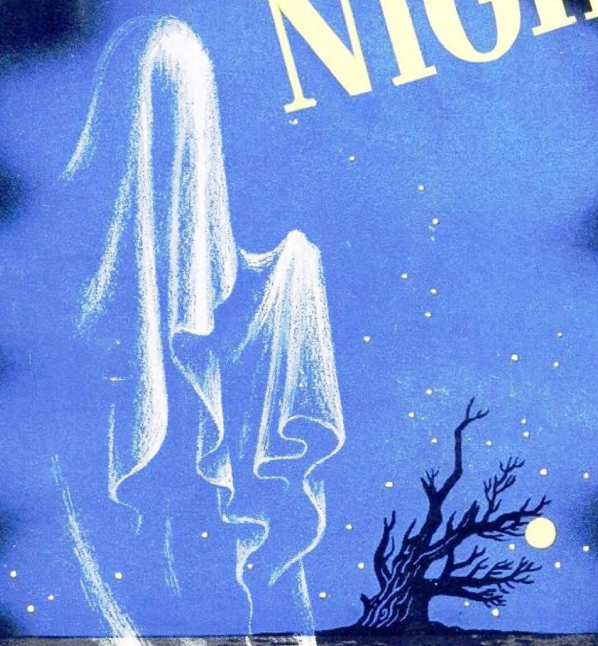


# CREEPS BY NIGHT



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**DASHIELL HAMMETT**  
Exciting stories wherein things that can't  
happen and ought not to happen do happen!



**CREEPS  
BY  
NIGHT**



# CREEPS BY NIGHT

CHILLS AND THRILLS

SELECTED BY

DASHIELL HAMMETT



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## INTRODUCTION

To taste the full flavor of these stories you must bring an orderly mind to them, you must have a reasonable amount of confidence, if not in what used to be called the laws of nature, at least in the currently suspected habits of nature. If you believe in the ability and willingness of surgeons to transplant brains from skull to skull with shocking results, these stories may frighten you, but merely in the same way—though hardly to the same extent—that having to take ether in a strange hospital would frighten you. If you believe in ghosts, you can hope to derive from these stories at the very most a weak semblance of the sensation you would experience on being told there was a bogey-man in the closet, or on having the village cut-up wrapped in a sheet jump out of hiding at you. If you believe in werewolves, then it can make little difference to you, except perhaps academically, whether your heroine is eaten by one of them or shot down by a Cicero muscle-man. To the truly superstitious the “weird” has only its Scotch meaning: “Something which actually takes place.”

The effectiveness of the sort of stories that we are

## INTRODUCTION

here concerned with depends on the reader's believing that certain things cannot happen and on the writer's making him feel—if not actually believe—that they can but should not happen. If the reader does not feel that these things have happened, or does not care whether they have happened, then the author has been, in the first case, unconvincing and, in the second, uninteresting, literary faults by no means confined to our present field, and so of no especial interest to us here. If the reader feels that it is nice for these things to have happened, or has no positive feeling that they should not have happened, then the story is, for that particular reader at least, fantasy and lies outside our field.

This business of making the reader feel that what cannot happen can and should not is a tremendously difficult one for the author. Addressing himself, as we have assumed he must, to the orderly minded reader, he cannot count on any native credulity or superstition to be taken advantage of.

Atmosphere may be used to set the stage, but is seldom a great help thereafter and in fact more often an encumbrance than not.

Brutality, often an excellent accompaniment and a means to an end, is never properly more than that in this field, and some of the finest effects have been secured with the daintiest touches. The most authentic single touch in "The Turn of the Screw"—too

## INTRODUCTION

well known as well as a bit too long for inclusion here—is not when the child sees the ghost across the lake, but when she turns her back to it, pretending interest in some rubbish at her feet, to keep her governess from knowing she has seen it. One of my own favorites is that attributed, I believe, to Thomas Bailey Aldrich:

A woman is sitting alone in a house. She knows she is alone in the whole world: every other living thing is dead. The doorbell rings.

That has, particularly, the restraint that is almost invariably the mark of the effective weird tale. Usually all the most skilled author can hope for are some shivers of apprehension as his reader feels himself led towards the thing that cannot happen and the culminant shudder as he feels that the cannot has become the should-not. This shudder is almost always momentary, almost never duplicated. Few weird stories have run successfully to any great length. The familiar exceptions are those in which considerable space was devoted to groundwork. The high spot is when the cannot becomes the should-not, and whether this transition is accepted or rejected by the reader, the peak has been passed and the wise author rests.

DASHIELL HAMMETT



**CREEPS  
BY  
NIGHT**



# A ROSE FOR EMILY

By

*William Faulkner*

---

W

HEN Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old negro manservant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish, frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily light-some style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and

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## CREEPS BY NIGHT

coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the edict that no negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction.



## A ROSE FOR EMILY

On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply. They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell. The negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

They rose when she entered—a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

Her voice was dry and cold. "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves."

"But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?"

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said.

## A ROSE FOR EMILY

"Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff. . . . I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by the—"

"See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But, Miss Emily—"

"See Colonel Sartoris." (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!" The negro appeared. "Show these gentlemen out."

### II

So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell. That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart—the one we believed would marry her—had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the negro man—a young man then—going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man—any man—could keep a

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbor, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty years old.

"But what will you have me do about it, madam?" he said.

"Why, send her word to stop it," the woman said. "Isn't there a law?"

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," Judge Stevens said. "It's probably just a snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I'll speak to him about it."

The next day he received two more complaints, one from a man who came in diffident deprecation. "We really must do something about it, Judge. I'd be the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily, but we've got to do something." That night the Board of Aldermen met—three graybeards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation.

"It's simple enough," he said. "Send her word to have her place cleaned up. Give her a certain time to do it in, and if she don't. . . ."

"Dammit, sir," Judge Stevens said, "will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?"

## A ROSE FOR EMILY

So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the out-buildings. As they recrossed the lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol. They crept quietly across the lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. After a week or two the smell went away.

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men was quite good enough for Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them as a tableau: Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

flung front door. So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she, too, would know the old thrill and the old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom. Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that, with nothing left, she would have

## A ROSE FOR EMILY

to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

### III

She was sick for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows—sort of tragic and serene.

The town had just let the contracts for paving the sidewalks, and in the summer after her father's death they began the work. The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a Yankee—a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers, and the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks. Pretty soon he knew everybody in town. Whenever you heard a lot of laughing anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the center of the group. Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable.

At first we were glad that Miss Emily would

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

have an interest, because the ladies all said, "Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer." But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige*—without calling it *noblesse oblige*. They just said, "Poor Emily. Her kinfolks should come to her." She had some kin in Alabama; but years ago her father had fallen out with them over the estate of old lady Wyatt, the crazy woman, and there was no communication between the two families. They had not even been represented at the funeral.

And as soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" they said to one another. "Of course it is. What else could . . ." This behind their hands; rustling of craned silk and satin behind jalousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."

She carried her head high enough—even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness. Like when she bought the rat poison, the



## A ROSE FOR EMILY

arsenic. That was over a year after they had begun to say "Poor Emily," and while the two female cousins were visiting her.

"I want some poison," she said to the druggist. She was over thirty then, still a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold, haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eye-sockets as you imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look. "I want some poison," she said.

"Yes, Miss Emily. What kind? For rats and such? I'd recom—"

"I want the best you have. I don't care what kind."

The druggist named several. "They'll kill anything up to an elephant. But what you want is—"

"Arsenic," Miss Emily said. "Is that a good one?"

"Is . . . arsenic? Yes, ma'am. But what you want—"

"I want arsenic."

The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag. "Why, of course," the druggist said. "If that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for."

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye to eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The negro delivery boy brought her the package; the druggist didn't come back. When she opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: "For rats."

### IV

So the next day we all said, "She will kill herself"; and we said it would be the best thing. When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet," because Homer himself had remarked—he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club—that he was not a marrying man. Later we said, "Poor Emily" behind the jealousies as they passed on Sunday afternoon in the glittering buggy, Miss Emily with her head high and Homer Barron with his hat cocked and a cigar in his teeth, reins and whip in a yellow glove.

Then some of the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example

## A ROSE FOR EMILY

to the young people. The men did not want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister—Miss Emily's people were Episcopal—to call upon her. He would never divulge what happened during that interview, but he refused to go back again. The next Sunday they again drove about the streets, and the following day the minister's wife wrote to Miss Emily's relations in Alabama.

So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments. At first nothing happened. Then we were sure that they were to be married. We learned that Miss Emily had been to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H. B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt, and we said, "They are married." We were really glad. We were glad because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.

So we were not surprised when Homer Barron—the streets had been finished some time since—was gone. We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off, but we believed that he had gone on to prepare for Miss Emily's coming, or to give her a chance to get rid

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

of the cousins. (By that time it was a cabal, and we were all Miss Emily's allies to help circumvent the cousins.) Sure enough, after another week they departed. And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbor saw the negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening.

And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets. Then we knew that this was to be expected too; as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die.

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray. During the next few years it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-gray, when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man.

From that time on her front door remained

## A ROSE FOR EMILY

closed, save for a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris' contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent to church on Sundays with a twenty-five-cent piece for the collection plate. Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted.

Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery, Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them.

Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the negro grow grayer and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs win-

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

dows—she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house—like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from generation to generation—dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the negro. He talked to no one, probably not even to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse.

She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight.

The negro met the first of the ladies at the front door and let them in, with their hushed, sibilant voices and their quick, curious glances, and then he disappeared. He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.

The two female cousins came at once. They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father

## A ROSE FOR EMILY

musings profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old men—some in their brushed Confederate uniforms—on the porch and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from the now by the narrow bottle-neck of the most recent decade of years.

Already we knew that there was one room in that region abovestairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie, as

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks.

The man himself lay in the bed.

For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.



# GREEN THOUGHTS

By

*John Collier*

---

**T**HE orchid had been sent among the effects of his friend, who had come by a lonely and mysterious death on the expedition. Or he had bought it among a miscellaneous lot, "unclassified," at the close of the auction. I forget which, but one or the other it certainly was; moreover, even in its dry, brown, dormant root state, this orchid had a certain sinister quality. It looked, with its bunched and ragged projections, like a rigid yet a gripping hand, hideously gnarled, or a grotesquely whiskered, threatening face. Would you not have known what sort of an orchid it was?

Mr. Mannering did not know. He read nothing but catalogues and books on fertilizers. He

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## CREEPS BY NIGHT

unpacked the new acquisition with a solicitude absurd enough in any case towards any orchid, or primrose either, in the twentieth century, but idiotic, foolhardy, doom-eager, when extended to an orchid thus come by, in appearance thus. And in his traditional obtuseness he at once planted it in what he called the "Observation Ward," a hothouse built against the south wall of his dumpy, red dwelling. Here he set always the most interesting additions to his collection, and especially weak and sickly plants, for there was a glass door in his study wall through which he could see into this hothouse, so that the weak and sickly plants could encounter no crisis without his immediate knowledge.

This plant, however, proved hardy enough. At the ends of thick and stringy stalks it opened out bunches of darkly shining leaves, and soon it spread in every direction, usurping so much space that first one, then another, then all its neighbors had to be removed to a hothouse at the end of the garden. It was, Cousin Jane said, a regular hop-vine. At the ends of the stalks, just before the leaves began, were set groups of tendrils, which hung idly, serving no apparent purpose. Mr. Mannering thought that very probably these were vestigial organs, a heritage

## GREEN THOUGHTS

from some period when the plant had been a climber. But when were the vestigial tendrils of an ex-climber half or quarter so thick and strong?

After a long time sets of tiny buds appeared here and there among the extravagant foliage. Soon they opened into small flowers, miserable little things: they looked like flies' heads. One naturally expects a large, garish, sinister bloom, like a sea anemone, or a Chinese lantern, or a hippopotamus yawning, on any important orchid; and should it be an unclassified one as well, I think one has every right to insist on a sickly and overpowering scent into the bargain.

Mr. Mannering did not mind at all. Indeed, apart from his joy and happiness in being the discoverer and godfather of a new sort of orchid, he felt only a mild and scientific interest in the fact that the paltry blossoms were so very much like flies' heads. Could it be to attract other flies for food or as fertilizers? But then, why like their heads?

It was a few days later that Cousin Jane's cat disappeared. This was a great blow to Cousin Jane, but Mr. Mannering was not, in his heart of hearts, greatly sorry. He was not fond of the cat, for he could not open the smallest chink in a

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

glass roof for ventilation but that creature would squeeze through somehow to enjoy the warmth, and in this way it had broken many a tender shoot. But before poor Cousin Jane had lamented two days something happened which so engrossed Mr. Mannering that he had no mind left at all with which to sympathize with her affliction or to make at breakfast kind and hypocritical inquiries after the lost cat. A strange new bud appeared on the orchid. It was clearly evident that there would be two quite different sorts of bloom on this one plant, as sometimes happens in such fantastic corners of the vegetable world, and that the new flower would be very different in size and structure from the earlier ones. It grew bigger and bigger, till it was as big as one's fist.

And just then, it could never have been more inopportune, an affair of the most unpleasant, the most distressing nature summoned Mr. Mannering to town. It was his wretched nephew, in trouble again, and this time so deeply and so very disgracefully that it took all Mr. Mannering's generosity, and all his influence, too, to extricate the worthless young man. Indeed, as soon as he saw the state of affairs, he told the prodigal that this was the very last time he might

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expect assistance, that his vices and his ingratitude had long cancelled all affection between them, and that for this last helping hand he was indebted only to his mother's memory, and to no faith on the part of his uncle either in his repentance or his reformation. He wrote, moreover, to Cousin Jane, to relieve his feelings, telling her of the whole business, and adding that the only thing left to do was to cut the young man off entirely.

When he got back to Torquay Cousin Jane had disappeared. The situation was extremely annoying. Their only servant was a cook who was very old and very stupid and very deaf. She suffered besides from an obsession, due to the fact that for many years Mr. Mannering had had no conversation with her in which he had not included an impressive reminder that she must always, no matter what might happen, keep the big kitchen stove up to a certain pitch of activity. For this stove, besides supplying the house with hot water, heated the pipes in the "Observation Ward," to which the daily gardener who had charge of the other hothouses had no access. By this time she had come to regard her duties as stoker as her chief *raison d'être*, and it was difficult to penetrate her deafness with any question

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which her stupidity and her obsession did not somehow transmute into an inquiry after the stove, and this, of course, was especially the case when Mr. Mannering spoke to her. All he could disentangle was what she had volunteered on first seeing him, that his cousin had not been seen for three days, that she had left without saying a word. Mr. Mannering was perplexed and annoyed but, being a man of method, he thought it best to postpone further inquiries until he had refreshed himself a little after his long and tiring journey. A full supply of energy was necessary to extract any information from the old cook; besides, there was probably a note somewhere. It was only natural that before he went to his room, Mr. Mannering should peep into the hothouse, just to make sure that the wonderful orchid had come to no harm during the inconsiderate absence of Cousin Jane. As soon as he opened the door his eyes fell upon the bud; it had now changed in shape very considerably, and had increased in size to the bigness of a human head. It is no exaggeration to state that Mr. Mannering remained rooted to the spot, with his eyes fixed upon this wonderful bud, for fully five minutes.

But, you will ask, why did he not see her clothes on the floor? Well, as a matter of fact (it

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is a delicate point), there were no clothes on the floor. Cousin Jane, though of course she was entirely estimable in every respect, though she was well over forty, too, was given to the practice of the very latest ideas on the dual culture of the soul and body—Swedish, German, neo-Greek and all that. And the orchid-house was the warmest place available. I must proceed with the order of events.

Mr. Mannering at length withdrew his eyes from this stupendous bud and decided that he must devote his attention to the gray exigencies of everyday life. But although his body dutifully ascended the stairs, heart, mind, and soul all remained in adoration of the plant. Although he was philosophical to the point of insensibility over the miserable smallness of the earlier flowers, yet he was now as much gratified by the magnitude of the great new bud as you or I might be. Hence it was not unnatural that Mr. Mannering while in his bath should be full of the most exalted visions of the blossoming of his heart's darling, his vegetable godchild. It would be the largest known, by far: complex as a dream, or dazzlingly simple. It would open like a dancer, or like the sun rising. Why, it might be opening at this very moment! At this thought

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Mr. Mannering could restrain himself no longer ; he rose from the steamy water, and, wrapping his bath-towel robe about him, hurried down to the hothouse, scarcely staying to dry himself, though he was subject to colds.

The bud had not yet opened : it still reared its unbroken head among the glossy, fleshy foliage, and he now saw, what he had had no eyes for previously, how very exuberant that foliage had grown. Suddenly he realized with astonishment that this huge bud was not that which had appeared before he went away. That one had been lower down on the plant. Where was it now, then ? Why, this new thrust and spread of foliage concealed it from him. He walked across, and discovered it. It had opened into a bloom. And as he looked at this bloom his astonishment grew to stupefaction, one might say to petrification, for it is a fact that Mr. Mannering remained rooted to the spot, with his eyes fixed on the flower, for fully fifteen minutes. The flower was an exact replica of the head of Cousin Jane's lost cat. The similitude was so exact, so lifelike, that Mr. Mannering's first movement, after the fifteen minutes, was to seize his bath-towel robe and draw it about him, for he was a modest man, and the cat, though bought for a Tom, had proved to be quite the



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reverse. I relate this to show how much character, spirit, *presence*—call it what you will—there was upon this floral cat's face. But although he made to seize his bathtowel robe, it was too late: he could not move; the new lusty foliage had closed in unperceived, the too lightly dismissed tendrils were everywhere upon him; he gave a few weak cries and sank to the ground, and there, as the Mr. Mannering of ordinary life, he passes out of this story.

Mr. Mannering sank into a coma, into an insensibility so deep that a black eternity passed before the first faint elements of his consciousness reassembled themselves in his brain. For of his brain was the center of a new bud being made. Indeed, it was two or three days before this, at first almost shapeless and quite primitive lump of organic matter, had become sufficiently mature to be called Mr. Mannering at all. These days, which passed quickly enough, in a certain mild, not unpleasant excitement, in the outer world, seemed to the dimly working mind within the bud to resume the whole history of the development of our species, in a great many epochal parts.

A process analogous to the mutations of the embryo was being enacted here. At last the en-

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tity which was thus being rushed down an absurdly foreshortened vista of the ages arrived, slowing up, into the foreground. It became recognizable. The Seven Ages of Mr. Mannering were presented, as it were, in a series of close-ups, as in an educational film; his consciousness settled and cleared; the bud was mature, ready to open. At this point, I believe, Mr. Mannering's state of mind was exactly that of a patient who, struggling up from vague dreams, wakening from under an anæsthetic, asks plaintively, "Where am I?" Then the bud opened, and he knew.

There was the hothouse, but seen from an unfamiliar angle; there, through the glass door, was his study, and there below him was the cat's head and there—there beside him was Cousin Jane. He could not say a word, but then, neither could she. Perhaps it was as well. At the very least, he would have been forced to own that she had been in the right in an argument of long standing; she had always maintained that in the end no good would come of his preoccupation with "those unnatural flowers."

Yet it must be admitted that Mr. Mannering was not at first greatly upset by this extraordinary upheaval in his daily life. This, I think, was

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because he was interested, not only in private and personal matters, but in the wider and more general, one might say the biological, aspects of his metamorphosis; for the rest, simply because he *was* now a vegetable, he responded with a vegetable reaction. The impossibility of locomotion, for example, did not trouble him in the least, or even the absence of body and limbs, any more than the cessation of that stream of rashers and tea, biscuit and glasses of milk, luncheon cutlets, and so forth that had flowed in at his mouth for over fifty years, but which had now been reversed to a gentle, continuous, scarcely noticeable feeding from below. All the powerful influence of the physical upon the mental, therefore, inclined him toward tranquillity. But the physical is not all. Although no longer a man, he was still Mr. Mannering. And from this anomaly, as soon as his scientific interest had subsided, issued a host of woes, mainly subjective in origin.

He was fretted, for instance, by the thought that he would now have no opportunity to name his orchid or to write a paper upon it and, still worse, there grew up in his mind the abominable conviction that, as soon as his plight was discovered, it was he who would be named and classified, and that he himself would be the sub-

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ject of a paper, possibly even of comment and criticism in the lay press. Like all orchid collectors, he was excessively shy and sensitive, and in his present situation these qualities were very naturally exaggerated, so that the bare idea of such attentions brought him to the verge of wilting. Worse yet was the fear of being transplanted, thrust into some unfamiliar, draughty, probably public place. Being dug up! Ugh! A violent shudder pulsed through all the heavy foliage that sprang from Mr. Mannering's division of the plant. He awoke to consciousness of ghostly and remote sensations in the stem below, and in certain tufts of leaves that sprouted from it; they were somehow reminiscent of spine and heart and limbs. He felt quite a dryad.

