever was going to be shown, it could be twisted into something that would add to the day’s fun. He decided to oblige.

“Sure!” he said, and switched them on.

Trimble looked around, absorbed a sudden dose of confidence. It was the sight at his side. There was Clarence towering up the wall like a mighty djinn.



“Go on,” commanded the tremendous shadow. “Do your stuff?”

Taking one step forward, Trimble snatched up the hijacker’s glass, flung its contents into the fellow’s face.

The recipient arose like one in a dream, gasped, mopped his streaming features, gasped again. Then he removed his jacket, folded it carefully, placed it on the counter. He spoke to his opponent very slowly, very deliberately, and very politely.

“I ain’t rolling in money, but my heart is bursting with charity. I’ll see that you get a decent burial!” With that, he released a pile-driver.

“Duck!” yelled Clarence.

Trimble pulled his head into his boots, felt an express locomotive rush across his hair.

“Now!” screamed Clarence frantically.

Popping up, Trimble slammed out a fist, concentrating on his aim, but putting all his weight and strength behind the blow. He tried for the Adam’s apple, got it, and for a moment thought he was going to stick his arm through the man’s neck. It was something like walloping the sixtieth floor of the Empire State Building, and the effect was just as spectacular. The fellow went down like a poled ox. Oh boy, had he got power.

“Again!” raved Clarence. “Lemme soak him another as he gets up.”

The smitten one was struggling to rise, an expression of absolute incredulity upon his face. He got halfway, making uncertain motions with his arms and legs.

Trimble wound up his right arm until he could almost hear it whiz. Then he let his fist fly, this time trying for the other’s smeller. He got it with a loud swack like the sound of a skied baseball. The victim tried to throw his head clean off his shoulders, then collapsed and slid a foot along the floor.

“G-g-gosh!” stuttered an awed voice.

Shaking with excitement, Trimble turned his back on his supine opponent, went to the counter. The bartender came up, his features wearing an expression of deep respect. Trimble

licked his own forefinger, drew a spit face inside a beer-ring on the counter.

“Put curls on that!”

The bartender hesitated, looked around with a beseeching air, swallowed hard. Meekly, he licked his finger, added the curls.

Reaching over, Trimble snatched the fellow's cloth.

“This is what'll happen next time you pull faces at me.” He rubbed out the face.

“Now, Mister, don't get tough,” pleaded the bartender.

“Nuts!” It was the first time Trimble had used the word as a retort. He shied the cloth back, had a look at his snoring victim, walked out.

As his plump little form passed through the doors, a customer said, “That guy sure is dynamite! Looks to me like he's full of dope, and ripe for a killing.”

“I dunno,” The bartender was both subdued and sheepish. “You can't never tell from the looks of them. Take Slugs McKeefe, he's a world-beater at his weight, but he's only a fat little guy. I didn't like that feller's looks from the first—he might be Slugs' brother.”

“He might,” conceded the critic thoughtfully.

Down on the floor, the stricken one's bubbling snore ended in a gasp, a gulp, and an oath. He stirred, tried to sit up.

Out on the street, Clarence said, delight in his voice, “Now for the boss.”

“No, no, not that!” Trimble's apologetic face was crimson from the strain of his recent adventure. His eyes kept flickering back, searching for the murderous pursuit that he thought was inevitable. It was hard to believe that he'd actually done what he had done, and he couldn't understand how he'd escaped alive.

“I said now for the boss, you animated pumpkin!” repeated the shadow, with much asperity.

“But I daren't batter the boss.” Trimble's voice grew to a

loud, protesting wail. “It’ll get me in stir.”

“*What’ll* get you in stir?” demanded a passer-by, stopping and staring at the distracted speaker.

“Nothing—I was talking to myself.” Trimble stopped as his irritated shadow snarled an interruption. He was reluctant to take the offered advice, but it looked as if he had to. “Hey!” he called. His questioner came back.

“Mind your own damn business,” said Trimble, rudely.

“Okay, okay, keep your hair on!” The other was startled, hurried away.

“See?” chortled Clarence. “Now for the boss. We won’t get hard unless we hafta.”

“Have to,” corrected Trimble.

“Hafta,” Clarence persisted. “We’ll talk first. If he won’t appease us, we’ll resort to force.” He was quiet for a moment, then added: “And don’t forget the lights—I like to grow powerful before I slap ’em.”

“Oh, all right.” Trimble began to feel resigned to a course of events that eventually was going to dump him in a cell, if not in the morgue. With a sigh of martyrdom, he entered the building, went upstairs to the office.

“Afternoon!”

“Humph!” said Watson.

Switching on the office lights, Trimble looked around, located his shady partner, then walked up close to Watson, and spoke in a very loud voice.

“I don’t expect anything but a grunt from a pig. Might I remind you that I bade you good afternoon?”

“Eh? . . . ah! . . . huh?” Watson was both scared and thunderstruck. “Ah! . . . very well . . . good afternoon!”

“That’s right! Remember it in future.” With numb feet and a whirling brain, Trimble went across to the boss’s door. He raised his knuckles to knock.

“Don’t!” swore Clarence.

Trimble shuddered, grasped the door-knob, turned it gently. Taking a deep breath, he gave the door a tremendous thrust that

sent it back with a crash. The thing almost flew off its hinges. As the boss shot up from behind his desk, Trimble walked in.

“You,” roared the boss, vibrating with rage, “you’re fired!”

Turning, Trimble went back, closing the maltreated door behind him. He didn’t say a word.

“Trimble,” bellowed the boss, his voice reverberating behind the door, “come here.”

Trimble entered for the second time. Closing the door on extended ears in the outer office, he scowled at the boss, then went to the wall, switched on the lights. After that, he fooled around until he got a position that made Clarence ceiling-high. The boss squatted and watched all this, his face purple, his eyes popping.

They stared at each other awhile, their silence broken only by the boss’s heavy, asthmatic breathing. Finally, the latter spoke.

“Have you been drinking, Trimble?”

“My taste in liquid refreshment is not a matter for discussion,” said Trimble, flatly. “I came in to tell you that I’ve resigned.”

Stark horror filled his soul as the fateful words fell from his lips. He’d done it now! Which was worse, Clarence or Martha? He didn’t know—but he sure had burned his boats.

“Resigned?” parroted the boss, mouthing it as if it was some new, outlandish word.

“Sure! I’m fed up. I’m going to offer my services to Rubinstein and Flanagan.” The boss shied like a frightened horse, and he went desperately on: “They’ll pay me well for what I know. I’m sick and tired of my lousy salary.”

“Now Trimble,” said the boss, gasping for breath. “I’ve no desire to part with you after your many years of service. I would not like to see your undoubted talents wasted on a gang of pikers like Rubenstein and Flanagan. I’ll give you another two dollars a week.”

“Lemme wipe his face off his neck,” suggested Clarence, eagerly.

“No!” shouted Trimble.

“Three dollars,” said the boss.

“Come on—just one crack,” Clarence persisted.

“No!” yelled Trimble, sweating at every pore.

“All right, I’ll give you five.” The boss’s face contorted.
“And that’s final.”

Mopping his brow, Trimble felt as if he was nearing the end of an hour upon the rack. Perspiration trickled down his spine, and his legs felt weak.

“I’ve been grossly underpaid the last ten years, and I wouldn’t stay with you for a raise of less than twelve bucks. I’m worth an extra twenty to you, but I’m willing to take twelve, and let you have eight for cigars.”

“C-c-cigars!”

“Rubinstein and Flanagan’ll raise me twelve. You can do it—or do without.”

“Twelve!” The boss was dumbfounded, then annoyed, then thoughtful. Eventually, he reached a decision.

“It seems, Trimble, that I have been guilty of underestimating your abilities. I’ll give you the increase for which you ask”—he bent forward and glared—“in exchange for a fidelity bond.”

“Okay. I’ll stay.” Making for the door, he opened it, said, “Thanks!”

“See?” said Clarence.

Without answering his nagging shade, Trimble took his seat at his desk.

In tones audible all over the room, he spoke to Watson.

“Nice weather we’re having.”

“Humph!”

“EH?” Trimble bawled.

“Very nice,” replied Watson, meekly. . .

His heart sang like a nest of nightingales while he worked through the afternoon. Somehow, the story of his affair with the boss leaked around the office. People spoke to him in manner different from that of yore. It was almost incredible, but he was getting something he’d never had before—respect.

Rain was hammering down when he closed his books and left for home. What did it matter? The stinging drops felt good on his plump, beaming face, and the air was like old wine. Disdaining the bus, he walked along the wet, shining avenue, whistling to himself as he trotted along. He'd got news that would paralyze Martha!

A noise came from around the next corner, an explosive sound like that of a burst tyre. Then another and another and another. Running feet pounded somewhere around the angle of the corner building. He came level, saw two figures racing toward him. One was six jumps behind the other, and both had guns. The nearest of the sprinting pair was twenty yards away. It was his opponent in the bar!

Spears of fear jabbed themselves into Trimble's brain. There was an uproar further down that street, and it looked like the running pair were making a frantic getaway. If the leader recognized Trimble, he'd seize the chance to blot him out in full flight. There was nowhere to hide in those split-seconds, no place in which to bury himself until the danger had passed. Even worse, the sky was heavily clouded, and his precious shadow was gone.

"Clarence!" he screamed, fearfully.

No reply. His shout drew the leading fugitive's attention. The fellow knew him immediately, sucked back thin lips in a deathly grin, raised his weapon. He was almost upon his quaking victim, the range was less than one yard, and it was impossible to miss.

Trimble kicked him on the knee-cap.

He didn't do it on the impulse of the moment, nor with the desperation of a cornered rat. He was driven to it by the inevitable conclusion that his only hope lay in behaving exactly as if his missing shadow was still in support. So he lashed out with his foot, striving to connect accurately, using every ounce of his strength.

The other promptly plunged onto his face as if determined to poke his head through the sidewalk and have a look at the

subway. It was a heartening sight that made Trimble suspect his efficient shade might still be hanging around even though unseen. The thought lent him courage.

With the startled expression of one who has seen an ant miraculously change into a lion, the second runner pulled up almost chest to chest with Trimble. He was a tall, lanky specimen whose Adam's apple seemed beyond reach.

Trimble batted his stomach against his spine. The fellow gagged, bent his upper half to a convenient angle, and Trimble bashed the apple. The victim did not assume the expected horizontal position. His sallow features suffused with a mixture of hatred and agony, he straightened, swiped at Trimble with the barrel of his weapon.

The blow failed to connect. Following former practice, Trimble sucked his head into his shoulders, blew it up again, stabbed another one into the stomach. The face came down once more and he smacked it up with considerable vim.

A crash sounded behind him, and a red-hot wasp bit off the lobe of his left ear. He took no notice, and he concentrated upon the face to the complete exclusion of everything else. Foul oaths were pouring from somewhere near the source of the crash, heavy feet were thumping the sidewalk toward him, people were shouting and whooping all around.

He heard none of it. His mind had no knowledge of his first assailant's resurrection. That snarling pan opposite his own was his sole object in life, the one purpose of his being.

With aim and weight and strength, he bashed the face up, socked it down, clouted it backward. Something hard and knobbly exploded out of nothingness, seemed to tear the left cheekbone from his own head. Another one appeared to tear his ribs apart. But Trimble kept working on that face, battering it into a bloody mask and pounding in the gore.

His heart was a jitterbug, and his breath coming in whistling sobs when a long, black object sailed over the hateful face, descended, pushing it down to the floor. He made a couple more automatic swiping motions, then stood shuddering and

blinking. His vision cleared slowly.

The cop said, "Mister, for a feller your size you sure are sudden death!"

Looking around, Trimble saw that half a dozen cops had arrived, and were bundling up his recent opponents.

"That first guy," went on the other, "was Ham Carlotti, and we've wanted him for months." He clothed Trimble in admiration. "We owe you one for this. Any time we can do something for you, just ask."

Getting out a handkerchief, Trimble dabbed his ear, looked at the handkerchief. There was blood on it. Wow! He was bleeding like a stuck pig! And his left eye was swelling up, his cheekbone felt like hell, his ribs were a torment. He was in a devil of a mess!

"You can do something for me right now," he told the cop. "Ever since I was a kid I've wanted to ride home in a police car. How about it?"

"You bet!" the cop enthused. "It'll be a pleasure." He called to the driver of a car that had just swung in. "This gent's been a help. The ride's on us."

"Where d'ya live?"

Clambering in, Trimble sat back and enjoyed himself. Off they went, hell-for-leather, the siren yelling like a banshee, traffic scuttling madly from their path. This was the life!

The sun came out, beaming at full strength. He became aware of his shadow riding by his side.

"Clarence."

"Yes, Master," he said very humbly.

"In future, you can leave it to me."

"Yes, Master. But . . ."

"Shut up!" bawled Trimble.

"Shut up who?" inquired the driver, glancing surprisedly over his shoulder.

"The missus," Trimble answered glibly. "I'm ready for war."

Smiling broadly, the driver whirled his car into the curb,

followed his passenger to the door. When Martha opened it, he touched his cap, said: "Ma'am, your husband's a hero." Then he went.

"Hero!" snorted Martha. Crossing brawny arms on her ample bosom, she braced herself for an informative speech. Then her eyes found her partner's war-scarred face. She let the eyes protrude. "Where've you been, to get a mug like that?"

Vouchsafing no reply, Trimble pushed past her, went into the hall. He waited until she had closed the door, then put skinned knuckles on his hips, faced her squarely. He had a kindly nature, and he had no desire to hurt her unduly, but it was now necessary to impress this woman that she had to deal with a man.

"Martha, I've slapped down a couple of gangsters, and I've soaked the boss another twelve bucks." He blinked as she clutched at the wall for support. He drew a deep breath. "I've been very patient with you for many years, but I've reached the end of my tether, and from now on I want no more of your lip."

"Lip?" she echoed dazedly, not believing her ears.

"Otherwise, I'll paste you one that'll make you wish you'd brought your parachute."

"Horatio!" She staggered forward, her face a picture of utter stupefaction. "You wouldn't strike a *woman*, would you?"

"Wouldn't I!" He spat on his sore knuckles.

"Oh, Horatio!" In one wild swoop she had embraced his neck and found his protesting lips.

Heck, aren't women peculiar critters? They liked 'em gentle, but a few—like Martha—preferred 'em tough. Might as well give her more of the same.

Grabbing her hair, he pulled her face over to a comfortable slant. Then he kissed her. He concentrated on aim, weight, and strength. It was a pouting, juicy, emphatic osculation that finished in a loud report.

Grinning triumphantly, he peeked over her shoulder to see what his subdued shadow thought of that. But Clarence was too busy to bother. Didn't Martha have a shadow too?

The Waxwork

A. M. BURRAGE

In which Raymond Hewson, a journalist, spends the night in the Murderer's Den of Marriner's Waxworks. Among the effigies are those of the usual well-known murderers—Crippen, Mahon, Browne and Kennedy—and one which is the star turn, Dr Bourdette, the only one who has not been hanged. Dr Bourdette terrorized Paris for a long time, cutting throats at night with a razor, but he was never caught. His effigy is particularly realistic, and Hewson finds it strangely disturbing . . .

WHILE the uniformed attendants of Marriner's Waxworks were ushering the last stragglers through the great glass-panelled double doors, the manager sat in his office interviewing Raymond Hewson.

The manager was a youngish man, stout, blond and of medium height. He wore his clothes well and contrived to look extremely smart without appearing over-dressed. Raymond Hewson looked neither. His clothes, which had been good when new and which were still carefully brushed and pressed, were beginning to show signs of their owner's losing battle with the world. He was a small, spare, pale man, with lank, errant brown hair, and although he spoke plausibly and even forcibly he had the defensive and somewhat furtive air of a man who was used to rebuffs. He looked what he was, a man gifted somewhat above the ordinary, who was a failure through his lack of self-assertion.

The manager was speaking.

"There is nothing new in your request," he said. "In fact we refuse it to different people—mostly young bloods who have tried to make bets—about three times a week. We have nothing to gain and something to lose by letting people spend the night

in our Murderers' Den. If I allowed it, and some young idiot lost his senses, what would be my position? But your being a journalist somewhat alters the case."

Hewson smiled.

"I suppose you mean that journalists have no senses to lose."

"No, no," laughed the manager, "but one imagines them to be responsible people. Besides, here we have something to gain: publicity and advertisement."

"Exactly," said Hewson, "and there I thought we might come to terms."

The manager laughed again.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "I know what's coming. You want to be paid twice, do you? It used to be said years ago that Madame Tussaud's would give a man a hundred pounds for sleeping alone in the Chamber of Horrors. I hope you don't think that we have made any such offer. Er—what is your paper, Mr Hewson?"

"I am freelancing at present," Hewson confessed, "working on space for several papers. However, I should find no difficulty in getting the story printed. The *Morning Echo* would use it like a shot. 'A Night with Marriner's Murderers.' No live paper could turn it down."

The manager rubbed his chin.

"Ah! And how do you propose to treat it?"

"I shall make it gruesome, of course; gruesome with just a saving touch of humour."

The other nodded and offered Hewson his cigarette-case.

"Very well, Mr Hewson," he said. "Get your story printed in the *Morning Echo*, and there will be a five pound note waiting for you here when you care to come and call for it. But first of all, it's no small ordeal that you're proposing to undertake. I'd like to be quite sure about you, and I'd like you to be quite sure about yourself. I own I shouldn't care to take it on. I've seen those figures dressed and undressed. I know all about the process of their manufacture, I can walk about in their company downstairs as unmoved as if I were walking among so many

skittles, but I should hate having to sleep down there alone among them.”

“Why?” asked Hewson.

“I don’t know. There isn’t any reason. I don’t believe in ghosts. If I did I should expect them to haunt the scene of their crimes or the spot where their bodies were laid, instead of a cellar which happens to contain their waxwork effigies. It’s just that I couldn’t sit alone among them all night, with their seeming to stare at me in the way they do. After all, they represent the lowest and most appalling types of humanity, and—although I would not own it publicly—the people who come to see them are not generally charged with the very highest motives. The whole atmosphere of the place is unpleasant, and if you are susceptible to atmosphere, I warn you that you are in for a very uncomfortable night.”

Hewson had known that from the moment when the idea had first occurred to him. His soul sickened at the prospect, even while he smiled casually upon the manager. But he had a wife and family to keep, and for the past month he had been living on paragraphs, eked out by his rapidly dwindling store of savings. Here was a chance not to be missed—the price of a special story in the *Morning Echo*, with a five-pound note to add to it. It meant comparative wealth and luxury for a week, and freedom from the worst anxieties for a fortnight. Besides, if he wrote the story well, it might lead to an offer of regular employment.

“The way of transgressors—and newspaper men—is hard,” he said. “I have already promised myself an uncomfortable night because your murderers’ den is obviously not fitted up as an hotel bedroom. But I don’t think your waxworks will worry me much.”

“You’re not superstitious?”

“Not a bit,” Hewson laughed.

“But you’re a journalist; you must have a strong imagination.”

“The news editors for whom I’ve worked have always complained that I haven’t any. Plain facts are not considered

sufficient in our trade, and the papers don't like offering their readers unbuttered bread."

The manager smiled and rose.

"Right," he said. "I think the last of the people have gone. Wait a moment. I'll give orders for the figures downstairs not to be draped, and let the night people know that you'll be there. Then I'll take you down and show you round."

He picked up the receiver of a house telephone, spoke into it and presently replaced it.

"One condition I'm afraid I must impose on you," he remarked. "I must ask you not to smoke. We had a fire scare down in the Murderers' Den this evening. I don't know who gave the alarm, but whoever it was it was a false one. Fortunately there were very few people down there at the time, or there might have been a panic. And now, if you're ready, we'll make a move."

Hewson followed the manager through half a dozen rooms where attendants were busy shrouding the kings and queens of England, the generals and prominent statesmen of this and other generations, all the mixed herd of humanity whose fame or notoriety had rendered them eligible for this kind of immortality. The manager stopped once and spoke to a man in uniform, saying something about an arm-chair in the Murderer's Den.

"It's the best we can do for you, I'm afraid," he said to Hewson. "I hope you'll be able to get some sleep."

He led the way through an open barrier and down ill-lit stone stairs which conveyed a sinister impression of giving access to a dungeon. In a passage at the bottom were a few preliminary horrors, such as relics of the Inquisition, a rack taken from a medieval castle, branding irons, thumbscrews, and other mementoes of man's one-time cruelty to man. Beyond the passage was the Murderers' Den.

It was a room of irregular shape with a vaulted roof, and dimly lit by electric lights burning behind inverted bowls of frosted glass. It was, by design, an eerie and uncomfortable

chamber—a chamber whose atmosphere invited its visitors to speak in whispers. There was something of the air of a chapel about it, but a chapel no longer devoted to the practice of piety and given over now for base and impious worship.

The waxwork murderers stood on low pedestals with numbered tickets at their feet. Seeing them elsewhere, and without knowing whom they represented, one would have thought them a dull-looking crew, chiefly remarkable for the shabbiness of their clothes, and as evidence of the changes of fashion even among the unfashionable.

Recent notorieties rubbed dusty shoulders with the old “favourites”. Thurtell, the murderer of Weir, stood as if frozen in the act of making a shop-window gesture to young Bywaters. There was Lefroy the poor half-baked little snob who killed for gain so that he might ape the gentleman. Within five yards of him sat Mrs Thompson, that erotic romanticist, hanged to propitiate British middle-class matronhood. Charles Peace, the only member of that vile company who looked uncompromisingly and entirely evil, sneered across a gangway at Norman Thorne. Browne and Kennedy, the two most recent additions, stood between Mrs Dyer and Patrick Mahon.

The manager, walking around with Hewson, pointed out several of the more interesting of these unholy notabilities.

“That’s Crippen; I expect you recognise him. Insignificant little beast who looks as if he couldn’t tread on a worm. That’s Armstrong. Looks like a decent, harmless country gentleman, doesn’t he? There’s old Vaquier; you can’t miss him because of his beard. And of course this——”

“Who’s that?” Hewson interrupted in a whisper, pointing.

“Oh, I was coming to him,” said the manager in a light undertone. “Come and have a good look at him. This is our star turn. He’s the only one of the bunch that hasn’t been hanged.”

The figure which Hewson had indicated was that of a small slight man not much more than five feet in height. It wore little waxed moustaches, large spectacles, and a caped coat. There was something so exaggeratedly French in its appearance that it

reminded Hewson of a stage caricature. He could not have said precisely why the mild-looking face seemed to him so repellent, but he had already recoiled a step and, even in the manager's company, it cost him an effort to look again.

"But who is he?" he asked.

"That," said the manager, "is Dr Bourdette."

Hewson shook his head doubtfully.

"I think I've heard the name," he said, "but I forget in connection with what."

The manager smiled.

"You'd remember better if you were a Frenchman," he said. "For some long while that man was the terror of Paris. He carried on his work of healing by day, and of throat-cutting by night, when the fit was on him. He killed for the sheer devilish pleasure it gave him to kill, and always in the same way—with a razor. After this last crime he left a clue behind him which set the police upon his track. One clue led to another, and before very long they knew that they were on the track of the Parisian equivalent of our Jack the Ripper, and had enough evidence to send him to the madhouse or the guillotine on a dozen capital charges.

"But even then our friend here was too clever for them. When he realised that the toils were closing about him he mysteriously disappeared, and ever since the police of every civilised country have been looking for him. There is no doubt that he managed to make away with himself, and by some means which has prevented his body coming to light. One or two crimes of a similar nature have taken place since his disappearance, but he is believed almost for certain to be dead, and the experts believe these recrudescences to be the work of an imitator. It's queer, isn't it, how every notorious murderer has imitators?"

Hewson shuddered and fidgeted with his feet.

"I don't like him at all," he confessed. "Ugh! What eyes he's got!"

"Yes this figure's a little masterpiece, you find the eyes bite

into you? Well, that's excellent realism, then, for Bourdette practised mesmerism, and was supposed to mesmerise his victims before dispatching them. Indeed, had he not done so, it is impossible to see how so small a man could have done his ghastly work. There were never any signs of a struggle."

"I thought I saw him move," said Hewson with a catch in his voice.

The manager smiled.

"You'll have more than one optical illusion before the night's out, I expect. You shan't be locked in. You can come upstairs when you've had enough of it. There are watchmen on the premises, so you'll find company. Don't be alarmed if you hear them moving about. I'm sorry I can't give you any more light, because all the lights are on. For obvious reasons we keep this place as gloomy as possible. And now I think you had better return with me to the office and have a tot of whisky before beginning your night's vigil. . ."

The member of the night staff who placed the arm-chair for Hewson was inclined to be facetious.

"Where will you have it, sir?" he asked, grinning. "Just 'ere, so as you can 'ave a little talk with Crippen when you're tired of sitting still? Or there's old Mother Dyer over there, making eyes and looking as if she could do with a bit of company. Say where, sir."

Hewson smiled. The man's chaff pleased him if only because, for the moment at least, it lent the proceedings a much-desired air of the commonplace.

"I'll place it myself, thanks," he said. "I'll find out where the draughts come from first."

"You won't find any down here. Well, good night sir. I'm upstairs if you want me. Don't let 'em sneak up be'ind you and touch your neck with their cold clammy 'ands. And you look out for that old Mrs Dyer; I b'lieve she's taken a fancy to you."

Hewson laughed and wished the man good night. It was easier than he had expected. He wheeled the arm-chair—a heavy one upholstered in plush—a little way down the central

gangway, and deliberately turned it so that its back was towards the effigy of Dr Bourdette. For some undefined reason he liked Dr Bourdette a great deal less than his companions. Busying himself with arranging the chair he was almost light-hearted, but when the attendant's footfalls had died away and a deep hush stole over the chamber he realised that he had no slight ordeal before him.

The dim unwavering light fell on the rows of figures which were so uncannily like human beings that the silence and the stillness seemed unnatural and even ghastly. He missed the sound of breathing, the rustling of clothes, the hundred and one minute noises one hears when even the deepest silence has fallen upon a crowd. But the air was as stagnant as water at the bottom of a standing pond. There was not a breath in the chamber to stir a curtain or rustle a hanging drapery or start a shadow. His own shadow, moving in response to a shifted arm or leg, was all that could be coaxed into motion. All was still to the gaze and silent to the ear. "It must be like this at the bottom of the sea," he thought, and wondered how to work the phrase into his story on the morrow.

He faced the sinister figures boldly enough. They were only waxworks. So long as he let that thought dominate all others he promised himself that all would be well. It did not, however, save him long from the discomfort occasioned by the waxen stare of Dr Bourdette, which, he knew, was directed upon him from behind. The eyes of the little Frenchman's effigy haunted and tormented him, and he itched with the desire to turn and look.

"Come!" he thought, "my nerves have started already. If I turn and look at that dressed-up dummy it will be an admission of funk."

And then another voice in his brain spoke to him.

"It's because you're afraid that you won't turn and look at him."

The two voices quarrelled silently for a moment or two, and at last Hewson slewed his chair round a little and looked behind him.



Among the many figures standing in stiff, unnatural poses, the effigy of the dreadful little doctor stood out with a queer prominence, perhaps because a steady beam of light beat straight down upon it. Hewson flinched before the parody of mildness which some fiendishly skilled craftsman had managed to convey in wax, met the eyes for one agonised second, and turned again to face the other direction.

“He’s only a waxwork like the rest of you,” Hewson muttered defiantly. “You’re all only waxworks.”

They were only waxworks, yes, but waxworks don’t move. Not that he had seen the least movement anywhere, but it struck him that, in the moment or two while he had looked behind him, there had been the least subtle change in the grouping of the figures in front. Crippen, for instance, seemed to have turned at least one degree to the left. Or, thought Hewson, perhaps the illusion was due to the fact that he had not slewed his chair back into its exact original position. And there were Field and Grey, too; surely one of them had moved his hands. Hewson held his breath for a moment, and then drew his courage back to him as a man lifts a weight. He remembered the words of more than one news editor and laughed savagely to himself.

“And they tell me I’ve got no imagination!” he said beneath his breath.

He took a notebook from his pocket and wrote quickly.

“Mem—Deathly silence and unearthly stillness of figures. Like being bottom of sea. Hypnotic eyes of Dr Bourdette. Figures seem to move when not being watched.”

He closed the book suddenly over his fingers and looked round quickly and awfully over his right shoulder. He had neither seen nor heard a movement, but it was as if some sixth sense had made him aware of one. He looked straight into the vapid countenance of Lefroy which smiled vacantly back as if to say, “It wasn’t I!”

Of course it wasn’t he, or any of them, it was his own nerves. Or was it? Hadn’t Crippen moved again during that moment

when his attention was directed elsewhere. You couldn't trust that little man! Once you took your eyes off him he took advantage of it to shift position. That was what they were all doing, if he only knew it, he told himself; and half rose out of his chair. This was not quite good enough! He was going. He wasn't going to spend the night with a lot of waxworks which moved while he wasn't looking.

. . . Hewson sat down again. This was very cowardly and very absurd. They *were* only waxworks and they *couldn't* move; let him hold that thought and all would yet be well. Then why all that silent unrest about him?—a subtle something in the air which did not quite break the silence and happened, whichever way he looked, just beyond the boundaries of his vision.

He swung round quickly to encounter the mild but baleful stare of Dr Bourdette. Then, without warning, he jerked his head back to stare straight at Crippen. Ha! he'd nearly caught Crippen that time! "You'd better be careful, Crippen—and all the rest of you! If I do see one of you move I'll smash you to pieces! Do you hear?"

He ought to go, he told himself. Already he had experienced enough to write his story, or ten stories, for the matter of that. Well, then, why not go? The *Morning Echo* would be none the wiser as to how long he had stayed, nor would it care so long as his story was a good one. Yes, but that night watchman upstairs would chaff him. And the manager—one never knew—perhaps the manager would quibble over that five-pound note which he needed so badly. He wondered if Rose were asleep or if she were lying awake and thinking of him. She'd laugh when he told her that he had imagined . . .

This was a little too much! It was bad enough that the waxwork effigies of murderers should move when they weren't being watched, but it was intolerable that they should *breathe*. Somebody was breathing. Or was it his own breath which sounded to him as if it came from a distance? He sat rigid, listened and straining until he exhaled with a long sigh. His own breath after all, or—if not, Something had divined that he was

listening and had ceased breathing simultaneously.

Hewson jerked his head swiftly around and looked all about him out of haggard and hunted eyes. Everywhere his gaze encountered the vacant waxen faces, and everywhere he felt that by just some least fraction of a second he had missed seeing a movement of hand or foot, a silent opening or compression of lips, a flicker of eyelids, a look of human intelligence now smoothed out. They were like naughty children in a class, whispering, fidgeting and laughing behind their teacher's back, but blandly innocent when his gaze was turned upon them.

This would not do! This distinctly would not do! He must clutch at something, grip with his mind upon something which belonged essentially to the workaday world, to the daylight London streets. He was Raymond Hewson, an unsuccessful journalist, a living and breathing man, and these figures grouped around him were only dummies, so they could neither move nor whisper. What did it matter if they were supposed to be lifelike effigies of murderers? They were only made of wax and sawdust, and stood there for the entertainment of morbid sightseers and orange-sucking trippers. That was better! Now what was that funny story which somebody had told him in the Falstaff yesterday? . . .

He recalled part of it, but not all, for the gaze of Dr Bourdette, urged, challenged, and finally compelled him to turn.

Hewson half-turned, and then swung his chair so as to bring him face to face with the wearer of those dreadful hypnotic eyes. His own eyes were dilated and his mouth, at first set in a grin of terror, lifted at the corners in a snarl. Then Hewson spoke and woke a hundred sinister echoes.

"You moved, damn you!" he cried. "Yes, you did, damn you! I saw you!"

Then he sat quite still, staring straight before him, like a man found frozen in the Arctic snows.

Dr Bourdette's movements were leisurely. He stepped off his pedestal with the mincing care of a lady alighting from a 'bus.

The platform stood about two feet from the ground, and above the edge of it a plush-covered rope hung in arc-like curves. Dr Bourdette lifted up the rope until it formed an arch for him to pass under, stepped off the platform and sat down on the edge facing Hewson. Then he nodded and smiled and said "Good evening."

"I need hardly tell you," he continued, in perfect English in which was traceable only the least foreign accent, "that not until I overheard the conversation between you and the worthy manager of this establishment, did I suspect that I should have the pleasure of a companion here for the night. You cannot move or speak without my bidding, but you can hear me perfectly well. Something tells me that you are—shall I say nervous? My dear sir, have no illusions. I am not one of these contemptible effigies miraculously come to life: I am Dr Bourdette himself."

He paused, coughed and shifted his legs.

"Pardon me," he resumed, "but I am a little stiff. And let me explain. Circumstances with which I need not fatigue you, have made it desirable that I should live in England. I was close to this building this evening when I saw a policeman regarding me a thought too curiously. I guessed that he intended to follow and perhaps ask me embarrassing questions, so I mingled with the crowd and came in here. An extra coin bought my admission to the chamber in which we now meet, and an inspiration showed me a certain means of escape.

"I raised a cry of fire, and when all the fools had rushed to the stairs I stripped my effigy of the caped coat which you behold me wearing, donned it, hid my effigy under the platform at the back, and took its place on the pedestal.

"I own that I have since spent a very fatiguing evening, but fortunately I was not always being watched and had opportunities to draw an occasional deep breath and ease the rigidity of my pose. One small boy screamed and exclaimed that he saw me moving. I understood that he was to be whipped and put straight to bed on his return home, and I can only hope that the

threat has been executed to the letter.

“The manager’s description of me, which I had the embarrassment of being compelled to overhear, was biased but not altogether inaccurate. Clearly I am not dead, although it is as well that the world thinks otherwise. His account of my hobby, which I have indulged for years, although, through necessity, less frequently of late, was in the main true although not intelligently expressed. The world is divided between collectors and non-collectors. With the non-collectors we are not concerned. The collectors collect anything, according to their individual tastes, from money to cigarette cards, from moths to matchboxes. I collect throats.”

He paused again and regarded Hewson’s throat with interest mingled with disfavour.

“I am obliged to the chance which brought us together to night,” he continued, “and perhaps it would seem ungrateful to complain. From motives of personal safety my activities have been somewhat curtailed of late years, and I am glad of this opportunity of gratifying my somewhat unusual whim. But you have a skinny neck, sir, if you will overlook a personal remark. I should never have selected you from choice. I like men with thick necks . . . thick red necks . . .”

He fumbled in an inside pocket and took out something which he tested against a wet forefinger and then proceeded to pass gently to and fro across the palm of his left hand.

“This is a little French razor,” he remarked blandly. “They are not much used in England, but perhaps you know them? One strops them on wood. The blade, you will observe, is very narrow. They do not cut very deep, but deep enough. In just one little moment you shall see for yourself. I shall ask you the little civil question of all the polite barbers: Does the razor suit you, sir?”

He rose up, a diminutive but menacing figure of evil, and approached Hewson with the silent, furtive step of a hunting panther.

“You will have the goodness,” he said, “to raise your chin a

little. Thank you, and a little more. Just a little more. Ah, thank you! . . . *Merci, m'sieur . . . Ah, merci . . . merci . . .*”

Over one end of the chamber was a thick skylight of frosted glass which, by day, let in a few sickly and filtered rays from the floor above. After sunrise these began to mingle with the subdued light from the electric bulbs, and this mingled illumination added a certain ghastliness to a scene which needed no additional touch of horror.

The waxwork figures stood apathetically in their places, waiting to be admired or execrated by the crowds who would presently wander fearfully among them. In their midst, in the centre gangway, Hewson sat still, leaning far back in his armchair. His chin was uptilted as if he were waiting to receive attention from a barber, and although there was not a scratch upon his throat, nor anywhere upon his body, he was cold and dead. His previous employers were wrong in having credited him with no imagination.

Dr Bourdette on his pedestal watched the dead man unemotionally. He did not move, nor was he capable of motion. But then, after all, he was only a waxwork.

The Inn

GUY PRESTON

In which a traveller seeks lodgings one foggy night at a remote inn on the Cumberland Moors. The inn is called "Ye Journey's End", and the inn sign depicts a coffin supported by six headless bearers. At last the door is opened by the landlord: a short, squat man with a smooth, hairless white face . . . and no eyes! When the traveller goes to the bathroom, he finds the sides and bottom of the bath are thick and slippery with blood . . .

THE life of a country doctor is apt to prove rather strenuous, particularly when his practice extends over an area of twenty square miles, and his sole vehicle happens to be a worn-out bicycle of antediluvian manufacture; consequently it was with an exclamation of annoyance that Dr Sutton awoke, at about half past four one winter's morning, to hear the front doorbell ringing furiously. His only servant had departed the previous day on a long-promised visit to her mother in Keswick, and as he was a bachelor he was, of course, alone in the house.

"Let them ring, confound them," he muttered to himself, "disturbing a hard-working body at this ungodly hour! And," he added, "after all the rumpus, I suppose it's the usual cry of 'Come at once—Willie has a pain in the toe.' Some folks seem to think a doctor has no right to a few hours' sleep."

He snuggled himself still farther under the bed-clothes, and tried to ignore the bell and the knocker, which had now come into play, but to no purpose.

BANG! BANG! BANG! Whoever it was out there had no

intention of being denied, for the house shook under the thunder of the knocking, and at last Dr Sutton rose, and slipping on his dressing-gown, went grumbling to the door.

As he opened it, peering into the darkness, a figure darted through into the house, slamming the door to after him, and clutched at the doctor's arm with a trembling hand.

The doctor made to free himself, but the stranger clung the tighter. "I was told the doctor lives here," he gasped, his breath coming in great gulps, that made a hoarse tearing sound in his throat. "Dr Sutton! Are you the doctor? I want a doctor!"

The doctor surveyed him calmly before leading the way to his study. The surgery was a sort of outhouse and as cold as an ice-well, but here, in the doctor's private study, a few embers still glowed despite the lateness of the hour, and the room was still warm.

"Yes, I am he," he replied, and threw a log on the fire.

"Then for God's sake, tell me—am I *mad*?"

Dr Sutton looked at him before replying. He presented an extraordinary appearance. His hair was wild and thick with dust and sweat, his clothes torn, and his face, which normally would be pleasing, was now cut and bleeding and begrimed with filth. A wild look was in his eyes, but in his voice was such a note of anxious pleading that, startled as he was by the stranger's queer aspect, the doctor was reassured.

"You have had a bad scare," was his answer. He motioned the man to a chair, into which he immediately collapsed, and went to the bureau upon which reposed half a dozen bottles and a siphon.

"Drink this!"

The man swallowed the brandy gratefully, and gradually the colour crept back into his cheeks.

The doctor regarded him keenly during the few moments of silence that followed. There was no need to hurry him; he would tell his own story when he had sufficiently recovered. He now lolled back in the chair, his right hand thrust deep into his coat pocket, his left tapping nervously on the arm, and from

time to time wiping imaginary stains from off his coat and the knees of his trousers.

Obviously he was in great distress, and his nerves had been taxed to their utmost.

Presently he began to speak, and this is the tale that he told.

★ ★ ★

“My name is Methuen—Frank Methuen— and I travel in photographic accessories. My firm—Messrs Bardsey and Black—switched me up to this district only a fortnight ago. Previously I had done only the South Coast towns, and I may say that I disliked intensely shooting up to Cumberland, away from all my friends, to break entirely fresh ground with my goods. However, somebody had to go, and as luck would have it I was the one to be chosen.”

He paused, and the doctor nodded encouragingly.

“We all have to do things occasionally that go against the grain,” he said. “It was not my choice to be buried in the moors like this, with a practice stretching from Gretna halfway to Whitehaven. Speaking figuratively, of course,” he added with a smile, as Methuen looked incredulous. “There are times when I long for the bustle and noise of a big town, and would willingly exchange this house, cosy as it is, for a flat and a practice among the slums of Glasgow.”

“Then you can imagine how I felt, a Londoner, used to travelling as I am, when I found myself deposited by the LNER at a dirty little station near Cockermouth—Hayra, I think it was called.”

The doctor nodded again and poured out two more drinks. He was becoming interested in the man who had so unfeelingly dragged him from his bed before even the dawn had come. There were few new faces in his life, and one could get so stale with only farm labourers and petty shopkeepers to talk to. Besides, he was feeling wide awake now, and cold, despite the burning log which had now caught and was roaring up the

chimney. Yes, a drink was clearly indicated.

Methuen thanked him and continued:

“I spent the first week trying to persuade a Cumbrian of Scotch ancestry to start a new line of P.O.P., but could make as much impression on him as I could on a piece of concrete by beating it with a feather. The next few days I wandered about the neighbouring villages, pushing the same and other articles, but without much success, and at last I decided to make for the Workington and Whitehaven district. Accordingly I mounted my motor bike late last night in an endeavour to reach the Royal Hotel, Whitehaven, in time for a bath and good night’s rest before starting early the next morning on my rounds; but Fate was against me.

“I was in the middle of a desolate tract of moorland when my bike conked out, and on dismounting I found that somehow my petrol tank had received a dinge, whether my fault or through the carelessness of the people at the last garage, I don’t know, and was leaking badly. It was, in fact, entirely empty; and on examining my spare tin, which I always carry, I discovered that someone had been liberally helping himself, and there were only a few drops left. I plugged the hole as best I could with a piece of chewing gum—useful stuff that—and refilling with my remaining spot of juice, recommenced my journey. I had got no farther than a quarter of a mile or so when the darn thing petered out again; my mending had been futile, I was stranded.

“It was by now about ten o’clock at night, pitch dark, and as far as I could estimate, at least six miles to the nearest village. I looked about for a house or farm of some sort, but could see nothing, and to add to my discomfort a thick moorland mist began to creep up.”

He broke off.

“You know this country well, I presume?”

“Passably,” admitted the doctor.

“Well, I don’t, and I don’t mind confessing that I found myself growing horribly afraid. Here was I, a stranger, landed miles from anywhere, absolutely alone on the Cumberland

moors, without a sight or a sound of a living human being, and that accursed mist growing denser every second. It was ghastly!”

Methuen stopped, and putting his left hand before his eyes made a movement as though to wipe away the recollection. Then he seemed to steady himself with an effort, and resumed:

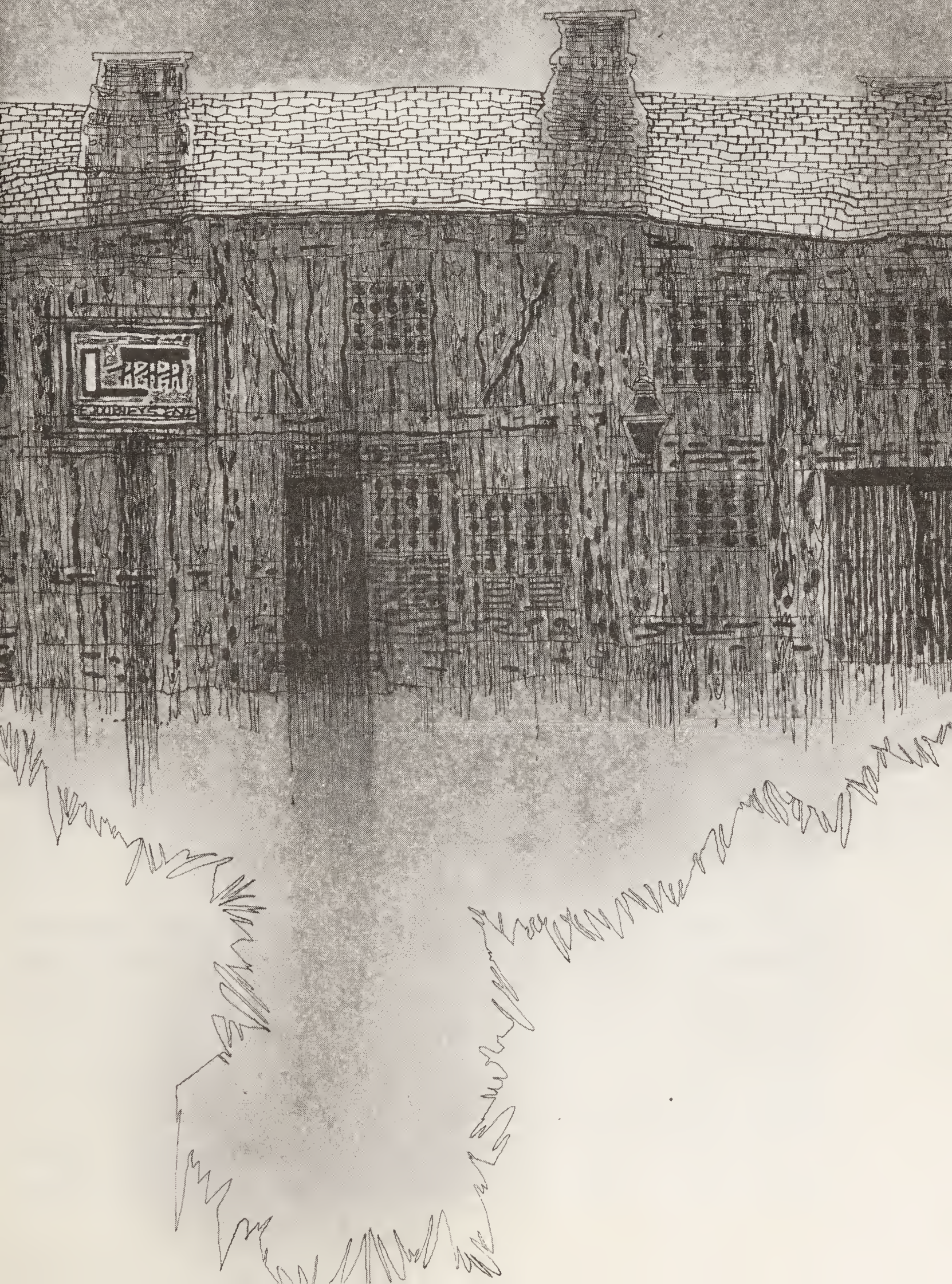
“I am not considered a coward so far as I know by my acquaintances, but here, somehow, I seemed to get an impression of evil—*intense evil*, as though something malevolent was with me, watching me, gloating over my inability to get away. I could almost feel its vile breath upon me, the pressure of something like tentacles stealing softly about my body with a sickening gentleness, like some loathsome caress, luring me, urging me, forcing me onward towards a gap in the hedge. I struggled, but to resist was useless. I was powerless in the grasp of this strange malign influence.

“Imagine my joy, then, when on reaching the gap and stepping through I felt his evil presence slip from my shoulders like a discarded mantle, and saw facing me the very shelter that I sought—an inn. It was like a friendly gesture in a foreign country!

“It stood, it is true, entirely in darkness, but I had no doubt that I could soon rouse the landlord, and visions of a hearty supper of ham and eggs, well fried, with perhaps a tankard of ale, rose rapidly before my eyes.

“This side of the hedge the feeling of fear had entirely vanished, and I laughed at myself for my qualms of a few moments before. The path to the inn lay almost hidden among the mass of straggling undergrowth, and this and the overhanging trees must have accounted for my not noticing it from the road.

“It was quite a fair-sized building, a low, rambling structure of old-world design, and swinging creakily in the cool night air I recognized a painted signboard, though it was too dark for me to read its portent from where I was standing. Though I noticed nothing unusual at the time, I may say that since it has struck me forcibly that there was something uncanny in the fact that, although the other side of the hedge the mist was thick and the



air still as death, here, in what might be called the garden of the inn, there was no mist, and little currents of wind eddied about through the trees, fanning my face and swinging the great signboard with a strange persistency. I went up to the door and knocked loudly. My motor bike could remain where I had left it, for I had quite made up my mind that wild horses would not drag me back into that ghastly atmosphere I had just encountered in the road.

“At first there was no response, and I repeated the summons, examining the old tavern more closely during the period I was kept waiting. Here, under the eaves of the porch, I could now discern—my eyes having become accustomed to the darkness—some semblance of a picture half-obliterated by exposure to many seasons of wind and rain, upon the inn sign. This was in the nature of a coffin supported by six headless bearers goose-stepping towards a white headstone, and underneath this somewhat forbidding daub with grim irony ran the legend: ‘Ye Journey’s End’.