In spite of all, however, the sunshine was very pleasant. The rich odor of hot, spicy earth filled the hothouse. From a special fixture on the hot-water pipes a little warm steam oozed into the air. Mr. Mannering began to abandon himself to a feeling of *laissez-aller*. Just then, up in the corner of the glass roof, at the ventilator, he heard a persistent buzzing. Soon the note changed from one of irritation to a more complacent sound; a bee had managed to find his way after some difficulty through one of the tiny

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chinks in the metal work. The visitor came drifting down and down through the still, green air, as if into some subaqueous world, and he came to rest on one of those petals which were Mr. Mannering's eyebrows. Thence he commenced to explore one feature after another and at last he settled heavily on the lower lip, which drooped under his weight and allowed him to crawl right into Mr. Mannering's mouth. This was quite a considerable shock, of course, but on the whole the sensation was neither as alarming nor as unpleasant as might have been expected; indeed, strange as it may sound, the appropriate word seemed to be something like . . . refreshing.

But Mr. Mannering soon ceased his drowsy toyings with the *mot juste* when he saw the departed bee, after one or two lazy circlings, settle directly upon the maiden lip of Cousin Jane. Ominous as lightning, a simple botanical principle flashed across the mind of her wretched relative. Cousin Jane was aware of it also, although, being the product of an earlier age, she might have remained still blessedly ignorant had not her cousin, vain, garrulous, proselytizing fool, attempted for years past to interest her in the rudiments of botany. How the miserable man upbraided himself now! He saw two bunches of

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leaves just below the flower tremble and flutter and rear themselves painfully upward into the very likeness of two shocked and protesting hands. He saw the soft and orderly petals of his cousin's face ruffle and incarnadine with rage and embarrassment, then turn sickly as a gardenia with horror and dismay. But what was he to do? All the rectitude implanted by his careful training, all the chivalry proper to an orchid-collector, boiled and surged beneath a paralytically calm exterior. He positively travailed in the effort to activate the muscles of his face, to assume an expression of grief, manly contrition, helplessness in the face of fate, willingness to make all honorable amends, all suffused with the light of a vague but solacing optimism; but it was all in vain. When he had strained till his nerves seemed likely to tear under the tension, the only movement he could achieve was a trivial flutter of the left eyelid—worse than nothing.

This incident completely aroused Mr. Man-nering from his vegetative lethargy. He rebelled against the limitations of the form into which he had thus been cast while subjectively he remained all too human. Was he not still at heart a man, with a man's hopes, ideals, aspirations—and capacity for suffering?

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When dusk came and the opulent and sinister shapes of the great plant dimmed to a suggestiveness more powerfully impressive than had been its bright noonday luxuriance, and the atmosphere of a tropical forest filled the orchid-house like an exile's dream or the nostalgia of the saxophone; when the cat's whiskers drooped, and even Cousin Jane's eyes slowly closed, the unhappy man remained wide awake, staring into the gathering darkness. Suddenly the light in the study was switched on. Two men entered the room. One of them was his lawyer, the other was his nephew.

"This is his study, as you know, of course," said the wicked nephew. "There's nothing here. I looked round when I came over on Wednesday."

"Ah! well," said the lawyer. "It's a very queer business, an absolute mystery." He had evidently said so more than once before; they must have been discussing matters in another room. "Well, we must hope for the best. In the meantime, in all the circumstances, it's perhaps as well that you, as next-of-kin, should take charge of things here. We must hope for the best."

Saying this, the lawyer turned, about to go, and Mr. Mannering saw a malicious smile over-

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spread the young man's face. The uneasiness which had overcome him at first sight of his nephew was intensified to fear and trembling at the sight of this smile.

When he had shown the lawyer out the nephew returned to the study and looked around him with lively and sinister satisfaction. Then he cut a caper on the hearth rug. Mr. Mannering thought he had never seen anything so diabolical as this solitary expression of the glee of a venomous nature at the prospect of unchecked sway, here whence he had been outcast. How vulgar petty triumph appeared, beheld thus; how disgusting petty spite, how appalling revengefulness and hardness of heart! He remembered suddenly that his nephew had been notable, in his repulsive childhood, for his cruelty to flies, tearing their wings off, and for his barbarity towards cats. A sort of dew might have been noticed upon the good man's forehead. It seemed to him that his nephew had only to glance that way and all would be discovered, although he might have remembered that it was impossible to see from the lighted room into the darkness in the hothouse.

On the mantelpiece stood a large unframed photograph of Mr. Mannering. His nephew soon caught sight of this and strode across to confront



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it with a triumphant and insolent sneer. "What? You old Pharisee," said he, "taken her off for a trip to Brighton, have you? My God! How I hope you'll never come back! How I hope you've fallen over the cliffs, or got swept off by the tide or something! Anyway . . . I'll make hay while the sun shines. Ugh! you old skinflint, you!" And he reached forward his hand, on which the thumb held the middle finger bent and in check, and that finger, then released, rapped viciously upon the nose in the photograph. Then the usurping rascal left the room, leaving all the lights on, presumably preferring the dining room with its cellarette to the scholarly austerities of the study.

All night long the glare of electric light from the study fell full upon Mr. Mannering and his Cousin Jane, like the glare of a cheap and artificial sun. You, who have seen at midnight, in the park, a few insomniac asters standing stiff and startled under an arc light, all their weak color bleached out of them by the drenching chemical radiance, neither asleep nor awake, but held fast in a tense, a neurasthenic trance, you can form an idea of how the night passed with this unhappy pair.

And towards morning an incident occurred, trivial in itself, no doubt, but sufficient then and

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there to add the last drop to poor Cousin Jane's discomfiture and to her relative's embarrassment and remorse. Along the edge of the great earth-box in which the orchid was planted ran a small black mouse. It had wicked red eyes, a naked, evil snout, and huge, repellent ears, queer as a bat's. This creature ran straight over the lower leaves of Cousin Jane's part of the plant. It was simply appalling: the stringy main stem writhed like a hair on a coal-fire, the leaves contracted in an agonized spasm, like seared mimosa; the terrified lady nearly uprooted herself in her convulsive horror. I think she would actually have done so, had not the mouse hurried on past her.

But it had not gone more than a foot or so when it looked up and saw, bending over it, and seeming positively to bristle with life, that flower which had once been called Tib. There was a breathless pause. The mouse was obviously paralyzed with terror, the cat could only look and long. Suddenly the more human watchers saw a sly frond of foliage curve softly outward and close in behind the hypnotized creature. Cousin Jane, who had been thinking exultantly, "Well, now it'll go away and never, never, never come back," suddenly became aware of hideous possibilities. Summoning all her energy, she achieved

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a spasmodic flutter, enough to break the trance that held the mouse, so that, like a clockwork toy, it swung round and fled. But already the fell arm of the orchid had cut off its retreat, the mouse leaped straight at it; like a flash five tendrils at the end caught the fugitive and held it fast, and soon its body dwindled and was gone. Now the heart of Cousin Jane was troubled with horrid fears, and slowly and painfully she turned her weary face first to one side, then to the other, in a fever of anxiety as to where the new bud would appear. A sort of sucker, green and sappy, which twisted lightly about her main stem, and reared a blunt head, much like a tip of asparagus, close to her own, suddenly began to swell in the most suspicious manner. She squinted at it, fascinated and appalled. Could it be her imagination? It was not. . . .

Next evening the door opened again, and again the nephew entered the study. This time he was alone, and it was evident that he had come straight from table. He carried in his hand a decanter of whiskey capped by an inverted glass. Under his arm was a siphon. His face was distinctly flushed, and such a smile as is often seen at saloon bars played about his lips. He put down his burdens and, turning to Mr. Manner-

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ing's cigar cabinet, produced a bunch of keys which he proceeded to try upon the lock, muttering vindictively at each abortive attempt, until it opened, when he helped himself from the best of its contents. Annoying as it was to witness this insolent appropriation of his property, and mortifying to see the contempt with which the cigar was smoked, the good gentleman found deeper cause for uneasiness in the thought that, with the possession of the keys, his abominable nephew had access to every private corner that was his.

At present, however, the usurper seemed indisposed to carry on investigations; he splashed a great deal of whiskey into the tumbler and relaxed into an attitude of extravagant comfort. But after a while the young man began to tire of his own company; he had not yet had time to gather any of his pothouse companions into his uncle's home, and repeated recourse to the whiskey bottle only increased his longing for something to relieve the monotony. His eye fell upon the door of the orchid-house. Sooner or later it was bound to have come to pass. Does this thought greatly console the condemned man when the fatal knock sounds upon the door of his cell? No. Nor were the hearts of the trem-

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bling pair in the hothouse at all succored by the reflection.

As the nephew fumbled with the handle of the glass door, Cousin Jane slowly raised two fronds of leaves that grew on each side, high up on her stem, and sank her troubled head behind them. Mr. Mannering observed, in a sudden rapture of hope, that by this device she was fairly well concealed from any casual glance. Hastily he strove to follow her example. Unfortunately, he had not yet gained sufficient control of his—his *limbs?*—and all his tortured efforts could not raise them beyond an agonized horizontal. The door had opened, the nephew was feeling for the electric light switch just inside. It was a moment for one of the superlative achievements of panic. Mr. Mannering was well equipped for the occasion. Suddenly, at the cost of indescribable effort, he succeeded in raising the right frond, not straight upwards, it is true, but in a series of painful jerks along a curve outward and backward, and ascending by slow degrees till it attained the position of an arm held over the possessor's head from behind. Then, as the light flashed on, a spray of leaves at the very end of this frond spread out into a fan, rather like a very fleshy horse-chestnut leaf in structure, and

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covered the anxious face below. What a relief! And now the nephew advanced into the orchid-house, and now the hidden pair simultaneously remembered the fatal presence of the cat. Simultaneously also, their very sap stood still in their veins. The nephew was walking along by the plant. The cat, a sagacious beast, "knew" with the infallible intuition of its kind that this was an idler, a parasite, a sensualist, gross and brutal, disrespectful to age, insolent to weakness, barbarous to cats. Therefore it remained very still, trusting to its low and somewhat retired position on the plant, and to protective mimicry and such things, and to the half-drunken condition of the nephew, to avoid his notice. But all in vain.

"What?" said the nephew, "What, a cat?" And he raised his hand to offer a blow at the harmless creature. Something in the dignified and unflinching demeanor of his victim must have penetrated into even his besotted mind, for the blow never fell, and the bully, a coward at heart, as bullies invariably are, shifted his gaze from side to side to escape the steady, contemptuous stare of the courageous cat. Alas! his eye fell on something glimmering whitely behind the dark foliage. He brushed aside the intervening

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leaves that he might see what it was. It was Cousin Jane.

“Oh! Ah!” said the young man, in great confusion. “*You’re* back. But what are you hiding there for?”

His sheepish stare became fixed, his mouth opened in bewilderment; then the true condition of things dawned upon his mind. Most of us would have at once instituted some attempt at communication or at assistance of some kind, or at least have knelt down to thank our Creator that we had, by His grace, been spared such a fate, or perhaps have made haste from the orchid-house to insure against accidents. But alcohol had so inflamed the young man’s hardened nature that he felt neither fear nor awe nor gratitude. As he grasped the situation a devilish smile overspread his face.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” said he, “but where’s the old man?”

He peered about the plant, looking eagerly for his uncle. In a moment he had located him and, raising the inadequate visor of leaves, discovered beneath it the face of our hero, troubled with a hundred bitter emotions.

“Hullo, Narcissus!” said the nephew.

A long silence ensued. The nephew was so

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pleased that he could not say a word. He rubbed his hands together, and licked his lips, and stared and stared as a child might at a new toy.

“You’re properly up a tree now,” he said. “Yes, the tables are turned now all right, aren’t they? Ha! Ha! Do you remember the last time we met?”

A flicker of emotion passed over the face of the suffering blossom, betraying consciousness.

“Yes, you can hear what I say,” added the tormentor, “feel, too, I expect. What about that?”

As he spoke, he stretched out his hand and, seizing a delicate frill of fine, silvery filaments that grew as whiskers grow round the lower half of the flower, he administered a sharp tug. Without pausing to note, even in the interests of science, the subtler shades of his uncle’s reaction, content with the general effect of that devastating wince, the wretch chuckled with satisfaction and, taking a long pull from the reeking butt of the stolen cigar, puffed the vile fumes straight into his victim’s center. The brute!

“How do you like that, John the Baptist?” he asked with a leer. “Good for the blight, you know. Just what you want!”

Something rustled upon his coat sleeve. Looking down, he saw a long stalk, well adorned with



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the fatal tendrils, groping its way over the arid and unsatisfactory surface. In a moment it had reached his wrist, he felt it fasten, but knocked it off as one would a leech, before it had time to establish its hold.

"Ugh!" said he, "so that's how it happens, is it? I think I'll keep outside till I get the hang of things a bit. *I* don't want to be made an Aunt Sally of. Though I shouldn't think they could get you with your clothes on." Struck by a sudden thought, he looked from his uncle to Cousin Jane, and from Cousin Jane back to his uncle again. He scanned the floor, and saw a single crumpled bath-towel robe lying in the shadow.

"Why?" he said, "*well!* . . . Haw! Haw! Haw!" And with an odious backward leer, he made his way out of the orchid-house.

Mr. Mannering felt that his suffering was capable of no increase. Yet he dreaded the morrow. His fevered imagination patterned the long night with waking nightmares, utterly fantastic visions of humiliation and torture. Torture! It was absurd, of course, for him to fear cold-blooded atrocities on the part of his nephew, but how he dreaded some outrageous whim that might tickle the youth's sense of humor and lead him to *any* wanton freak, especially if he were

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drunk at the time. He thought of slugs and snails, espaliers and topiary. If only the monster would rest content with insults and mockery, with wasting his substance, ravaging his cherished possessions before his eyes, with occasional pulling at the whiskers, even! Then it might be possible to turn gradually from all that still remained in him of man, to subdue the passions, no longer to admire or desire, to go native, as it were, relapsing into the Nirvana of a vegetable dream. But in the morning he found this was not so easy.

In came the nephew and, pausing only to utter the most perfunctory of jeers at his relatives in the glass house, he sat at the desk and unlocked the top drawer. He was evidently in search of money, his eagerness betrayed that; no doubt he had run through all he had filched from his uncle's pockets, and had not yet worked out a scheme for getting direct control of his bank account. However, the drawer held enough to cause the scoundrel to rub his hands with satisfaction and, summoning the housekeeper, to bellow into her ear a reckless order upon the wine and spirit merchant.

"Get along with you," he shouted, when he had at last made her understand. "I shall have to

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get some one a bit more on the spot to wait on me; I can tell you that." "Yes," he added to himself as the poor old woman hobbled away, deeply hurt by his bullying manner, "yes, a nice little parlor-maid . . . a nice little parlor-maid."

He hunted in the *Buff Book* for the number of the local registry office. That afternoon he interviewed a succession of maidservants in his uncle's study. Those that happened to be plain, or too obviously respectable, he treated curtly and coldly; they soon made way for others. It was only when a girl was attractive (according to the young man's depraved tastes, that is) and also bore herself in a fast or brazen manner, that the interview was at all prolonged. In these cases the nephew would conclude in a fashion that left no doubt at all in the minds of any of his auditors as to his real intentions. Once, for example, leaning forward, he took the girl by the chin, saying with an odious smirk, "There's no one else but me, and so you'd be treated just like one of the family; d'you see, my dear?" To another he would say, slipping his arm round her waist, "Do you think we shall get on well together?"

After this conduct had sent two or three in confusion from the room, there entered a young person of the most regrettable description, one whose

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character, betrayed as it was in her meretricious finery, her crude cosmetics, and her tinted hair, showed yet more clearly in florid gesture and too facile smile. The nephew lost no time in coming to an arrangement with this creature. Indeed, her true nature was so obvious that the depraved young man only went through the farce of an ordinary interview as a sauce to his anticipations, enjoying the contrast between conventional dialogue and unbridled glances. She was to come next day. Mr. Mannering feared more for his unhappy cousin than for himself. "What scenes may she not have to witness," he thought, "that yellow cheek of hers to incarnadine?" If only he could have said a few words!

But that evening, when the nephew came to take his ease in the study, it was obvious that he was far more under the influence of liquor than had been the case before. His face, flushed patchily by the action of the spirits, wore a sullen sneer, an ominous light burned in that bleared eye, he muttered savagely under his breath. Clearly this fiend in human shape was what is known as "fighting drunk"; clearly some trifle had set his vile temper in a blaze.

It is interesting to note, even at this stage, a sudden change in Mr. Mannering's reactions.

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They now seemed entirely egotistical, and were to be elicited only by stimuli directly associated with physical matters. The nephew kicked a hole in a screen in his drunken fury, he flung a burning cigar-end down on the carpet, he scratched matches on the polished table. His uncle witnessed this with the calm of one whose sense of property and of dignity has become numbed and paralyzed; he felt neither fury nor mortification. Had he, by one of those sudden strides by which all such development takes place, approached much nearer to his goal, complete vegetation? His concern for the threatened modesty of Cousin Jane, which had moved him so strongly only a few hours earlier, must have been the last dying flicker of exhausted altruism; that most human characteristic had faded from him. The change, however, in its present stage, was not an unmixed blessing. Narrowing in from the wider and more expressly human regions of his being, his consciousness now left outside its focus not only pride and altruism, which had been responsible for much of his woe, but fortitude and detachment also, which, with quotations from the Greeks, had been his support before the whole battery of his distresses. Moreover, within its constricted circle, his ego was not reduced but

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concentrated, his serene, flowerlike indifference toward the ill-usage of his furniture was balanced by the absorbed, flowerlike single-mindedness of his terror at the thought of similar ill-usage directed toward himself.

Inside the study the nephew still fumed and swore. On the mantelpiece stood an envelope, addressed in Mr. Mannering's handwriting to Cousin Jane. In it was the letter he had written from town, describing his nephew's disgraceful conduct. The young man's eye fell upon this and, unscrupulous, impelled by idle curiosity, he took it up and drew out the letter. As he read, his face grew a hundred times blacker than before.

"What?" he muttered, "'a mere race-course cad . . . a worthless vulgarian . . . a scoundrel of the sneaking sort' . . . and what's this? ' . . . cut him off absolutely. . . .' What?" said he, with a horrifying oath, "*Would* you cut me off absolutely? Two can play at that game, you old devil!"

And he snatched up a large pair of scissors that lay on the desk, and burst into the hothouse. . . .

Among fish, the dory, they say, screams when it is seized upon by man; among insects, the

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caterpillar of the death's-head moth is capable of a still, small shriek of terror; in the vegetable world, only the mandrake could voice its agony —till now.





# THE GHOST OF ALEXANDER PERKS, A.B.

By  
*Robert Dean Frisbie*

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**T**HE *Pirara* is a garrulous old hooker, proud of her departed days and fond of reminiscing to me during the night watches below. At times she is querulous, too, complaining of the cargoes of rancid copra she must carry in her old age; of the native passengers who mess up her decks, tie awnings of patchwork quilts to the rigging, and whittle their initials in the rail; or of the parsimony of her owners, who refuse to buy a new winch—the old one is in a sorry plight—or replace the rusty old foretopmast stay. She even growls at me, her mate, though the Lord knows that I do my best; but it *is* hard to keep awake on clear nights during the twelve-to-four watch.

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## CREEPS BY NIGHT

“Lackadaisy!” she groaned to-night, breaking into my dreams. “This is a lubber’s shift! Rancid copra bulging my poor old ribs; engine-room grease and bilge water washing over my kelson. Why don’t you pay a little attention to the pumps? You haven’t sounded my well for a week! Fine mate you are for such a lady as me!”

“That is unfair!” I cried in my sleep. “You know that I watched Six-Seas pumping during the dog-watch.”

The old schooner laughed derisively. “What a fib!” she cried. “Watched, indeed! You sat on the wheel box twiddling your thumbs, and you took Six-Seas’ word for it when he said the pumps had sucked!” Then sharply, not giving me time to reply: “Don’t say anything! Not a word out of you! You’ll only lie and make me angry, and that’ll be bad for your soul and my digestion!”

She fell silent as she wallowed in a long trough; then, with a groan—more from habit than anything else, for, like all old folks, she makes much of her troubles—she rose to the top of a long sea and lumbered down the other side.

“There’s another one over, thank the good Lord!” she muttered. “My, what a number of rollers there are in the ocean! It is perfectly ridic-

## GHOST OF ALEXANDER PERKS, A.B.

ulous! I've crossed as many as seven thousand in a single day. That was on the good old Shanghai-Frisco run when beating against the north-westerlies. Ah, those were the days! No filthy copra then, but cases of silks and tea, and clean mats of rice with little tins of opium hidden in them. And in those days Captain Pester gave my spars a coat of varnish every four months, all my standing rigging was served, and the brass on my rail shone beautifully. There were no broken catheads or rusty jib-boom guys on me then."

One bell sounded. I heard it in my sleep, but refused to waken for another moment or two.

"Get up, get up!" the old schooner cried maliciously. She concluded, her voice dwindling away to a murmur that finally merged into the splash of water along her sides: "Get up and go on deck, Lazybones, and finish your sleep while you're on watch."