“Evidently the landlord was a man with either a peculiar sense of humour or gifted with an enormous propensity for continuing a tradition, for it was plain that the inn was a relic of ancient and more stirring days, and it was possible that his love of old things made him hesitate to change this gruesome, though exceedingly interesting, old sign.

“While I was thus conjecturing I heard a movement within the house, and a faint glimmer of light appeared from behind one of the windows above the porch to my right. After an appreciable pause this was suddenly extinguished, and I concluded that whoever was within the inn had decided they had imagined my knocking and retired to bed again. I had just raised my hand to deliver a sound drubbing to the massive front door when I sensed, rather than heard, a faint *flip-flop* of loosely slippered feet approaching the door from the inside. The next instant came the welcome sound of heavy iron bolts being withdrawn, and the big door swung slowly inwards.

“The man who confronted me was a singularly unprepossessing individual, and I had a sensation, as I viewed him, as

though someone has lightly run a brush fitted with many sharp-pointed and icy bristles down my spinal column.

“He stood squarely before me, a short squat man, with a smooth round face white as a full moon and entirely hairless. An old-fashioned nightcap covered his scalp, and about his shoulders depended a long cloak of some dark colour. But what struck the greatest chill of all was this—*he had no eyes!*”

“From the bald place where the eyebrows should have been, to the top of the puffy cheeks, stretched a thick layer of parchment-like skin, and he groped before him with his hands, using them like the antennae of some fat white slug. Ugh!”

Methuen shivered, and the doctor leaned forward in his chair. “Go on!” he said.

“Behind him stood a woman holding an old-fashioned candlestick, and the contrast between them was extraordinary. She was of middle height and of a good figure, and was draped in a kind of wrapper of filmy texture. A very goddess of a creature!

“She was handsome in a rather impudent, bold way, full-lipped and black browed, and her large eyes seemed to glow with a strange lustre as she stood there watching me.

“I explained my circumstances and asked for shelter, and at the sound of my voice the landlord—for I presume it was he—reached out for my face, feeling it all over with his pulpy fingers as if to satisfy himself as to my appearance.

“I suppose the woman must have seen the look of disgust upon my features, for she called out to him, ‘Let him enter, he will do well enough,’ and at the words he stood aside and beckoned me in. I may as well tell you now that had there been anything, even a barn or a fowl house, in the neighbourhood where I could have spent the night secure from the cold and the penetrating damp of the mist, I would have sought it rather than pass an hour here. But this was no time to indulge fancies. I was a stranger and must count myself lucky to be admitted, and if my landlord filled me with a strange, unaccountable dread, I should have to put up with it unless I wished once more to face the terrors of that awful road outside.

“I entered, and the woman silently conducted me to a bedroom on the first floor. I should have stated before that the inn had only two storeys, and I was now immediately below the roof. At my request for some supper and a bath she shook her head, and concluding that probably she was tired, I let it go at that, after just regretting that I had disturbed her slumbers, and wishing her a ‘goodnight’. She smiled mysteriously and withdrew with a little curtsy, closing the door after her. I was alone in the room.

“I glanced round it; it was bare enough but it would do. In one corner was a small washhand-stand and towels, a couple of chairs stood against one wall, and against another was a massive oak chest. A huge four-poster bed occupied nearly the whole of one side of the room, and the remaining side was entirely bare except for a small door, which, on my trying it, refused to yield. I put my eye to the keyhole and peeped through, but of course could make out nothing because of the darkness.

“Well, I was tired and began to undress. My one illumination was a vast bronze lamp, so heavy that it must have taken three men to place it where it now stood on a pedestal in the corner near the window, and the bad light it gave made me wish my hosts had a little less love of the antique and little more of ordinary everyday comfort. As I gratefully threw off my clothes, I considered. Surely that bold beauty who had guided me to my room could not be the wife of that monstrosity who had met me at the door? And if so, what a terrible existence for her! To be shut up with such a creature alone on these desolate moors—what wrong could a mere girl do to merit such a diabolical punishment? It was against the laws of Nature! It was an outrage! Thus my chivalrous spirit took up the cause of beauty, and condemned the beast.

“At last, when I was ready for bed, the yearning for a bath once more came over me.

“I wondered—was it possible?—and crossed once more to the little door in the wall. Yes, it was locked, but that alone would not deter me. I have always made a point of carrying with me any old keys that I have ever used or even found, in case they

may come in useful later on. My idiosyncrasy was rewarded, and on trying one of my bunch in the lock, to my joy I found it fitted.

“I turned it and the door opened. Rapture—a bathroom! Dirty, ill-kept, but still the joy of all Englishmen—a *bathroom*! I glanced round for a candle, as the lamp was too heavy to shift, but, as usual, when one needs a thing it is never to be found anywhere. Well, I would bathe in the dark, that was all!

“I turned on the tap. Even in the gloom, with only the light which escaped from my bedroom to see by, I could see that the water ran dark with iron, or, more probably, rust from disuse and the old pipes and cistern which wheezed and gurgled over my head. The bath itself was an iron one of primitive construction, not like the enamelled luxuries we are used to today. I returned to my room while the water ran, or, rather, trickled, and tried my bed.

“Here at any rate was comfort, and again I laughed at my earlier fears. I might fare a great deal worse than spend a night on this feathered mattress, and if I filched a bath, even a cold one, and no one the wiser—well, it was all to the good. I began at last to consider myself in luck’s way. I whistled cheerfully as I returned to the bathroom and slipped off my dressing-gown; I chuckled at my deceit as I turned off the water and stepped into the bath. Then I caught my breath, transfixed. God in Heaven! What was this?

“*The sides and bottom of the bath were thick and slippery with blood!* I reeled and leapt out, and then for a moment I think I must have fainted.

“When I recovered I was lying at the side of that foul receptacle, and my feet and ankles were red with the rapidly congealing fluid, which something told me was unquestionably the lifeblood of a human being.

“At first I was too dazed to think coherently. The macabre ablutions I had so nearly performed were too hideous to contemplate. When at last my strength had returned sufficiently to permit me to regain my own room and wipe the malodorous beastliness, now grown sticky and glutinous, from

my feet with my towel, I felt better, and tried to consider the whole affair in a calm light. It seemed impossible! Yet there were the vile stains upon my towel to convince me that I had suffered no monstrous hallucination. It was real! It was horrible! It was harrowing, revolting, but undeniably true!

“For how long I remained sitting hunched upon my bed, striving to collect my scattered wits, I do not know. It may have been five minutes, but it seemed an eternity.

“At last I gathered my things together and began to dress. To sleep was impossible with the knowledge of that horror lying so near and so silent in the next room. For that the body was concealed somewhere within that fatal bathroom I had no doubt; the body of the poor victim drained of his blood as though he had been sucked dry by some mighty leech, which in turn had disgorged its ghastly meal into that reeking bath.

“A leech! In a flash it came to me, the simile I had sought to fit to my blind landlord. That was what it was he reminded me of so forcibly—a great loathsome white leech, gluttoned with blood, and greedy, greedy for *more*!

“Who would be next? I shuddered, then I flew to the window. No! Escape that way was out of the question, for I saw now what had previously eluded my notice. From top to bottom of my window, fixed firmly into the masonry, ran six stout iron bars, and whatever else in the inn might have fallen into decay, these remained in a perfect state of preservation.

“I ran to the door—*it was locked*! I was a prisoner!

“Then as I stood there wondering what to do, I heard again the steady *flip-flop, flip-flop* of loosely fitting slippers on the stairs. They came nearer, nearer; they reached my door; they ceased!

“Watching with eyes dilated with fear, I saw the lock slip noiselessly back in its socket and the door knob begin to turn slowly, almost imperceptibly, round.

“I stood rooted to the spot, paralyzed with terror, my heart pounding in my throat, the blood hammering in my temples with the noise of muffled drums.

“The silence was awful!

“Not a sound broke the stillness save the whistling of my breath between my teeth and the slow drip-drip-drip from the bathroom tap. Then I felt a tremor of icy air fan my cheek, which gradually grew to a steady draught—the door was stealthily opening!

“Somehow I found my voice.

“‘Go away!’ I screamed, a thin, unnatural sound, and threw my whole weight against this last barrier between myself and—*What?* I felt a moment’s resistance, then it yielded and shut, and as I lay clawing at the panels in a paroxysm of fright, I heard the shuffling footsteps recede until once more absolute stillness reigned. For some minutes longer I lay there panting, cursing myself for a coward, and wondering why I had not brained the blind horror and made good my escape, but somehow it seemed that in the presence of this creature every vestige of manliness was drained from me, and I was left a craven, cowed by the awful sense of evil that emanated from him.

“After a little while I plucked up my courage and opened the door. The landing was in darkness, but what was more important the key was missing from the other side of the door. It was consequently impossible for me to lock myself in, and not for a kingdom would I risk an attempt to get out that way.

“I closed the door again, and, crossing the room, tried to shift the great oak chest. With a big effort I found this to be possible, so bit by bit, I eased it nearer, until at last it rested across my threshold, and I heaved a sigh of relief.

“Here at any rate was a barrier to be reckoned with! Now there was nothing for it but to wait until daylight, and leaving the lamp still burning, I flung myself down fully dressed on the bed, resolved to bear with the circumstances as best I could.

“I have mentioned that the bed was an old four-poster one, and it was hung with faded green curtains which depended in the usual style from the canopy overhead to my right and left and round at the back, excluding all draught.

“As I lay there I examined these with idle interest, casting my eyes up until I reached the canopy itself.

“I am not fastidious, as you may have guessed, but if there is

one insect which fills me with more disgust than another it is a spider, and there, dangling by a single thread immediately above my face, was a great fat monster of the species. A long point of metal stuck down from the middle of the canopy, which had been used, I conjectured, at some time for forming the base of a swinging lantern, and from this the insect had spun its web across to one of the poles at the head of the bed. He had now returned to the centre of his trap, and as I have said, dangled precariously over my face.

“I watched him, fascinated, but by now I was worn out, and from time to time caught myself dozing. I strove to keep awake, but Nature asserted herself, and at last I succumbed to her wooing. I slept.

“The next thing I remember was feeling the plop of the wretched insect as it landed on my cheek and scuttled down my neck. With a smothered cry I leapt from my bed, and as I did so the long metal point fell with a swish and embedded itself in the depression just vacated by my body. I tell you, sir, that spider saved my life!

“Wondering, and not a little afraid, I ungratefully brushed the creature from my person and approached the bed. Then I think I realized what it meant. That metal point was part of a long spear-like contrivance, whose shaft vanished through a small hole in the ceiling, the whole being the most damnable invention for murder ever conceived by the brain of a fiend!

“Its fall had broken the web, and, presumably, the preliminary trembling of the shaft before its release had frightened the spider, which had alighted on my face, warning me in its turn.

“A Providential escape!

“As I paused irresolute in the middle of the room I thought I heard a slight movement outside the door, but may have been mistaken. I waited a few moments longer to reassure myself that this was but the outcome of extreme nervous tension, and stood listening intently. Then from behind the wall at the side of the bed there came the unmistakable sound of something

scratching softly, scratching and fumbling, and the sound of a click.

“I wheeled round.

“Slowly, very slowly, a crack appeared in the wall itself, and from within showed the faint glimmer of a light.

“In a trace I was across the room and had put out my lamp. This time I had no intention of letting my fears overcome my faculties. With the courage born of desperation I forced myself again to enter that loathsome bathroom and pushed the door to, taking care to leave it just sufficiently ajar to enable me to watch whatever might be about to occur, while at the same time keeping myself free from observation. From my new point of vantage I saw the gap in the panel widen. I saw the pulpy hands like the antennae of a huge slug come feeling along the wall, and then, like the obscene figment of an unhealthy imagination, my landlord stepped into the room. For a moment he paused, listening, his hands pawing the air before him as if uncertain of his direction, and then stealthily, noiselessly he turned and moved, groping towards my bed.

“Behind him, framed in the space of the open panel, stood the woman, her hand still grasping the candle in the same way in which she had met me at the door, but on her face was such an expression of ghoulish exultation that I shivered, for only a devil could exult as she did then.

“By now the man had reached the side of the bed, and softly his hands felt over the sheets, groping, groping. They touched the spear-shaft, and with a sound like the contented purr of a giant cat he slid his hands down the shaft, feeling for the body which had so lately lain there.

“Suddenly he snarled and started back, and at the sound the woman came into the room. With one glance she comprehended the situation and seized him by the arm.

“Quick! The bathroom!” she whispered, and half pushing, half dragging the blind, groping creature, moved swiftly in my direction. There was no time to lose. Like a flash I cast round for some means of egress from this charnel-house. Above the

cistern, which was over the bath, something winked and twinkled—a star. Like lightning I clawed my way up the pipes to the skylight, and lay there gasping. A foul stench assailed my nostrils, but I dare not move. Indeed, I had hardly gained the top of the cistern and flung myself flat before the door opened and my pursuers stood on the threshold. Would they see me?

“I think I prayed then as I have never prayed before. Right from my heart I sent up a cry to heaven for assistance.

“The woman said something and stopped, feeling under the bath. When she stood up again I saw that she held an axe in her hand, and she began to laugh horribly. It was like the roar of a wild animal that smells raw meat.

“‘Come down!’ she cried. ‘You must pay for your lodging,’ and, when I made no movement, thrust the candle into the man’s hand and made to climb up after me.

“It was the work of a second to put my elbow through the glass and break the window, and as I struggled to get through I heard her clambering up after me with the agility of a young tigress.

“Once I slipped and fell, striking the lid of the cistern, which gave way beneath my weight, and my feet and hands came in contact with some soft and flabby substance. I looked down—horror of horrors! *I was kneeling on a heap of mutilated corpses!*

“Men and women were there, some untouched by the hand of corruption, others in the final stages of decomposition; the bodies of wayfarers like myself who had tasted the hospitality of this appalling inn.

“I scrambled out, and reaching the window, threw myself out upon the sloping tiles of the roof. I could see the face of the woman distorted with fury, as she, too, began to squeeze her way through the skylight. I edged myself nearer the eaves to a spot where a branch of a tree overhung the roof, holding out promise of escape. I had almost grasped this blessed branch in my hands, when suddenly my foot slipped on a piece of moss and I slithered to the edge and clung there with all my might.

“To fall now might mean a broken limb, and that spelt

capture, with all that it entailed.

"I hesitated and was lost.

"With a scream of triumph the woman was upon me. Horrified, I saw her whirl the axe aloft. Hypnotized, I heard it swish as it cleaved the air. Then there came a stinging sensation in my right hand, and I found myself slipping, falling to the ground below.

"Somehow I staggered to my feet and fled.

"How long I ran through the night like a mad thing I don't know. I only know that when at last I did look back for a possible pursuer, the place where the inn had stood was a blaze of flame, and the sky above glowed crimson in the surrounding darkness."

Methuen ceased, and the sweat was standing out in great beads on his brow, as though he had lived again his harrowing experience.

"Very interesting," remarked the doctor. "So the inn caught fire? How was that?"

"I can only conclude that when the woman gave the blind man the candle to hold he must have placed it against his flannelette nightgown inadvertently, and blundered out of the bathroom in his panic, to come up against some such draperies as those about the four-poster."

The doctor smiled.

"You are certainly adept at explaining things," he admitted.

Methuen rose and went behind his chair. He was very pale, and placed his left hand on the back of it as though to support himself as he faced the doctor.

"So you *do* think I'm mad?" he exclaimed slowly.

The doctor shrugged.

"Then how do you account for this?"

With a sudden gesture he withdrew his right arm from his coat pocket and thrust it out before him.

All four fingers of the hand were missing, and the roughly improvised bandages hung loosely, sticky and wet with blood.

Dr Sutton caught him as he swayed and fell.

The Cloak

ROBERT BLOCH

In which Henderson visits a costumer's shop to buy a costume for a Halloween masquerade party. The shopkeeper offers him a vampire's cloak, which he assures him is completely authentic. That night when Henderson puts it on, he feels a sudden chill in his bones; the taxi driver is so terrified by his appearance that he drives away without waiting for his fare; and the other guests at the party back away from him in fear . . .

THE sun was dying, and its blood spattered the sky as it crept into a sepulchre behind the hills. The keening wind sent the dry, fallen leaves scurrying towards the west, as though hastening them to the funeral of the sun.

"Nuts!" said Henderson to himself, and stopped thinking.

The sun was setting in a dingy red sky, and a dirty raw wind was kicking up the half-rotten leaves in a filthy gutter. Why should he waste time with cheap imagery?

"Nuts!" said Henderson again.

It was probably a mood evoked by the day, he mused. After all, this was the sunset of Halloween. Tonight was the dreaded All Hallows Eve, when spirits walked in and skulls cried out from their graves beneath the earth.

Either that, or tonight was just another rotten cold fall day. Henderson sighed. There was a time, he reflected, when the coming of this night meant something. A dark Europe, groaning in superstitious fear, dedicated this Eve to the grinning Unknown. A million doors had once been barred against the evil visitants, a million prayers mumbled, a million candles lit. There was something majestic about the idea,

Henderson reflected. Life had been an adventure in those times, and men walked in terror of what the next turn of a midnight road might bring. They had lived in a world of demons and ghouls and elementals who sought their souls—and by Heaven, in those days a man's soul meant something. This new scepticism had taken a profound meaning away from life. Men no longer revered their souls.

“Nuts!” said Henderson again, quite automatically. There was something crude and twentieth-century about the coarse expression which always checked his introspective flights of fancy.

The voice in his brain that said “nuts” took the place of humanity to Henderson—common humanity which would echo the same sentiment upon hearing his secret thoughts. So now Henderson uttered the word and endeavoured to forget problems and purple patches alike.

He was walking down the street at sunset to buy a costume for the masquerade party tonight, and he had much better concentrate on finding the costumer's before it closed than waste his time daydreaming about Halloween.

His eyes searched the darkening shadows of the dingy buildings lining the narrow thoroughfare. Once again he peered at the address he had scribbled down after finding it in the phone book.

Why the devil didn't they light up the shops when it got dark? He couldn't make out the numbers. This was a poor, run-down neighbourhood, but after all—

Abruptly, Henderson spied the place across the street and started over. He passed the window and glanced in. The last rays of the sun slanted over the top of the building across the way and fell directly on the window and its display. Henderson drew a sharp intake of breath.

He was staring at a costumer's window—not looking through a fissure into hell. Then why was it all red fire, lighting the grinning visages of fiends?

“Sunset,” Henderson muttered aloud. Of course it was, and

the faces were merely clever masks such as would be displayed in this sort of place. Still, it gave the imaginative man a start. He opened the door and entered.

The place was dark and still. There was a smell of loneliness in the air—the smell that haunts all places long undisturbed; tombs, and graves in deep woods, and caverns in the earth, and—

“Nuts.”

What the devil was wrong with him, anyway? Henderson smiled apologetically at the empty darkness. This was the smell of the costumer’s shop, and it carried him back to college days of amateur theatricals. Henderson had known this smell of moth balls, decayed furs, grease paint and oils. He had played amateur Hamlet and in his hands he had held a smirking skull that hid all knowledge in its empty eyes—a skull, from the costumer’s.

Well, here he was again, and the skull gave him an idea. After all, Halloween night it was. Certainly in this mood of his he didn’t want to go as a rajah, or a Turk, or a pirate—they all did that. Why not go as a fiend, or a warlock, or a werewolf? He could see Lindstrom’s face when he walked into the elegant penthouse wearing rags of some sort. The fellow would have a fit, with his society crowd wearing their expensive Elsa Maxwell take-offs. Henderson didn’t greatly care for Lindstrom’s sophisticated friends anyway; a gang of amateur Noel Cowards and horsy women wearing harnesses of jewels. Why not carry out the spirit of Halloween and go as a monster?

Henderson stood there in the dusk, waiting for someone to turn on the lights, come out from the back room and serve him. After a minute or so he grew impatient and rapped sharply on the counter.

“Say in there! Service!”

Silence. And a shuffling noise from the rear, then—an unpleasant noise to hear in the gloom. There was a banging from downstairs and then the heavy clump of footsteps. Suddenly Henderson gasped. A black hulk was rising from the floor!

It was, of course, only the opening of the trapdoor from the basement. A man shuffled behind the counter, carrying a lamp. In that light his eyes blinked drowsily.

The man's yellowish face crinkled into a smile.

"I was sleeping, I'm afraid," said the man softly. "Can I serve you, sir?"

"I was looking for a Halloween costume."

"Oh, yes. And what was it you had in mind?"

The voice was weary, infinitely weary. The eyes continued to blink in the flabby yellow face.

"Nothing usual, I'm afraid. You see, I rather fancied some sort of monster getup for a party—don't suppose you carry anything in that line?"

"I could show you masks."

"No. I meant werewolf outfits, something of that sort. More of the authentic."

"So. The *authentic*."

"Yes." Why did this old dunce stress the word?

"I might—yes. I might have just the thing for you, sir." The eyes blinked, but the thin mouth pursed in a smile. "Just the thing for Halloween."

"What's that?"

"Have you ever considered the possibility of being a vampire?"

"Like Dracula?"

"Ah—yes, I suppose—Dracula."

"Not a bad idea. Do you think I'm the type for that, though?"

The man appraised him with that tight smile. "Vampires are of all types, I understand. You would do nicely."

"Hardly a compliment," Henderson chuckled. "But why not? What's the outfit?"

"Outfit? Merely evening clothes, or what you wear. I will furnish you with the authentic cloak."

"Just a cloak—is that all?"

"Just a cloak. But it is worn like a shroud. It *is* shroud-cloth, you know. Wait, I'll get it for you."

The shuffling feet carried the man into the rear of the shop again. Down the trapdoor entrance he went, and Henderson waited. There was more banging, and presently the old man reappeared carrying the cloak. He was shaking dust from it in the darkness.

“Here it is—the genuine cloak.”

“Genuine?”

“Allow me to adjust it for you—it will work wonders, I’m sure.”

The cold, heavy cloth hung draped about Henderson’s shoulders. The faint odour rose mustily in his nostrils as he stepped back and surveyed himself in the mirror. The lamp was poor, but Henderson saw that the cloak effected a striking transformation in his appearance. His long face seemed thinner, his eyes were accentuated in the facial pallor heightened by the sombre cloak he wore. It was a big, black shroud.

“Genuine,” murmured the old man. He must have come up suddenly, for Henderson hadn’t noticed him in the glass.

“I’ll take it,” Henderson said. “How much?”

“You’ll find it quite entertaining, I’m sure.”

“How much?”

“Oh. Shall we say five dollars?”

“Here.”

The old man took the money, blinking, and drew the cloak from Henderson’s shoulders. When it slid away he felt suddenly warm again. It must be cold in the basement—the cloth was icy.

The old man wrapped the garment, smiling, and handed it over.

“I’ll have it back tomorrow,” Henderson promised.

“No need. You purchased it. It is yours.”

“But—”

“I am leaving business shortly. Keep it. You will find more use for it than I, surely.”

“But—”

“A pleasant evening to you.”

Henderson made his way to the door in confusion, then turned to salute the blinking old man in the dimness.

Two eyes were burning at him from across the counter—two eyes that did not blink.

“Good night,” said Henderson, and closed the door quickly. He wondered if he were going just a trifle mad.

At eight, Henderson nearly called up Lindstrom to tell him he couldn’t make it. The cold chills came the minute he put on the damned cloak, and when he looked at himself in the mirror his blurred eyes could scarcely make out the reflection.

But after a few drinks he felt better about it. He hadn’t eaten, and the liquor warmed his blood. He paced the floor, attitudinizing with the cloak—sweeping it about him and scowling in what he thought was a ferocious manner. Damn it, he was going to be a vampire all right! He called a cab, went down to the lobby. The driver came in, and Henderson was waiting, black cloak furled.

“I wish you to drive me,” he said in a low voice.

The cabman took one look at him in the cloak and turned pale.

“Whazzat?”

“I ordered you to come,” said Henderson gutturally, while he quaked with inner mirth. He leered ferociously and swept the cloak back.

“Yeah, yeah. O.K.”