There was a scratching on my cabin port light; then the senile whine of old Seaside, the Kanaka second mate: "One bell! One bell! Ropati *tané!*"

I opened my eyes. The scratching continued, irritating me. Knowing it would not stop until I replied, I pounded on the bulkhead, and growled, "All right, Seaside, you old fool! I hear you!"

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The scratching stopped. I jumped out of my berth, lit the lamp, and dressed. Then, turning the lamp low, I climbed on deck just as the Seth Thomas clock struck eight times and the second mate repeated the hour on the ship's bell. He was alone, with the wheel lashed, for we had given the sailors the entire night below so we could work them all day on the morrow holystoning, scraping, and oiling decks.

The old man grinned at me, exposing his three yellow wolf-fang teeth. He sat on the wheel box with the binnacle light full on his deeply wrinkled face, making his sharp little eyes glow evilly. I glanced at the compass and then went to the weather rail to feel the wind. We seemed to be keeping on our course, full and by on the port tack. Returning to Seaside, I asked:—

“Well, old man, how's your friend the ghost to-night?”

I was referring to Mr. Alexander Perks, A.B., the spirit that is supposed to haunt this trading schooner. Mind you, I don't believe a word of it; but the sailors claim they see the old gentleman snooping around every night, trying to get one of them to play draughts with him. Personally, I say it's all nonsense, for I have a theory that there are no such things as ghosts.

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"Up and about," came from Seaside's grinning lips. "Listen, there he is now!"

"It's only the wind, Seaside, you old fool," I replied. "Only the wind moaning in the shrouds."

"It's Perks," the old man declared, his smile fading and an indignant flash appearing in his eyes. Abruptly he turned and pointed to the galley. "And there he is; I must go and have a yarn with him. I'll be back by and by."

I glanced forward. There *was* a nebulous glimmer visible through the galley door, and I could understand how a simple native like Seaside might imagine it a ghost. Of course I knew better.

"It's only the moonlight, Seaside," I said as the old man started forward. "Only the moonlight shining through the galley window."

The silly old fellow laughed in his cackling way as he crossed the midship house deck. "It's gone now, but still the moon shines," he said. A moment later he had dropped into the waist and entered the galley, leaving me to my thoughts.

## II

Rats and ghosts, I mused, are favorable omens to a sailor, for they always desert a ship that is

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doomed. There was the old *Lillah Allers*, for instance, which was named after her owner's wife—the owner was his own skipper. If I remember rightly, Mrs. Allers died aboard during a blow off the Horn. *Lillah* must have been a terror to the captain, for she used to come on deck when the wind freshened and make suggestions about taking in the royals, reefing the t'gallant-s'ls, or tying up the flying jib.

"Woman," Captain Allers would say to her in his sternest tone, "thy place is below; get thee below to thy sewing!"

This would make the old lady rave, for she believed that in a tight place she was more level-headed than the captain; also, she claimed to have presentiments which never failed her. Well, she died that night off the Horn while she was in the midst of one of her presentiments. She had rushed on deck to declare that something terrible was about to happen. Just then the spanker backed, carried away its boom tackle, and, jibbing over, caught her on the nape of the neck. She was buried in Latitude 60°18' South; but her spirit stayed by the ship, and Captain Allers used to swear that every time the wind freshened to a gale he could see her hovering above the poop deck, gesticulating frantically, pointing

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aloft in an effort to give some advice about handling the ship.

“Poor old *Lillah Allers!*” I continued my musing, thinking of the ship, not the lady. The last time Captain Allers took her out of the Golden Gate he knew he would come to grief, for the night before he had seen the ghost of his late wife, a Gladstone bag and a hatbox in her hands, walking hurriedly down the gangplank.

“The ship is doomed!” he told the mate as soon as they were out of the bay, but before they had dropped the pilot. “My wife’s spirit has deserted us!”

The mate respectfully suggested that the captain might have mentioned this before they threw off their dock lines. He added that he would just step into his cabin for his gear and go ashore with the pilot; but the captain wouldn’t hear of it.

Well, they dropped the pilot, hoisted the old *Lillah Allers’s* kites, and sailed over the horizon, never to be seen or heard of again!

I walked to the weather rail and watched the clouds of phosphorescence rise and subside. A school of bonito was over our windward quarter, streaking the sea with parallel lines of fire. I could hear from above our masts the squawking of a tropic bird, and from the galley Seaside’s

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whine as he cried: "Jump me, Perks! You've got to jump!" or cackling with glee as he told the ghost that he had made the king row. The poor deluded native was imagining he was playing draughts with the spirit of Able-bodied Seaman Alexander Perks!

I returned to my musings, letting my mind wander to stories of other haunted ships. There was the *Ghost Ship* of Richard Middleton that was blown into Host's turnip patch by the great gale; the *Flying Dutchman*; the *Marie Celeste*, the Maori canoe of ill omen that appears at night in the lagoon of an island before a great catastrophe is to occur. Then there was Captain Arthur Mason's *Wampa* with its mysterious Hindu stowaway, who saved the ship during a hurricane by taking orders from the ghost of the dead captain and transmitting them to the crew. Haunted ships are as common as haunted houses, for sailors are as superstitious as old women; their lives are governed by omens and presentiments. Even I, who have a theory that such things are all nonsense, find myself half believing in them at times. There is Perks, for instance. Much though I deride his existence, it is sometimes difficult to disbelieve in him; in fact, it re-



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quires all the cogency of my theory to prove him an illusion.

### III

"I beat him," said Seaside as he climbed over the break of the midship house.

"Suppose you turn in instead of snooping around deck and playing checkers with imaginary specters," I replied sharply. "You'll be good for nothing to-morrow unless you get some sleep."

"Old men seldom sleep," the second mate told me; "and to-night I could never lie in my bunk, I'd be that fidgety."

"What's all the trouble?"

The old man came close to me and whispered: "We make Vostok Island to-morrow, Captain Andy says, and I'm to go ashore for birds' eggs!"

"All the more reason for you to sleep to-night."

"But Perks?"

"What about him?"

Seaside leaned against the weather rail and let his sharp little eyes wander aloft. He shook his head knowingly, and again the fatuous grin played across his mouth; but in another moment he was whispering his story to me—whispering it

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because, as he said, he did not want Perks to overhear.

Three years ago, according to Seaside, the *Pirara* was not a haunted ship; but one day Captain Andy decided to put into Vostok Island for sea birds' eggs, and then all the trouble started. They came along the reef in the afternoon, and Seaside was landed with some empty boxes for the eggs. The reef boat put back to the schooner, leaving him alone. The old man waded through the shallows and climbed up the beach with his boxes, untroubled by an inkling of the harrowing experience which lay ahead.

It was a dreary place, he told me, of coral formation and without more than six feet elevation on its highest point. Not a coconut tree grew there, nor a bush, nor a blade of grass; but inland the island was overgrown with great puka trees, whose huge soft and porous trunks towered straight and slimy two hundred feet in the air, and there broke into a mass of foliage so dense that only a dismal leaden light seeped through, lugubrious, as is the fading refulgence of twilight. The ground swarmed with black Norwegian rats and coconut crabs, the latter a foot long, their bodies scarlet-red, their eyes protruding, their claws powerful enough to snap off a

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man's finger. Millions of birds roosted like owls on the limbs of the trees, squawking with a deafening clamor, leaving their perches by the thousand as the old native passed beneath them. Other than these there was no sign of life on that unearthly island.

Seaside felt the awe of the unknown gnaw his bones; his knees weakened and his skin became clammy as he picked his way deep into the jungle, climbing over the trunks of fallen giants, stumbling into crab holes, sinking into quagmires of guano and decayed vegetation. He kept clear of the trunks of the trees, for, he said, they swarmed with rats and crabs climbing to the roosting birds to feed on their eggs and young. Often he could see fights carried on between them, when the boobies would pounce on the rats that were sucking their eggs, tear them from the limbs, and hurl them to the ground; or screaming birds would dive at and circle about a coconut crab that held a fledgling in its claws. It was a horrible scene of carnage that had been carried on for thousands of years—a death struggle between the species.

On into the island went Seaside, his boxes under his arms, hunting for an open space by the eastern beach where the terns should lay their

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eggs. The gloom of the jungle deepened, the air became rank and nauseating with the stench of sea birds' droppings, decaying flesh, damp vegetation. And the deeper he penetrated the more alive the ground became with evil creeping things.

Suddenly he halted in panic terror, his hair on end and his eyes bulging. Directly in front of him, hanging by a long rope of bark, was a dead man! A few rags of cloth hung to him, a sailor cap sat jauntily on his head. He must have been long dead. Seaside shuddered when he told me that one arm had dropped off; its yellowed bones lay, rat-gnawed, on the ground.

Seaside did not know how long he stood staring at the dead man; but when he did regain enough courage to move he turned with a yell, dropped his boxes, and rushed wildly through the jungle, hunting for the outer beach! He must have run in circles, for an hour passed and still he was in the depth of the island. It seemed that the jungle, with its millions of loathsome creatures feeding on one another, had no end. Twice again he came upon the dead man, each time to increase his terror and send him rushing wildly away.

Several hours passed, when suddenly, it

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seemed, darkness closed about him, dense and impenetrable. The blackness pressed him from all sides as though a sable shroud had been thrown over him and he had been sunk deep in the sea. He staggered a few feet forward and bumped against a tree. A rat dropped on his head and ran down his body. All about him he could hear sharp squeals, the clicking of the crabs' claws, and, above, the clamor of the birds, though they were quieter now except when a rat or a crab crept upon their young—then the air would be alive with their screams.

Seaside sank on his knees at the foot of the tree. Gradually he became calmer. "After all," he reasoned, "the crabs and the rats can't kill me; the worst that can happen will be a sleepless night on this island." He felt a little better after this, but still far from easy. He told me an hour must have passed before he saw the ghost of Able-bodied Seaman Alexander Perks.

He had been staring into the darkness, his eyes shifting from side to side, when all at once a nebulous thing formed a few yards from him, danced back and forth among the trees, and then gradually took the shape of a man. It approached to within a few feet, bowed extravagantly, and lifted its hat. Seaside said that the

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jungle became aglow with an eerie light which disclosed the dead man a few feet to one side, swinging slightly now, while a dozen rats below his feet were leaping into the air, trying to get at him. After this Seaside lost cognizance of things.

When he came to, there was Perks, sitting on one of the boxes that he had brought ashore for eggs, talking in the hollow tone common among ghosts. "It's a shame," he was saying, "a beastly shame!"

Seaside snapped his eyes closed and started repeating the Lord's Prayer, but still he could hear Perks muttering: "I see you've come to, now. It's about time. 'Ere I've been marooned fer four years on this blinkin' island, and the first bloke as comes 'asn't the courtesy to treat me wid common civility. So strike me pink if it ain't a shame!"

Seaside opened one eye a fraction of an inch. He noted that the specter appeared to have a kindly face; but he was far from reassured, so he snapped his eyes shut again and started trembling violently as again he went over the prayer.

"Prayin', so 'elp me, prayin'!" moaned Perks. "But I suppose it *is* queer-like to see a man o' my profession—Able-bodied Seaman I am,

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Alexander Perks, A.B.—on a bloomin' island like this. But it's all right, matey, I'm 'armless—only a poor marooned mariner wot's died by 'is own 'and after two years of lonely and pathetic life on this blinkin' desert island."

Seaside opened both his eyes at this, for he felt sorry for the spirit. He had seen plenty of ghosts before, and though they always filled him with terror he realized that there were both the harmless and the vicious kinds.

"It must have been lonely," he managed to gasp.

"Lonely ain't no word fer it," Perks said with a shake of his head. "It's been unsocial as 'ell. I've been livin' a retired and 'omeless life widout even a bloke to play draughts wid!"

Here Seaside saw tears stream down the poor fellow's cheeks. "You like to play draughts?" he asked, his fright now gone.

The ghost's eyes brightened with an unearthly light. "It's been my lifelong 'abit," he replied, "and even since my late and lamented end it bides by me." After a moment's silence a wistful glow appeared in his eyes; he leaned forward and asked: "Matey, you don't 'appen, let's say, to play draughts, do you? I've the most 'andsome

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checkerboard on the north beach, beamy and symmetrical.”

Seaside told him that he played a game now and then, whereupon the ghost insisted that they go to the beach and play. Of course this suited the old native, for at least it would mean their getting out of the foul damp air of the jungle. He rose and followed Perks, who drifted among the trees, leaving a ghostly light behind him by which Seaside could with difficulty pick his way. In the course of a half hour they broke through the trees to the clean white outer beach, sparkling with moonlight and swept by a fine breeze from off the sea. Perks stopped before a large slab of coral.

“Ain’t it ’andsome?” he asked. “I marked the squares wid octopus ink, as you can see, and my men are black shells and white ones; only when I makes a king I turns ’im over instead of pilin’ one on top of tother, they being too round-like to stand. But I ain’t ’ad a game since my sad end, it bein’ against nature fer a ghost to move the men. Before my decease I played myself.”

“That must have been a tiresome game,” Seaside ventured.

“Strike me pink, but it was awful,” Perks said: “always winning from myself, one way or



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t'other! It got so discouragin', never winning a game decisive-like, that I put an end to it all and done away wid myself!"

They sat with the slab between them and started a game, Seaside moving Perks' men for him. One game after the other he lost to the ghost, sometimes no more than getting a single man to the king row. The night waned, but still they played. Perks became more and more excited over the game; he would scream like a banshee when he won, and an evil glint would come into his eyes when he jumped three men at once or slipped into a saddle between two of Seaside's men. They were near the end of their twentieth game when dawn broke. Gradually Perks dissolved in the morning light, and his voice became fainter until it was lost in a scarcely audible moan which told Seaside of another game he had lost.

The old native looked up from the checkerboard. The sun was just breaking above the horizon; in the offing lay the *Pirara*, her boat over the side and not twenty yards from the reef.

Seaside told me there was the devil to pay when he met Captain Andy and tried to explain why he had no birds' eggs and why he hadn't been on the reef the evening before. He men-

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tioned something about being delayed by a ghost; but at this the captain flew off the handle, cursing all superstitious sailors to Gehenna and back again. Seaside stood it as long as he could; then slunk forward and told his story to the sailors. They all knew it was true, and sympathized mightily.

But the strange thing was that, as soon as he came on deck the next night to stand his watch, there was Alexander Perks waiting for him, smiling and bowing and lifting his hat and suggesting a game of draughts. The old gentleman had stowed away, slipping into the ship's boat under cover of daylight!

Seaside broke from his story, turned quickly and said: "All right, Perks, I'm coming."

A cold shiver ran down my back. There, not six feet away, was a strange misty thing, bowing extravagantly and lifting his hat. I shook myself to dispel the illusion; then turned aft, refusing to glance toward the thing for several moments, for I don't believe in ghosts and don't want my convictions shaken by hallucinations. When I did turn, both Seaside and the imaginary Perks were gone.

## GHOST OF ALEXANDER PERKS, A.B.

### IV

“Lackadaisy!” the old *Pirara* groaned while I was putting in my twelve-to-four watch below. “Death comes to old and young alike.”

“What a hackneyed thing to say!” I replied sharply—the old hooker had nearly wakened me. “You might be a little more original.”

“Patience, my son,” she went on, a note of true pathos in her voice. “You should be more considerate of the dying.”

“Dying?”

“Alas, yes; my day has come, and now I find myself so close to Christening Grooves that—”

“Christening Grooves! What’s that?”

“Such ignorance! It’s the paradise for dead ships, where every morning the ghost ships waken on the grooves of launching, stout, tight, shining with paint and varnish and polished brass. Every morning the crowds are there, watching fair maidens break bottles of champagne on the ghost ships’ bows. Then everybody cheers while the band plays ‘Life on the Ocean Wave,’ the cameras click, and the ships slip gracefully into the water!”

“And every morning it happens all over again?”

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"Every morning."

"Why do you moan about dying, then?"

"Death is a sad thing," the old lady sighed. "For instance, all of you, whom I have learned to love, will probably perish at sea! Alas! You shouldn't have allowed Mr. Perks to go ashore!"

I shuddered in my sleep as I queried, "Perks ashore?"

"Of course," she replied. "He's back on Vostok Island again. He went ashore with Seaside this morning when the captain sent him after birds' eggs. Why, even the rats were trying to jump into the boat!"

"Then we're lost!" I cried in my sleep.

The old lady became sarcastic. "Don't let that trouble you," she murmured. "Fiddler's Green is quite as good a paradise for sailors as is Christening Grooves for ships."

She chuckled to herself.

"One bell! One bell! Ropati *tané!*" came Seaside's senile whine, followed by the scratching on the cabin port.

I jumped from my berth and ran on deck. "Seaside, you old fool!" I shouted. "Is it true that Perks went ashore with you?"

The old sinner grinned and nodded his head in affirmation.

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Twenty-four hours later we were all in the reef boat, watching the *Pirara* plunge to Christening Grooves before we started pulling the hundred and twenty miles back to Vostok Island.



# THE HOUSE

By

*André Maurois*

Translated by Jacques Chambrun

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**F**IVE years ago, when I was so very ill," she said, "I noticed I had the same dream every night. I would walk in the country and, from afar, would see a house, white, low, and long, surrounded by a grove of lindens. At the left of the house a meadow edged with poplars made a pleasing break in the symmetry of the background, and the tops of these trees, which could be seen from a distance, swayed above the lindens.

"In my dream I was drawn to this house and would walk towards it. At the entrance was a gate, painted white. Then I would follow a gracefully curving path, bordered by trees, under which I would find spring flowers, prim-

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## CREEPS BY NIGHT

roses, periwinkles, and anemones, which faded the moment I picked them. Then the path ended, and I was within a few steps of the house.

“In front of it was a large lawn, clipped like English turf, and almost bare, with only one long bed of violet, red, and white flowers, which produced a delightful effect in this green stretch. The house, of white stone, had a huge roof of blue slate. The door, of light colored oak, with carved panels, was at the head of a short flight of steps. I longed to go inside the house, but no one would answer me. I was greatly disappointed; I rang, I shouted, and at last I would awake.

“Such was my dream, and it was repeated month after month with such precision and fidelity that I ended by thinking I certainly must have seen this park and this château in my childhood. However, in my waking state I could not visualize it, and the quest for it became so strong an obsession that one summer, having learned to drive a small car, I decided to spend my vacation on the highways of France, seeking the house of my dream.

“I shall not tell you my travels in detail. I explored Normandy, Touraine, Poitou; but I found nothing. In October I returned to Paris,



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and all winter long I went on dreaming about the white house. Last spring I resumed my drives through the country about Paris. One day, while on a hill near Orleans, I suddenly felt an agreeable shock, that curious emotion one feels when recognizing after long absence people or places one has loved. Although I had never been in this region before, I recognized perfectly the country which lay at my right. The tops of poplars crowned a grove of linden trees. Through their foliage, still sparse, one sensed that there was a house.

“Then I knew that I had found the *château* of my dreams. Quite naturally, I knew that, a hundred yards farther on, a narrow road would cut the highway. I took it. It led me to a white gate, and there was the path I had so often followed. Beneath the trees I admired the soft colored carpet formed by the periwinkles, primroses, and anemones. When I came out from under the arching lindens, I could see the green lawn and the small stoop, at the top of which was the door of light colored oak. I got out of my car, walked rapidly up the steps, and rang the bell. I was very much afraid nobody would answer, but almost immediately a servant appeared. He was a man with a melancholy face,

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very old, wearing a black coat. Upon seeing me he seemed surprised, and looked at me attentively without speaking.

“‘I beg your pardon,’ I said. ‘I am going to make a strange request. I do not know the owners of this house, but I should greatly appreciate their permission to see it.’

“‘The château is to let, Madame,’ he said, ‘I am here to show it.’

“‘To let?’ I said. ‘What an unexpected piece of luck! . . . How is it the owners themselves aren’t living in this fascinating house?’

“‘The owners did live in it, Madame. They left only when the house became haunted.’

“‘Haunted?’ I said. . . . ‘That certainly won’t stop me. I did not know that in the French countryside they still believed in ghosts. . . .’

“‘I shouldn’t believe it either, Madame,’ he said in all seriousness, ‘if I had not myself so often met at night in the park the ghost that drove my masters away.’

“‘What a story!’ I exclaimed, trying to smile, but not without a strange uneasiness.

“‘A story,’ said the old man with an air of reproach, ‘that you, least of all, Madame, should not laugh at, since that ghost was you.’”

# THE KILL

*By*

*Peter Fleming*

---

**I**N the cold waiting-room of a small railway station in the West of England two men were sitting. They had sat there for an hour, and were likely to sit there longer. There was a thick fog outside. Their train was indefinitely delayed.

The waiting-room was a barren and unfriendly place. A naked electric bulb lit it with wan, disdainful efficiency. A notice, "No Smoking," stood on the mantel-piece; when you turned it round, it said "No Smoking" on the other side, too. Printed regulations relating to an outbreak of swine-fever in 1924 were pinned neatly to one wall, almost, but maddeningly not quite, in the center of it. The stove gave out a hot, thick smell, powerful already, but increasing. A pale leprous flush on the black and beaded window

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showed that a light was burning on the platform outside, in the fog. Somewhere, water dripped with infinite reluctance onto corrugated iron.

The two men sat facing each other over the stove on chairs of an unswerving woodenness. Their acquaintance was no older than their vigil. From such talk as they had had, it seemed likely that they were to remain strangers.

The younger of the two resented the lack of contact in their relationship more than the lack of comfort in their surroundings. His attitude toward his fellow beings had but recently undergone a transition from the subjective to the objective. As with many of his class and age, the routine, unrecognized as such, of an expensive education, with the triennial alternative of those delights normal to wealth and gentility, had atrophied many of his curiosities. For the first twenty-odd years of his life he had read humanity in terms of relevance rather than reality, looking on people who held no ordained place in his own existence much as a buck in a park watches visitors walking up the drive: mildly, rather resentfully inquiring—not inquisitive. Now, hot in reaction from this unconscious provincialism, he treated mankind as a museum, gaping conscientiously at each fresh exhibit,

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hunting for the noncumulative evidence of man's complexity with indiscriminate zeal. To each magic circle of individuality he saw himself as a kind of free-lance tangent. He aspired to be a connoisseur of men.

There was undoubtedly something arresting about the specimen before him. Of less than medium height, the stranger had yet that sort of ranging leanness that lends vicarious inches. He wore a long black overcoat, very shabby, and his shoes were covered with mud. His face had no color in it, though the impression it produced was not one of pallor; the skin was of a dark sallow, tinged with gray. The nose was pointed, the jaw sharp and narrow. Deep vertical wrinkles, running down toward it from the high cheek bones, sketched the permanent groundwork of a broader smile than the deep-set, honey-colored eyes seemed likely to authorize. The most striking thing about the face was the incongruity of its frame. On the back of his head the stranger wore a bowler hat with a very narrow brim. No word of such casual implications as a tilt did justice to its angle. It was clamped, by something at least as holy as custom, to the back of his skull, and that thin, questing face confronted the world fiercely from under a black halo of nonchalance.

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The man's whole appearance suggested *difference* rather than aloofness. The unnatural way he wore his hat had the significance of indirect comment, like the antics of a performing animal. It was as if he was part of some older thing, of which homo sapiens in a bowler hat was an expurgated edition. He sat with his shoulders hunched and his hands thrust into his overcoat pockets. The hint of discomfort in his attitude seemed due not so much to the fact that his chair was hard as to the fact that it was a chair.

The young man had found him uncommunicative. The most mobile sympathy, launching consecutive attacks on different fronts, had failed to draw him out. The reserved adequacy of his replies conveyed a rebuff more effectively than sheer surliness. Except to answer him, he did not look at the young man. When he did, his eyes were full of an abstracted amusement. Sometimes he smiled, but for no immediate cause.

Looking back down their hour together, the young man saw a field of endeavor on which frustrated banalities lay thick, like the discards of a routed army. But resolution, curiosity, and the need to kill time all clamored against an admission of defeat.

"If he will not talk," thought the young man,

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“then I will. The sound of my own voice is infinitely preferable to the sound of none. I will tell him what has just happened to me. It is really a most extraordinary story. I will tell it as well as I can, and I shall be very much surprised if its impact on his mind does not shock this man into some form of self-revelation. He is unaccountable without being *outré*, and I am inordinately curious about him.”

Aloud he said, in a brisk and engaging manner: “I think you said you were a hunting man?”

The other raised his quick, honey-colored eyes. They gleamed with inaccessible amusement. Without answering, he lowered them again to contemplate the little beads of light thrown through the iron-work of the stove onto the skirts of his overcoat. Then he spoke. He had a husky voice.

“I came here to hunt,” he agreed.

“In that case,” said the young man, “you will have heard of Lord Fleer’s private pack. Their kennels are not far from here.”

“I know them,” replied the other.

“I have just been staying there,” the young man continued. “Lord Fleer is my uncle.”

The other looked up, smiled and nodded, with the bland inconsequence of a foreigner who does

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not understand what is being said to him. The young man swallowed his impatience.

“Would you,” he continued, using a slightly more peremptory tone than heretofore,—“would you care to hear a new and rather remarkable story about my uncle? Its dénouement is not two days old. It is quite short.”

From the fastness of some hidden joke, those light eyes mocked the necessity of a definite answer. At length: “Yes,” said the stranger, “I would.” The impersonality in his voice might have passed for a parade of sophistication, a reluctance to betray interest. But the eyes hinted that interest was alive elsewhere.

“Very well,” said the young man.

Drawing his chair a little closer to the stove, he began:

As perhaps you know, my uncle, Lord Fleer, leads a retired, though by no means an inactive life. For the last two or three hundred years, the currents of contemporary thought have passed mainly through the hands of men whose gregarious instincts have been constantly awakened and almost invariably indulged. By the standards of the eighteenth century, when Englishmen first became self-conscious about soli-



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tude, my uncle would have been considered unsociable. In the early nineteenth century, those not personally acquainted with him would have thought him romantic. To-day, his attitude toward the sound and fury of modern life is too negative to excite comment as an oddity; yet even now, were he to be involved in any occurrence which could be called disastrous or interpreted as discreditable, the press would pillory him as a "Titled Recluse."

The truth of the matter is, my uncle has discovered the elixir, or, if you prefer it, the opiate, of self-sufficiency. A man of extremely simple tastes, not cursed with overmuch imagination, he sees no reason to cross frontiers of habit which the years have hallowed into rigidity. He lives in his castle (it may be described as commodious rather than comfortable), runs his estate at a slight profit, shoots a little, rides a great deal, and hunts as often as he can. He never sees his neighbors except by accident, thereby leading them to suppose, with sublime but unconscious arrogance, that he must be slightly mad. If he is, he can at least claim to have padded his own cell.

My uncle has never married. As the only son of his only brother, I was brought up in the

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expectation of being his heir. During the war, however, an unforeseen development occurred.

In this national crisis my uncle, who was of course too old for active service, showed a lack of public spirit which earned him locally a good deal of unpopularity. Briefly, he declined to recognize the war, or, if he did recognize it, gave no sign of having done so. He continued to lead his own vigorous but (in the circumstances) rather irrelevant life. Though he found himself at last obliged to recruit his hunt-servants from men of advanced age and uncertain mettle in any crisis of the chase, he contrived to mount them well, and twice a week during the season himself rode two horses to a standstill after the hill-foxes which, as no doubt you know, provide the best sport the Fleer country has to offer.

When the local gentry came and made representations to him, saying that it was time he did something for his country besides destroying its vermin by the most unreliable and expensive method ever devised, my uncle was very sensible. He now saw, he said, that he had been standing too aloof from a struggle of whose progress (since he never read the paper) he had been only indirectly aware. The next day he wrote to London and ordered the *Times* and a Belgian refu-

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gee. It was the least he could do, he said. I think he was right.

The Belgian refugee turned out to be a female, and dumb. Whether one or both of these characteristics had been stipulated for by my uncle, nobody knew. At any rate, she took up her quarters at Fleeer: a heavy, unattractive girl of 25, with a shiny face and small black hairs on the backs of her hands. Her life appeared to be modeled on that of the larger ruminants, except, of course, that the greater part of it took place indoors. She ate a great deal, slept with a will, and had a bath every Sunday, remitting this salubrious custom only when the house-keeper, who enforced it, was away on her holiday. Much of her time she spent sitting on a sofa, on the landing outside her bedroom, with Prescott's "Conquest of Mexico" open on her lap. She read either exceptionally slowly or not at all, for to my knowledge she carried the first volume about with her for eleven years. Hers, I think, was the contemplative type of mind.

The curious, and from my point of view the unfortunate, aspect of my uncle's patriotic gesture was the gradually increasing affection with which he came to regard this unlovable creature. Although, or more probably because, he saw her

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only at meals, when her features were rather more animated than at other times, his attitude toward her passed from the detached to the courteous, and from the courteous to the paternal. At the end of the war there was no question of her return to Belgium, and one day in 1919 I heard with pardonable mortification that my uncle had legally adopted her, and was altering his will in her favor.

Time, however, reconciled me to being disinherited by a being who, between meals, could scarcely be described as sentient. I continued to pay an annual visit to Fleeer, and to ride with my uncle after his big-boned Welsh hounds over the sullen, dark-gray hill country in which—since its possession was no longer assured to me—I now began to see a powerful, though elusive, beauty.

I came down here three days ago, intending to stay for a week. I found my uncle, who is a tall, fine-looking man with a beard, in his usual unassailable good health. The Belgian, as always, gave me the impression of being impervious to disease, to emotion, or indeed to anything short of an act of God. She had been putting on weight since she came to live with my uncle, and was

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now a very considerable figure of a woman, though not, as yet, unwieldy.

It was at dinner, on the evening of my arrival, that I first noticed a certain *malaise* behind my uncle's brusque, laconic manner. There was evidently something on his mind. After dinner he asked me to come into his study. I detected, in the delivery of the invitation, the first hint of embarrassment I had known him to betray.

The walls of the study were hung with maps and the extremities of foxes. The room was littered with bills, catalogues, old gloves, fossils, rat-traps, cartridges, and feathers which had been used to clean his pipe—a stale diversity of jetsam which somehow managed to produce an impression of relevance and continuity, like the débris in an animal's lair. I had never been in the study before.

“Paul,” said my uncle as soon as I had shut the door, “I am very much disturbed.”

I assumed an air of sympathetic inquiry.

“Yesterday,” my uncle went on, “one of my tenants came to see me. He is a decent man, who farms a strip of land outside the park wall, to the northward. He said that he had lost two sheep in a manner for which he was wholly un-

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able to account. He said he thought they had been killed by some wild animal."

My uncle paused. The gravity of his manner was really portentous.

"Dogs?" I suggested, with the slightly patronizing diffidence of one who has probability on his side.

My uncle shook his head judiciously. "This man had often seen sheep which had been killed by dogs. He said that they were always badly torn—nipped about the legs, driven into a corner, worried to death: it was never a clean piece of work. These two sheep had not been killed like that. I went down to see them for myself. Their throats had been torn out. They were not bitten, or nuzzled. They had both died in the open, not in a corner. Whatever did it was an animal more powerful and more cunning than a dog."

I said: "It couldn't have been something that had escaped from a traveling menagerie, I suppose?"

"They don't come into this part of the country," replied my uncle; "there are no fairs."

We were both silent for a moment. It was hard not to show more curiosity than sympathy as I waited on some further revelation to stake out my uncle's claim on the latter emotion. I could

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put no interpretation on those two dead sheep wild enough to account for his evident distress.

He spoke again, but with obvious reluctance.

"Another was killed early this morning," he said in a low voice, "on the Home Farm. In the same way."

For lack of any better comment, I suggested beating the nearby coverts. There might be some—

"We've scoured the woods," interrupted my uncle brusquely.

"And found nothing?"

"Nothing. . . . Except some tracks."

"What sort of tracks?"

My uncle's eyes were suddenly evasive. He turned his head away.

"They were a man's tracks," he said slowly. A log fell over in the fireplace.

Again a silence. The interview appeared to be causing him pain rather than relief. I decided that the situation could lose nothing through the frank expression of my curiosity. Plucking up courage, I asked him roundly what cause he had to be upset? Three sheep, the property of his tenants, had died deaths which, though certainly unusual, were unlikely to remain for long mysterious. Their destroyer, whatever it was, would

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inevitably be caught, killed, or driven away in the course of the next few days. The loss of another sheep or two was the worst he had to fear.

When I had finished, my uncle gave me an anxious, almost a guilty look. I was suddenly aware that he had a confession to make.

"Sit down," he said. "I wish to tell you something."

This is what he told me:

A quarter of a century ago, my uncle had had occasion to engage a new housekeeper. With the blend of fatalism and sloth which is the foundation of the bachelor's attitude to the servant problem, he took on the first applicant. She was a tall, black, slant-eyed woman from the Welsh border, aged about 30. My uncle said nothing about her character, but described her as having "powers." When she had been at Fleer some months, my uncle began to notice her, instead of taking her for granted. She was not averse to being noticed.

One day she came and told my uncle that she was with child by him. He took it calmly enough till he found that she expected him to marry her; or pretended to expect it. Then he flew into a rage, called her a whore, and told her she must leave the house as soon as the child was born.



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Instead of breaking down, or continuing the scene, she began to croon to herself in Welsh, looking at him sideways with a certain amusement. This frightened him. He forbade her to come near him again, had her things moved into an unused wing of the castle, and engaged another housekeeper.

A child was born, and they came and told my uncle that the woman was going to die; she asked for him continually, they said. As much frightened as distressed, he went through passages long unfamiliar to her room. When the woman saw him, she began to gabble in a pre-occupied kind of way, looking at him all the time, as if she were repeating a lesson. Then she stopped, and asked that he should be shown the child.

It was a boy. The midwife, my uncle noticed, handled it with a reluctance almost amounting to disgust.

“That is your heir,” said the dying woman, in a harsh, unstable voice. “I have told him what he is to do. He will be a good son to me, and jealous of his birthright.” And she went off, my uncle said, into a wild yet cogent rigmarole about a curse, embodied in the child, which would fall on any whom he made his heir over the bastard’s

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head. At last her voice trailed away and she fell back, exhausted and staring.

As my uncle turned to go, the midwife whispered to him to look at the child's hands. Gently unclasping the podgy, futile little fists, she showed him that on each hand the third finger was longer than the second. . . .

Here I interrupted. The story had a certain queer force behind it, perhaps from its obvious effect on the teller. My uncle feared and hated the things he was saying.

"What did that mean?" I asked; "—the third finger longer than the second?"

"It took me a long time to discover," replied my uncle. "My own servants, when they saw I did not know, would not tell me. But at last I found out through the doctor, who had it from an old woman in the village. People born with their third finger longer than their second become werewolves. At least" (he made a perfunctory effort at amused indulgence) "that is what the common people here think."

"And what does that—what is that supposed to mean?" I, too, found myself throwing rather hasty sops to skepticism. I was growing strangely credulous.

"A werewolf," said my uncle, dabbling in im-

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probability without self-consciousness, "is a human being who becomes, at intervals, to all intents and purposes a wolf. The transformation—or the supposed transformation—takes place at night. The werewolf kills men and animals and is supposed to drink their blood. Its preference is for men. All through the Middle Ages, down to the seventeenth century, there were innumerable cases (especially in France) of men and women being legally tried for offenses which they had committed as animals. Like the witches, they were rarely acquitted, but, unlike the witches, they seem seldom to have been unjustly condemned." My uncle paused. "I have been reading the old books," he explained. "I wrote to a man in London who is interested in these things when I heard what was believed about the child."

"What became of the child?" I asked.

"The wife of one of my keepers took it in," said my uncle. "She was a stolid woman from the North who, I think, welcomed the opportunity to show what little store she set by the local superstitions. The boy lived with them till he was ten. Then he ran away. I had not heard of him since then till—" my uncle glanced at me almost apologetically—"till yesterday."

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We sat for a moment in silence, looking at the fire. My imagination had betrayed my reason in its full surrender to the story. I had not got it in me to dispel his fears with a parade of sanity. I was a little frightened myself.

"You think it is your son, the werewolf, who is killing the sheep?" I said at length.

"Yes. For a boast: or for a warning: or perhaps out of spite, at a night's hunting wasted."

"Wasted?"

My uncle looked at me with troubled eyes.

"His business is not with sheep," he said uneasily.

For the first time I realized the implications of the Welshwoman's curse. The hunt was up. The quarry was the heir to Fleeer. I was glad to have been disinherited.

"I have told Germaine not to go out after dusk," said my uncle, coming in pat on my train of thought.

The Belgian was called Germaine; her other name was Vorn.

I confess I spent no very tranquil night. My uncle's story had not wholly worked in me that "suspension of disbelief" which some one speaks of as being the prime requisite of good drama.

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But I have a powerful imagination. Neither fatigue nor common sense could quite banish the vision of that metamorphosed malignancy ranging, with design, the black and silver silences outside my window. I found myself listening for the sound of loping footfalls on a frost-baked crust of beech-leaves. . . .

Whether it was in my dream that I heard, once, the sound of howling I do not know. But the next morning I saw, as I dressed, a man walking quickly up the drive. He looked like a shepherd. There was a dog at his heels, trotting with a noticeable lack of assurance. At breakfast my uncle told me that another sheep had been killed, almost under the noses of the watchers. His voice shook a little. Solicitude sat oddly on his features as he looked at Germaine. She was eating porridge, as if for a wager.

After breakfast we decided on a campaign. I will not weary you with the details of its launching and its failure. All day we quartered the woods with thirty men, mounted and on foot. Near the scene of the kill our dogs picked up a scent which they followed for two miles and more, only to lose it on the railway line. But the ground was too hard for tracks, and the men

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said it could only have been a fox or a polecat, so surely and readily did the dogs follow it.

The exercise and the occupation were good for our nerves. But late in the afternoon my uncle grew anxious; twilight was closing in swiftly under a sky heavy with clouds, and we were some distance from Fleer. He gave final instructions for the penning of the sheep by night, and we turned our horses' heads for home.

We approached the castle by the back drive, which was little used: a dank, unholy alley, running the gauntlet of a belt of firs and laurels. Beneath our horses' hoofs flints chinked remotely under a thick carpet of moss. Each consecutive cloud from their nostrils hung with an air of permanency, as if bequeathed to the unmoving air.

We were perhaps three hundred yards from the tall gates leading to the stable yard when both horses stopped dead, simultaneously. Their heads were turned toward the trees on our right, beyond which, I knew, the sweep of the main drive converged on ours.

My uncle gave a short, inarticulate cry in which premonition stood aghast at the foreseen. At the same moment, something howled on the other side of the trees. There was relish, and a

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kind of sobbing laughter, in that hateful sound. It rose and fell luxuriously, and rose and fell again, fouling the night. Then it died away, fawning on satiety in a throaty whimper.

The forces of silence fell unavailingly on its rear; its filthy echoes still went reeling through our heads. We were aware that feet went loping lightly down the iron-hard drive . . . two feet.

My uncle flung himself off his horse and dashed through the trees. I followed. We scrambled down a bank and out into the open. The only figure in sight was motionless.

Germaine Vom lay doubled up in the drive, a solid, black mark against the shifting values of the dusk. We ran forward. . . .

To me she had always been an improbable cipher rather than a real person. I could not help reflecting that she died, as she had lived, in the live-stock tradition. Her throat had been torn out.

The young man leant back in his chair, a little dizzy from talking and from the heat of the stove. The inconvenient realities of the waiting-room, forgotten in his narrative, closed in on him again. He sighed, and smiled rather apologetically at the stranger.

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“It is a wild and improbable story,” he said. “I do not expect you to believe the whole of it. For me, perhaps, the reality of its implications has obscured its almost ludicrous lack of verisimilitude. You see, by the death of the Belgian I am heir to Fleeer.”

The stranger smiled: a slow, but no longer an abstracted smile. His honey-colored eyes were bright. Under his long black overcoat his body seemed to be stretching itself in sensual anticipation. He rose silently to his feet.

The other found a sharp, cold fear drilling into his vitals. Something behind those shining eyes threatened him with appalling immediacy, like a sword at his heart. He was sweating. He dared not move.

The stranger's smile was now a grin, a ravening convulsion of the face. His eyes blazed with a hard and purposeful delight. A thread of saliva dangled from the corner of his mouth.

Very slowly he lifted one hand and removed his bowler hat. Of the fingers crooked about its brim, the young man saw that the third was longer than the second.



# TEN O'CLOCK

*By*

*Philip MacDonald*

---

I MUST make everybody understand, somehow, that I was quite normal that night when I came back from my month with the Vansittarts. Quite absolutely, stone-cold, righteously, smugly normal. Normal with a capital N. I could, you know, have stayed another fortnight. Mary asked me to, and so did Tom, and the others all joined in. I must have been damn popular in that house. It was a good house, and a good party, and I'd another month before the long vac. ended. But I had to come back.

It was Claire who made me come back. Not, you must understand, by writing to me, or telephoning to me, or wirelessly to me, or even telepathing me. . . . She wasn't a girl who would do that. She wasn't one to worry a man. She

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made me come back simply by the very fact of her existence.

London was very hot. A damn sight hotter than it was full. But I didn't care. . . . I'd sent her a telegram that I was coming.

It was rather queer about that telegram. Queer, I mean in a way that will show you how absolutely my very existence was governed by Claire's being in the world. I could have sent that wire, of course, from the Vansittarts' house. Or if I hadn't liked to do that I could have hopped out one evening and sent it from that little pub at the top of the hill. I could have tipped the grocer's boy a shilling to take it to the post office and send it for me. I could have done this, and I could have done that, and I could have done the other. But I didn't. It wasn't that I was frightened that anybody should know about Claire, because she didn't care two hoots in hell what they thought, and I was in that state where outside opinions, outside influence, anything outside that utterly pagan, beatific world in which we two dwelt when we got the chance, didn't matter one solitary jot. I didn't send that wire from the house, because to have done that would have seemed a violation somehow of that wonderful privacy. I meant to send the damn thing

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from the station before the train left, but with the usual perversity of things Vansittart, the Vansittart clocks that day were all about a quarter of an hour slow. As we got to the top of the short steep hill before the little station, we saw the train just coming out of the long tunnel. So Peters whipped up the cob, and we rattled down the slope just in time for me to scramble into the last carriage before the guard's van. . . .