The driver almost ran outside. Henderson stalked after him.

“Where to, boss—I mean, sir?”

The frightened face didn’t turn as Henderson intoned the address and sat back.

The cab started with a lurch that set Henderson to chuckling deeply, in character. At the sound of laughter the driver got panicky and raced his engine up to the limit set by the governor. Henderson laughed loudly, and the impressionable driver fairly quivered in his seat. It was quite a ride, but Henderson was entirely unprepared to open the door and find it slammed

after him as the cabman drove hastily away without collecting a fare.

"I must look the part," he thought complacently, as he took the elevator up to the penthouse apartment.

There were three or four others in the elevator; Henderson had seen them before at other affairs Lindstrom had invited him to attend, but nobody seemed to recognize him. It rather pleased him to think how his wearing of an unfamiliar cloak and an unfamiliar scowl seemed to change his entire personality and appearance. Here the other guests had donned elaborate disguises—one woman wore the costume of a Watteau shepherdess, another was attired as a Spanish ballerina, a tall man dressed as Pagliacci, and his companion had donned a toreador outfit. Yet Henderson recognized them all; knew that their expensive habiliments were not truly disguises at all, but merely elaborations calculated to enhance their appearance. Most people at costume parties gave vent to suppressed desires. The women showed off their figures, the men either accentuated their masculinity as the toreador did, or clowning it. Such things were pitiful; these conventional fools eagerly doffing their dismal business suits and rushing off to a lodge, or amateur theatrical, or mask ball in order to satisfy their starving imaginations. Why didn't they dress in garish colours on the street? Henderson often pondered the question.

Surely, these society folk in the elevator were fine-looking men and women in their outfits—so healthy, so red-faced and full of vitality. They had such robust throats and necks. Henderson looked at the plump arms of the woman next to him. He stared, without realizing it, for a long moment. And then, he saw that the occupants of the car had drawn away from him. They were standing in the corner, as though they feared his cloak and scowl, and his eyes fixed on the woman. Their chatter had ceased abruptly. The woman looked at him, as though she were about to speak, when the elevator doors opened and afforded Henderson a welcome respite.

What the devil was wrong? First the cab driver, then the

woman. Had he drunk too much?

Well, no chance to consider that. Here was Marcus Lindstrom, and he was thrusting a glass into Henderson's hand.

"What have we here? Ah, a boggy-man!" It needed no second glance to perceive that Lindstrom, as usual at such affairs, was already quite bottle-dizzy. The fat host was positively swimming in alcohol.

"Have a drink, Henderson, my lad! I'll take mine from the bottle. That outfit of yours gave me a shock. Where'd you get the make-up?"

"Make-up? I'm not wearing any make-up."

"Oh. So you're not. How . . . silly of me."

Henderson wondered if he were crazy. Had Lindstrom really drawn back? Were his eyes actually filled with a certain dismay? Oh, the man was obviously intoxicated.

"I'll . . . I'll see you later," babbled Lindstrom, edging away and quickly turning to the other arrivals. Henderson watched the back of Lindstrom's neck. It was fat and white. It bulged over the collar of his costume and there was a vein in it. A vein in Lindstrom's fat neck. Frightened Lindstrom.

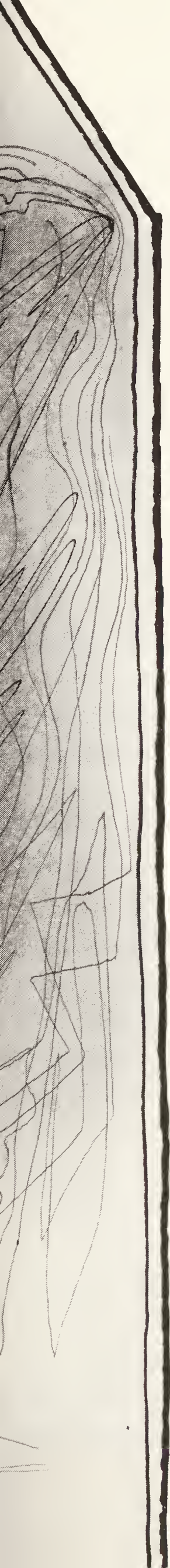
Henderson stood alone in the ante-room. From the parlour beyond came the sound of music and laughter; party noises. Henderson hesitated before entering. He drank from the glass in his hand—Bacardi rum, and powerful. On top of his other drinks it almost made the man reel. But he drank, wondering. What was wrong with him and his costume? Why did he frighten people? Was he unconsciously acting his vampire role? That crack of Lindstrom's about make-up now—

Acting on impulse, Henderson stepped over to the long panel mirror in the hall. He lurched a little, then stood in the harsh light before it. He faced the glass, stared into the mirror, and saw nothing.

He looked at himself in the mirror, and there was no one there!

Henderson began to laugh softly, evilly, deep in his throat. And as he gazed into the empty, unreflecting glass, his laughter





rose in black glee.

"I'm drunk," he whispered. "I must be drunk. Mirror in my apartment made me blurred. Now I'm so far gone I can't see straight. Sure I'm drunk. Been acting ridiculously, scaring people. Now I'm seeing hallucinations—or not seeing them, rather. Visions. Angels."

His voice lowered. "Sure angels. Standing right in the back of me, now. Hello, angel."

"Hello."

Henderson whirled. There she stood, in the dark cloak, her hair a shimmering halo above her white, proud face, her eyes celestial blue, and her lips infernal red.

"Are you real?" asked Henderson, gently. "Or am I a fool to believe in miracles?"

"This miracle's name is Sheila Darrly, and it would like to powder its nose if you please?"

"Kindly use this mirror through the courtesy of Stephen Henderson," replied the cloaked man, with a grin. He stepped back-a-ways, eyes intent.

The girl turned her head and favoured him with a slow, impish smile. "Haven't you ever seen powder used before?" she asked.

"Didn't know angels indulged in cosmetics," Henderson replied. "But then there's a lot I don't know about angels. From now on I shall make them a special study of mine. There's so much I want to find out. So you'll probably find me following you around with a notebook all evening."

"Notebooks for a vampire?"

"Oh, but I'm a very intelligent vampire—not one of those backwoods Transylvanian types. You'll find me charming, I'm sure."

"Yes, you look like the sure type," the girl mocked. "But an angel and a vampire—that's a queer combination."

"We can reform one another," Henderson pointed out. "Besides, I have a suspicion that there's a bit of the devil in you. That dark cloak over your angel costume; dark angel, you

know. Instead of heaven you might hail from my home town."

Henderson was flippant, but underneath his banter cyclonic thoughts whirled. He recalled discussions in the past; cynical observations he had made and believed.

Once, Henderson had declared that there was no such thing as love at first sight, save in books or plays where such a dramatic device served to speed up action. He asserted that people learned about romance from books and plays and accordingly adopted a belief in love at first sight when all one could possibly feel was desire.

And now this Sheila—this blonde angel—had to come along and drive out all thoughts of morbidity, all thoughts of drunkenness and foolish gazings into mirrors, from his mind; had to send him madly plunging into dreams of red lips, ethereal blue eyes and slim white arms.

Something of his feeling had swept into his eyes, and as the girl gazed up at him she felt the truth.

"Well," she breathed, "I hope the inspection pleases."

"A miracle of understatement, that. But there was something I wanted to find out particularly about divinity. Do angels dance?"

"Tactful vampire! The next room?"

Arm in arm they entered the parlour. The merry-makers were in full swing. Liquor had already pitched gaiety at its height, but there was no dancing any longer. Boisterous little grouped couples laughed arm in arm about the room. The usual party gagsters were performing their antics in corners. The superficial atmosphere, which Henderson detested, was fully in evidence.

It was reaction which made Henderson draw himself up to full height and sweep the cloak about his shoulders. Reaction brought the scowl to his pale face, caused him to stalk along in brooding silence. Sheila seemed to regard this as a great joke.

"*Pull* a vampire act on them," she giggled, clutching his arm. Henderson accordingly scowled at the couples, sneered horrendously at the women. And his progress was marked by

the turning of heads, the abrupt cessation of chatter. He walked through the long room like Red Death incarnate. Whispers trailed in his wake.

“Who is that man?”

“His eyes—”

“Vampire!”

“Hello, Dracula!” It was Marcus Lindstrom and a sullen-looking brunette in Cleopatra costume who lurched towards Henderson. Host Lindstrom could scarcely stand, and his companion in cups was equally at a loss. Henderson liked the man when sober at the club, but his behaviour at parties had always irritated him. Lindstrom was particularly objectionable in his present condition—it made him boorish.

“M’dear, I want you t’meet a very dear friend of mine. Yessir, it being Halloween and all I invited Count Dracula here, t’gether with his daughter. Asked his grandmother, but she’s busy tonight at a Black Sabbath—along with Aunt Jemima. Ha! Count, meet my little playmate.”

The woman leered up at Henderson.

“Oooh Dracula, what big eyes you have! Oooh, what big teeth you have! Oooh—”

“Really, Marcus,” Henderson protested. But the host had turned and shouted to the room.

“Folks, meet the real goods—only genuine living vampire in captivity! Dracula Henderson, only existing vampire with false teeth.”

In any other circumstances Henderson would have given Lindstrom a quick, efficient punch in the jaw. But Sheila was at his side, it was a public gathering; better to humour the man’s clumsy jests. Why not be a vampire?

Smiling quickly at the girl, Henderson drew himself erect, faced the crowd, and frowned. His hands brushed the cloak. Funny, it still felt cold. Looking down he noticed for the first time that it was a little dirty at the edges; muddy or dusty. But the cold silk slid through his fingers as he drew it across his breast with one long hand. The feeling seemed to inspire him.

He opened his eyes wide and let them blaze. His mouth opened. A sense of dramatic power filled him. And he looked at Marcus Lindstrom's soft, fat neck with the vein standing in the whiteness. He looked at the neck, saw the crowd watching him, and then the impulse seized him. He turned, eyes on that creasy neck—that wabbling, creasy neck of the fat man.

Hands darted out. Lindstrom squeaked like a frightened rat. He was a plump, sleek white rat, bursting with blood. Vampires liked blood. Blood from the rat, from the neck of the rat, from the vein in the neck of the rat, from the vein in the neck of the squeaking rat.

“Warm blood.”

The deep voice was Henderson's own.

The hands were Henderson's own.

The hands that went around Lindstrom's neck as he spoke, the hands that felt the warmth, that searched out the vein. Henderson's face was bending for the neck, and, as Lindstrom struggled, his grip tightened. Lindstrom's face was turning, turning purple. Blood was rushing to his head. That was good. Blood!

Henderson's mouth opened. He felt the air on his teeth. He bent down towards that fat neck, and the—

“Stop! That's plenty!”

The voice, the cooling voice of Sheila. Her fingers on his arm. Henderson looked up, startled. He released Lindstrom, who sagged with open mouth.

The crowd was staring, and their mouths were all shaped in the instinctive O of amazement.

Sheila whispered, “Bravo! Served him right—but you frightened him!”

Henderson struggled a moment to collect himself. Then he smiled and turned.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “I have just given a slight demonstration to prove to you what our host said of me was entirely correct. I *am* a vampire. Now that you have been given fair warning, I am sure you will be in no further danger. If there

is a doctor in the house I can, perhaps, arrange for a blood transfusion."

The O's relaxed and laughter came from startled throats. Hysterical laughter, in part, then genuine. Henderson had carried it off. Marcus Lindstrom alone still stared with eyes that held utter fear. *He* knew.

And then the moment broke, for one of the gagsters ran into the room from the elevator. He had gone downstairs and borrowed the apron and cap of a newsboy. Now he raced through the crowd with a bundle of papers under his arm.

"Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Big Halloween Horror! Extra!"

Laughing guests purchased papers. A woman approached Sheila, and Henderson watched the girl walk away in a daze.

"See you later," she called, and her glance sent fire through his veins. Still, he could not forget the terrible feeling that came over him when he had seized Lindstrom. Why?

Automatically he accepted a paper from the shouting pseudo-newsboy. "Big Halloween Horror," he had shouted. What was that?

Blurred eyes searched the paper.

Then Henderson reeled back. That headline! It was an *Extra* after all. Henderson scanned the columns with mounting dread.

"Fire in costumer's . . . shortly after 8 p.m. firemen were summoned to the shop of . . . flames beyond control . . . completely demolished . . . damage estimated at . . . peculiarly enough, name of proprietor unknown . . . skeleton found in—"

"No!" gasped Henderson aloud.

He read, reread *that* closely. The skeleton had been found in a box of earth in the cellar beneath the shop. The box was a coffin. There had been two other boxes, empty. The skeleton had been wrapped in a cloak, undamaged by the flames—

And in the hastily penned box at the bottom of the column were eye-witness comments, written up under scareheads of heavy black type. Neighbours had feared the place. Hungarian

neighbourhood, hints of vampirism, of strangers who entered the shop. One man spoke of a cult believed to have held meetings in the place. Superstition about things sold there—love philtres, outlandish charms and weird disguises.

Weird disguises—vampires—cloaks—*his eyes!*

“This is an authentic cloak.”

“I will not be using this much longer. Keep it.”

Memories of these words screamed through Henderson’s brain. He plunged out of the room and rushed to the panel mirror.

A moment, then he flung one arm before his face to shield his eyes from the image that was not there—the missing reflection. *Vampires have no reflections.*

No wonder he looked strange. No wonder arms and necks invited him. He had wanted Lindstrom. Good God!

The cloak had done that, the dark cloak with the stains. The stains of earth, grave-earth. The wearing of the cloak, the cold cloak, had given him the feelings of a true vampire. It was a garment accursed, a thing that had lain on the body of one undead. The rusty stain along one sleeve was blood.

Blood, it would be nice to see blood. To taste its warmth, its red life, flowing.

No. That was insane. He was drunk, crazy.

“Ah. My pale friend, the vampire.”

It was Sheila again. And above all horror rose the beating of Henderson’s heart. As he looked at her shining eyes, her warm mouth shaped in red invitation, Henderson felt a wave of warmth. He looked at her white throat rising above her dark, shimmering cloak, and another kind of warmth rose. Love, desire, and a—hunger.

She must have seen it in his eyes, but she did not flinch. Instead, her own gaze burned in return.

Sheila loved him, too!

With an impulsive gesture, Henderson ripped the cloak from about his throat. The icy weight lifted. He was free. Somehow, he hadn’t wanted to take the cloak off, but he had to. It was a

cursed thing, and in another minute he might have taken the girl in his arms, taken her for a kiss and remained to—

But he dared not think of that.

“Tired of masquerading?” she asked. With a similar gesture she, too, removed her cloak and stood revealed in the glory of her angel robe. Her blonde, statuesque perfection forced a gasp to Henderson’s throat.

“Angel,” he whispered.

“Devil,” she mocked.

And suddenly they were embracing. Henderson had taken her cloak in his arm with his own. They stood with lips seeking rapture until Lindstrom and a group moved noisily into the anteroom.

At the sight of Henderson the fat host recoiled.

“You—” he whispered. “You are—”

“Just leaving,” Henderson smiled. Grasping the girl’s arm, he drew her towards the empty elevator. The door shut on Lindstrom’s pale, fear-filled face.

“Were we leaving?” Sheila whispered, snuggling against his shoulder.

“We were. But not for earth. We do not go down into my realm, but up—into yours.”

“The roof garden?”

“Exactly, my angelic one. I want to talk to you against the background of your own heavens, kiss you amidst the clouds, and—”

Her lips found his as the car rose.

“Angel and devil. What a match!”

“I thought so, too,” the girl confessed. “Will our children have halos or horns?”

“Both, I’m sure.”

They stepped out onto the deserted rooftop. And once again it was Halloween.

Henderson felt it. Downstairs it was Lindstrom and his society friends, in a drunken costume party. Here it was night, silence, gloom. No light, no music, no drinking, no chatter

which made one party identical with another; one night like all the rest. This night was individual here.

The sky was not blue, but black. Clouds hung like the grey beards of hovering giants, peering at the round orange globe of the moon. A cold wind blew from the sea and filled the air with tiny murmurings from afar.

This was the sky that witches flew through to their Sabbath. This was the moon of wizardry, the sable silence of black prayers and whispered invocations. The clouds hid monstrous Presences shambling in summons from afar. It was Halloween.

It was also quite cold.

“Give me my cloak,” Sheila whispered. Automatically, Henderson extended the garment, and the girl’s body swirled under the dark splendour of the cloth. Her eyes burned up at Henderson with a call he could not resist. He kissed her, trembling.

“You’re cold,” the girl said. “Put on your cloak.”

Yes, Henderson, he thought to himself. Put on your cloak while you stare at her throat. Then, the next time you kiss her you will want her throat and she will give it in love and you will take it in—hunger.

“Put it on, darling—I insist,” the girl whispered. Her eyes were impatient, burning with an eagerness to match his own.

Henderson trembled.

Put on the cloak of darkness? The cloak of the grave, the cloak of death, the cloak of the vampire? The evil cloak filled with a cold life of its own that transformed his face, transformed his mind, made his soul instinct with awful hunger?

“Here.”

The girl’s slim arms were about him, pushing the cloak onto his shoulders. Her fingers brushed his neck, caressingly, as she linked the cloak about his throat.

Henderson shivered.

Then he felt it—through him—that icy coldness turning to a more dreadful heat. He felt himself expand, felt the sneer cross his face. This was Power!

And the girl before him, her eyes taunting, inviting. He saw her ivory neck, her warm slim neck, waiting. It was waiting for him, for his lips.

For his teeth.

No—it couldn't be. He loved her. His love must conquer this madness. Yes, wear the cloak, defy its power, and take her in his arms as a man, not as a fiend. He must. It was the test.

"Sheila," Funny how his voice deepened.

"Yes, dear."

"Sheila, I must tell you this."

Her eyes—so alluring. It would be easy!

"Sheila, please. You read the paper tonight?"

"Yes."

"I . . . I got my cloak there. I can't explain it. You saw how I took Lindstrom. I wanted to go through with it. Do you understand me? I meant to . . . to bite him. Wearing this damnable thing makes me feel like one of those creatures."

Why didn't her stare change? Why didn't she recoil in horror? Such trusting innocence! Didn't she understand? Why didn't she run? Any moment now he might lose control, seize her.

"I love you, Sheila. Believe that. I love you."

"I know." Her eyes gleamed in the moonlight.

"I want to test it. I want to kiss you, wearing this cloak. I want to feel that my love is stronger than this—thing. If I weaken, promise me you'll break away and run, quickly. But don't misunderstand. I must face this feeling and fight it; I want my love for you to be that pure, that secure. Are you afraid?"

"No." Still she stared at him, just as he stared at her throat. If she knew what was in his mind!

"You don't think I'm crazy? I went to this costumer's—he was a horrible little old man—and he gave me the cloak. Actually told me it was a real vampire's. I thought he was joking, but tonight I didn't see myself in the mirror, and I wanted Lindstrom's neck, and I want you. But I must test it."

“You’re not crazy. I know. I’m not afraid.”

“Then—”

The girl’s face mocked. Henderson summoned his strength. He bent forward, his impulses battling. For a moment he stood there under the ghastly orange moon, and his face was twisted in struggle.

And the girl lured.

Her odd, incredibly red lips parted in a silvery, chuckly laugh as her white arms rose from the black cloak she wore to circle his neck gently. “I know—I knew when I looked in the mirror. I knew you had a cloak like mine—got yours where I got mine—”

Queerly, her lips seemed to elude his as he stood frozen for an instant of shock. Then he felt the icy hardness of her sharp little teeth on his throat, a strangely soothing sting, and an engulfing blackness rising over him.

The Soul Cages

T. CROFTON CROKER

In which Jack Dogherty is given his wish to meet a Merrow. Merrows are Irish mermaids which frequent the wilder reaches of the Irish coast—so the locals say—and fishermen believe to see one is a sign of a coming gale. The Merrow has green hair, long green teeth, a red nose and pig's eyes; it has a fish's tail, legs with scales on them, and short arms like fins. It wears no clothes, but has a cocked hat under its arm. And with the aid of such a hat Jack is able to visit the Merrow world under the sea . . .

JACK Dogherty lived on the coast of County Clare. Jack was a fisherman, as his father and grandfather before him had been. Like them, too, he lived all alone (but for the wife), and just in the same spot. People used to wonder why the Dogherty family were so fond of that wild situation, so far away from all human kind, and in the midst of huge shattered rocks, with nothing but the wide ocean to look upon. But they had their own good reasons for it.

The place was just the only spot on that part of the coast where anybody could live well. There was a neat little creek, where a boat might lie as snug as a puffin in her nest, and out of this creek a ledge of sunken rocks ran into the sea. Now when the Atlantic, according to custom, was raging with a storm, and a good westerly wind was blowing strong on the coast, many a richly-laden ship went to pieces on these rocks; and then the fine bales of cotton and tobacco, and such like things, and the pipes of wine, and the puncheons of rum, and the casks of brandy, and the kegs of Hollands that used to come ashore! Dunbeg Bay was just like a little estate to the Doghertys.

Not but they were kind and humane to a distressed sailor, if ever one had the good luck to get to land; and many a time indeed did Jack put out in his little *corragh* (which, though not quite equal to honest Andrew Hennessy's canvas life-boat, would breast the billows like any gannet), to lend a hand towards bringing off the crew from a wreck. But when the ship had gone to pieces, and the crew were all lost, who would blame Jack for picking up all he could find?

"And who is the worse of it?" said he. "For as to the king, God bless him! everybody knows he's rich enough already without getting what's floating in the sea."

Jack, though such a hermit, was a good-natured, jolly fellow. No other, sure, could ever have coaxed Biddy Mahoney to quit her father's snug and warm house in the middle of the town of Ennis, and to go so many miles off to live among the rocks, with the seals and sea-gulls for next-door neighbours. But Biddy knew that Jack was the man for a woman who wished to be comfortable and happy; for, to say nothing of the fish, Jack had the supplying of half the gentlemen's houses of the country with the *Godsends* that came into the bay. And she was right in her choice; for no woman ate, drank, or slept better, or made a prouder appearance at chapel on Sundays, than Mrs Dogherty.

Many a strange sight, it may well be supposed, did Jack see, and many a strange sound did he hear, but nothing daunted him. So far was he from being afraid of Merrows, or such things, that the very first wish of his heart was to fairly meet with one. Jack had heard that they were mighty like Christians, and that luck had always come out of an acquaintance with them. Never, therefore, did he dimly discern the Merrows moving along the face of the water in their robes of mist, but he made direct for them; and many a scolding did Biddy, in her own quiet way, bestow upon Jack for spending his whole day out at sea, and bringing home no fish. Little did poor Biddy know the fish Jack was after!

It was rather annoying to Jack that, though living in a place where the Merrows were as plenty as lobsters, he never could

get a right view of one. What vexed him more was that both his father and grandfather had often and often seen them; and he even remembered hearing, when a child, how his grandfather, who was the first of the family that had settled down at the creek, had been so intimate with a Merrow that, only for fear of vexing the priest, he would have had him stand for one of his children. This, however, Jack did not well know how to believe.

Fortune at length began to think that it was only right that Jack should know as much as his father and grandfather did. Accordingly, one day when he had strolled a little farther than usual along the coast to the northward, just as he turned a point, he saw something, like to nothing he had ever seen before, perched upon a rock at a little distance out to sea. It looked green in the body, as well as he could discern at that distance, and he would have sworn, only the thing was impossible, that it had a cocked hat in its hand. Jack stood for a good half-hour straining his eyes, and wondering at it, and all the time the thing did not stir hand or foot. At last Jack's patience was quite worn out, and he gave a loud whistle and a hail, when the Merrow (for such it was) started up, put the cocked hat on its head, and dived down, head foremost, from the rock.

Jack's curiosity was now excited, and he constantly directed his steps towards the point; still he could never get a glimpse of the sea-gentleman with the cocked hat; and with thinking and thinking about the matter, he began at last to fancy he had been only dreaming. One very rough day, however, when the sea was running mountains high, Jack Dogherty determined to give a look at the Merrow's rock (for he had always chosen a fine day before), and then he saw the strange thing cutting capers upon the top of the rock, and then diving down, and then coming up, and then diving down again.