What I did will just show you the state of mind I was in. I got out, actually got out of the train, at Greyne and sent the wire from there. So it cost me an hour's wait for the next train. That'll show you how normal I was. It was one of those damn fool things that only a sane man will do. A madman's got more logic.

I was saying just now that London was hot. It was. Hot as hell in a frying pan. And empty. Empty as Piccadilly Circus is of virgins. I got a taxi at Waterloo, made the old fellow—I'll never forget him, he was exactly like an old crab with long white whiskers—shove down the top, and off we trundled. Empty as the town was, it took that rattling taxi at least half an hour to get to the Temple. By the time I got there I was hot and sticky, and in fiendish temper.

Bascombe, with that seventh sense of his which

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made him the best valet my old father ever had, and certainly the best servant that any young K.C. could wish for, had in his miraculous way anticipated my arrival. He was actually standing under the arch of Dr. Johnson's chambers waiting for the taxi. He took my bags, and paid the driver. He shepherded me upstairs like an old hen getting chickens back into the run. He gave me a drink. Told me that my bath was ready. That he presumed I would like to dine early, and could do so within an hour. That no one had called, rung up, or written that day. That Simpson—my chief clerk—had told him there were seven new briefs. That he had taken the liberty of paying two bills. That he hoped I was feeling refreshed and exhilarated by my holiday. . . .

And that'll show you the sort of fellow Bascombe was. One of the best, if not *the* best.

I had that bath and that drink. In pyjamas and dressing-gown I went to the telephone. Bascombe was just leaving the room, a tray in one hand, an empty tumbler in the other. I said to him:

"Any telephone messages, Bascombe? Special messages?" I didn't look at him. I knew perfectly well that he knew I meant Claire. And he knew perfectly well that I knew. He shook his

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head. "No, sir," he said. "Had there been, sir, I should have taken the liberty of informing you over the wire." A good fellow, Bascombe.

I took up the receiver. As always, when it was Claire to whom I was telephoning, I got the most ridiculous little lump in my throat. A small lump, but in a way a painful lump. One moment it wasn't there, and then it was, so that I couldn't swallow. I told Claire about it once. I tried to make a joke of it because I really thought she'd think it silly. But Claire—and this'll show you what sort of a girl she was—Claire didn't even smile. I said, with rather a painful attempt to laugh it off: "Perhaps you'll realize now how much I love you. When a man gets to a state when a 'phone number'll make him go choky, he's in a pretty bad way."

But as I say, she didn't even smile. She put an arm round my neck and pressed my face into that delicious hollow between shoulder and breast. She said:

"It doesn't need that, old boy. Nothing could make me love you any more. But that *does* all the same. . . ."

I picked up the receiver, and then let it drop; left it until the small lump had gone. I picked it up again, and asked an angry exchange girl

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for the number. I then waited. After what, by the clock, said two minutes, but was really in the time of my mind at least half an hour, I began "depressing the receiver continuously and slowly." I always start like that, and it never works. Always keep it up for about two minutes, and then turn it into a kind of fury of rattling.

But this time nothing was any good. I mean as far as Claire was concerned. She obviously wasn't in the flat. I thought at first that the exchange girl wasn't trying—I always did if they couldn't get Claire—so I got on to the supervisor. But supervisor, who was also supercilious, couldn't get any reply either. So I hung up.

I had had the drink, and the bath, in double quick time. But I dressed in double slow. I got through nearly an hour putting on a dinner jacket, I think. But at last I wandered towards the meal.

I began to make some show of drinking the soup, more to please old Bascombe than anything. But the stuff tasted like ink. I'd just managed to force the last spoonful down my resisting gorge, when the 'phone rang. Bascombe went to it. He came back saying:

"A lady for you, sir." His face was expressionless and his voice meant to be. But there was in

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it a nuance which spelt Claire as plainly as did that lovely word's own six letters. I made a dash for the library. A dash with more speed about it than dignity; but who was I to think of being dignified where Claire was concerned? Dignity's all right when you're all figged out in wig and gown; but otherwise I've not much use for it. . . .

Her voice came to me over that blessed wire like a thin and silver and magic stream of water to a desert-bound fool, almost at the point of drinking his own blood. She said:

"You *are* back, then! . . ."

She hadn't had my wire. She'd been out all day, and even now was telephoning from some restaurant or somewhere. She had, she said, been lonely. She had thought, she said, so lonely had she been, of going that night to a theater by herself. But somehow, she said, she had known, or hoped anyhow, that I was back in town. I said:

"How long will it take you to get back to the flat? *My* wings'll do it in twenty-five minutes."

Her laugh came to me like a disembodied picture of all the fire and sweetness of her. She said: "You'd better clip them then, because I won't be ready for you till ten."

And that was the first time that night that I looked at the little bronze clock which stood at

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the right-hand corner of my writing table. Its hands stood—if I close my eyes I can see them now, not a picture of them, nor the memory of them, but the very damn things themselves—they stood at seven minutes and a half to nine. Not eight, or seven and three-quarters to, but seven and a half to. I said:

“I’ll go there first, and wait for you. And when you do come in . . . well, just you look out, my girl! That’s all.”

She didn’t laugh this time. There came that little deep note into her voice which always sounded when she would say something of importance. She said: “Darling, you mustn’t, mustn’t, mustn’t! Not after you’ve been away such days of months.” And then she did laugh again, only this time it was a little double-noted laugh which, to me, was a symbol of all her magic provocativeness, and, too, of all the tender, mad, glorious, wild redemptions of provocation that afterwards would come. . . . She said, after that laugh:

“Such days of months! This, Ivor, is a *special* night. An extra special command night. Come at ten, my darling; not a moment later, and not half a minute before. I’ll be ready, I promise you. And when it is ten, not a moment later, and



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not half a moment before, you'll believe that ten was worth waiting for."

I heard the little metallic click of finality which so abruptly ends a telephone conversation. Sometimes I wonder whether I thought anything special about that particular click. Whether I did or not I can't remember. Sometimes it seems to me so vastly important that I should. . . . But at other times it doesn't seem to matter whether I do or not. . . .

Anyhow, there I was left, with the dumb black instrument in my hands, and my eyes on the clock.

Bascombe came in. He coughed. That perfectly discreet, what-the-devil-are-you-up-to cough of the perfect manservant. I went back to my dinner. I was sorry that the soup was finished. I know now that it had been very good soup, as good in its way as was the rest of the meal. There is nothing like disappointment turned joy for giving a man zest; zest even for the enjoyment of lesser things than promise holds.

I firmly believe that Bascombe was incapable of listening at doors. And quite firmly I believe that, that night, he knew as well as did I the gist of that telephonic talk of mine. I had just

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finished my peach when there came another of his coughs. This time an excuse-me-sir-but-if-you-are-not-too-busy-I-would-like-to-speak-to-you cough. He said:

“Might I suggest, sir, that there are still two dozen of His Lordship’s port? Only half-bottles, sir, but two dozen.”

“Bascombe,” I said, “make it one dozen and ten.”

He carried the two bottles in, dust and cobwebs and all, as if they had been twin children which all his life he had longed for.

I must say old Ribbleford knew something about wine. It was good port. The best port I’ve ever tasted. I lingered over it a bit. I was trying to kill time, and this seemed a pleasant weapon. I lingered until the clock on the mantelpiece—I believe it was five minutes fast—said ninety-five. And then I took my glass, and I got up, and I went over to that clock. I was damn fool enough to drink its health. I opened the foolish old chap’s case, and moved the hands round until they stood, not at a minute past ten, not at a minute before, but just exactly at ten o’clock. I was rather like that in those days. If I could give myself a symbol I could picture Claire, or the incident or emotion which the sym-

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bol symbolized, picture her so real-ly that often did I stretch out a hand to touch her. . . .

I was very successful then. Quite suddenly, and most damnably acutely, I saw her. . . .

First I saw her as I thought I might see her at ten o'clock—not a minute past or half a minute to, but at ten o'clock exactly. And that, believe me, was a sight so exquisite in its intrinsic beauty and in its ineffable promise that almost I staggered on my feet. . . .

And then I saw Claire as first I had seen her. . . . I didn't want then to think about that. I don't want to write about it. Before she met me there had been no happiness for Claire. That much she told me, and that's all. . . . I didn't want to think about it; not even what my chance passing by had helped her to avert. . . . But I did not mind thinking, as I stood there drinking my port before that mantelpiece, of another time—I think it was three months after that first meeting—when Claire, now clothed as befitted her beauty, and housed as befitted her, or as nearly befitting her as my pocket would allow, first became that mistress who was to be more friend than any wife, more lovely than any mere beauty, more faithful than any simple wench,

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

yet with her lover more gloriously wanton than any whose wantonness is their all.

I've often thought, you know, that I'd like to write a book about Claire. Only all the time I've really known that that book about Claire would never be written because, you see, it would have had to be *such* a book! I don't suppose there's any man living, or that there ever has lived any man who, even with my untold and paradisaic opportunities, could write a book about Claire which would come within even measurable distance of doing justice to its subject. I once, having told her that I was going to write a book about her, sent her a thick octavo volume bound in blue morocco and having a golden key. This book contained four hundred and ninety-nine blank pages. The first, which made up the full five hundred, was the only one written upon. I have headed this page "The Book of Claire," and under this title I had written: "She was most wonderfully her unique self. . . ."

It has often occurred to me to wonder how long I should have gone on that night standing before the clock, which now by the action of my own hands was fast by a full five and twenty minutes, had not Bascombe jerked me out of my

## TEN O'CLOCK

symbolizing reverie; Bascombe and another of his coughs. . . .

I spun round angrily. He stood just inside the door. The light from the low-hung lamp over the dining table showed me only his stout body, and the formal formless clothes of the English manservant.

I could see nothing of his head. He might not have had a head at all. From somewhere near his face, above that island of white shirt-front with the discreet black stud glittering like an ebony island in its whiteness, he said—and his voice had in it an agitation which all his training couldn't conceal:

“Sir . . . you must forgive me, sir . . . but there's a man! A man, sir, at this time of night. He says he must see you, sir. Won't take 'No' for an answer. I told him, sir, that you weren't here. . . . But he's inside, sir, and his back's against the oak, sir. . . .”

Poor old Bascombe's voice, quivering in a most unusual and even eerie mixture of outraged dignity and sense of failure, quivered off into silence. . . .

I was going to say something pretty curt. But before I could open my mouth I saw that the poor old boy was trembling; actually trembling.

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

By the set of his mouth and the curious posture of his short, fat legs I knew that he was making a supreme effort to still this trembling. But the effort wasn't any good.

It gave me a jerk, that did, you know. Bascombe trembling! One might, I thought, as well see St. Paul's at the angle of Pisa's Leaning Tower. . . .

I walked round the table and put my hand on one of his shoulders. Under my palm I could feel the shaking of his soft servant's body. I said: "All right, Bascombe. You sit down. Have a glass of port." I half pushed him into a chair. I believe I remember a small sound, almost a cry of protest, which the dear old thing's servile soul forced his mouth to utter. But I took no notice.

I went out into the hall. I remember that, as I passed through the doorway, I buttoned my open dinner jacket in the way a man buttons his coat when he expects trouble—physical trouble, that is. I'm rather a big fellow still and I was big then, in all conscience. I said, as I stepped out from light to darkness—for, for some obscure reason poor old Bascombe had forgotten to switch on the hall light:

"What the devil's all this about?"

## TEN O'CLOCK

Opposite me the library door stood ajar, and from it there came a shaft of faint yellow light. . . . It slid slimily across the deep gray darkness of the hall. I looked towards the outer door. I couldn't see anything. I expect that was because my eyes weren't yet accustomed to the change, because of course the place wasn't really dark. I mean, not *dark*. . . .

The first thing I saw—actually saw with my eyes—was an interference with that shaft of dusky gold light, from the library. It *had* reached right across the hall to my feet. Suddenly—and there was no sound—it reached only half-way. I stood quite still. . . . Then I began to see. . . . What I saw was a shape. A great, indeterminate, columnar mass. A man all right. But a man so big, and so blurred somehow in outline, that it seemed impossible, at least standing where I was, to take in the whole of him at one glance.

A voice came to me out of the semi-darkness. A very small voice to come from so great a bulk. A small still voice. There was that about this voice which I find very hard to describe. I think I can best get at it when I say that it was a dead voice. It said:

“Are you Mr. Lorimer, sir?”

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

It was funny about that voice. I don't know the exact words which had been on the tip of my tongue before he spoke, but they were to the effect that if he didn't get out in rather less time than it takes a cat to wag its tail once, I'd *put* him out. But after he'd spoken the idea seemed to leave me. I said that Mr. Lorimer I was. I also said, I believe: "And what do *you* want?"

He still stood blocking that light from the library door, and I tried putting my hand out and feeling along the wall for the hall switch. But either I was standing an inch or two further to the left than I thought, or else the switch had moved. . . . That sounds damn silly. But perhaps it isn't. . . . I mean, you never know. . . .

The still small voice said: "What I want, sir, is advice."

That doesn't look much written down, does it? It's the sort of ordinary remark that any ordinary man might make at any ordinary time. But, believe me, that isn't how it sounded. Whether it was in that voice—though the voice was toneless—or in the words—though the words were senseless—or in the man—though the man was indeterminate—wherever it was, there was urgency there. A compelling urgency. An urgency which it would have been impossible to deny.



## TEN O'CLOCK

I said: "All right. I can give you a few minutes. Come in here!" And I pointed towards the library door. . . .

Only the queer thing was that my lips, though they moved, didn't make any sound. And my hand that I had meant to point stayed where it was, bunched into a fist in my right-hand trouser pocket. . . .

A sort of shiver went through me, standing there in that dark hall. . . . Mind you, I don't know what it was about. For I wasn't frightened. I wasn't even particularly interested. It was as if something else, somebody outside me, had taken charge and had said, not to the internal me, but to the external husk of me: "Look out! Look out! Look out!"

I swallowed hard and had another try. This time I got the words out. They sounded all right. I believe I smiled to myself as I heard them. Smiled inside, I mean, because my face was too stiff to smile with.

I pointed at the library. The full lights weren't on there. There was only the reading lamp on the table. It made a sort of dull gold pool, a clearly defined pool which yet sent out beyond its defined circle a luminous, rather febrile light which cut a dim path to the door, and had been

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the origin of that splash across the hall which my visitor's bulk had swallowed up.

I went in ahead of him. I remember stiffening my shoulders. Not only squaring them, but actually giving them that straining tension which tries to make shoulder-blades meet; that movement which a man makes semi-consciously when he is walking away from an enemy, and doesn't look round though he knows there may be danger. . . .

It wasn't, you know, that I felt any kind of physical danger. . . . Mental danger, then, you say? . . . No. Not a feeling of that, either. That's my difficulty in putting all this down. I had impressions—my God, I had impressions!—but what they were impressions of I couldn't tell you to save my life. . . .

I dropped into my chair and waved my visitor to one that faced me across the table. I could see him better now. He was, all of him, well within the pool of light from the reading lamp, because now I had turned the shade so that the little lake it had spilt over the table left me in shadow, and flooded the chair in which my visitor sat.

I say "in which he sat," but that's wrong. Because he didn't sit *in* it. He balanced himself, in that precarious way the lower classes have when

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sitting in the presence of those they term their superiors, *on* the chair's front edge. Right forward he was, and, looking at him, I got a silly idea.

So silly that it made me feel for a moment very much as if I was going actually to vomit. The fellow had a great oilskin round him. Oilskin of that patchy, dirty, greeny-yellow which comes to oilskin which has seen many years use upon hard and dangerous seas. And this coat, as he sat there perched like some damned great ugly bird, hung down right to the floor in front of him. It didn't only just touch the floor; it coiled up on the floor, and made him look as if, perhaps, he hadn't any legs. . . . As if, perhaps, there was of him only that great bulk of his torso and head and arms balanced by some devilish means on the chair's edge. . . .

I had to make quite an effort to pull myself together after that silly idea. But I did it all right, and as the light wasn't on me, but on him, I don't suppose he could have seen.

I was waiting for him to begin talking. But he seemed to be thinking the same about me. I wanted to look at the time. Wanted to badly. But, d'you know, it cost me what seemed like a full minute to take my eyes off that shapeless

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bulk, and turn them to the clock. When I did, I saw that if I gave this visitor more than three minutes I should be late. I shouldn't be at the flat at ten exactly—nor should I be there at half a minute past—not half a minute to. I should be there at a quarter past. . . . And had I not been told that it was at ten o'clock I must come?

So I tried to make myself a bit brusque. I said: "Come on, man. If you want to speak to me, speak up! I can give you"—I looked across at the clock—"exactly nine and a half minutes."

He spoke then, damn him! He said: "*You are* Mr. Lorimer, sir? The K.C. sir? The Mr. Lorimer who was actin' for the fellow in that red bicycle case last twelve-month?"

I nodded. I didn't want to draw things out any longer by answering when it wasn't necessary. Really, I was waiting for him to get on with it. I tried hard, really very hard, to take in some accurate impression of him. But d'you know, I couldn't. He was utterly and most determinedly indeterminate. He was a great mass. A shapeless mass with no outlines which man's eye could take in; no salient points. No incongruity, no congruity. . . .

I don't mean, you know, that he was fluid or anything crazy like that. I mean that, somehow,

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I didn't seem to be able to make my eyes take him in. . . .

And then, just as this was beginning to annoy me, with that half-fearful, half-petty annoyance which the inexplicable often gives a man, he began to speak again. As he began to speak he lifted one of his great arms with a semi-apologetic gesture. It had been hanging down beside the chair, almost out of my sight, but now it came into sight. And it had grasped in a massive indeterminate hand, a little wicker basket. It was the size and shape of those baskets in which old women carry cats; but in that hand it seemed much smaller than this. He stood it upon his knee. Every now and then, with his breathing, it creaked a little. He said, in that small voice which ought to have been incongruous; that small voice which ought to have been ridiculous; that small voice which was neither:

"It's advice I want, sir. And your advice." He paused for ten seconds which seemed to me quite ten minutes. He went on then: "It's like this, sir. I've killed some'un, sir. . . ."

D'you know, I very nearly laughed. So nearly that I had to get out my handkerchief and turn what would have been a laugh into an unconvincing cough. . . . I nearly laughed because—I

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hope I can make this part clear—because this statement seemed, after all the extraordinary impressiveness (*impressiveness* is the only word to use) of his entry, his coming, his—well, everything about him—this statement seemed, I say, to have about it a queer, almost bathetic humor. It was a most flagrant anti-climax.

He seemed, now, again to be waiting for me to say something. He sat there in silence. I was silent too. I couldn't think of anything to say. First, there was that feeling of anti-climactics. Secondly—well, what *do* you say when a man comes in and says he's just killed another?

I could hear the little clock on the desk, its hand pointing nearly to the hour of ten. I could hear, with his breathing, the creak of the lid of his quaint little basket, as, with his breathing, the basket moved.

The silence went on. It seemed, to my mind, rather as if there was a contest of some sort going on between us. A contest in which the loser was the man who first said anything. If that *was* it, I won all right. Because he suddenly leaned forward, the basket giving a loud creak as his chest came against it. And he said, fixing his eyes on me—to this day I can't tell what color or size

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those eyes were; I can't even tell you where they were in his face—he said:

“So, as I've done this, sir, I'm what they call a murd'rer. And I want, sir, to know what's the best I can do. . . . I'm . . . 'm sort of out of touch, as you might say, sir. . . .”

He told me then that he was a seaman. He had been away, he said, for seven years. This seven years wasn't his fault. He was one of the three survivors of the wreck of that unfortunate ship, the *Hesperides*. Five years it had taken him to get home again. . . . When he *had* got home. . . .

But now, with the whispered tick-tock of the little clock drumming into my head the minutes of Claire that I was losing, I grew brutal. And this despite that still, terrible, most gripping urgency in the small, dead voice.

I cut him short in mid-sentence. I said: “For God's sake stop that damned basket squeaking!”

You know, that thing had got on my nerves, all the time creak, creak, creak. It seemed so even, so systematic, that just when I thought I was going to get into the swing of the thing and be able to anticipate the next creak, the time would change. I'd never meant those words to leave me. I was sorry for the way in which I said them.

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He stopped talking again, and looked at me. Again I tried to place his eyes but couldn't. He said: "I'm sorry, sir." He set the basket down on the floor beside him, but then changed his mind. He lifted it, and with a humbly apologetic gesture which rippled oddly over his bulk, set it upon the edge of my table. . . .

I got up. I said: "You've come to ask for my advice, and my advice is this—and it's good advice; you can take it or leave it. Don't tell me any more. Go at once to the police. Tell *them* the whole thing. They'll put you inside, but that's got to come. Do it now. Get it over. When they've got you inside they'll ask you who you want to see. Then you can give them my name. They'll notify me. I'll come and see you. I'll do what I can."

A funny thing happened then. Odd, isn't it, how I keep laughing. It *was* funny—damned funny. . . . Funny in the sense of being queer and unexpected. You'd have thought when I'd said that, and like that, for I was pretty short, that he'd have gone on talking. Wouldn't you, now? But did he? No, he did *not*. He surged to his feet. Yes, *surged* is right. . . . He said:

"Thank'ee, sir."

And he turned, and rolled towards the door.



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Again my eyes, which wanted to go to the clock, didn't go to the clock. They went instead to the shapeless, enormous, indefinable back. They went with that enveloping oilskin which was wrapped about it like some foul, greeny-yellow mist, went with it until that back had got to the door; until it had passed through the door, and had gone out of actual sight; until it was down the stairs and out into the courtyard, and under Dr. Johnson's arch, and into Middle Temple Lane, and out into the Strand, and from the Strand. . . .

That's a bloody silly thing to say. But that's what my eyes did. . . .

And then, with a jerk, I got myself back to myself. I howled for Bascombe. I howled for a hat and a coat. And a taxi. Loudest of all for a taxi.

I looked at the clock, and the clock said ten twenty-five.

By the time I got there I should have lost an hour out of my life. An hour with Claire; a whole hour with the mind of Claire, that beautiful, tender, caressing, sword-like mind; a whole hour with the white body of Claire, with that glorious strong, lovely, maddening body. . . . An hour! Sixty jeweled minutes which never could I have

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again, not even should Claire and I live to be as old as the world itself. . . .

And I should have hurt Claire—not that she wouldn't understand—but have hurt her with a hurt that would last for at least one hour; and to hurt Claire for the seventeenth part of a half second was to stab myself through with flaming, jagged spears of pain. . . .

I heard Bascombe running. I heard him go out, leaving the oak open. I heard his old feet flapping down the stone stairs, and out again onto the cobbles of the court. He was getting my taxi. Good old Bascombe!

I went over to the door and struggled into a coat, flipped open my hat and rammed it on. . . . And then I suddenly felt—I'm sorry I can't describe this any better—a summons. A command from behind me. It was one of those sensations totally inexplicable but nevertheless impossible of obtaining anything else but obedience from him who feels it.

I turned. I saw my writing table, and the pool which the reading lamp made in the dusk of the low room. And on my writing table I saw the telephone. Beside it was that wicker basket. . . . I thought: Damn; he's forgotten the thing!

I went over to the table. . . . Of course, I

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must phone Claire and explain. That would save her, when she knew how quickly I would be with her, perhaps ten minutes of her hurt.

I lifted the receiver and got that damn silly lumpiness in my throat. . . . But this time it was worse, so that I dropped that phone as if it had been red hot. Actually dropped it, I mean, so that it fell sprawled on the carpet. Sprawled, with its black, stupid mouth uttering silly cackles. . . .

I was going to stoop to pick it up. I believe I began to stoop. Began to—but I didn't finish. . . .

Suddenly I had a vision. A vision which, even to me who all my life have seen things with interior as well as exterior eyes, was so clear as to make me think that this sight was actual physical sight. I saw, in front of me, so near that with half out-stretched arms I could have caught her, Claire. Claire as most of all I loved to see her. Claire as Claire. With nothing to hide her loveliness but those softly rippling waves of that black, black hair, which never would I let her shear. . . .

A great pain came to me then. A sharp, stabbing pain, which sent its hot spears through me. I gasped. I can hear even now that strange not-

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me sound with which that gasp rang, in those ears which were mine. . . .

And then she wasn't there. Not for either inward or outward eyes to see. But her presence remained; so surely, so certainly, that one half of my brain seemed to know that could I but turn in some direction impossible to man, so, surely, would I see what before I had seen.

And then, as suddenly as he had left me, that dire and terrible God whose name is *Common-sense* returned to me. I stooped again to the fallen telephone. I picked it up and set it upon the table. I replaced the receiver, and cut short the mundane cackling. I knew that speak into its black mouth I couldn't. Better go to her quickly—quickly—*quickly*. . . .

I turned, and the skirt of the light coat into which I had crammed myself flew up with the speed of my turning. Flew up and brushed against the basket. . . .

It was only the ghost of a creaking sound, so slight as to appear disembodied. But in my present state, it was enough. An oath tore itself out of my throat. Tore itself savagely, and savagely fled into the dimness of the room's corners. I struck out behind me with my left hand. I

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can still feel, on the left side of my fist, the impression of the wicker. . . .

With a squeaking, rattling, bumping little thud, the thing slid off the table and fell to the carpet.

I meant to go on to the door. I wanted to go on to the door. But I turned round. The basket was lying open. I could see that upon the farther side from me the lid had come away from the rest. A force which was not mine moved my legs. I took a step forward. I stood looking down.

And I looked at the face of Claire. . . . The face of Claire—and the head of Claire and the hair of Claire. The hair of Claire lay spread out in a dusky, misty, glistening cloud upon my gray carpet. And from the head of Claire there came small and dull and sluggish dark streaks to stain my gray carpet. . . .



# THE SPIDER

By

*Hanns Heinz Ewers*

Translated by Walter F. Kohn

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W

HEN Richard Bracquemont, medical student, decided to move into Room No. 7 of the little Hotel Stevens at 6 Rue Alfred Stevens, three people had already hanged themselves from the window-sash of the room on three successive Fridays.

The first was a Swiss traveling salesman. His body was not discovered until Saturday evening; but the physician established the fact that death must have come between five and six o'clock on Friday afternoon. The body hung suspended from a strong hook which had been driven into the window-sash, and which ordinarily served for hanging clothes. The window was closed, and the dead man had used the curtain cord as a rope. Since the window was rather

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low, his legs dragged on the ground almost to his knees. The suicide must consequently have exercised considerable will power in carrying out his intention. It was further established that he was married and the father of four children; that he unquestionably had an adequate and steady income; and that he was of a cheerful disposition, and well contented in life. Neither a will nor anything in writing that might give a clue to the cause of the suicide was found; nor had he ever intimated leanings toward suicide to any of his friends or acquaintances.

The second case was not very different. The actor Karl Krause, who was employed at the nearby Cirqué Medrano as a lightning bicycle artiste, engaged Room No. 7 two days after the first suicide. When he failed to appear at the performance the following Friday evening, the manager of the theater sent an usher to the little hotel. The usher found the actor hanged from the window-sash in the unlocked room, in identically the same circumstances that had attended the suicide of the Swiss traveling salesman. This second suicide seemed no less puzzling than the first: the actor was popular, drew a very large salary, was only twenty-five years old, and seemed to enjoy life to the utmost. Again, noth-



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ing was left in writing, nor were there any other clues that might help solve the mystery. The actor was survived only by an aged mother, to whom he used to send three hundred marks for her support promptly on the first of each month.

For Madame Dubonnet, who owned the cheap little hotel, and whose clientele was made up almost exclusively of the actors of the nearby vaudevilles of Montmartre, this second suicide had very distressing consequences. Already several of her guests had moved out, and other regular customers had failed to come back. She appealed to the Commissioner of the IXth Ward, whom she knew well, and he promised to do everything in his power to help her. So he not only pushed his investigation of reasons for the suicides with considerable zeal, but he also placed at her disposal a police officer who took up his residence in the mysterious room.

It was the policeman Charles-Maria Chaumié who had volunteered his services in solving the mystery. An old "Marousin" who had been a marine infantryman for eleven years, this sergeant had guarded many a lonely post in Tonkin and Annam single-handed, and had greeted many an uninvited deputation of river pirates, sneaking like cats through the jungle darkness,

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with a refreshing shot from his rifle. Consequently he felt himself well heeled to meet the "ghosts" of which the Rue Stevens gossiped. He moved into the room on Sunday evening and went contentedly to sleep after doing high justice to the food and drink Madame Dubonnet set before him.

Every morning and evening Chaumié paid a brief visit to the police station to make his reports. During the first few days his reports confined themselves to the statement that he had not noticed even the slightest thing out of the ordinary. On Wednesday evening, however, he announced that he believed he had found a clue. When pressed for details he begged to be allowed to say nothing for the present: he said he was not certain that the thing he thought he had discovered necessarily had any bearing on the two suicides. And he was afraid of being ridiculed in case it should all turn out to be a mistake. On Thursday evening he seemed to be even more uncertain, although somewhat graver; but again he had nothing to report. On Friday morning he seemed quite excited: half seriously and half in jest he ventured the statement that the window of the room certainly had a remarkable power of attraction. Nevertheless he still clung to the

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theory that that fact had nothing whatever to do with the suicides, and that he would only be laughed at if he told more. That evening he failed to come to the police station: they found him hanged from the hook on the window-sash.

Even in this case the circumstances, down to the minutest detail, were again the same as they had been in the other cases: the legs dragged on the floor, and the curtain cord had been used as a rope. The window was closed, and the door had not been locked; death had evidently come at about six o'clock in the afternoon. The dead man's mouth was wide open and his tongue hung out.

As a consequence of this third suicide in Room No. 7, all the guests left the Hotel Stevens that same day, with the exception of the German high school teacher in Room No. 16, who took advantage of this opportunity to have his rent reduced one-third. It was small consolation for Madame Dubonnet to have Mary Garden, the famous star of the Opéra Comique, drive by in her Renault a few days later and stop to buy the red curtain cord for a price she beat down to two hundred francs. Of course she had two reasons for buying it: in the first place, it would bring

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luck; and in the second—well, it would get into the newspapers.

If these things had happened in summer, say in July or August, Madame Dubonnet might have got three times as much for her curtain cord; at that time of the year the newspapers would certainly have filled their columns with the case for weeks. But at an uneasy time of the year, with elections, disorders in the Balkans, a bank failure in New York, a visit of the English King and Queen—well, where could the newspapers find room for a mere murder case? The result was that the affair in the Rue Alfred Stevens got less attention than it deserved, and such notices of it as appeared in the newspapers were concise and brief, and confined themselves practically to repetitions of the police reports, without exaggerations.

These reports furnished the only basis for what little knowledge of the affair the medical student Richard Bracquemont had. He knew nothing of one other little detail that seemed so inconsequential that neither the Commissioner nor any of the other witnesses had mentioned it to the reporters. Only afterwards, after the adventure the medical student had in the room, was this detail remembered. It was this: when the

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police took the body of Sergeant Charles-Maria Chaumié down from the window-sash, a large black spider crawled out of the mouth of the dead man. The porter flicked it away with his finger, crying: "Ugh! Another such ugly beast!" In the course of the subsequent autopsy—that is, the one held later for Bracquemont—the porter told that when they had taken down the corpse of the Swiss traveling salesman, a similar spider had been seen crawling on his shoulder—But of this Richard Bracquemont knew nothing.

He did not take up his lodging in the room until two weeks after the last suicide, on a Sunday. What he experienced there he entered very conscientiously in a diary.

\* \* \* \* \*

### THE DIARY OF RICHARD BRACQUEMONT, MEDICAL STUDENT

*Monday, February 28*

I moved in here last night. I unpacked my two suitcases, put a few things in order, and went to bed. I slept superbly: the clock was just striking nine when a knock at the door awakened me. It was the landlady, who brought me my breakfast herself. She is evidently quite solicitous about

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me, judging from the eggs, the ham, and the splendid coffee she brought me. I washed and dressed, and then watched the porter make up my room. I smoked my pipe while he worked.

So, here I am. I know right well that this business is dangerous, but I know too that my fortune is made if I solve the mystery. And if Paris was once worth a mass—one could hardly buy it that cheaply nowadays—it might be worth risking my little life for it. Here is my chance, and I intend to make the most of it.

At that there were plenty of others who saw this chance. No less than twenty-seven people tried, some through the police, some through the landlady, to get the room. Three of them were women. So there were enough rivals—probably all poor devils like myself.

But I got it! Why? Oh, I was probably the only one who could offer a “solution” to the police. A neat solution! Of course it was a bluff.

These entries are of course intended for the police, too. And it amuses me considerably to tell these gentlemen right at the outset that it was all a trick on my part. If the Commissioner is sensible he will say, “Hm! Just because I knew he was tricking us, I had all the more confidence in him!” As far as that is concerned, I don’t care

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what he says afterward: now I'm here. And it seems to me a good omen to have begun my work by bluffing the police so thoroughly.

Of course I first made my application to Madame Dubonnet, but she sent me to the police station. I lounged about the station every day for a week, only to be told that my application "was being given consideration" and to be asked always to come again next day. Most of my rivals had long since thrown up the sponge; they probably found some better way to spend their time than waiting for hour after hour in the musty police court. But it seems the Commissioner was by this time quite irritated by my perseverance. Finally he told me point blank that my coming back would be quite useless. He was very grateful to me as well as to all the other volunteers for our good intentions, but the police could not use the assistance of "dilettante laymen." Useless I had some carefully worked out plan of procedure. . . .

So I told him that I had exactly that kind of a plan. Of course I had no such thing and couldn't have explained a word of it. But I told him that I could tell him about my plan—which was good, although dangerous, and which might possibly come to the same conclusion as the in-

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vestigation of the police sergeant—only in case he promised me on his word of honor that he was ready to carry it out. He thanked me for it, but regretted that he had no time for such things. But I saw that I was getting the upper hand when he asked me whether I couldn't at least give him some intimation of what I planned doing.

And I gave it to him. I told him the most glorious nonsense, of which I myself hadn't had the least notion even a second beforehand. I don't know even now how I came by this unusual inspiration so opportunely. I told him that among all the hours of the week there was one that had a secret and strange significance. That was the hour in which Christ left His grave to go down to hell: the sixth hour of the afternoon of the last day of the Jewish week. And he might take into consideration, I went on, that it was exactly in this hour, between five and six o'clock on Friday afternoon, in which all three of the suicides had been committed. For the present I could not tell him more, but I might refer him to the Book of Revelations according to St. John.

The Commissioner put on a wise expression, as if he had understood it all, thanked me, and asked me to come back in the evening. I came



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back to his office promptly at the appointed time; I saw a copy of the New Testament lying in front of him on the table. In the meantime I had done just what he had: I had read the Book of Revelations through and—had not understood a word of it. Perhaps the Commissioner was more intelligent than I was; at least he told me that he understood what I was driving at in spite of my very vague hints. And that he was ready to grant my request and to aid me in every possible way.

I must admit that he has actually been of very considerable assistance. He has made arrangements with the landlady under which I am to enjoy all the comforts and facilities of the hotel free of charge. He has given me an exceptionally fine revolver and a police pipe. The policemen on duty have orders to go through the little Rue Alfred Stevens as often as possible, and to come up to the room at a given signal. But the main thing is his installation of a desk telephone that connects directly with the police station. Since the station is only four minutes' walk from the hotel, I am thus enabled to have all the help I want immediately. With all this, I can't understand what there is to be afraid of. . . .

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

*Tuesday, March 1*

Nothing has happened, neither yesterday nor today. Madame Dubonnet brought me a new curtain cord from another room—Heaven knows she has enough of them vacant. For that matter, she seems to take every possible opportunity to come to my room; every time she comes she brings me something. I have again had all the details of the suicides told me, but have discovered nothing new. As far as the causes of the suicides were concerned, she had her own opinions. As for the actor, she thought he had had an unhappy love affair; when he had been her guest the year before, he had been visited frequently by a young woman who had not come at all this year. She admittedly couldn't quite make out why the Swiss gentleman had decided to commit suicide, but of course one couldn't know everything. But there was no doubt that the police sergeant had committed suicide only to spite her.

I must confess these explanations of Madame Dubonnet's are rather inadequate. But I let her gabble on; at least she helps break up my boredom.

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*Thursday, March 3*

Still nothing. The Commissioner rings me up several times a day and I tell him that everything is going splendidly. Evidently this information doesn't quite satisfy him. I have taken out my medical books and begun to work. In this way I am at least getting something out of my voluntary confinement.

*Friday, March 4, 2 P. M.*

I had an excellent luncheon. Madame Dubonnet brought a half bottle of champagne along with it. It was the kind of dinner you get before your execution. She already regards me as being three-fourths dead. Before she left me she wept and begged me to go with her. Apparently she is afraid I might also hang myself "just to spite her."

I have examined the new curtain cord in considerable detail. So I am to hang myself with that? Well, I can't say that I feel much like doing it. The cord is raw and hard, and it would make a good slipknot only with difficulty—one would have to be pretty powerfully determined to emulate the example of the other three suicides in order to make a success of the job. But now I'm sitting at the table, the telephone at my

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left, the revolver at my right. I certainly have no fear—but I am curious.

*6 P. M.*

Nothing happened—I almost write it with regret. The crucial hour came and went, and was just like all the others. Frankly I can't deny that sometimes I felt a certain urge to go to the window—oh, yes, but for other reasons! The Commissioner called me up at least ten times between five and six. He was just as impatient as I was. But Madame Dubonnet is satisfied: some one has lived for a week in No. 7 without hanging himself. Miraculous!

*Monday, March 7*

I am now convinced that I shall discover nothing; and I am inclined to think that the suicides of my predecessors were a matter of pure coincidence. I have asked the Commissioner to go over all the evidence in all three cases again, for I am convinced that eventually a solution of the mystery will be found. But as far as I am concerned, I intend to stay here as long as possible. I probably will not conquer Paris, but in the meantime I'm living here free and am already gaining considerably in health and weight. On top of it all

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I'm studying a great deal, and I notice I am rushing through in great style. And of course there is another reason that keeps me here.

*Wednesday, March 9*

I've progressed another step. Clarimonde—

Oh, but I haven't said a word about Clarimonde yet. Well, she is—my third reason for staying here. And it would have been for her sake that I would gladly have gone to the window in that fateful hour—but certainly not to hang myself. Clarimonde—but why do I call her that? I haven't the least idea as to what her name might be; but it seems to me as if I simply *must* call her Clarimonde. And I'd like to bet that some day I'll find out that that is really her name.

I already noticed Clarimonde the first few days I was here. She lives on the other side of this very narrow street, and her window is directly opposite mine. She sits there back of her curtains. And let me also say that she noticed me before I was aware of her, and that she visibly manifested an interest in me. No wonder—every one on the street knows that I am here, and knows why, too. Madame Dubonnet saw to that.

I am in no way the kind of person who falls

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in love. My relations with women have always been very slight. When one comes to Paris from Verdun to study medicine and hardly has enough money to have a decent meal once every three days, one has other things besides love to worry about. I haven't much experience, and I probably began this affair pretty stupidly. Anyhow, it's quite satisfactory as it stands.

At first it never occurred to me to establish communications with my strange neighbor. I simply decided that since I was here to make observations, and that I probably had nothing real to investigate anyhow, I might as well observe my neighbor while I was at it. After all, one can't pore over one's books all day long. So I have come to the conclusion that, judging from appearances, Clarimonde lives all alone in her little apartment. She has three windows, but she sits only at the one directly opposite mine. She sits there and spins, spins at a little old-fashioned distaff. I once saw such a distaff at my grandmother's, but even my grandmother never used it. It was merely an heirloom left her by some great-aunt or other. I didn't know that they were still in use. For that matter, Clarimonde's distaff is a very tiny, fine thing, white, and apparently made of ivory. The threads she spins

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must be infinitely fine. She sits behind her curtains all day long and works incessantly, stopping only when it gets dark. Of course it gets dark very early these foggy days. In this narrow street the loveliest twilight comes about five o'clock. I have never seen a light in her room.

How does she look?—Well, I really don't know. She wears her black hair in wavy curls, and is rather pale. Her nose is small and narrow, and her nostrils quiver. Her lips are pale, too, and it seems as if her little teeth might be pointed, like those of a beast of prey. Her eyelids throw long shadows; but when she opens them her large, dark eyes are full of light. Yet I seem to sense rather than know all this. It is difficult to identify anything clearly back of those curtains.

One thing further: she always wears a black, closely-buttoned dress, with large purple dots. And she always wears long black gloves, probably to protect her hands while working. It looks strange to see her narrow black fingers quickly taking and drawing the threads, seemingly almost through each other—really almost like the wriggling of an insect's legs.

Our relations with each other? Oh, they are really quite superficial. And yet it seems as if

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they were truly much deeper. It began by her looking over to my window, and my looking over to hers. She noticed me, and I her. And then I evidently must have pleased her, because one day when I looked at her she smiled. And of course I did, too. That went on for several days, and we smiled at each other more and more. Then I decided almost every hour that I would greet her; I don't know exactly what it is that keeps me from carrying out my decision.

I have finally done it, this afternoon. And Clarimonde returned the greeting. Of course the greeting was ever so slight, but nevertheless I distinctly saw her nod.