Jack had now only to choose his time (that is, a good blowing day), and he might see the man of the sea as often as he pleased. All this, however, did not satisfy him — "much will have more"; he wished now to get acquainted with the Merrow, and even in this he succeeded. One tremendous blustering day, before he

got to the point whence he had a view of the Merrow's rock, the storm came on so furiously that Jack was obliged to take shelter in one of the caves which are so numerous along the coast; and there, to his astonishment, he saw sitting before him a thing with green hair, long green teeth, a red nose, and pig's eyes. It had a fish's tail, legs with scales on them, and short arms like fins. It wore no clothes, but had the cocked hat under its arm, and seemed engaged thinking very seriously about something.

Jack, with all his courage, was a little daunted; but now or never, thought he; so up he went boldly to the cogitating fisherman, took off his hat, and made his best bow.

"Your servant, sir," said Jack.

"Your servant, kindly, Jack Dogherty," answered the Merrow.

"To be sure, then, how well your honour knows my name!" said Jack.

"Is it I not know your name, Jack Dogherty? Why, man, I knew your grandfather long before he was married to Judy Regan, your grandmother! Ah, Jack, Jack, I was fond of that grandfather of yours; he was a mighty worthy man in his time: I never met his match above or below, before or since, for sucking in a shellful of brandy. I hope, my boy," said the old fellow, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, "I hope you're his own grandson!"

"Never fear me for that," said Jack; "if my mother had only reared me on brandy, 'tis myself that would be a sucking infant to this hour!"

"Well, I like to hear you talk so manly; you and I must be better acquainted, if it were only for your grandfather's sake. But, Jack, that father of yours was not the thing! he had no head at all."

"I'm sure," said Jack, "since your honour lives down under the water, you might be obliged to drink a power to keep any heat in you in such a cruel, damp, cold place. Well, I've often heard of Christians drinking like fishes; and might I be so bold as ask where you get the spirits?"

“Where do you get them yourself, Jack?” said the Merrow, twitching his red nose between the forefinger and thumb.

“Hubbubboo,” cries Jack, “now I see how it is; but I suppose, sir, your honour has got a fine dry cellar below to keep them in.”

“Let me alone for the cellar,” said the Merrow, with a knowing wink of his left eye.

“I’m sure,” continued Jack, “it must be mighty well worth the looking at.”

“You may say that, Jack,” said the Merrow; “and if you meet me here next Monday, just at this time of the day, we will have a little more talk with one another about the matter.”

Jack and the Merrow parted the best friends in the world. On Monday they met, and Jack was not a little surprised to see that the Merrow had two cocked hats with him, one under each arm.

“Might I take the liberty to ask, sir,” said Jack, “why your honour has brought the two hats with you today? You would not, sure, be going to give me one of them to keep for the *curiosity* of the thing?”

“No, no, Jack,” said he, “I don’t get my hats so easily, to part with them that way; but I want you to come down and dine with me, and I brought you the hat to dine with.”

“Lord bless and preserve us!” cried Jack, in amazement, “would you want me to go down to the bottom of the salt sea ocean? Sure, I’d be smothered and choked up with the water, to say nothing of being drowned! And what would poor Biddy do for me, and what would she say?”

“And what matter what she says, you *pinkeen*? Who cares for Biddy’s squalling? It’s long before your grandfather would have talked in that way. Many’s the time he stuck that same hat on his head, and dived down boldly after me; and many’s the snug bit of dinner and good shellful of brandy he and I have had together below, under the water.”

“Is it really, sir, and no joke?” said Jack; “why, then, sorrow from me for ever and a day after, if I’ll be a bit worse man nor my grandfather was! Here goes—but play me fair now. Here’s neck or nothing!” cried Jack.

“That’s your grandfather all over,” said the old fellow; “so come along, then, and do as I do.”

They both left the cave, walked into the sea, and then swam a piece until they got to the rock. The Merrow climbed to the top of it, and Jack followed him. On the far side it was as straight as the wall of a house, and the sea beneath looked so deep that Jack was almost cowed.

“Now, do you see, Jack,” said the Merrow: “just put this hat on your head, and mind to keep your eyes wide open. Take hold of my tail, and follow after me, and you’ll see what you’ll see.”

In he dashed, and in dashed Jack after him boldly. They went and they went, and Jack thought they’d never stop going. Many a time did he wish himself sitting at home by the fireside with Biddy. Yet where was the use of wishing now, when he was so many miles, as he thought, below the waves of the Atlantic? Still he held hard by the Merrow’s tail, slippery as it was; and, at last, to Jack’s great surprise, they got out of the water, and he actually found himself on dry land at the bottom of the sea. They landed just in front of a nice house that was slated very neatly with oyster shells; and the Merrow, turning about to Jack, welcomed him down.

Jack could hardly speak, what with the wonder, and what with being out of breath with travelling so fast through the water. He looked about him and could see no living things, barring crabs and lobsters, of which there were plenty walking leisurely about on the sand. Overhead was the sea like a sky, and the fishes like birds swimming about in it.

“Why don’t you speak, man?” said the Merrow. “I dare say you had no notion that I had such a snug little concern here as this? Are you smothered, or choked, or drowned, or are you fretting after Biddy, eh?”

“Oh! not myself, indeed,” said Jack showing his teeth with a good-humoured grin; “but who in the world would ever have thought of seeing such a thing?”

“Well, come along, and let’s see what they’ve got for us to eat?”

Jack really was hungry, and it gave him no small pleasure to

perceive a fine column of smoke rising from the chimney, announcing what was going on within. Into the house he followed the Merrow, and there he saw a good kitchen, right well provided with everything. There was a noble dresser, and plenty of pots and pans, with two young Merrows cooking. His host then led him into the room, which was furnished shabbily enough. Not a table or a chair was there in it; nothing but planks and logs of wood to sit on, and eat off. There was, however, a good fire blazing upon the hearth—a comfortable sight to Jack.

“Come now, and I’ll show you where I keep—you know what,” said the Merrow, with a sly look; and opening a little door, he led Jack into a fine cellar, well filled with pipes, and kegs, and hogsheads, and barrels.

“What do you say to that, Jack Dogherty? Eh! maybe a body can’t live snug under the water?”

“Never the doubt of that,” said Jack, with a convincing smack of his under lip, that he really thought what he said.

They went back to the room, and found dinner laid. There was no tablecloth, to be sure—but what matter? It was not always Jack had one at home. The dinner would have been no discredit to the first house of the country on a fast day. The choicest of fish, and no wonder, was there. Turbots, and sturgeons, and soles, and lobsters, and oysters, and twenty other kinds, were on the planks at once, and plenty of the best of foreign spirits. The wines, the old fellow said, were too cold for his stomach.

Jack ate and drank till he could eat no more: then, taking up a shell of brandy, “Here’s to your honour’s good health, sir,” said he; “though, begging your pardon, it’s mighty odd that as long as we’ve been acquainted I don’t know your name yet.”

“That’s true, Jack,” replied he; “I never thought of it before, but better late than never. My name’s Coomara.”

“And a mighty decent name it is,” cried Jack, taking another shellful: “here’s to your good health, Coomara, and may ye live these fifty years to come!”

“Fifty years!” repeated Coomara; “I’m obliged to you, indeed! If you had said five hundred, it would have been something worth the wishing.”

“By the laws, sir,” cried Jack, “*youz* live to a powerful age here under the water! You knew my grandfather, and he’s dead and gone better than these sixty years. I’m sure it must be a healthy place to live in.”

“No doubt of it, but come, Jack, keep the liquor stirring.”

Shell after shell did they empty, and to Jack’s exceeding surprise, he found the drink never got into his head, owing, I suppose, to the sea being over them, which kept their noddles cool.

Old Coomara got exceedingly comfortable, and sung several songs; but Jack, if his life depended on it, never could remember more than

*Rum fum boodle boo,
Ripple dipple nitty dob;
Dumdoo doodle coo,
Raffle taffle chittiboo!*

It was the chorus to one of them; and, to say the truth, nobody that I know has ever been able to pick any particular meaning out of it; but that, to be sure, is the case with many a song nowadays.

At length said he to Jack, “Now, my dear boy, if you follow me, I’ll show you my *curiosities*!” He opened a little door, and led Jack into a large room, where Jack saw a great many odds and ends that Coomara had picked up at one time or another. What chiefly took his attention, however, were things like lobster-pots ranged on the ground along the wall.

“Well, Jack, how do you like my *curiosities*?” said old Coomara.

“Upon my *sowkins* (soul) sir,” said Jack, “they’re mighty well worth looking at; but might I make so bold as to ask what these things like lobster-pots are?”

“Oh! the Soul Cages, is it?”

“The what, sir!”

“These things here that I keep the souls in.”

“*Arrah!* what souls, sir?” said Jack, in amazement; “surely the fish have no souls in them?”

“Oh! no,” replied Coo, quite coolly, “that they have not; but these are the souls of drowned sailors.”

“The Lord preserve us from all harm!” muttered Jack, “how in the world did you get them?”

“Easily enough: I’ve only, when I see a good storm coming on, to set a couple of dozen of these, and then, when the sailors are drowned and the souls get out of them under the water, the poor things are almost perished to death, not being used to the cold; so they make into my pots for shelter, and then I have them snug, and fetch them home, and keep them here dry and warm; and is it not well for them, poor souls, to get into such good quarters?”

Jack was so thunderstruck he did not know what to say, so he said nothing. They went back into the dining-room, and had a little more brandy, which was excellent, and then, as Jack knew that it must be getting late, and as Biddy might be uneasy, he stood up, and said he thought it was time for him to be on the road.

“Just as you like, Jack,” said Coo, “but take a *duc an durrus* (stirrup-cup) before you go; you’ve a cold journey before you.”

Jack knew better manners than to refuse the parting glass. “I wonder,” said he, “will I be able to make out my way home?”

“What should ail you,” said Coo, “when I’ll show you the way?”

Out they went before the house, and Coomara took one of the cocked hats, and put it upon Jack’s head the wrong way, and then lifted him up on his shoulder that he might launch him up into the water.

“Now,” says he, giving him a heave, “you’ll come up just in the same spot you came down in; and, Jack, mind and throw me back the hat.”

He canted Jack off his shoulder, and up he shot like a

bubble—whirr, whirr, whiz—away he went up through the water, till he came to the very rock he had jumped off, where he found a landing-place, and then in he threw the hat, which sunk like a stone.

The sun was just going down in the beautiful sky of a calm summer's evening. *Feascor* was seen dimly twinkling in the cloudless heaven, a solitary star, and the waves of the Atlantic flashed in a golden flood of light. So Jack, perceiving it was late, set off home; but when he got there, not a word did he say to Biddy of where he had spent his day.

The state of the poor souls cooped up in the lobster-pots gave Jack a great deal of trouble, and how to release them cost him a great deal of thought. He at first had a mind to speak to the priest about the matter. But what could the priest do, and what did Coo care for the priest? Besides, Coo was a good sort of an old fellow, and did not think he was doing any harm. Jack had a regard for him, too, and it also might not be much to his own credit if it were known that he used to go dine with Merrows. On the whole, he thought his best plan would be to ask Coo to dinner, and to make him drunk, if he was able, and then to take the hat and go down and turn up the pots. It was, first of all, necessary, however, to get Biddy out of the way; for Jack was prudent enough, as she was a woman, to wish to keep the thing secret from her.

Accordingly, Jack grew mighty pious all of a sudden, and said to Biddy that he thought it would be for the good of both their souls if she was to go and take her rounds at Saint John's Well, near Ennis. Biddy thought so too, and accordingly off she set one fine morning at day-dawn, giving Jack a strict charge to have an eye to the place. The coast being clear, away went Jack to the rock to give the appointed signal to Coomara, which was throwing a big stone into the water. Jack threw, and up sprang Coo!

"Good morning, Jack," said he; "what do you want with me?"

"Just nothing at all to speak about, sir," returned Jack, "only

to come and take a bit of dinner with me, if I might make so free as to ask you, and sure I'm now after doing so."

"It's quite agreeable, Jack, I assure you; what's your hour?"

"Any time that's most convenient to you, sir—say one o'clock, that you may go home, if you wish, with the daylight."

"I'll be with you," said Coo, "never fear me."

Jack went home, and dressed a noble fish dinner, and got out plenty of his best foreign spirits, enough, for that matter, to make twenty men drunk. Just to the minute came Coo, with his cocked hat under his arm. Dinner was ready, they sat down, and ate and drank away manfully. Jack, thinking of the poor souls below in the pots, plied old Coo well with brandy, and encouraged him to sing, hoping to put him under the table, but poor Jack forgot that he had not the sea over his own head to keep it cool. The brandy got into it, and did his business for him, and Coo reeled off home, leaving his entertainer as dumb as a haddock on a Good Friday.

Jack never woke till the next morning, and then he was in a sad way. "'Tis to no use for me thinking to make that old Raparee drunk," said Jack, "and how in the world can I help the poor souls out of the lobster-pots?" After ruminating nearly the whole day, a thought struck him. "I have it," says he, slapping a knee; "I'll be sworn that Coo never saw a drop of *poteen*, as old as he is, and that's the *thing* to settle him! Oh! then, is not it well that Biddy will not be home these two days yet; I can have another twist at him."

Jack asked Coo again, and Coo laughed at him for having no better head, telling him he'd never come up to his grandfather.

"Well, but try me again," said Jack, "and I'll be bail to drink you drunk and sober, and drunk again."

"Anything in my power," said Coo, "to oblige you."

At this dinner Jack took care to have his own liquor well watered, and to give the strongest brandy he had to Coo. At last says he, "Pray, sir, did you ever drink any *poteen*?—any real mountain dew?"

"No," says Coo; "what's that, and where does it come from?"

“Oh, that’s a secret,” said Jack, “but it’s the right stuff—never believe me again, if ’tis not fifty times as good as brandy or rum either. Biddy’s brother just sent me a present of a little drop, in exchange for some brandy, and as you’re an old friend of the family, I kept it to treat you with.”

“Well, let’s see what sort of thing it is,” said Coomara.

The *poteen* was the right sort. It was first-rate, and had the real smack upon it. Coo was delighted: he drank and he sung *Rum bum boodle boo* over and over again; and he laughed and he danced, till he fell on the floor fast asleep. Then Jack, who had taken good care to keep himself sober, snapt up the cocked hat—ran off to the rock—leaped in, and soon arrived at Coo’s habitation.

All was as still as a churchyard at midnight—not a Merrow, old or young, was there. In he went and turned up the pots, but nothing did he see, only he heard a sort of little whistle or chirp as he raised each of them. At this he was surprised, till he recollected what the priests had often said, that nobody living could see the soul, no more than they could see the wind or the air. Having now done all that he could do for them, he set the pots as they were before, and sent a blessing after the poor souls to speed them on their journey wherever they were going. Jack now began to think of returning; he put the hat on, as was right, the wrong way; but when he got out he found the water so high over his head that he had no hopes of ever getting up into it, now that he had not old Coomara to give him a lift. He walked about looking for a ladder, but not one could he find, and not a rock was there in sight. At last he saw a spot where the sea hung rather lower than anywhere else, so he resolved to try there. Just as he came to it, a big cod happened to put down his tail. Jack made a jump and caught hold of it, and the cod, all in amazement, gave a bounce and pulled Jack up. The minute the hat touched the water away Jack was whisked, and up he shot like a cork, dragging the poor cod, that he forgot to let go, up with him tail foremost. He got to the rock in no time, and without a moment’s delay hurried home, rejoicing in the good deed he had done.





But meanwhile, there was fine work at home; for our friend Jack had hardly left the house on his soul-freeing expedition, when back came Biddy from her soul-saving one to the well. When she entered the house and saw things lying *thrie-na-helah* (higgledy-piggledy) on the table before her—"Here's a pretty job!" said she; "that blackguard of mine—what ill-luck I had ever to marry him! He has picked up some vagabond or other, while I was praying for the good of his soul, and they've been drinking all the *poteen* that my own brother gave him, and all the spirits, to be sure, that he was to have sold to his honour." Then hearing an outlandish kind of a grunt, she looked down, and saw Coomara lying under the table. "The blessed Virgin help me," shouted she, "if he has not made a real beast of himself! Well, well, I've often heard of a man making a beast of himself with drink! Oh hone! Oh hone!—Jack, honey, what will I do with you, or what will I do without you? How can any decent woman ever think of living with a beast?"

With such like lamentations Biddy rushed out of the house, and was going she knew not where, when she heard the well-known voice of Jack singing a merry tune. Glad enough was Biddy to find him safe and sound, and not turned into a thing that was like neither fish nor flesh. Jack was obliged to tell her all, and Biddy, though she had half a mind to be angry with him for not telling her before, owned that he had done a great service to the poor souls. Back they both went most lovingly to the house, and Jack wakened up Coomara; and, perceiving the old fellow to be rather dull, he bid him not to be cast down, for 'twas many a good man's case; said it all came of his not being used to the *poteen*, and recommended him, by way of a cure, to swallow a hair of the dog that bit him. Coo, however, seemed to think he had had quite enough. He got up, quite out of sorts, and without having the manners to say one word in the way of civility, he sneaked off to cool himself by a jaunt through the salt water.

Coomara never missed the souls. He and Jack continued the best friends in the world, and no one perhaps, ever equalled Jack for freeing souls from purgatory; for he contrived fifty

excuses for getting into the house below the sea, unknown to the old fellow, and then turning up the pots and letting out the souls. It vexed him, to be sure, that he could never see them; but as he knew the thing to be impossible, he was obliged to be satisfied.

Their friendship continued for several years. However, one morning, on Jack's throwing in a stone as usual, he got no answer. He flung another and another, still there was no reply. He went away, and returned the following morning, but it was to no purpose. As he was without the hat, he could not go down to see what had become of old Coo, but his belief was, that the old man, or the old fish, or whatever he was, had either died, or had removed from that part of the country.

The Whistling Room

WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

In which a room in an Irish castle is haunted by a strange whistling sound . . . an extraordinary hooning whistle, monstrous and inhuman, which seems to make the air throb under the power of some wanton Immense Force . . .

CARNACKI shook a friendly fist at me as I entered late. Then he opened the door into the dining-room, and ushered the four of us—Jessop, Arkright, Taylor and myself—in to dinner.

We dined well, as usual, and, equally as usual, Carnacki was pretty silent during the meal. At the end, we took our wine and cigars to our accustomed positions, and Carnacki—having got himself comfortable in his big chair—began without any preliminary:

“I have just got back from Ireland again,” he said. “And I thought you chaps would be interested to hear my news. Besides, I fancy I shall see the thing clearer, after I have told it all out straight. I must tell you this, though, at the beginning—up to the present moment, I have been utterly and completely ‘stumped.’ I have tumbled upon one of the most peculiar cases of ‘haunting’—or devilment of some sort—that I have come against. Now listen.

“I have been spending the last few weeks at Iastrae Castle, about twenty miles north-east of Galway. I got a letter about a month ago from a Mr Sid K. Tassoc, who it seemed had bought the place lately, and moved in, only to find that he had got a very peculiar piece of property.

“When I reached there, he met me at the station, driving a jaunting-car, and drove me up to the castle, which, by the way,

he called a 'house-shanty.' I found that he was 'pigging it' there with his boy brother and another American, who seemed to be half servant and half companion. It appears that all the servants had left the place, in a body, as you might say; and now they were managing among themselves, assisted by some day-help.

"The three of them got together a scratch feed, and Tassoc told me all about the trouble, whilst we were at table. It is most extraordinary, and different from anything that I have had to do with; though that Buzzing Case was very queer, too.

"Tassoc began right in the middle of his story. 'We've got a room in this shanty,' he said, 'which has got a most infernal whistling in it; sort of haunting it. The thing starts any time: you never know when, and it goes on until it frightens you. All the servants have gone, as I've told you. It's not ordinary whistling, and it isn't the wind. Wait till you hear it.'

" 'We're all carrying guns,' said the boy; and slapped his coat pocket.

" 'As bad as that?' I said; and the older brother nodded. 'I may be soft,' he replied; 'but wait till you've heard it. Sometimes I think it's some infernal thing, and the next moment, I'm just as sure that someone's playing a trick on us.'

" 'Why?' I asked. 'What is to be gained?'

" 'You mean,' he said, 'that people usually have some good reason for playing tricks as elaborate as this. Well, I'll tell you. There's a lady in this province, by the name of Miss Donnehue, who's going to be my wife, this day two months. She's more beautiful than they make them, and so far as I can see, I've just stuck my head into an Irish hornet's nest. There's about a score of hot young Irishmen been courting her these two years gone, and now that I've come along and cut them out, they feel raw against me. Do you begin to understand the possibilities?'

" 'Yes,' I said. Perhaps I do in a vague sort of way; but I don't see how all this affects the room?'

" 'Like this,' he said. 'When I'd fixed it up with Miss Donnehue, I looked out for a place, and bought this little house-shanty. Afterwards, I told her—one evening during

dinner, that I'd decided to tie up here. And then she asked me whether I wasn't afraid of the whistling room. I told her it must have been thrown in gratis, as I'd heard nothing about it. There were some of her men friends present, and I saw a smile go round. I found out, after a bit of questioning, that several people have bought this place during the last twenty odd years. And it was always on the market again, after a trial.

“ ‘Well, the chaps started to bait me a bit, and offered to take bets after dinner that I'd not stay six months in this shanty. I looked once or twice to Miss Donnehue, so as to be sure I was “getting the note” of the talkee-talkee; but I could see that she didn't take it as a joke, at all. Partly, I think, because there was a bit of a sneer in the way the men were tackling me, and partly because she really believes there is something in this yarn of the whistling room.

“ ‘However, after dinner, I did what I could to even things up with the others. I nailed all their bets, and screwed them down good and safe. I guess some of them are going to be hard hit, unless I lose; which I don't mean to. Well, there you have practically the whole yarn.’

“ ‘Not quite,’ I told him. ‘All that I know, is that you have bought a castle, with a room in it that is in some way “queer,” and that you've been doing some betting. Also, I know that your servants have got frightened, and run away. Tell me something about the whistling?’

“ ‘Oh that!’ said Tassoc; ‘that started the second night we were in. I'd had a good look round the room in the daytime, as you can understand; for the talk up at Arlestrae—Miss Donnehue's place—had made me wonder a bit. But it seems just as usual as some of the other rooms in the old wing, only perhaps a bit more lonesome feeling. But that may be only because of the talk about it, you know.

“ ‘The whistling started about ten o'clock, on the second night, as I said. Tom and I were in the library, when we heard an awfully queer whistling, coming along the East Corridor—The room is in the East Wing, you know.

“ ‘That blessed ghost!’ I said to Tom, and we collared the lamps off the table, and went up to have a look. I tell you, even as we dug along the corridor, it took me a bit in the throat, it was so beastly queer. It was a sort of tune, in a way; but more as if a devil or some rotten thing were laughing at you, and going to get round at your back. That’s how it makes you feel.

“ ‘When we got to the door, we didn’t wait; but pushed it open; and then I tell you the sound of the thing fairly hit me in the face. Tom said he got it the same way—sort of felt stunned and bewildered. We looked all round, and soon got so nervous, we just cleared out, and I locked the door.

“ ‘We came down here, and had a stiff peg each. Then we landed fit again, and began to feel we’d been nicely had. So we took sticks, and went out into the grounds, thinking after all it must be some of these confounded Irishmen working the ghost-trick on us. But there was not a leg stirring.

“ ‘We came down here, and had a stiff peg each. Then we paid another visit to the room. But we simply couldn’t stand it. We fairly ran out, and locked the door again. I don’t know how to put it into words; but I had a feeling of being up against something that was rottenly dangerous. You know! We’ve carried our guns ever since.

“ ‘Of course, we had a real turn-out of the room next day, and the whole house-place; and we even hunted the grounds; but there was nothing queer. And now I don’t know what to think; except that the sensible part of me tells me that it’s some plan of these Wild Irishmen to try to take a rise out of me.’

“ ‘Done anything since?’ I asked him.

“ ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Watched outside the door of the room at nights, and chased round the grounds, and sounded the walls and floor of the room. We’ve done everything we could think of; and it’s beginning to get on our nerves; so we sent for you.’

“By this, we had finished eating. As we rose from the table, Tassoc suddenly called out: ‘Ssh! Hark!’

“We were instantly silent, listening. Then I heard it, an extraordinary hooning whistle, monstrous and inhuman,

coming from far away through corridors to my right.

“ ‘By God!’ said Tassoc; ‘and it’s scarcely dark yet! Collar those candles, both of you, and come along.’

“In a few moments, we were all out of the door and racing up the stairs. Tassoc turned into a long corridor, and we followed, shielding our candles as we ran. The sound seemed to fill all the passage as we drew near, until I had the feeling that the whole air throbbed under the power of some wanton Immense Force—a sense of an actual taint, as you might say, of monstrosity all about us.

“Tassoc unlocked the door; then, giving it a push with his foot, jumped back, and drew his revolver. As the door flew open, the sound beat out at us, with an effect impossible to explain to one who has not heard it—with a certain, horrible personal note in it; as if in there in the darkness you could picture the room rocking and creaking in a mad, vile glee to its own filthy piping and whistling and hooning; and yet all the time aware of you in particular. To stand there and listen, was to be stunned by Realization. It was as if someone showed you the mouth of a vast pit suddenly, and said: That’s Hell. And you *knew* that they had spoken the truth. Do you get it, even a little bit?

“I stepped a pace into the room, and held the candle over my head, and looked quickly round. Tassoc and his brother joined me, and the man came up at the back, and we all held our candles high. I was deafened with the shrill, piping hoon of the whistling; and then, clear in my ear, something seemed to be saying to me: ‘Get out of here—quick! Quick! Quick!’

“As you chaps know, I never neglect that sort of thing. Sometimes it may be nothing but nerves; but as you will remember, it was just such a warning that saved me in the ‘Grey Dog’ Case, and in the ‘Yellow Finger’ Experiments; as well as other times. Well, I turned sharp round to the others: ‘Out!’ I said. ‘For God’s sake, *out* quick!’ And in an instant I had them into the passage.

“There came an extraordinary yelling scream into the

hideous whistling, and then, like a clap of thunder, an utter silence. I slammed the door, and locked it. Then, taking the key, I looked round at the others. They were pretty white, and I imagine I must have looked that way too. And there we stood a moment, silent.

“ ‘Come down out of this, and have some whisky,’ said Tassoc, at last, in a voice he tried to make ordinary; and he led the way. I was the back man, and I knew we all kept looking over our shoulders. When we got downstairs, Tassoc passed the bottle round. He took a drink himself, and slapped his glass on-to the table. Then sat down with a thud.

“ ‘That’s a lovely thing to have in the house with you, isn’t it!’ he said. And directly afterwards: ‘What on earth made you hustle us all out like that, Carnacki?’

“ ‘Something seemed to be telling me to get out, *quick*,’ I said. ‘Sounds a bit silly superstitious, I know; but when you are meddling with this sort of thing, you’ve got to take notice of queer fancies, and risk being laughed at.’

“ ‘I told him then about the ‘Grey Dog’ business, and he nodded a lot to that. ‘Of course,’ I said, ‘this may be nothing more than those would-be rivals of yours playing some funny game; but, personally, though I’m going to keep an open mind, I feel that there is something beastly and dangerous about this thing.’

“ ‘We talked for a while longer, and then Tassoc suggested billiards, which we played in a pretty half-hearted fashion, and all the time cocking an ear to the door, as you might say, for sounds; but none came, and later, after coffee, he suggested early bed, and a thorough overhaul of the room on the morrow.

“ ‘My bedroom was in the newer part of the castle, and the door opened into the picture gallery. At the east end of the gallery was the entrance to the corridor of the east wing; this was shut off from the gallery by two old and heavy oak doors, which looked rather odd and quaint beside the more modern doors of the various rooms.

“ ‘When I reached my room, I did not go to bed; but began to

unpack my instrument trunk, of which I had retained the key. I intended to take one or two preliminary steps at once, in my investigation of the extraordinary whistling.

“Presently, when the castle had settled into quietness, I slipped out of my room, and across to the entrance of the great corridor. I opened one of the low, squat doors, and threw the beam of my pocket searchlight down the passage. It was empty, and I went through the doorway, and pushed-to the oak behind me. Then along the great passageway, throwing my light before and behind, and keeping my revolver handy.

“I had hung a ‘protection belt’ of garlic round my neck, and the smell of it seemed to fill the corridor and give me assurance; for, as you all know, it is a wonderful ‘protection’ against the more usual Aeiirii forms of semi-materialization, by which I supposed the whistling might be produced; though, at that period of my investigation, I was still quite prepared to find it due to some perfectly natural cause; for it is astonishing the enormous number of cases that prove to have nothing abnormal in them.

“In addition to wearing the necklet, I had plugged my ears loosely with garlic, and as I did not intend to stay more than a few minutes in the room, I hoped to be safe.

“When I reached the door, and put my hand into my pocket for the key, I had a sudden feeling of sickening funk. But I was not going to back out, if I could help it. I unlocked the door and turned the handle. Then I gave the door a sharp push with my foot, as Tassoc had done, and drew my revolver, though I did not expect to have any use for it, really.

“I shone the searchlight all round the room, and then stepped inside, with a disgustingly horrible feeling of walking slap into a waiting Danger. I stood a few seconds, expectant, and nothing happened, and the empty room showed bare from corner to corner. And then, you know, I realized that the room was full of an abominable silence; can you understand that? A sort of purposeful silence, just as sickening as any of the filthy noises the Things have power to make. Do you remember what I told

you about that 'Silent Garden' business? Well, this room had just that same *malevolent* silence—the beastly quietness of a thing that is looking at you and not seeable itself, and thinks that it has got you. Oh, I recognized it instantly, and I whipped the top off my lantern, so as to have light over the *whole* room.

“Then I set to, working like fury, and keeping my glance all about me. I sealed the two windows with lengths of human hair, right across, and sealed them at every frame. As I worked, a queer, scarcely perceptible tenseness stole into the air of the place, and the silence seemed, if you can understand me, to grow more solid. I knew then that I had no business there without ‘full protection’; for I was practically certain that this was no mere Aeiirii development; but one of the worst forms, as the Saiitii; like that ‘Grunting Man’ case—you know.

“I finished the window, and hurried over to the great fireplace. This is a huge affair, and has a queer gallows-iron, I think they are called, projecting from back of the arch. I sealed the opening with seven human hairs—the seventh crossing the six others.

“Then, just as I was making an end, a low, mocking whistle grew in the room. A cold, nervous prickling went up my spine, and round my forehead from the back. The hideous sound filled all the room with an extraordinary, grotesque parody of human whistling, too gigantic to be human—as if something gargantuan and monstrous made the sounds softly. As I stood there a last moment, pressing down the final seal, I had little doubt but that I had come across one of those rare and horrible cases of the *Inanimate* reproducing the functions of the *Animate*. I made a grab for my lamp and went quickly to the door, looking over my shoulder, and listening for the thing that I expected. It came, just as I got my hand upon the handle—a squeal of incredible, malevolent anger, piercing through the low hooning of the whistling. I dashed out, slamming the door and locking it.

“I leant a little against the opposite wall of the corridor, feeling rather funny; for it had been a hideously narrow squeak. . . . ‘Theyr be no sayfetic to be gained bye gayrds of

holiness when the monyster hath pow'r to speak throe woode and stoene.' So runs the passage in the Sigsand MS, and I proved it in that 'Nodding Door' business. There is no protection against this particular form of monster, except, possibly, for a fractional period of time; for it can reproduce itself in, or take to its purpose, the very protective material which you may use, and has power to '*forme* wythine the pentycle'; though not immediately. There is, of course, the possibility of the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual being uttered; but it is too uncertain to count upon, and the danger is too hideous; and even then it has no power to protect for more than 'maybe fyve beats of the harte,' as the Sigsand has it.

"Inside of the room, there was now a constant, meditative, hooning whistling; but presently this ceased, and the silence seemed worse; for there is such a sense of hidden mischief in a silence.

"After a little, I sealed the door with crossed hairs, and then cleared off down the great passage, and so to bed.

"For a long time I lay awake; but managed eventually to get some sleep. Yet, about two o'clock I was waked by the hooning whistling of the room coming to me, even through the closed doors. The sound was tremendous, and seemed to beat through the whole house with a presiding sense of terror. As if (I remember thinking) some monstrous giant had been holding mad carnival with itself at the end of that great passage.

"I got up and sat on the edge of the bed, wondering whether to go along and have a look at the seal; and suddenly there came a thump on my door, and Tassoc walked in, with his dressing-gown over his pyjamas.

" 'I thought it would have waked you, so I came along to have a talk,' he said. '*I* can't sleep. Beautiful! Isn't it?'

" 'Extraordinary!' I said, and tossed him my case.

"He lit a cigarette, and we sat and talked for about an hour; and all the time that noise went on, down at the end of the big corridor.

“Suddenly Tassoc stood up:

“ ‘Let’s take our guns, and go and examine the brute,’ he said, and turned towards the door.

“ ‘No!’ I said. ‘By Jove—NO! I can’t say anything definite yet; but I believe that room is about as dangerous as it well can be.’

“ ‘Haunted—*really* haunted?’ he asked, keenly and without any of his frequent banter.

“I told him, of course, that I could not say a definite *yes* or *no* to such a question; but that I hoped to be able to make a statement, soon. Then I gave him a little lecture on the False Re-materialization of the Animate Force through the In-animate Inert. He began then to understand the particular way in which the room might be dangerous, if it were really the subject of a manifestation.

“About an hour later, the whistling ceased quite suddenly and Tassoc went off again to bed. I went back to mine, also, and eventually got another spell of sleep.

“In the morning, I walked along to the room. I found the seals on the door intact. Then I went in. The window seals and the hair were all right; but the seventh hair across the great fireplace was broken. This set me thinking. I knew that it might, very possibly, have snapped, through my having tensioned it too highly; but then, again, it might have been broken by something else. Yet it was scarcely possible that a man, for instance, could have passed between the six unbroken hairs; for no one would ever have noticed them, entering the room that way, you see; but just walked through them, ignorant of their very existence.

“I removed the other hairs, and the seals. Then I looked up the chimney. It went up straight, and I could see blue sky at the top. It was a big open flue, and free from any suggestion of hiding-places or corners. Yet, of course, I did not trust to any such casual examination, and after breakfast, I put on my overalls, and climbed to the very top, sounding all the way; but I found nothing.

“Then I came down, and went over the whole of the room—floor, ceiling, and walls, mapping them out in six-inch squares, and sounding with both hammer and probe. But there was nothing unusual.

“Afterwards, I made a three-weeks’ search of the whole castle, in the same thorough way; but found nothing. I went even further then; for at night, when the whistling commenced, I made a microphone test. You see, if the whistling were mechanically produced, this test would have made evident to me the working of the machinery, if there were any such concealed within the walls. It certainly was an up-to-date method of examination, as you must allow.

“Of course, I did not think that any of Tassoc’s rivals had fixed up any mechanical contrivance; but I thought it just possible that there had been some such thing for producing the whistling, made away back in the years, perhaps with the intention of giving the room a reputation that would ensure its being free of inquisitive folk. You see what I mean? Well, of course, it was just possible, if this were the case, that someone knew the secret of the machinery, and was utilizing the knowledge to play this devil of a prank on Tassoc. The microphone test of the walls would certainly have made this known to me, as I have said; but there was nothing of the sort in the castle; so that I had practically no doubt at all now, but that it was a genuine case of what is popularly termed ‘haunting’.

“All this time, every night, and sometimes most of each night, the hooning whistling of the room was intolerable. It was as if an Intelligence there knew that steps were being taken against it, and piped and hooned in a sort of mad mocking contempt. I tell you, it was as extraordinary as it was horrible. Time after time I went along—tiptoeing noiselessly on stockinged feet—to the sealed door (for I always kept the room sealed). I went at all hours of the night, and often the whistling, inside, would seem to change to a brutally jeering note, as though the half-animate monster saw me plainly through the shut door. And all the time, as I would stand watching, the

hooning of the whistling would seem to fill the whole corridor, so that I used to feel a precious lonely chap, messing about there with one of Hell's mysteries.

"And every morning I would enter the room, and examine the different hairs and seals. You see, after the first week I had stretched parallel hairs all along the walls of the room, and along the ceiling; but over the floor, which was of polished stone, I had set out little colourless wafers, tacky-side uppermost. Each wafer was numbered, and they were arranged after a definite plan, so that I should be able to trace the exact movements of any living thing that went across.

"You will see that no material being or creature could possibly have entered that room, without leaving many signs to tell me about it. But nothing was ever disturbed, and I began to think that I should have to risk an attempt to stay a night in the room, in the Electric Pentacle. Mind you, I *knew* that it would be a crazy thing to do; but I was getting stumped, and ready to try anything.

"Once, about midnight, I did break the seal on the door and have a quick look in; but I tell you, the whole room gave one mad yell, and seemed to come towards me in a great belly of shadows, as if the walls had bellied in towards me. Of course, that must have been fancy. Anyway, the yell was sufficient, and I slammed the door, and locked it, feeling a bit weak down my spine. I wonder whether you know the feeling.

"And then, when I had got to that state of readiness for anything, I made what, at first, I thought was something of a discovery.

"It was about one in the morning, and I was walking slowly round the castle, keeping in the soft grass. I had come under the shadow of the east front, and far above me, I could hear the vile hooning whistling of the room, up in the darkness of the unlit wing. Then, suddenly, a little in front of me, I heard a man's voice, speaking low, but evidently in glee:

" 'By George! You chaps; but I wouldn't care to bring a wife home to that!' it said, in the tone of the cultured Irish.

“Someone started to reply; but there came a sharp exclamation, and then a rush, and I heard footsteps running in all directions. Evidently, the men had spotted me.

“For a few seconds I stood there, feeling an awful ass. After all, *they* were at the bottom of the haunting! Do you see what a big fool it made me seem? I had no doubt but that they were some of Tassoc’s rivals; and here I had been feeling in every bone that I had hit a genuine Case! And then, you know, there came the memory of hundreds of details, that made me just as much in doubt, again. Anyway, whether it was natural, or abnatural, there was a great deal yet to be cleared up.

“I told Tassoc, next morning, what I had discovered, and through the whole of every night, for five nights, we kept a close watch round the east wing; but there was never a sign of anyone prowling about; and all the time, almost from evening to dawn, that grotesque whistling would hoon incredibly, far above us in the darkness.

“On the morning after the fifth night, I received a wire from here, which brought me home by the next boat. I explained to Tassoc that I was simply bound to come away for a few days; but I told him to keep up the watch round the castle. One thing I was very careful to do, and that was to make him absolutely promise never to go into the Room between sunset and sunrise. I made it clear to him that we knew nothing definite yet, one way or the other; and if the room were what I had first thought it to be, it might be a lot better for him to die first, than enter it after dark.

“When I got here, and had finished my business, I thought you chaps would be interested; and also I wanted to get it all spread out clear in my mind; so I rang you up. I am going over again tomorrow, and when I get back I ought to have something pretty extraordinary to tell you. By the way, there is a curious thing I forgot to tell you. I tried to get a phonographic recording of the whistling; but it simply produced no impression on the wax at all. That is one of the things that has made me feel queer.

“Another extraordinary thing is that the microphone will not

magnify the sound—will not even transmit it; seems to take no account of it, and acts as if it were non-existent. I am absolutely and utterly stumped, up to the present. I am a wee bit curious to see whether any of your dear clever heads can make daylight of it. *I cannot—not yet.*”

He rose to his feet.

“Goodnight, all,” he said, and began to usher us out abruptly, but without offence, into the night.

A fortnight later, he dropped us each a card, and you can imagine that I was not late this time. When we arrived, Carnacki took us straight into dinner, and when we had finished, and all made ourselves comfortable, he began again, where he had left off:

“Now just listen quietly; for I have got something very queer to tell you. I got back late at night, and I had to walk up to the castle, as I had not warned them that I was coming. It was bright moonlight; so that the walk was rather a pleasure than otherwise. When I got there, the whole place was in darkness, and I thought I would go round outside, to see whether Tassoc or his brother was keeping watch. But I could not find them anywhere and concluded that they had got tired of it, and gone off to bed.

“As I returned across the lawn that lies below the front of the east wing, I caught the hooning whistling of the room, coming down strangely clear through the stillness of the night. It had a peculiar note in it, I remember—low and constant, queerly meditative. I looked up at the window, bright in the moonlight, and got a sudden thought to bring a ladder from the stable-yard, and try to get a look into the room, from the outside.

“With this notion, I hunted round at the back of the castle, among the straggle of offices, and presently found a long, fairly light ladder; though it was heavy enough for one, goodness knows! I thought at first that I should never get it reared. I managed at last, and let the ends rest very quietly against the wall, a little below the sill of the larger window. Then, going silently, I went up the ladder. Presently, I had my face above

the sill, and was looking in, alone in the moonlight.

“Of course, the queer whistling sounded louder up there; but it still conveyed that peculiar sense of something whistling quietly to itself—can you understand? Though, for all the meditative lowness of the note, the horrible, gargantuan quality was distinct—a mighty parody of the human; as if I stood there and listened to the whistling from the lips of a monster with a man’s soul.

“And then, you know, I saw something. The floor in the middle of the huge, empty room, was puckered upwards in the centre into a strange, soft-looking mound, parted at the top into an ever-changing hole, that pulsed to that great, gentle hooning. At times, as I watched, I saw the heaving of the indented mound gap across with a queer inward suction, as with the drawing of an enormous breath; then the thing would dilate and pout once more to the incredible melody. And suddenly, as I stared, dumb, it came to me that the thing was living. I was looking at two enormous, blackened lips, blistered and brutal, there in the pale moonlight. . . .

“Abruptly, they bulged out to a vast, pouting mound of force and sound, stiffened and swollen, and hugely massive and clean-cut in the moonbeams. And a great sweat lay heavy on the vast upper lip. In the same moment of time, the whistling had burst into a mad screaming note, that seemed to stun me, even where I stood, outside of the window. And then, the following moment, I was staring blankly at the solid, undisturbed floor of the room—smooth, polished stone flooring, from wall to wall. And there was an absolute silence.

“You can picture me staring into the quiet room, and knowing what I knew. I felt like a sick, frightened child, and I wanted to slide *quietly* down the ladder, and run away. But in that very instant, I heard Tassoc’s voice calling to me from within the room, for help, *help*. My God! but I got such an awful dazed feeling; and I had a vague bewildered notion that, after all, it was the Irishmen who had got him in there, and were taking it out on him. And then the call came again, and I burst



the window, and jumped in to help him. I had a confused idea that the call had come from within the shadow of the great fireplace, and I raced across to it; but there was no one there.

“ ‘Tassoc!’ I shouted, and my voice went empty-sounding round the great apartment; and then, in a flash, *I knew that Tassoc had never called*. I whirled round, sick with fear, towards the window, and as I did so a frightful, exultant whistling scream burst through the room. On my left, the end wall had bellied in towards me, in a pair of gargantuan lips, black and utterly monstrous, to within a yard of my face. I fumbled for a mad instant at my revolver; not for *it*, but myself; for the danger was a thousand times worse than death. And then, suddenly, the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual was whispered quite audibly in the room. Instantly, the thing happened that I have known once before. There came a sense as of dust falling continually and monotonously, and I knew that my life hung uncertain and suspended for a flash, in a brief reeling vertigo of unseeable things. Then *that* ended, and I knew that I might live. My soul and body blended again, and life and power came to me. I dashed furiously at the window, and hurled myself out head foremost; for I can tell you that I had stopped being afraid of death. I crashed down on to the ladder, and slithered, grabbing and grabbing; and so came some way or other alive to the bottom. And there I sat in the soft, wet grass, with the moonlight all about me; and far above, through the broken window of the room, there was a low whistling.

“That is the chief of it. I was not hurt, and I went round to the front, and knocked Tassoc up. When they let me in, we had a long yarn, over some good whisky—for I was shaken to pieces—and I explained things as much as I could. I told Tassoc that the room would have to come down, and every fragment of it be burned in a blast-furnace, erected within a pentacle. He nodded. There was nothing to say. Then I went to bed.

“We turned a small army on to the work, and within ten days,

that lovely thing had gone up in smoke, and what was left was calcined and clean.

“It was when the workmen were stripping the panelling, that I got hold of a sound notion of the beginnings of that beastly development. Over the great fireplace, after the great oak panels had been torn down, I found that there was let into the masonry a scrollwork of stone, with on it an old inscription, in ancient Celtic, that here in this room was burned Dian Tiansay, Jester of King Alzof, who made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore of the Seventh Castle.

“When I got the translation clear, I gave it to Tassoc. He was tremendously excited; for he knew the old tale, and took me down to the library to look at an old parchment that gave the story in detail. Afterwards, I found that the incident was well known about the countryside; but always regarded more as a legend than as history. And no one seemed ever to have dreamt that the old east wing of Iastrae Castle was the remains of the ancient Seventh Castle.

“From the old parchment, I gathered that there had been a pretty dirty job done, away back in the years. It seems that King Alzof and King Ernore had been enemies by birthright, as you might say truly; but that nothing more than a little raiding had occurred on either side for years, until Dian Tiansay made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore, and sang it before King Alzof; and so greatly was it appreciated that King Alzof gave the jester one of his ladies to wife.

“Presently, all the people of the land had come to know the song, and so it came at last to King Ernore, who was so angered that he made war upon his old enemy, and took and burned him and his castle; but Dian Tiansay, the jester, he brought with him to his own place, and having torn his tongue out because of the song which he had made and sung he imprisoned him in the room in the east wing (which was evidently used for unpleasant purposes), and the jester’s wife he kept for himself, having a fancy for her prettiness.

“But one night Dian Tiansay’s wife was not to be found, and

in the morning they discovered her lying dead in her husband's arms, and he sitting, whistling the Song of Foolishness, for he had no longer the power to sing it.

"Then they roasted Dian Tiansay in the great fireplace—probably from that selfsame 'gallows-iron' which I have already mentioned. And until he died, Dian Tiansay 'ceased not to whistle' the Song of Foolishness, which he could no longer sing. But afterwards, 'in that room' there was often heard at night the sound of something whistling; and there 'grew a power in that room,' so that none dared to sleep in it. And presently, it would seem, the King went to another castle; for the whistling troubled him.

"There you have it all. Of course, that is only a rough rendering of the translation from the parchment. It's a bit quaint! Don't you think so?"

"Yes," I said, answering for the lot. "But how did the thing grow to such a tremendous manifestation?"

"One of those cases of continuity of thought producing a positive action upon the immediate surrounding material," replied Carnacki. "The development must have been going forward through centuries, to have produced such a monstrosity. It was a true instance of Saiitii manifestation, which I can best explain by likening it to a living spiritual fungus, which involves the very structure of the aether-fibre itself, and, of course, in so doing, acquired an essential control over the 'material-substance' involved in it. It is impossible to make it plainer in a few words."

"What broke the seventh hair?" asked Taylor.

But Carnacki did not know. He thought it was probably nothing but being too severely tensioned. He also explained that they found out that the men who had run away had not been up to mischief; but had come over secretly merely to hear the whistling, which, indeed, had suddenly become the talk of the whole countryside.

"One other thing," said Arkwright, "have you any idea what governs the use of the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa

Ritual? I know, of course, that it was used by the Ab-human Priests in the Incantation of Raaeee; but what used it on your behalf, and what made it?"

"You had better read Harzam's Monograph, and my Addenda to it, on 'Astral and Astarral Co-ordination and Interference'," said Carnacki. "It is an extraordinary subject, and I can only say here that the human vibration may not be insulated from the 'astarral' (as is always believed to be the case, in interferences by the Ab-human) without immediate action being taken by those Forces which govern the spinning of the outer circle. In other words, it is being proved, time after time, that there is some inscrutable Protective Force constantly intervening between the human soul (not the body, mind you) and the Outer Monstrosities. Am I clear?"

"Yes, I think so," I replied. "And you believe that the room had become the material expression of the ancient jester—that his soul, rotted with hatred, had bred into a monster—eh?" I asked.