*Thursday, March 10*

Last night I sat up late over my books. I can't truthfully say that I studied a great deal: I spent my time building air castles and dreaming about Clarimonde. I slept very lightly, but very late into the morning.

When I stepped up to the window, Clarimonde was sitting at hers. I greeted her and she nodded. She smiled, and looked at me for a long time.

I wanted to work, but couldn't seem to find the necessary peace of mind. I sat at the window



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and stared at her. Then I suddenly noticed that she, too, folded her hands in her lap. I pulled at the cord of the white curtain and—practically at the same instant—she did the same. We both smiled and looked at one another.

I believe we must have sat like that for an hour.

Then she began spinning again.

*Saturday, March 12*

These days pass swiftly. I eat and drink, and sit down to work. I light my pipe and bend over my books. But I don't read a word. Of course I always make the attempt, but I know beforehand that it won't do any good. Then I go to the window. I greet Clarimonde, and she returns my greeting. We smile and gaze at one another—for hours.

Yesterday afternoon at six I felt a little uneasy. Darkness settled very early, and I felt a certain nameless fear. I sat at my desk and waited. I felt an almost unconquerable urge to go to the window—certainly not to hang myself, but to look at Clarimonde. I jumped up and stood back of the curtain. It seemed as if I had never seen her so clearly, although it was already quite dark. She was spinning, but her eyes looked

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across at me. I felt a strange comfort and a very subtle fear.

The telephone rang. I was furious at the silly old Commissioner for interrupting my dreams with his stupid questions.

This morning he came to visit me, along with Madame Dubonnet. She seems to be satisfied enough with my activities: she takes sufficient consolation from the fact that I have managed to *live* in Room No. 7 for two whole weeks. But the Commissioner wants results besides. I confided to him that I had made some secret observations, and that I was tracking down a very strange clue. The old fool believed all I told him. In any event I can still stay here for weeks—and that's all I care about. Not on account of Madame Dubonnet's cooking and cellar—God, how soon one becomes indifferent to that when one always has enough to eat!—only because of the window, which she hates and fears, and which I love so dearly: this window that reveals Clarimonde to me.

When I light the lamp I no longer see her. I have strained my eyes trying to see whether she goes out, but I have never seen her set foot on the street. I have a comfortable easy chair and a green lampshade whose glow warmly suffuses

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me. The Commissioner has sent me a large package of tobacco. I have never smoked such good tobacco. And yet I cannot do any work. I read two or three pages, and when I have finished I realize that I haven't understood a word of their contents. My eyes grasp the significance of the letters, but my brain refuses to supply the connotations. Queer! Just as if my brain bore the legend: "No Admittance." Just as if it refused to admit any thought other than the one: Clarimonde. . . .

Finally I push my books aside, lean far back in my chair, and dream.

*Sunday, March 13*

This morning I witnessed a little tragedy. I was walking up and down in the corridor while the porter made up my room. In front of the little court window there is a spider web hanging, with a fat garden spider sitting in the middle of it. Madame Dubonnet refuses to let it be swept away: spiders bring luck, and Heaven knows she has had enough bad luck in her house. Presently I saw another much smaller male spider cautiously running around the edge of the web. Tentatively he ventured down one of the precarious threads toward the middle; but the moment

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the female moved, he hastily withdrew. He ran around to another end of the web and tried again to approach her. Finally the powerful female spider in the center of the web seemed to look upon his suit with favor, and stopped moving. The male spider pulled at one of the threads of the web—first lightly, then so vigorously that the whole web quivered. But the object of his attention remained immovable. Then he approached her very quickly, but carefully. The female spider received him quietly and let him embrace her delicately while she retained the utmost passivity. Motionless the two of them hung for several minutes in the center of the large web.

Then I saw how the male spider slowly freed himself, one leg after another. It seemed as if he wanted to retreat quietly, leaving his companion alone in her dream of love. Suddenly he let her go entirely and ran out of the web as fast as he could. But at the same instant the female seemed to awaken to a wild rush of activity, and she chased rapidly after him. The weak male spider let himself down by a thread, but the female followed immediately. Both of them fell to the window-sill; and, gathering all his energies, the male spider tried to run away. But it was too late. The female spider seized him in her powerful

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grip, carried him back up into the net, and set him down squarely in the middle of it. And this same place that had just been a bed for passionate desire now became the scene of something quite different. The lover kicked in vain, stretched his weak legs out again and again, and tried to disentangle himself from this wild embrace. But the female would not let him go. In a few minutes she had spun him in so completely that he could not move a single member. Then she thrust her sharp pincers into his body and sucked out the young blood of her lover in deep draughts. I even saw how she finally let go of the pitiful, unrecognizable little lump—legs, skin and threads—and threw it contemptuously out of the net.

So that's what love is like among these creatures! Well, I can be glad I'm not a young spider.

*Monday, March 14*

I no longer so much as glance at my books. Only at the window do I pass all my days. And I keep on sitting there even after it gets dark. Then she is no longer there; but I close my eyes and see her anyhow. . . .

Well, this diary has become quite different

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than I thought it would be. It tells about Madame Dubonnet and the Commissioner, about spiders and about Clarimonde. But not a word about the discovery I had hoped to make.—Well, is it my fault?

*Tuesday, March 15*

Clarimonde and I have discovered a strange new game, and we play it all day long. I greet her, and immediately she returns the greeting. Then I drum with my fingers on my window-pane. She has hardly had time to see it before she begins drumming on hers. I wink at her, and she winks at me. I move my lips as if I were talking to her and she follows suit. Then I brush the hair back from my temples, and immediately her hand is at the side of her forehead. Truly child's play. And we both laugh at it. That is, she really doesn't laugh: it's only a quiet, passive smile she has, just as I suppose mine must be.

For that matter all this isn't nearly as senseless as it must seem. It isn't imitation at all: I think we would both tire of that very quickly. There must be a certain telepathy or thought transference involved in it. For Clarimonde repeats my motions in the smallest conceivable fraction of a second. She hardly has time to see

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what I am doing before she does the same thing. Sometimes it even seems to me that her action is simultaneous with mine. That is what entices me: always doing something new and unpremeditated. And it's astounding to see her doing the same thing at the same time. Sometimes I try to catch her. I make a great many motions in quick succession, and then repeat them again; and then I do them a third time. Finally I repeat them for the fourth time, but change their order, introduce some new motion, or leave out one of the old ones. It's like children playing Follow the Leader. It's really remarkable that Clarimonde never makes a single mistake, although I sometimes change the motions so rapidly that she hardly has time to memorize each one.

That is how I spend my days. But I never feel for a second that I'm squandering my time on something nonsensical. On the contrary, it seems as if nothing I had ever done were more important.

*Wednesday, March 16*

Isn't it queer that I have never thought seriously about putting my relations with Clarimonde on a more sensible basis than that of these hour-consuming games? I thought about it last

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night. I could simply take my hat and coat and go down two flights of stairs, five steps across the street, and then up two other flights of stairs. On her door there is a little coat-of-arms engraved with her name: "Clarimonde . . ." Clarimonde what? I don't know what; but the name Clarimonde is certainly there. Then I could knock, and then . . .

That far I can imagine everything perfectly, down to the last move I might make. But for the life of me I can't picture what would happen after that. The door would open—I can conceive that. But I would remain standing in front of it and looking into her room, into a darkness—a darkness so utter that not a solitary thing could be distinguished in it. She would not come—nothing would come; as a matter of fact, there would be nothing there. Only the black impenetrable darkness.

Sometimes it seems as if there could be no other Clarimonde than the one I play with at my window. I can't picture what this woman would look like if she wore a hat, or even some dress other than her black one with the large purple dots; I can't even conceive her without her gloves. If I could see her on the street, or even in some restaurant, eating, drinking, talk-



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ing—well, I really have to laugh: the thing seems so utterly inconceivable.

Sometimes I ask myself whether I love her. I can't answer that question entirely, because I have never been in love. But if the feeling I bear toward Clarimonde is really—well, love—then love is certainly very, very different than I saw it among my acquaintances or learned about it in novels.

It is becoming quite difficult to define my emotions. In fact, it is becoming difficult even to think about anything at all that has no bearing on Clarimonde—or rather, on our game. For there is truly no denying it: it's really the game that preoccupies me—nothing else. And that's the thing I understand least of all.

Clarimonde—well, yes, I feel attracted to her. But mingled with the attraction there is another feeling—almost like a sense of fear. Fear? No, it isn't fear either: it is more of a temerity, a certain inarticulate alarm or apprehension before something I cannot define. And it is just this apprehension that has some strange compulsion, something curiously passionate that keeps me at a distance from her and at the same time draws me constantly nearer to her. It is as if I were going around her in a wide circle, came a little

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nearer at one place, withdrew again, went on, approached her again at another point and again retreated rapidly. Until finally—of that I am absolutely certain—I *must* go to her.

Clarimonde is sitting at her window and spinning. Threads—long, thin, infinitely fine threads. She seems to be making some fabric—I don't know just what it is to be. And I can't understand how she can make the network without tangling or tearing the delicate fabric. There are wonderful patterns in her work—patterns full of fabulous monsters and curious grotesques.

For that matter—but what am I writing? The fact of the matter is that I can't even see what it is she is spinning: the threads are much too fine. And yet I can't help feeling that her work must be exactly as I see it—when I close my eyes. Exactly. A huge network peopled with many creatures—fabulous monsters, and curious grotesques . . .

*Thursday, March 17*

I find myself in a strange state of agitation. I no longer talk to any one; I hardly even say good morning to Madame Dubonnet or the porter. I hardly take time to eat; I only want to sit at the

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window and play with her. It's an exacting game. Truly it is.

And I have a premonition that to-morrow something must happen.

*Friday, March 18*

Yes, yes. Something must happen to-day . . . I tell myself—oh, yes, I talk aloud, just to hear my own voice—that it is just for *that* that I am here. But the worst of it is that I am afraid. And this fear that what has happened to my predecessors in this room may also happen to me is curiously mingled with my other fear—the fear of Clarimonde. I can hardly keep them apart.

I am afraid. I would like to scream.

*6 P. M.*

Let me put down a few words quickly, and then get into my hat and coat.

By the time five o'clock came, my strength was gone. Oh, I know now for certain that it must have something to do with this sixth hour of the next to the last day of the week. . . . Now I can no longer laugh at the fraud with which I duped the Commissioner. I sat on my chair and stayed there only by exerting my will power to the utmost. But this thing drew me, almost pulled me

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to the window. I had to play with Clarimonde—and then again there rose that terrible fear of the window. I saw them hanging there—the Swiss traveling salesman, a large fellow with a thick neck and a gray stubble beard. And the lanky acrobat and the stocky, powerful police sergeant. I saw all three of them, one after another and then all three together, hanging from the same hook with open mouths and with tongues lolling far out. And then I saw myself among them.

Oh, this fear! I felt I was as much afraid of the window-sash and the terrible hook as I was of Clarimonde. May she forgive me for it, but that's the truth: in my ignominious fear I always confused her image with that of the three who hanged there, dragging their legs heavily on the floor.

But the truth is that I never felt for an instant any desire or inclination to hang myself: I wasn't even afraid I would do it. No—I was afraid only of the window itself—and of Clarimonde—and of something terrible, something uncertain and unpredictable that was now to come. I had the pathetic irresistible longing to get up and go to the window. And I *had* to do it. . . .

Then the telephone rang. I grabbed the re-

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ceiver and before I could hear a word I myself cried into the mouthpiece: "Come! Come at once!"

It was just as if my unearthly yell had instantly chased all the shadows into the farthest cracks of the floor. I became composed immediately. I wiped the sweat from my forehead and drank a glass of water. Then I considered what I ought to tell the Commissioner when he came. Finally I went to the window, greeted Clarimonde, and smiled.

And Clarimonde greeted me and smiled.

Five minutes later the Commissioner was here. I told him that I had finally struck the root of the whole affair; if he would only refrain from questioning me to-day, I would certainly be able to make some remarkable disclosures in the very near future. The queer part of it was that while I was lying to him I was at the same time fully convinced in my own mind that I was telling the truth. And I still feel that that is the truth—against my better judgment.

He probably noticed the unusual condition of my temper, especially when I apologized for screaming into the telephone and tried to explain—and failed to find any plausible reason

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for my agitation. He suggested very amiably that I need not take undue consideration of him: he was always at my service—that was his duty. He would rather make a dozen useless trips over here than to let me wait for him once when I really needed him. Then he invited me to go out with him to-night, suggesting that that might help distract me—it wasn't a good thing to be alone all the time. I have accepted his invitation, although I think it will be difficult to go out: I don't like to leave this room.

*Saturday, March 19*

We went to the Gaieté Rochechouart, to the Cigale, and to the Lune Rousse. The Commissioner was right: it was a good thing for me to go out and breathe another atmosphere. At first I felt rather uncomfortable, as if I were doing something wrong, as if I were a deserter, running away from our flag. But by and by that feeling died; we drank a good deal, laughed, and joked.

When I went to the window this morning, I seemed to read a reproach in Clarimonde's look. But perhaps I only imagined it: how could she know that I had gone out last night? For that

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matter, it seemed to last for only a moment; then she smiled again.

We played all day long.

*Sunday, March 20*

To-day I can only repeat: we played all day long.

*Monday, March 21*

We played all day long.

*Tuesday, March 22*

Yes, and to-day we did the same. Nothing, absolutely nothing else. Sometimes I ask myself why we do it. What is it all for? Or, what do I really want, to what can it all lead? But I never answer my own question. For it's certain that I want nothing other than just this. Come what may, that which is coming is exactly what I long for.

We have been talking to one another these last few days, of course not with any spoken word. Sometimes we moved our lips, at other times we only looked at one another. But we understood each other perfectly.

I was right: Clarimonde reproached me for

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running away last Friday. But I begged her forgiveness and told her I realized that it had been very unwise and horrid of me. She forgave me and I promised her never again to leave the window. And we kissed each other, pressing our lips against the panes for a long, long time.

*Wednesday, March 23*

I know now that I love her. It must be love—I feel it tingling in every fiber of my being. It may be that with other people love is different. But is there any one among a thousand millions who has a head, an ear, a hand that is like any one else's? Every one is different, so it is quite conceivable that our love is unlike that of other people. I know that my love is very singular. But does that make it any less beautiful? I am almost happy in this love.

If only there would not be this fear! Sometimes it falls asleep. Then I forget it. But only for a few minutes. Then it wakes up again and will not let me go. It seems to me like a poor little mouse fighting against a huge and beautiful snake, trying to free itself from its overpowering embrace. Just wait, you poor foolish little fear, soon our love will devour you!



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*Thursday, March 24*

I have made a discovery: I don't play with Clarimonde—*she plays with me.*

It happened like this.

Last night, as usual, I thought about our game. I wrote down five intricate movements with which I wanted to surprise her to-day. I gave every motion a number. I practiced them so as to be able to execute them as quickly as possible, first in order, and then backwards. Then only the even numbers and then the odd, and then only the first and last parts of each of the five motions. It was very laborious, but it gave me great satisfaction because it brought me nearer to Clarimonde, even though I could not see her. I practiced in this way for hours, and finally they went like clock-work.

This morning I went to the window. We greeted each other, and the game began. Forward, backward—it was incredible to see how quickly she understood me, and how instantaneously she repeated all the things I did.

Then there was a knock at my door. It was the porter, bringing me my boots. I took them; but when I was going back to the window my glance fell on the sheet of paper on which I had

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recorded the order of the movements. *And I saw that I had not executed a single one of these movements.*

I almost reeled. I grabbed the back of the easy chair and let myself down into it. I couldn't believe it. I read the sheet again and again. But it was true: of all the motions I had made at the window, not a single one was mine.

And again I was aware of a door opening somewhere far away—her door. I was standing before it and looking in . . . nothing, nothing—only an empty darkness. Then I knew that if I went out, I would be saved; and I realized that now I *could* go. Nevertheless I did not go. That was because I was distinctly aware of one feeling: that I held the secret of the mystery. Held it tightly in both hands.—Paris—I was going to conquer Paris!

For a moment Paris was stronger than Clarimonde.

Oh, I've dropped all thought of it now. Now I am aware only of my love, and in the midst of it this quiet, passionate fear.

But in that instant I felt suddenly strong. I read through the details of my first movement once more and impressed it firmly in my memory. Then I went back to the window.

## THE SPIDER

And I took exact notice of what I did: *not a single motion I executed was among those I had set out to do.*

Then I decided to run my index finger along my nose. But instead I kissed the window-pane. I wanted to drum on the window-sill, but ran my hand through my hair instead. So it was true: Clarimonde did not imitate the things I did: on the contrary, I repeated the things she indicated. And I did it so quickly, with such lightning rapidity, that I followed her motions in the same second, so that even now it seems as if I were the one who exerted the will power to do these things.

So it is I—I who was so proud of the fact that I had determined her mode of thought—I was the one who was being so completely influenced. Only, her influence is so soft, so gentle that it seems as if nothing on earth could be so soothing.

I made other experiments. I put both my hands in my pockets and resolved firmly not to move them; then I looked across at her. I noticed how she lifted her hand and smiled, and gently chided me with her index finger. I refused to budge. I felt my right hand wanting to take itself out of my pocket, but I dug my fingers deep into the pocket lining. Then slowly,

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

after several minutes, my fingers relaxed, my hand came out of the pocket, and I lifted my arm. And I chided her with my index finger and smiled. It seemed as if it were really not I that was doing all this, but some stranger whom I watched from a distance. No, no—that wasn't the way of it. I, I was the one who did it—and some stranger was watching me. It was the stranger—that other me—who was so strong, who wanted to solve this mystery with some great discovery. But that was no longer I.

I—oh, what do I care about the discovery? I am only here to do her bidding, the bidding of my Clarimonde, whom I love with such tender fear.

*Friday, March 25*

I have cut the telephone wire. I can no longer stand being perpetually bothered by the silly old Commissioner, least of all when the fateful hour is at hand. . . .

God, why am I writing all this? Not a word of it is true. It seems as if some one else were guiding my pen.

But I do—I do want to set down here what actually happens. It is costing me a tremendous

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effort. But I want to do it. If only for the last time to do—what I really want to do.

I cut the telephone wire . . . oh . . .

*Because I had to.* . . . There, I finally got it out! Because I had to, I had to!

We stood at the window this morning and played. Our game has changed a little since yesterday. She goes through some motions and I defend myself as long as possible. Until finally I have to surrender, powerless to do anything but her bidding. And I can scarcely tell what a wonderful sense of exaltation and joy it gives me to be conquered by her will, to make this surrender.

We played. And then suddenly she got up and went back into her room. It was so dark that I couldn't see her; she seemed to disappear into the darkness. But she came back very shortly, carrying in her hands a desk telephone just like mine. Smiling, she set it down on the windowsill, took a knife, cut the wire, and carried it back again.

I defended myself for about a quarter of an hour. My fear was greater than ever, but that made my slow surrender all the more delectable. And I finally brought my telephone to the window, cut the wire, and set it back on the table.

That is how it happened.

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

I am sitting at the table. I have had my tea, and the porter has just taken the dishes out. I asked him what time it was—it seems my watch isn't keeping time. It's five fifteen . . . five fifteen . . .

I know that if I look up now Clarimonde will be doing something or other. Doing something or other that I will have to do too.

I look up anyhow. She is standing there and smiling. Well . . . if I could only tear my eyes away from her! . . . now she is going to the curtain. She is taking the cord off—it is red, just like the one on my window. She is tying a knot—a slipknot. She is hanging the cord up on the hook in the window-sash.

She is sitting down and smiling.

. . . No, this is no longer a thing one can call fear, this thing I am experiencing. It is a maddening, choking terror—but nevertheless I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. It is a compulsion of an unheard of nature and power, yet so subtly sensual in its inescapable ferocity.

Of course I could rush up to the window and do exactly what she wants me to do. But I am waiting, struggling, and defending myself. I

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feel this uncanny thing getting stronger every minute . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

So, here I am, still sitting here. I ran quickly to the window and did the thing she wanted me to do: I took the curtain cord, tied a slipknot in it, and hung it from the hook . . .

And now I am not going to look up any more. I am going to stay here and look only at this sheet of paper. For I know now what she would do if I looked up again—now in the sixth hour of the next to the last day of the week. If I see her, I shall have to do her bidding . . . I shall have to . . .

I shall refuse to look at her.

But I am suddenly laughing—loudly. No, I'm not laughing—it is something laughing within me. I know why, too: it's because of this "I will not . . ."

I don't want to, and yet I know certainly that I must. I must look at her . . . must, must do it . . . and then—the rest.

I am only waiting to stretch out the torment. Yes, that is it . . . For these breathless sufferings are my most rapturous transports. I am writing . . . quickly, quickly, so that I can remain sitting here longer . . . in order to stretch

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out these seconds of torture, which carry the ecstasy of love into infinity . . .

More . . . longer . . .

Again this fear, again! I know that I shall look at her, that I shall get up, that I shall hang myself. *But it isn't that that I fear.* Oh, no—that is sweet, that is beautiful.