"Yes," said Carnacki, nodding. "I think you've put my thought rather neatly. It is a queer coincidence that Miss Donnehue is supposed to be descended (so I have heard since) from the same King Ernore. It makes one think some rather curious thoughts, doesn't it? The marriage coming on, and the room waking to fresh life. If she had gone into that room, ever . . . eh? IT had waited for a long time. Sins of the fathers. Yes, I've thought of that. They're to be married next week, and I am to be best man, which is a thing I hate. And he won his bets, rather! Just think *if* ever she had gone into that room. Pretty horrible, eh?"

He nodded his head grimly, and we four nodded back. Then he rose and took us collectively to the door, and presently thrust us forth in friendly fashion on to the Embankment, and into the fresh night air.

"Goodnight," we all called back, and went to our various homes.

If she had, eh? If she had? That is what I kept thinking.

The Music of Erich Zann

H. P. LOVECRAFT

In which a dumb violist, Erich Zann, plays weird, haunting music in the middle of the night. None of his harmonies have any relation to music that has been heard before . . . they hold vibrations suggesting nothing on this earth. As the weeks pass, the playing grows wilder, until one night something responds from outside the window . . .

I HAVE examined maps of the city with the greatest care, yet I have never again found the Rue d'Auseil. These maps have not been modern maps alone, for I know that names change. I have on the contrary, delved deeply into all the antiquities of the place, and have personally explored every region, of whatever name, which could possibly answer to the street I knew as the Rue d'Auseil. But despite all I have done, it remains a humiliating fact that I cannot find the house, the street, or even the locality, where, during the last months of my impoverished life as a student of metaphysics at the university, I heard the music of Erich Zann.

That my memory is broken, I do not wonder; for my health, physical and mental, was gravely disturbed throughout the period of my residence in the Rue d'Auseil, and I recall that I took none of my few acquaintances there. But that I cannot find the place again is both singular and perplexing; for it was within a half-hour's walk of the university and was distinguished by peculiarities which could hardly be forgotten by anyone who had been there. I have never met a person who has seen the Rue d'Auseil.

The Rue d'Auseil lay across a dark river bordered by

precipitous brick blear-windowed warehouses and spanned by a ponderous bridge of dark stone. It was always shadowy along that river, as if the smoke of neighbouring factories shut out the sun perpetually. The river was also odorous with evil stench which I have never smelled elsewhere, and which may some day help me to find it, since I should recognize them at once. Beyond the bridge were narrow cobbled streets with rails; and then came the ascent, at first gradual, but incredibly steep as the Rue d'Auseil was reached.

I have never seen another street as narrow and steep as the Rue d'Auseil. It was almost a cliff, closed to all vehicles, consisting in several places of flights of steps, and ending at the top in a lofty ivied wall. Its paving was irregular, sometimes stone slabs, sometimes cobblestones, and sometimes bare earth with struggling greenish-grey vegetation. The houses were tall, peaked-roofed, incredibly old, and crazily leaning backward, forward and sidewise. Occasionally an opposite pair, both leaning forward, almost met across the street like an arch; and certainly they kept most of the light from the ground below. There were a few overhead bridges from house to house across the street.

The inhabitants of that street impressed me peculiarly. At first I thought it was because they were all very old. I do not know how I came to live on such a street, but I was not myself when I moved there. I had been living in many poor places, always evicted for want of money; until at last I came upon that tottering house in the Rue d'Auseil kept by the paralytic Blandot. It was the third house from the top of the street, and by far the tallest of them all.

My room was on the fifth storey; the only inhabited room there, since the house was almost empty. On the night I arrived I heard strange music from the peaked garret overhead, and the next day asked old Blandot about it. He told me it was an old German viol-player, a strange dumb man who signed his name as Erich Zann, and who played evenings in a cheap theatre orchestra; adding that Zann's desire to play in the night after

his return from the theatre was the reason he had chosen this lofty and isolated garret room, whose single gable window was the only point on the street from which one could look over the terminating wall at the declivity and panorama beyond.

Thereafter I heard Zann every night, and although he kept me awake, I was haunted by the weirdness of his music. Knowing little of the art myself, I was yet certain that none of his harmonies had any relation to music I had heard before; and concluded that he was a composer of highly original genius. The longer I listened, the more I was fascinated, until after a week I resolved to make the old man's acquaintance.

One night as he was returning from his work, I intercepted Zann in the hallway and told him that I would like to know him and be with him when he played. He was a small, lean, bent person, with shabby clothes, blue eyes, grotesque, satyr-like face, and nearly bald head; and at my first words seemed both angered and frightened. My obvious friendliness, however, finally melted him; and he grudgingly motioned to me to follow him up the dark, creaking and rickety attic stairs. His room, one of only two in the steeply pitched garret, was on the west side, towards the high wall that formed the upper end of the street. Its size was very great, and seemed the greater because of its extraordinary barrenness and neglect. Of furniture there was only a narrow iron bedstead, a dingy wash-stand, a small table, a large bookcase, an iron music-rack, and three old-fashioned chairs. Sheets of music were piled in disorder about the floor. The walls were of bare boards, and had probably never known plaster; whilst the abundance of dust and cobwebs made the place seem more deserted than inhabited. Evidently Erich Zann's world of beauty lay in some far cosmos of the imagination.

Motioning me to sit down, the dumb man closed the door, turned the large wooden bolt, and lighted a candle to augment the one he had brought with him. He now removed his viol from its moth-eaten covering, and, taking it, seated himself in the least uncomfortable of the chairs. He did not employ the

music-rack, but, offering no choice and playing from memory, enchanted me for over an hour with strains I had never heard before; strains which must have been of his own devising. To describe their exact nature is impossible for one unversed in music. They were a kind of fugue, with recurrent passages of the most captivating quality, but to me were notable for the absence of any of the weird notes I had overheard from my room below on other occasions.

Those haunting notes I had remembered, and had often hummed and whistled inaccurately to myself, so when the player at length laid down his bow I asked him if he would render some of them. As I began my request the wrinkled satyr-like face lost the bored placidity it had possessed during the playing, and seemed to show the same curious mixture of anger and fright which I had noticed when first I accosted the old man. For a moment I was inclined to use persuasion, regarding rather lightly the whims of senility; and even tried to awaken my host's weirder mood by whistling a few of the strains to which I had listened the night before. But I did not pursue this course for more than a moment; for when the dumb musician recognized the whistled air his face grew suddenly distorted with an expression wholly beyond analysis, and his long, cold bony right hand reached out to stop my mouth and silence the crude imitation. As he did this he further demonstrated his eccentricity by casting a startled glance towards the lone curtained window, as if fearful of some intruder—a glance doubly absurd, since the garret stood high and inaccessible above all the adjacent roofs, this window being the only point of the steep street, as the concierge had told me, from which one could see over the wall at the summit.

The old man's glance brought Blandot's remark to mind, and with a certain capriciousness I felt a wish to look out over the wide and dizzying panorama of moonlit roofs and city lights beyond the hilltop, which of all the dwellers in the Rue d'Auseil only this crabbed musician could see. I moved toward the window and would have drawn aside the nondescript curtains,

when with a frightened rage even greater than before, the dumb lodger was upon me again; this time motioning with his head toward the door as he nervously strove to drag me thither with both hands. Now thoroughly disgusted with my host, I ordered him to release me, and told him I would go at once. His clutch relaxed, and as he saw my disgust and offence, his own anger seemed to subside. He tightened his relaxing grip, but this time in a friendly manner, forcing me into a chair; then, with an appearance of wistfulness, crossed to the littered table, where he wrote many words with a pencil, in the laboured French of a foreigner.

The note which he finally handed me was an appeal for tolerance and forgiveness. Zann said that he was old, lonely, and afflicted with strange fears and nervous disorders connected with his music and with other things. He had enjoyed my listening to his music, and wished I would come again and not mind his eccentricities. But he could not play to another his weird harmonies, and could not bear hearing them from another; nor could he bear having anything in his room touched by another. He had not known until our hallway conversation that I could overhear his playing in my room, and now asked me if I would arrange with Blandot to take a lower room where I could not hear him in the night. He would, he wrote, defray the difference in rent.

As I sat deciphering the execrable French, I felt more lenient toward the old man. He was a victim of physical and nervous suffering, as was I; and my metaphysical studies had taught me kindness. In the silence there came a slight sound from the window—the shutter must have rattled in the night wind, and for some reason I started almost as violently as did Erich Zann. So when I had finished reading, I shook my host by the hand, and departed as a friend.

The next day Blandot gave me a more expensive room on the third floor, between the apartments of an aged money-lender and the room of a respectable upholsterer. There was no one on the fourth floor.

It was not long before I found that Zann's eagerness for my company was not as great as it had seemed while he was persuading me to move down from the fifth storey. He did not ask me to call on him, and when I did call he appeared uneasy and played listlessly. This was always at night—in the day he slept and would admit no one. My liking for him did not grow, though the attic room and the weird music seemed to hold an odd fascination for me. I had a curious desire to look out of that window, over the wall and down the unseen slope at the glittering roofs and spires which must lie outspread there. Once I went up to the garret during theatre hours, when Zann was away, but the door was locked.

What I did succeed in doing was to overhear the nocturnal playing of the dumb old man. At first I would tip-toe to my old fifth floor, then I grew bold enough to climb the last creaking staircase to the peaked garret. There in the narrow hall, outside the bolted door with the covered keyhole, I often heard sounds which filled me with an indefinable dread—the dread of vague wonder and brooding mystery. It was not that the sounds were hideous, for they were not; but that they held vibrations suggesting nothing on this globe of earth, and that at certain intervals they assumed a symphonic quality which I could hardly conceive as produced by one player. Certainly, Erich Zann was a genius of wild power. As the weeks passed, the playing grew wilder, whilst the old musician acquired an increasing haggardness and furtiveness pitiful to behold. He now refused to admit me at any time, and shunned me whenever we met on the stairs.

Then one night as I listened at the door, I heard the shrieking viol swell into a chaotic babel of sound; a pandemonium which would have led me to doubt my own shaking sanity had there not come from behind that barred portal a piteous proof that the horror was real—the awful, inarticulate cry which only a mute can utter, and which rises only in moments of the most terrible fear or anguish. I knocked repeatedly at the door, but received no response. Afterwards I waited in the black hallway,

shivering with cold and fear, till I heard the poor musician's effort to rise from the floor by the aid of a chair. Believing him just conscious after a fainting fit, I renewed my rapping, at the same time calling out my name reassuringly. I heard Zann stumble to the window and close both shutter and sash, then stumble to the door, which he falteringly unfastened to admit me. This time his delight at having me present was real; for his distorted face gleamed with relief while he clutched at my coat as a child clutches at its mother's skirts.

Shaking pathetically, the old man forced me into a chair whilst he sank into another, beside which his viol and bow lay carelessly on the floor. He sat for some time inactive, nodding oddly, but having a paradoxical suggestion of intense and frightened listening. Subsequently he seemed to be satisfied, and crossing to a chair by the table wrote a brief note, handed it to me, and returned to the table, where he began to write rapidly and incessantly. The note implored me in the name of mercy, and for the sake of my own curiosity, to wait where I was while he prepared a full account in German of all the marvels and terrors which beset him. I waited, and the dumb man's pencil flew.

It was perhaps an hour later, while I still waited and while the old musician's feverishly written sheets still continued to pile up, that I saw Zann start as from the hint of a horrible shock. Unmistakably he was looking at the curtained window and listening shudderingly. Then I half fancied I heard a sound myself; though it was not a horrible sound, but rather an exquisitely low and infinitely distant musical note, suggesting a player in one of the neighbouring houses, or in some abode beyond the lofty wall over which I had never been able to look. Upon Zann the effect was terrible, for, dropping his pencil, suddenly he rose, seized his viol, and commenced to rend the night with the wildest playing I had ever heard from his bow save when listening at the barred door.

It would be useless to describe the playing of Erich Zann on that dreadful night. It was more horrible than anything I had



ever overheard, because I could now see the expression of his face, and could realize that this time the motive was stark fear. He was trying to make a noise; to ward something off or drown something out—what, I could not imagine, awesome though I felt it must be. The playing grew fantastic, delirious, and hysterical, yet kept to the last the qualities of supreme genius which I knew this strange old man possessed. I recognized the air—it was a wild Hungarian dance popular in the theatres, and I reflected for a moment that this was the first time I had ever heard Zann play the work of another composer.

Louder and louder, wilder and wilder, mounted the shrieking and whining of that desperate viol. The player was dripping with an uncanny perspiration and twisted like a monkey, always looking frantically at the curtained window. In his frenzied strains I could almost see shadowy satyrs and bacchanals dancing and whirling insanely through seething abysses of clouds and smoke and lightning. And then I thought I heard a shriller, steadier note that was not from the viol; a calm, deliberate, purposeful, mocking note from far away in the West.

At this juncture the shutter began to rattle in a howling night wind which had sprung up outside as if in answer to the mad playing within. Zann's screaming viol now outdid itself emitting sounds I had never thought a viol could emit. The shutter rattled more loudly, unfastened, and commenced slamming against the window. Then the glass broke shiveringly under the persistent impacts, and the chill wind rushed in, making the candles sputter and rustling the sheets of paper on the table where Zann had begun to write out his horrible secret. I looked at Zann, and saw that he was past conscious observation. His blue eyes were bulging, glassy and sightless, and the frantic playing had become a blind, mechanical, unrecognizable orgy that no pen could even suggest.

A sudden gust, stronger than the others, caught up the manuscript and bore it towards the window. I followed the flying sheets in desperation, but they were gone before I

reached the demolished panes. Then I remembered my old wish to gaze from this window, the only window in the Rue d'Auseil from which one might see the slope beyond the wall, and the city outspread beneath. It was very dark, but the city's lights always burned, and I expected to see them there amidst the rain and wind. Yet when I looked from that highest of all gable windows, looked while the candles sputtered and the insane viol howled with the night wind, I saw no city spread below, and no friendly lights gleamed from remembered streets, but only the blackness of space, illimitable; unimagined space alive with motion and music, and having no semblance of anything on earth. And as I stood there looking in terror, the wind blew out both the candles in that ancient peaked garret, leaving me in savage and impenetrable darkness with chaos and pandemonium before me, and the demon madness of that night-baying viol behind me.

I staggered back in the dark, without the means of striking a light, crashing against the table, overturning a chair, and finally groping my way to the place where the blackness screamed with shocking music. To save myself and Erich Zann I could at least try, whatever the powers opposed to me. Once I thought some chill thing brushed me, and I screamed, but my scream could not be heard above that hideous viol. Suddenly out of the blackness the madly sawing bow struck me, and I knew I was close to the player. I felt ahead, touched the back of Zann's chair, and then found and shook his shoulder in an effort to bring him to his senses.

He did not respond, and still the viol shrieked on without slackening. I moved my hand to his head, whose mechanical nodding I was able to stop, and shouted in his ear that we must both flee from the unknown things of the night. But he neither answered me nor abated the frenzy of his unutterable music, while all through the garret strange currents of wind seemed to dance in the darkness and babel. When my hand touched his ear I shuddered, though I knew not why—knew not why till I felt the still face; the ice-cold, stiffened, unbreathing face whose

glassy eyes bulged uselessly into the void. And then, by some miracle, finding the door and the large wooden bolt, I plunged wildly away from that glassy-eyed thing in the dark, and from the ghoulis howling of that accursed viol whose fury increased even as I plunged.

Leaping, floating, flying down those endless stairs through the dark house; racing mindlessly out into the narrow, steep, and ancient street of steps and tottering houses; clattering down steps and over cobbles to the lower streets and the putrid canyon-walled river; panting across the great dark bridge to the broader, healthier streets and boulevards we know; all these are terrible impressions that linger with me. And I recall that there was no wind, and that the moon was out, and that all the lights of the city twinkled.

Despite my most careful searches and investigations, I have never since been able to find the Rue d'Auseil. But I am not wholly sorry; either for this or for the loss in undreamable abysses of the closely written sheets which alone could have explained the music of Erich Zann.

Deadline

RICHARD MATHESON

In which a doctor is called away from a New Year's Eve party to attend a dying old man. The old man appears to have nothing particularly wrong with him, but has simply decided to die that night as the New Year comes in. What is more, he insists that he is only one year old . . .

THERE are at least two nights a year a doctor doesn't plan on and those are Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. On Christmas Eve it was Bobby Dascouli's arm burns. I was salving and swathing them about the time I would have been nestled in an easy chair with Ruth eyeing the technicolor doings of the Christmas tree.

So it came as small surprise that ten minutes after we got to my sister Mary's house for the New Year's Eve party my answering service phoned and told me there was an emergency call downtown.

Ruth smiled at me sadly and shook her head. She kissed me on the cheek. "Poor Bill," she said.

"Poor Bill indeed," I said, putting down my first drink of the evening, two-thirds full. I patted her much evident stomach.

"Don't have that baby till I get back," I told her.

"I'll do my bestest," she said.

I gave hurried goodbyes to everyone and left; turning up the collar of my overcoat and crunching over the snow-packed walk to the Ford; milking the choke and finally getting the engine started; driving downtown with that look of dour reflection I've seen on many a GP's face at many a time.

It was after eleven when my tyre chains rattled on to the dark

desertion of East Main Street. I drove three blocks north to the address and parked in front of what had been a refined apartment dwelling when my father was in practice. Now it was a boarding-house, ancient, smelling of decay.

In the vestibule I lined the beam of my pencil flashlight over the mail boxes but couldn't find the name. I rang the landlady's bell and stepped over to the hall door. When the buzzer sounded I pushed it open.

At the end of the hall a door opened and a heavy woman emerged. She wore a black sweater over her wrinkled green dress, striped anklets over her heavy stockings, saddle shoes over the anklets. She had no make-up on; the only colour in her face was a chapped redness in her cheeks. Wisps of steel-grey hair hung across her temples. She picked at them as she trundled down the dim hallway towards me.

"You the doctor?" she asked.

I said I was.

"I'm the one called ya," she said. "There's an old guy up the fourth floor says he's dyin'."

"What room?" I asked.

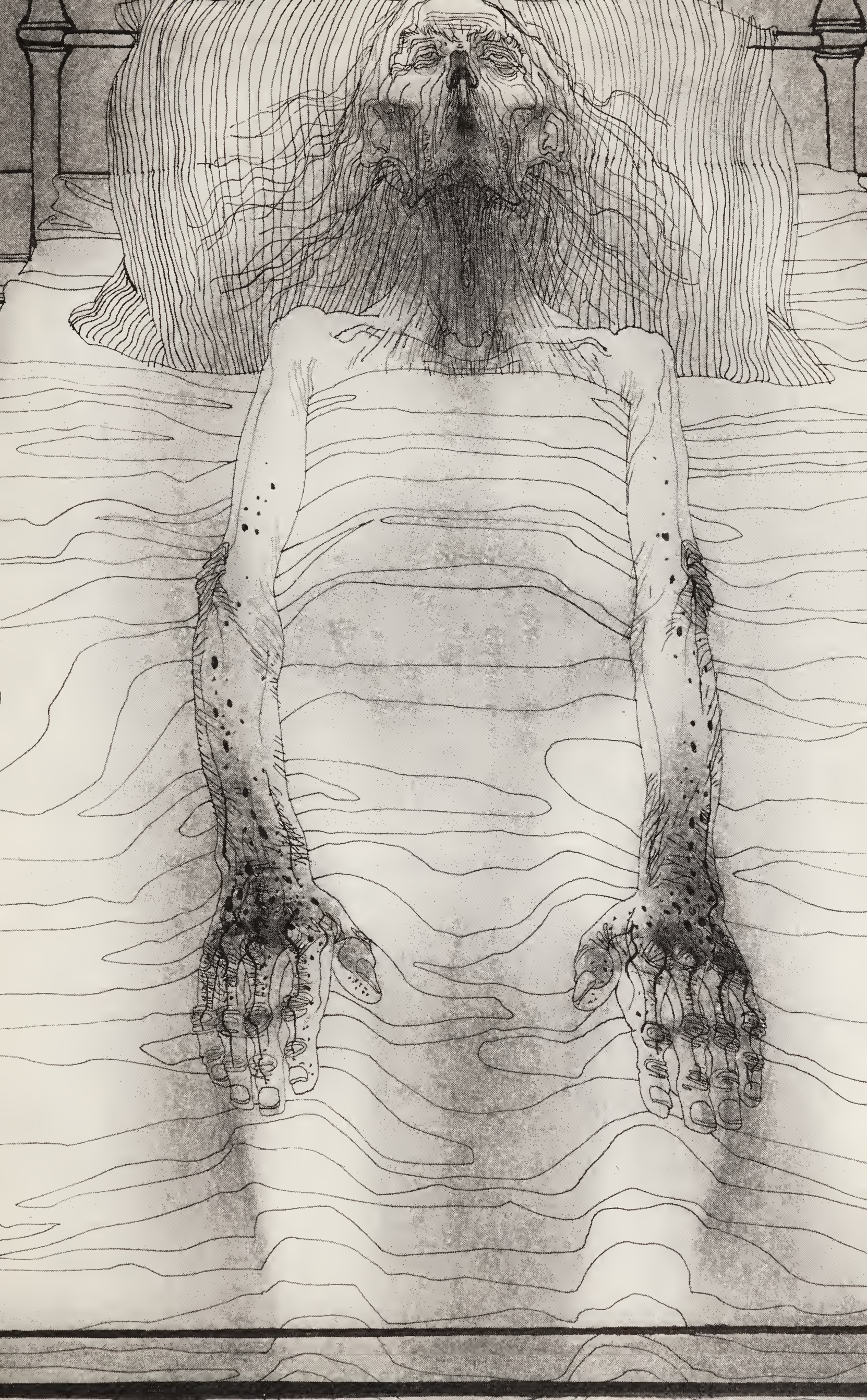
"I'll show ya."

I followed her wheezing ascent up the stairs. We stopped in front of room 47 and she rapped on the thin panelling of the door, then pushed it open.

"In here," she said.

As I entered I saw him lying on an iron bed. His body had the flaccidity of a discarded doll. At his sides, frail hands lay motionless, topographed with knots of vein, islanded with liver spots. His skin was the brown of old page edges, his face a wasted mask. On the caseless pillow, his head lay still, its white hair straggling across the stripes like threading drifts of snow. There was a pallid stubble on his cheeks. His pale blue eyes were fixed on the ceiling.

As I slipped off my coat I saw that there was no suffering evident. His expression was one of peaceful acceptance as I sat down on the bed and took his wrist. His eyes shifted and he



looked at me.

“Hello,” I said, smiling.

“Hello,” I was surprised by the cognizance of his voice.

The beat of his blood was what I expected, however—a bare trickle of life, a pulsing almost lost beneath the fingers. I put down his hand and laid my palm across his forehead. There was no fever. But then he wasn’t sick. He was only running down.

I patted the old man’s shoulder and stood, gesturing towards the opposite side of the room. The landlady clumped there with me.

“How long has he been in bed?” I asked.

“Just since this afternoon,” she said. “He come down to my room and said he was gonna die tonight.”

I stared at her. I’d never come in contact with such a thing. I’d read about it; everyone has. An old man or woman announces that, at a certain time, they’ll die and, when the time comes, they do. Who knows what it is; will or prescience or both. All one knows is that it is a strangely awesome thing.

“Has he any relatives?” I asked.

“None I know of,” she said.

I nodded.

“Don’t understand it,” she said.

“What?”

“When he first moved in about a month ago he was all right. Even this afternoon he didn’t look sick.”

“You never know,” I said.

“No. You don’t.” There was a haunted and uneasy flickering back deep in her eyes.

“Well, there’s nothing I can do for him,” I said. “He’s not in pain. It’s just a matter of time.”

The landlady nodded.

“How old is he?” I asked.

“He never said.”

“I see.” I walked back to the bed.

“I heard you,” the old man told me.

“Oh?”

“You want to know how old I am.”

“How old are you?”

He started to answer, then began coughing dryly. I saw a glass of water on the bedside table and, sitting, I propped the old man while he drank a little. Then I put him down again.

“I’m one year old,” he said.

It didn’t register. I stared down at his calm face. Then, smiling nervously, I put the glass down on the table.

“You don’t believe that,” he said.

“Well——” I shrugged.

“It’s true enough,” he said.

I nodded and smiled again.

“I was born on December 31st, 1958,” he said, “At midnight.”

He closed his eyes. “What’s the use?” he said, “I’ve told a hundred people and none of them understood.”

“Tell me about it,” I said.

After a few moments, he drew in breath slowly.

“A week after I was born,” he said, “I was walking and talking. I was eating by myself. My mother and father couldn’t believe their eyes. They took me to a doctor. I don’t know what he thought but he didn’t do anything. What could he do? I wasn’t sick. He sent me home with my mother and father. Precocious growth, he said.

“In another week we were back again. I remember my mother’s and father’s faces when we drove there. They were afraid of me.

“The doctor didn’t know what to do. He called in specialists and they didn’t know what to do. I was a normal four-year-old boy. They kept me under observation. They wrote papers about me. I didn’t see my father and mother any more.”

The old man stopped a moment, then went on in the same mechanical way.

“In another week I was six,” he said. “In another week, eight. Nobody understood. They tried everything but there

was no answer. And I was ten and twelve. I was fourteen and I ran away because I was sick of being stared at.”

He looked at the ceiling for almost a minute.

“You want to hear more?” he asked then.

“Yes,” I said, automatically. I was amazed at how easily he spoke.

“In the beginning I tried to fight it,” he said. “I went to doctors and screamed at them. I told them to find out what was wrong with me. But there wasn’t anything wrong with me. I was just getting two years older every week.

“Then I got the idea.”

I started a little, twitching out of the reverie of staring at him. “Idea?” I asked.

“This is how the story got started,” the old man said.

“What story?”

“About the old year and the new year,” he said. “The old year is an old man with a beard and a scythe. You know. And the new year is a little baby.”

The old man stopped. Down in the street I heard a tyre-screeching car turn a corner and speed past the building.

“I think there have been men like me all through time,” the old man said. “Men who live for just a year. I don’t know how it happens or why; but, once in a while, it does. That’s how the story got started. After a while, people forgot how it started. They think it’s a fable now. They think it’s symbolic; but it isn’t.”

The old man turned his worn face towards the wall.

“And I’m 1959,” he said, quietly. “That’s who I am.”

The landlady and I stood in silence looking down at him. Finally, I glanced at her. Abruptly, as if caught in guilt, she turned and hurried across the floor. The door thumped shut behind her.

I looked back at the old man. Suddenly, my breath seemed to stop. I leaned over and picked up his hand. There was no pulse. Shivering, I put down his hand and straightened up I stood looking down at him. Then, from where I don’t know, a chill

laced up my back. Without thought, I extended my left hand and the sleeve of my coat slid back across my watch.

To the second.

I drove back to Mary's house unable to get the old man's story out of my mind—or the weary acceptance in his eyes. I kept telling myself it was only a coincidence, but I couldn't quite convince myself.

Mary let me in. The living-room was empty.

“Don't tell me the party's broken up already?” I said.

Mary smiled. “Not broken up,” she said. “Just continued at the hospital.”

I stared at her, my mind swept blank. Mary took my arm.

“And you'll never guess,” she said, “what time Ruth had the sweetest little boy.”

Don't look Behind You

FREDERIC BROWN

JUST sit back and relax, now. Try to enjoy this; it's going to be the last story you ever read, or nearly the last. After you finish it you can sit there, and stall a while, you can find excuses to hang around your house, or your room, or your office, wherever you're reading this; but sooner or later you're going to have to get up and go out. That's where I'm waiting for you: outside. Or maybe closer than that. Maybe in this room.

You think that's a joke of course. You think this is just a story in a book, and that I don't really mean you. Keep right on thinking so. But be fair; admit that I'm giving you fair warning.

Harley bet me I couldn't do it. He bet me a diamond he's told me about, a diamond as big as his head. So you see why I've got to kill you. And why I've got to tell you how and why and all about it first. That's part of the bet. It's just the kind of idea Harley would have.

I'll tell you about Harley first. He's tall and handsome, and suave and cosmopolitan. He looks something like Ronald Colman, only he's taller. He dresses like a million dollars, but it wouldn't matter if he didn't; I mean that he'd look distinguished in overalls. There's a sort of magic about Harley, a mocking magic in the way he looks at you; it makes you think of palaces and far-off countries and bright music.

It was in Springfield, Ohio, that he met Justin Dean. Justin was a funny-looking little runt who was just a printer. He worked for the Atlas Printing & Engraving Company. He was a very ordinary little guy, just about as different as possible from Harley; you couldn't pick two men more different. He was only thirty-five, but he was mostly bald already, and he had to wear thick glasses because he'd worn out his eyes doing fine printing

and engraving. He was a good printer and engraver; I'll say that for him.

I never asked Harley how he happened to come to Springfield, but the day he got there, after he'd checked in at the Castle Hotel, he stopped in at Atlas to have some calling cards made. It happened that Justin Dean was alone in the shop at the time, and he took Harley's order for the cards; Harley wanted engraved ones, the best. Harley always wants the best of everything.

Harley probably didn't even notice Justin; there was no reason why he should have. But Justin noticed Harley all right, and in him he saw everything that he himself would like to be, and never would be, because most of the things Harley was, you have to be born with.

And Justin made the plates for the cards himself and printed them himself, and he did a wonderful job—something he thought would be worthy of a man like Harley Prentice. That was the name engraved on the card, just that and nothing else, as all really important people have their cards engraved.

He did fine-line work on it, freehand cursive style, and used all the skill he had. It wasn't wasted, because the next day when Harley called to get the cards he held one and stared at it for a while, and then he looked at Justin, seeing him for the first time. He asked, "Who did this?"

And little Justin told him proudly who had done it, and Harley smiled at him and told him it was the work of an artist, and he asked Justin to have dinner with him that evening after work, in the Blue Room of the Castle Hotel.

That's how Harley and Justin got together, but Harley was careful. He waited until he'd known Justin a while before he asked him whether or not he could make plates for five and ten dollar bills. Harley had the contacts; he could market the bills in quantity with men who specialized in passing them, and—most important—he knew where he could get paper with the silk threads in it, paper that wasn't quite the genuine thing, but was close enough to pass inspection by anyone but an expert.

So Justin quit his job at Atlas and he and Harley went to New York, and they set up a little printing shop as a blind, on Amsterdam Avenue south of Sherman Square, and they worked at the bills. Justin worked hard, harder than he had ever worked in his life, because besides working on the plates for the bills, he helped meet expenses by handling what legitimate printing work came into the shop.

He worked day and night for almost a year, making plate after plate, and each one was a little better than the last, and finally he had plates that Harley said were good enough. That night they had dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria to celebrate and after dinner they went the rounds of the best night clubs, and it cost Harley a small fortune, but that didn't matter because they were going to get rich.

The drank champagne, and it was the first time Justin ever drank champagne and he got disgustingly drunk and must have made quite a fool of himself. Harley told him about it afterwards, but Harley wasn't mad at him. He took him back to his room at the hotel and put him to bed, and Justin was pretty sick for a couple of days. But that didn't matter, either, because they were going to get rich.

Then Justin started printing bills from the plates, and they got rich. After that, Justin didn't have to work so hard, either, because he turned down most jobs that came into the print shop, told them he was behind schedule and couldn't handle any more. He took just a little work, to keep up a front. And behind the front, he made five and ten dollar bills, and he and Harley got rich.

He got to know other people whom Harley knew. He met Bull Mallon, who handled the distribution end. Bull Mallon was built like a bull, that was why they called him that. He had a face that never smiled or changed expression at all except when he was holding burning matches to the soles of Justin's bare feet. But that wasn't then; that was later, when he wanted Justin to tell him where the plates were.

And he got to know Captain John Willys of the Police-

Department, who was a friend of Harley's, to whom Harley gave quite a bit of the money they made, but that didn't matter either, because there was plenty left and they all got rich. He met a friend of Harley's who was a big star of the stage, and one who owned a big New York newspaper. He got to know other people equally important, but in less respectable ways.

Harley, Justin knew, had a hand in lots of other enterprises besides the little mint on Amsterdam Avenue. Some of these ventures took him out of town, usually over weekends. And the weekend that Harley was murdered Justin never found out what really happened, except that Harley went away and didn't come back. Oh, he knew that he was murdered, all right, because the police found his body—with three bullet holes in his chest—in the most expensive suite of the best hotel in Albany. Even for a place to be found dead in, Harley Prentice had chosen the best.

All Justin ever knew about it was that a long-distance call came to him at the hotel where he was staying, the night that Harley was murdered—it must have been a matter of minutes, in fact, before the time the newspapers said Harley was killed.

It was Harley's voice on the phone, and his voice was debonair and unexcited as ever. But he said, "Justin? Get to the shop and get rid of the plates, the paper, everything. Right away. I'll explain when I see you," He waited only until Justin said, "Sure, Harley," and then he said, "Attaboy," and hung up.

Justin hurried around to the printing shop and got the plates and the paper and a few thousand dollars' worth of counterfeit bills that were on hand. He made the paper and bills into one bundle and the copper plates into another, smaller one, and he left the shop with no evidence that it had ever been a mint in miniature.

He was very careful and very clever in disposing of both bundles. He got rid of the big one first by checking in at a big hotel, not one he or Harley ever stayed at, under a false name, just to have a chance to put the big bundle in the incinerator there. It was paper and it would burn. And he made sure there

was a fire in the incinerator before he dropped it down the chute.

The plates were different. They wouldn't burn, he knew, so he took a trip to Staten Island and back on the ferry and, somewhere out in the middle of the bay, he dropped the bundle over the side into the water.

Then having done what Harley had told him to do, and having done it well and thoroughly, he went back to the hotel—his own hotel, not the one where he had dumped the paper and the bills—and went to sleep.

In the morning he read the newspapers that Harley had been killed, and he was stunned. It didn't seem possible. He couldn't believe it; it was a joke someone was playing on him. Harley would come back to him, he knew. And he was right; Harley did, but that was later, in the swamp.

But anyway, Justin had to know, so he took the very next train to Albany. He must have been on the train when the police went to his hotel, and at the hotel they must have learned he'd asked the desk about trains for Albany, because they were waiting for him when he got off the train there.

They took him to a station and they kept him there a long long time, days and days, asking him questions. They found out, after a while, that he couldn't have killed Harley because he'd been in New York City at the time Harley was killed in Albany but they knew also that he and Harley had been operating a little mint, and they thought that might be a lead to who killed Harley, and they were interested in the counterfeiting, too, maybe even more than in the murder. They asked Justin Dean questions, over and over and over, and he couldn't answer them, so he didn't. They kept him awake for days at a time, asking him questions over and over. Most of all they wanted to know where the plates were. He wished he could tell them that the plates were safe where nobody could ever get them again, but he couldn't tell them that without admitting that he and Harley had been counterfeiting, so he couldn't tell them.

They located the Amsterdam shop, but they didn't find any evidence there, and they really had no evidence to hold Justin on at all, but he didn't know that, and it never occurred to him to get a lawyer.

He kept wanting to see Harley, and they wouldn't let him; then, when they learned he really didn't believe Harley could be dead, they made him look at a dead man they said was Harley, and he guessed it was, although Harley looked different dead. He didn't look magnificent dead. And Justin believed, then, but still didn't believe. And after that he just went silent and wouldn't say a word, even when they kept him awake for days and days with a bright light in his eyes, and kept slapping him to keep him awake. They didn't use clubs or rubber hoses, but they slapped him a million times and wouldn't let him sleep. And after a while he lost track of things and couldn't have answered their questions even if he'd wanted to.

For a while after that, he was in a bed in a white room, and all he remembers about that are nightmares he had, and calling for Harley and an awful confusion as to whether Harley was dead or not, and then things came back to him gradually and he knew he didn't want to stay in the white room; he wanted to get out so he could hunt for Harley. And if Harley was dead, he wanted to kill whoever had killed Harley, because Harley would have done the same for him.

So he began pretending, and acting, very cleverly, the way the doctors and nurses seemed to want him to act, and after a while they gave him his clothes and let him go.

He was becoming cleverer now. He thought: What would Harley tell me to do? And he knew they'd try to follow him because they'd think he might lead them to the plates, which they didn't know were at the bottom of the bay, and he gave them the slip before he left Albany, and he went first to Boston, and from there by boat to New York, instead of going direct.

He went first to the print shop, and went in the back way after watching the alley for a long time to be sure the place wasn't guarded. It was a mess; they must have searched it very

thoroughly for the plates.

Harley wasn't there, of course. Justin left and from a phone booth in a drugstore he telephoned their hotel and asked for Harley and was told Harley no longer lived there; and to be clever and not let them guess who he was, he asked for Justin Dean, and they said Justin Dean didn't live there any more either.

Then he moved to a different drugstore and from there he decided to call up some friends of Harley's, and he phoned Bull Mallon first and because Bull was a friend, he told him who he was and asked if he knew where Harley was.

Bull Mallon didn't pay any attention to that; he sounded excited, a little, and he asked, "Did the cops get the plates, Dean?" and Justin said they didn't, that he wouldn't tell them, and he asked again about Harley.

Bull asked, "Are you nuts, or kidding?" And Justin just asked him again, and Bull's voice changed and he said, "Where are you?" and Justin told him. Bull said, "Harley's here. He's staying under cover, but it's all right if you know, Dean. You wait right there at the drugstore, and we'll come and get you."

They came and got Justin, Bull Mallon and two other men in a car, and they told him Harley was hiding out way deep in New Jersey and that they were going to drive there now. So he went along and sat in the back seat between two men he didn't know, while Bull Mallon drove.

It was late afternoon then, when they picked him up, and Bull drove all evening and most of the night and he drove fast, so he must have gone farther than New Jersey, at least into Virginia or maybe farther, into the Carolinas.

The sky was getting faintly grey with first dawn when they stopped at a rustic cabin that looked like it had been used as a hunting lodge. It was miles from anywhere, there wasn't even a road leading to it, just a trail that was level enough for the car to be able to make it.

They took Justin into the cabin and tied him to a chair, and they told him Harley wasn't there, but Harley had told them

that Justin would tell them where the plates were, and he couldn't leave until he did tell.

Justin didn't believe them; he knew then that they'd tricked him about Harley, but it didn't matter, as far as the plates were concerned. It didn't matter if he told them what he'd done with the plates, because they couldn't get them again, and they wouldn't tell the police. So he told them, quite willingly.

But they didn't believe him. They said he'd hidden the plates and was lying. They tortured him to make him tell. They beat him, and they cut him with knives, and they held burning matches and lighted cigars to the soles of his feet, and they pushed needles under his fingernails. Then they'd rest and ask him questions and if he could talk, he'd tell them the truth, and after a while they'd start to torture him again.

It went on for days and weeks—Justin doesn't know how long, but it was a long time. Once they went away for several days and left him tied up with nothing to eat or drink. They came back and started it all over again. And all the time he hoped Harley would come to help him, but Harley didn't come, not then.

After a while what was happening in the cabin ended, or anyway he didn't know any more about it. They must have thought he was dead; maybe they were right, or anyway not far from wrong.

The next thing he knows was the swamp. He was lying in shallow water at the edge of deeper water. His face was out of the water; it woke him when he turned a little and his face went under. They must have thought him dead and thrown him into the water, but he had floated into the shallow part before he had drowned, and a last flicker of consciousness had turned him over on his back with his face out.

I don't remember much about Justin in the swamp; it was a long time, but I just remember flashes of it. I couldn't move at first; I just lay there in the shallow water with my face out. It got dark and it got cold, I remember, and finally my arms would move a little and I got farther out of the water, lying in the mud

with only my feet in the water. I slept or was unconscious again and when I woke up it was getting grey dawn, and that was when Harley came. I think I'd been calling him, and he must have heard.

He stood there, dressed as immaculately and perfectly as ever, right in the swamp, and he was laughing at me for being so weak and lying there like a log, half in the dirty water and half in the mud, and I got up and nothing hurt any more.

We shook hands and he said, "Come on, Justin, let's get you out of here," and I was so glad he'd come that I cried a little. He laughed at me for that and said I should lean on him and he'd help me walk, but I wouldn't do that, because I was coated with mud and filth of the swamp and he was so clean and perfect in a white linen suit, like an ad in a magazine. And all the way out of that swamp, all the days and nights we spent there, he never even got mud on his trouser cuffs, nor his hair mussed.

I told him just to lead the way, and he did, walking just ahead of me, sometimes turning around, laughing and talking to me and cheering me up. Sometimes I'd fall but I wouldn't let him come back and help me. But he'd wait patiently until I could get up. Sometimes I'd crawl instead when I couldn't stand up any more. Sometimes I'd have to swim streams that he'd leap lightly across.

And it was day and night and day and night, and sometimes I'd sleep, and things would crawl across me. And some of them I caught and ate, or maybe I dreamed that. I remember other things, in that swamp, like an organ that played a lot of the time, and sometimes angels in the air and devils in the water, but those were delirium, I guess.

Harley would say, "A little farther, Justin; we'll make it. And we'll get back at them, at all of them."

And we made it. We came to dry fields, cultivated fields with waist-high corn, but there weren't ears on the corn for me to eat. And then there was a stream, a clear stream that wasn't stinking water like the swamp, and Harley told me to wash myself and my clothes and I did, although I wanted to hurry on

to where I could get food.

I still looked pretty bad; my clothes were clean of mud and filth but they were mere rags and wet, because I couldn't wait for them to dry, and I had a ragged beard and I was barefoot.

But we went on and came to a little farm building, just a two-room shack, and there was a smell of fresh bread just out of an oven, and I ran the last few yards to knock on the door. A woman, an ugly woman, opened the door and when she saw me she slammed it again before I could say a word.

Strength came to me from somewhere, maybe from Harley, although I can't remember him being there just then. There was a pile of kindling logs beside the door. I picked one of them up as though it were no heavier than a broomstick, and I broke down the door and killed the woman. She screamed a lot, but I killed her. Then I ate the hot fresh bread.

I watched from the window as I ate, and saw a man running across the field towards the house. I found a knife, and I killed him as he came in at the door. It was much better, killing with the knife; I liked it that way.

I ate more bread, and kept watching from all the windows, but no one else came. Then my stomach hurt from the hot bread I'd eaten and I had to lie down, doubled up, and when the hurting quit, I slept.

Harley woke me up, and it was dark. He said, "Let's get going; you should be far away from here before it's daylight."

I knew he was right, but I didn't hurry away. I was becoming, as you see, very clever now. I knew there were things to do first. I found matches and a lamp, and lighted the lamp. Then I hunted through the shack for everything I could use. I found clothes of the man, and they fitted me not too badly except that I had to turn up the cuffs of the trousers and the shirt. His shoes were big, but that was good because my feet were so swollen.

I found a razor and shaved; it took a long time because my hand wasn't steady, but I was very careful and didn't cut myself much.

I had to hunt hardest for their money, but I found it finally. It

was sixty dollars.

And I took the knife, after I had sharpened it. It isn't fancy; just a bone-handled carving knife, but it's good steel. I'll show it to you, pretty soon now. It's had a lot of use.

Then we left and it was Harley who told me to stay away from the roads, and find railroad tracks. That was easy because we heard a train whistle far off in the night and knew which direction the tracks lay. From then on, with Harley helping, it's been easy.

You won't need the details from here. I mean, about the brakeman, and about the tramp we found asleep in the empty reefer, and about the near thing I had with the police in Richmond. I learned from that; I learned I mustn't talk to Harley when anybody else was around to hear. He hides himself from them; he's got a trick and they don't know he's there, and they think I'm funny in the head if I talk to him, but in Richmond I bought better clothes and got a haircut and a man I killed in an alley had forty dollars on him, so I had money again. I've done a lot of travelling since then. If you stop to think you'll know where I am right now.

I'm looking for Bull Mallon and the two men who helped him. Their names are Harry and Carl. I'm going to kill them when I find them. Harley keeps telling me that those fellows are big time and that I'm not ready for them yet. But I can be looking while I'm getting ready so I keep moving around. Sometimes I stay in one place long enough to hold a job as a printer for a while. I've learned a lot of things. I can hold a job and people don't think I'm too strange; they don't get scared when I look at them like they sometimes did a few months ago. And I've learned not to talk to Harley except in our own room and then only very quietly so people in the next room won't think I'm talking to myself.

And I've kept in practice with the knife. I've killed lots of people with it, mostly on the streets at night. Sometimes because they look like they might have money on them, but mostly just for practice and because I've come to like doing it.

I'm really good with the knife by now. You'll hardly feel it.

But Harley tells me that kind of killing is easy and that it's something else to kill a person who's on guard, as Bull and Harry and Carl will be.

And that's the conversation that led to the bet I mentioned. I told Harley that I'd bet him that, right now, I could warn a man I was going to use the knife on him and even tell him why and approximately when, and that I could still kill him. And he bet me that I couldn't and he's going to lose that bet.

He's going to lose it because I'm warning you right now and you're not going to believe me. I'm betting that you're going to believe that this is just another story in a book. That you won't believe that this is the *only* copy of this book that contains this story and that this story is true. Even when I tell you how it was done, I don't think you'll really believe me.

You see I'm putting it over on Harley, winning the bet, by putting it over on you. He never thought, and you won't realize how easy it is for a good printer, who's been a counterfeiter too, to counterfeit one story in a book. Nothing like as hard as counterfeiting a five dollar bill.

I had to pick a book of short stories and I picked this one because I happened to notice that the last story in the book was titled *Don't Look Behind You* and that was going to be a good title for this. You'll see what I mean in a few minutes.

I'm lucky that the printing shop I'm working for now does book work and has a type face that matches the rest of this book. I had a little trouble matching the paper exactly, but I finally did and I've got it ready while I'm writing this, I'm writing this directly on a linotype, late at night in the shop where I'm working days. I even have the boss's permission, told him I was going to set up and print a story that a friend of mine had written, as a surprise for him, and that I'd melt the type metal back as soon as I'd printed one good copy.

When I finish writing this I'll make up the type in pages to match the rest of the book and I'll print it on the matching paper I have ready. I'll cut the new pages to fit and bind them in; you



won't be able to tell the difference, even if a faint suspicion may cause you to look at it. Don't forget I made five and ten dollar bills you couldn't have told from the original, and this is kindergarten stuff compared to that job. And I've done enough bookbinding that I'll be able to take the last story out of the book and bind this one in instead of it and you won't be able to tell the difference no matter how closely you look. I'm going to do a perfect job of it if it takes me all night.

And tomorrow I'll go to some bookstore, or maybe a news-stand or even a drugstore that sells books and has other copies of this book, ordinary copies, and I'll plant this one there. I'll find myself a good place to watch from, and I'll be watching when you buy it.

The rest I can't tell you because it depends a lot on circumstances, whether you went right home with the book or what you did. I won't know till I follow you and keep watch till you read it—and I see that you're reading the last story in the book.

If you're home while you're reading this, maybe I'm in the house with you right now. Maybe I'm in this very room, hidden, waiting for you to finish the story. Maybe I'm watching through a window. Or maybe I'm sitting near you on the streetcar or train, if you're reading it there. Maybe I'm on the fire escape outside your hotel room. But wherever you're reading it, I'm near you, watching and waiting for you to finish. You can count on that.

You're pretty near the end now. You'll be finished in seconds and you'll close the book, still not believing. Or, if you haven't read the stories in order, maybe you'll turn back to start another story. If you do, you'll never finish it.

But don't look around; you'll be happier if you don't know, if you don't see the knife coming. When I kill people from behind they don't seem to mind so much.

Go on, just a few seconds or minutes, thinking this is just another story. Don't look behind you. Don't believe this—*until you feel the knife.*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Author and editor of many books for both children and adults, Helen Hoke is also well known both here and abroad for her collections of stories for children. Her collections of the terrifying and supernatural include *Dragons, Dragons, Dragons; Witches, Witches, Witches; Spooks, Spooks, Spooks; Weirdies, Weirdies, Weirdies; Monsters, Monsters, Monsters; and Devils, Devils, Devils.*

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Charles Keeping has illustrated over one hundred books and made many films for children's television. He has won the Kate Greenaway Medal.

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