But there is something else . . . something else associated with it—*something that will happen afterward.* I don't know what it will be—but it is coming, it is certainly coming, certainly . . . certainly. For the joy of my torments is so infinitely great—oh, I feel it is so great that something terrible must follow it.

Only I must not think. . . .

Let me write something, anything, no matter what. Only quickly, without thinking . . .

My name—Richard Bracquemont, Richard Bracquemont, Richard—oh, I can't go any farther—Richard Bracquemont—Richard Bracquemont—now—now—I must look at her . . . Richard Bracquemont—I must—no—no, more—more . . . Richard . . . Richard Bracque—

\* \* \* \* \*

The Commissioner of the IXth Ward, after failing repeatedly to get a reply to his telephone calls, came to the Hotel Stevens at five minutes



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after six. In Room No. 7 he found the body of the student Richard Bracquemont hanging from the window-sash, in exactly the same position as that of his three predecessors.

Only his face had a different expression; it was distorted in a horrible fear, and his eyes, wide open, seemed to be pushing themselves out of their sockets. His lips were drawn apart, but his powerful teeth were firmly and desperately clenched.

And glued between them, bitten and crushed to pieces, there was a large black spider, with curious purple dots.

On the table lay the medical student's diary. The Commissioner read it and went immediately to the house across the street. There he discovered that the second apartment had been vacant and unoccupied for months and months . . .



# BREAKDOWN

*By*

*L. A. G. Strong*

---

**H** E HAD planned it all exactly. Muriel was going up to town on the 1:52, and he was supposed to be going with her. They were to be independent of each other till half past four, when he was to meet her for tea at the Chadwickes'; and they were coming home by the 6:05.

He told Muriel to start for the station ahead of him, as he might be kept late at the office. It was a necessary part of the plan that he should not arrive on the platform till a minute or so before the train started. He had taken his ticket beforehand, at the office in the town where they knew him well, and where they entered up the number of each ticket in a ledger.

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## CREEPS BY NIGHT

The train was in when he reached the incline leading up to the station, and the big engine, shining in the sunlight, let off important clouds of steam and uttered every now and again a raucous, sustained snort. Maurice pulled his hat over his forehead, took a platform ticket, and hurried through the barrier.

As he expected, Muriel was in the very front of the train. She gave him the inexpressive smile which she kept for public occasions. "I've kept a seat for you," she said, with a hint of emphasis in her even tones, suggesting that the keeping had caused some resentment to the other occupants of the compartment. She would get her own way; but she was perhaps just as glad that he had turned up to prove that she was keeping the seat legitimately.

"Thanks." He stood fumbling at the pockets of his overcoat, which was hanging open. Then he looked up at her with a well-feigned dismay. "Oh, Lord, I've nothing to read. I must get a magazine. I've just time."

"Maurice—surely? The train's just off."

"That's all right. I'll get in farther down."

And he ran down the platform without waiting for further argument. General Waiting Room—this would do. He dived in, huddling

## BREAKDOWN

down into his coat, and a minute later had the satisfaction of seeing the train slide past the yellow windows. Almost at once a little crowded local came bustling in, and it was easy to join the crowd and give up his platform ticket at the barrier; the collector was too busy to do anything but watch the hands that offered him tickets.

That was all right. He had a clear hour now. He would go back by a different bus route, which landed him half a mile from home, and get into the flat by the back way. There was a bare chance that some one he knew might see him, but it was very unlikely; and, after all, one had to take some chances. He had lots of time to dodge back by the most improbable little streets.

What was that tag out of "Patience"?—"You can't love two women at once," or something to that effect; to which the fool answered "Can't you though!" Maurice's face twitched. He had had ample opportunity lately to consider that proposition in all its aspects. You might be able to be in love with two women at once, but you couldn't carry on the business as if each was the only one and cope with a full day's work as well. Since Merrick had been ill, he'd had more than he could manage at the office. Scarcely time for Muriel, let alone Vera. Oh, hell, hell, hell! It all

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ran round in his head like Catherine wheels—great aching circles of fire. He had all he could do not to stand still and stamp on the pavement and cry out in sheer nervous exasperation at the burden of it. Steady, though! He must keep a clear head for what lay before him.

The problem was going to be solved all right—the Gordian knot cut. He gave a quick little snigger, tucking his chin down inside his coat collar. That was more like it, perhaps. *Something* had to be done. To go on as he had been was simply to court a breakdown. And he knew what a nervous breakdown meant. Collapse, mental and physical. He had had as much as he could stand. Just about as much as he could stand.

No one knew him on this bus route. Strange in what narrow channels the streams of a community ran! A small town, fifty miles from London; yet by simply getting into a bus that traveled almost parallel to his own, he was plunged at once into a quite unknown stream—people whom he had never seen, and who had never seen him.

It was twenty to three when he walked up the back stairs to the flat. He had put on his shoes with the crêpe soles. No one heard him, no one saw him. The door opened noiselessly, and he slipped inside. He went into the little sitting-

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room, lit the fire, dragged the sofa forward from the wall, and drew the one curtain that faced a neighboring house. Then he went into the bedroom and returned with an eiderdown and a rug, which he threw over the end of the sofa. Back again to the bedroom, he pulled out the bottom drawer of the wardrobe, groped in the back of it, and took out a long, narrow box. There was something inside it, wrapped in tissue paper. He felt it to make sure it was there, and put the box on the bed. Lastly, he took out his pocketbook and looked into a pocket in which there were two or three little slips of paper. Satisfied, he laid it on the bed beside the box.

Now there was nothing to do but wait.

### II

It was just seven minutes past three when his strained ears heard a light step, followed by a rattle of the letter box. Instantly he was at the door, and the tall, graceful figure stood silhouetted, smiling, before him. It was a picture he had seen very often in the last six months. The same actions and sensations were precisely repeated: her soft "Hullo, Maurice, dear," the shutting of the door, the darkness, her cool fragrance as he penned her in against the wall

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

and took her in his arms. Then, with a trembling hand, he opened the sitting-room door and she stepped in front of him, taking in everything with a glance, pulling off her fur gloves, making some trivial remark, still smiling.

What was it that made her so damnably attractive? She wasn't beautiful, with her snub nose and her wide, strong mouth. Her hands and feet were rather large, too. Yet she had some indefinable neatness, an elasticity, a buoyance in her step, the carriage of her head, something provocative and yet endearing, which made people call her "little Vera"—though in fact she stood well above the average height. It was an outside which expressed uncommonly well her vivid, careless personality.

Her marriage had not been a success, far less of a success than his with Muriel. She admitted that. Yet she made light of it, never complained, appeared philosophically to take it as all in the game. "Oh, I thought that was part of a wife's job," she would say, and smile at him with innocent eyes as he scolded her for not resisting some fresh enormity.

He watched her now as she took off her scarf. She always stood in front of the fire to do this, and put it with her gloves on the corner of the



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mantelpiece. Then he would take her hand and lead her to the sofa, sitting her down beside him.

“Well, little Vera.”

“Well?”

“How are you?”

“I’m all right. How are you?”—all prelude to the first kiss upon her cool, steady lips that always smelled of lavender.

Well—since he could no longer bear the strain of both, it had to be Vera or Muriel. Vera was an exotic, a temptress; Muriel was his own, his companion, till death them did part. Death?

Good Lord, they were right about hell being here, on earth. Even the good times were paid for by wretched fits of nerves and depression. The notes, the furtive appointments, the necessity of finding out where Muriel was going to be—he wasn’t made for carrying on an intrigue. What seemed to exhilarate some men only tormented him. The sense of treachery . . . absurd, illogical, oh, he knew that. He had reasoned it all out long ago, yet he somehow found it hard to meet Muriel’s eyes.

The affair wasn’t really serious, in the sense that it would have been if Vera and Muriel were rivals. There was no question as to which of the two he chose to live with. In that, the fundamen-

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tal sense, he was perfectly loyal. Yet, telling himself all this savagely over and over again, he felt guilty, and, latterly, distraught. It had become unbearable—and he would end it to-day. Even with the familiar cool touch of Vera's lips upon his own, he was resolute.

Gently he loosed himself from her. "Just a minute," he whispered, and made a little gesture toward the next room. She held him with her eyes, looking up into his, strangely earnest.

"Don't be long," she said.

He tried to speak, swallowed angrily, and answered "I won't" more loudly than he had intended; then went out and closed the door.

Once in the bedroom, he pulled off his coat and waistcoat, rolled his sleeves up above the elbow, and took from the back of the wardrobe a faded old yellow bathgown, all stained and smeared. He had used it to protect his clothes while making up a troupe for amateur theatricals, and the front of it was a mass of grease paint. No one would be likely to find it, stuffed away in the bottom of the old trunk whence he had that morning taken it out.

He stood for a moment in front of the long glass, looking at himself. A pale, serious face looked back at him. The brown eyes confessed

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nothing of their intent. They looked the same as usual. Turning away with a sigh, he picked up the box and the pocketbook. This was a time to act on impulse. He did not know when the chance would come.

He went back to the living-room, softly closing the door behind him. Vera was sitting on the floor in front of the fire, holding out her hands to it. The red, steady glow fell softly upon her bare arms and shoulders. She did not look up as he came in.

Moving very softly, he came behind her. With demoralizing suddenness, his heart began to beat frantically, like the crying of a bird upon which a cat has pounced. Steadying himself, he put the pocketbook on the sofa and opened the box.

Vera half turned her head at the rustle of the tissue paper; then she leaned forward and laid it sideways on her knees, with a little contented sound. She was waiting for his arms to steal round her and draw her back to him.

Very quietly he put the box down beside the pocketbook. In his right hand was a long Indian knife with carved blade and handle, and his left hand moved across to join the other upon the long hilt. He took a step forward.

“Mau—rice.” It was a slow, lazy whisper. She

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would rouse and turn round. His chance would be gone.

Fixing his gaze on a point just inside her left shoulder blade, he grasped the knife in both hands, raised it, and literally fell upon her with all his might. The blow came straight down; her body in its doubled-up position resisted the impact, and Maurice fell sprawling to one side. Picking himself up like lightning, he sprang away. The knife had gone in almost up to the hilt.

For a moment she remained doubled forward, her head on her knees. Then the head craned back: she tried to straighten herself up, stuck—like a hen he had seen, crushed by a car and desperately trying to rise—and fell suddenly sideways. She kicked, thrusting one foot against the stove, but seeming not to feel it; her hands reached out, clutched the sofa, and she began to drag herself up. Her head was thrown back, the forehead a mask of wrinkles, her eyes staring, fixed on the wall, seemingly quite unconscious of him; and through her open mouth she made a queer indrawn sound, “Aw-w-aw-aw-a-w—”

As he watched, she pulled the top part of her body upright, leaning backward over the knife—farther, farther back—her lips drawn away

## BREAKDOWN

from the gums; she coughed, and went all limp, rolling over with her face toward him on the carpet. Her eyebrows rose once or twice as if in surprise. Then her face became sleepy and peaceful as a child's. She uttered a little, gentle sigh, and was still.

It was a full minute before he dared to move. His hands were shaking uncontrollably in reaction from the effort. Holding them out in front of him, he steadied them somewhat by an effort of his will. Then, going as near to the window as he dared, he scanned the front of his bathgown. Not a speck of blood on it! One long streak on his right forearm—that was all. Get rid of that first.

He went swiftly into the bathroom, and in a few seconds that splash of evidence was gone. Now then, he must get a move on. Hesitating with his hand on the door, he had the idea that when he went in he might find her sitting in front of the fire, as before. That would be disconcerting. A mistress with nine lives, eh? It was almost a relief to find her lying as he had left her. A dark stain was slowly spreading over the carpet.

He crossed to the sofa, opened the pocketbook, and took out three little slips of thin paper. If they were going to get him, if he had to swing

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for it, he'd give the public something to talk about. This was to be no commonplace murder. Each of the little slips had typed on it a bizarre and meaningless sentence. "So Time goes by, whitening old city churches," read one. That would get them guessing. Another was a text from the Epistle to the Romans, about Sodom and Gomorrah. They might think he was mad, but they would notice them all right. Headlines. . . . He might even get off as a madman.

The slips were typed—not on his own typewriter—not by any means. He had tapped them out under pretense of trying a machine for sale in a stationer's in the town, while the assistant was getting him a particular size of envelope he knew was kept upstairs. The paper might be identified, though he had kept the type clear of the watermark; but what if it were? Hundreds of people used it.

Rolling up the slips, he bent over the body, inserted one in each nostril, and the third in the mouth, between the teeth and underlip. That was all. Now to get away.

### III

Ten minutes later he was hurrying to the terminus of the bus which had brought him out.

## BREAKDOWN

By good luck, he had hardly any wait at all. The winter dusk was already beginning to fall; it was a foggy, dull day.

Seated in the bus, he reviewed his plans. He had a ticket, which the clerk at the office would swear to giving him, and the number of which was checked up in the ledger. This ticket he was now going to use. The 3:57 would get him up to town too late to join Muriel at the Chadwicks', but in plenty of time to meet her on the 6:05 and explain that his business had kept him. That business was a weak spot, of course, but he would put in one or two quick calls which would show he had at any rate been in town that afternoon. Muriel would be ready to say he had come up by the 1:52, and his ticket would be found among the day's collection at Paddington. (He only hoped they didn't check them after each train!)

At this end no one knew where Vera had gone. She lived only a few hundred yards away, and she had come straight to the flat, so that her maids would be witness that she had not left home till three. Actually, she was dead within ten minutes of entering the flat, and he was away in less than ten minutes after that. Flimsy though his alibi might be, this point at least was in his

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

favor. When on earth, his counsel would ask, could he have found time to commit the murder? The 3:57 got to town by a quarter to five. From then on he would contrive to be seen by several people. The prosecution would not have matters all their own way, even if they did run him in. Unless some one had seen him coming in or going out of the flat, that is to say; and he was pretty sure nobody had.

“Have you ever seen this in your husband’s possession, madam?” (Holding up the knife.)

“Never,” Muriel would reply, with perfect truth; for he had bought it in an old curiosity shop in Devonport a long time ago, and it had been stowed away somewhere among his things ever since.

Or perhaps they didn’t examine a wife when her husband was on trial? He couldn’t remember.

When they reached the station, he wrapped a scarf round his mouth and scuffled through the barrier with his head down, enduring as best he might the agonizing minutes before the train arrived. It was not long, but it might have been a whole year of his life. At last the train came. Getting into a carriage crowded with country folk, he at once disappeared behind a newspaper, and, by a queer trick of the mind which was a



## BREAKDOWN

complete surprise to him, managed to forget what had happened for whole minutes together. He wasn't well, that's what was at the back of it all. He wasn't well; the strain had been taking it out of him frightfully.

The moment the train reached Paddington, he jumped into a taxi and made for an address in Notting Hill, to a friend of his who had a small, one-man office, and who could therefore be relied upon to be in. Dismissing the taxi at the corner of the street, Maurice went quickly along and mounted the rickety stair. "Come in and wait—back in five minutes," said a confiding message on a card pinned to the door. Excellent. He went in and picked up a paper. It took him two or three minutes to realize that it was the same paper he had been reading in the train.

A reckless plunging on the stair suddenly announced the owner's return, and a second later he entered, apologetic and breathless. "Oh, it's you! I say, I'm awfully sorry. I was kept much longer than I expected. You haven't been waiting long, I hope?"

Maurice glanced at the clock. "Not long. Only about twenty minutes."

"I say, I *am* sorry. I'd no idea they'd—"

"Oh, that's all right. I've nothing particular to

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

do. Fact is," he forced a smile, "I was just wondering if I'd drawn another blank."

"Another?"

"Yes. I went all the way out to see Baines, and he wasn't in." That was good. It had only just come into his head. Baines *was* out that afternoon; he happened to know, indirectly. He was covering up his tracks in grand style.

"Oh, well," his host stretched out a cigarette case, "I'm glad you found me, anyway."

### IV

It hardly seemed worth while making other calls, after that, but he looked in at two places on his way back to the station. Then there seemed to be a queer gap in his memory, for the next thing he knew, he found himself walking up the platform carrying some of Muriel's parcels, with no clear idea of how he got there.

"Here," she said, halting beside a door, "this will do."

Going back. Home. Up from the station, up the stairs, in the door. . . .

He turned his mind away, rubbed a clear patch on the window, and tried to look out. The lights of a factory whirled derisively by. He shuddered and steeled himself to endure the long, barren,

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eternal journey. Why did people nod their heads in a train, the fools? His head was nodding too, he supposed. How idiotic they must all look—nodding in fatuous, rhythmic assent to some unheard proposition; replying in the only way they could devise to the unanswerable question—why did they exist at all? The whole thing was symbolic of humanity answering the major riddles—obstinate, endless assertion instead of reason.

And other questions. Was she dead? Nod—nod—nod. Did they know who had killed her? Nod—nod. Would he be caught? Nod—nod—nod. Would he hang?

The train rushed over the joints of a junction and swung away on a new path in the darkness.

And every nod, every clitter-clock, clitter-clock of the wheels, was carrying him so much nearer to—to what had happened. He turned his mind away resolutely and tried to read the back of the man's paper opposite. Muriel was in her corner, her eyes closed, one hand delicately against her cheek. She met all the disagreeable things of life like that, gracefully, fastidiously. Her composure was very precious to her. Well, she'd need it soon.

He fell to reviewing all the steps he had taken to build up an alibi. Flimsy enough, they looked

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

—full of great black gaps through which the huge arm of the law could suddenly shoot and grab him. A light shiver ran down his spine. But, so far, he was not so much frightened of the consequences as curious—academically, disinterestedly curious—to see how it would all work out. Would the local police tackle it, or would they call in the Yard at once? Recalling himself with a jolt, he fixed his eyes upon the joggling paper opposite him, and with great concentration read something very silly about an actress who was being sued for breach of contract.

At last, after ages so long that his whole life and several previous existences seemed to have been spent in the same hideous compartment, the train slowed down, and they stepped out into the chill air of the platform. They took a taxi, because of Muriel's parcels. In precisely the same way as one turns one's mind away while the dentist fixes a drill in his machine, Maurice turned his mind to any externals it could seize upon during the journey up.

"Two and six, is it?" he was repeating presently. "Two and six, eh?" And he took the money out of his pocket and counted it over twice, with great deliberation, before the action would register in his consciousness at all. "Oh, ah, yes—two

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and six." The man was looking at him. "Well. Here you are. Good night."

He was walking up the stairs, his arms full of parcels. His heart seemed to be beating distinctly, sharply, rather than fast; and at once he saw a picture of it, as a sort of cylinder with two convex ends, swinging imperatively against the surrounding tissues.

"All right. I have a key."

Muriel's manner seemed a bit constrained. She had looked at him strangely, he thought. Pooh! All fancy. It shows how one's conscience can run away with you. Oh, my God, here they were, in the dark little hall, only a few yards, only a door away from it! He almost ran down the passage to the bedroom, stumbling in at the door and shedding his parcels on the bed in a heap. He kept his back turned on Muriel, for the lower part of his face seemed to have become all loose and uncontrolled. Muriel put down her bag, took off her hat, leaned forward to scrutinize her face in the dressing table mirror; then went out of the room, without speaking.

Sick and shaking, he caught hold of the bedpost and held on. She went along the passage. She was outside the living-room door. No—she had gone into the bathroom. He brushed his fore-

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head and tried vainly to moisten his lips. This was awful, awful, awful, his mind kept saying. It—ah. She had come out again. He heard her turn the handle of the living-room door, switch on the light. . . . Shutting his eyes, he nerved himself for her scream.

It did not come. He could hear her moving about in the room. He—she—oh, God, this was past all bearing, worse than any outcry. Something told him that his eyes were staring in his head; he ducked, not daring to look in the glass, and ran out into the passage, falling, lurching, swaying, with hands outstretched against the cold walls; tottered to the open door of light; grasped the doorpost, the knuckles sticking out white from the back of his hand, and, with a rending, terrible effort, pulled himself into the room and looked on the floor in front of the fireplace.

There was no body. Nothing at all.

“Ah—ha—ha-ha!” A little shrill whimpering laugh sounded in the room, and he realized that it had come from his own throat. Frantically he raised his eyes. Muriel was staring at him in amazement and distaste.

“Whatever is the matter with you, Maurice!” she exclaimed.

“The matter?”

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“Yes.” She came a step nearer. “You’ve been behaving in the queerest way, all the afternoon.” She gave a half laugh, looking closely into his eyes. “You haven’t been drinking, have you?”

“Queer? I—why, what’s been the matter with me?” He got the words out, but all the time his mind was trying to cope with the staggering thing she had just said. All the afternoon. Queer all the afternoon. That’s what she had said.

Muriel laughed again. It was her way of turning aside her irritation. “I don’t know what’s the matter with you,” she answered. “All I know is that you’ve been behaving very queerly all the afternoon. They were all wondering what was the matter with you. I could see they were.”

His mouth fell open. “They—who were?”

“Why, at the Chadwicks’, of course. You wouldn’t say a word to a soul, except once, when you were quite unnecessarily rude to old General McKie.”

“At the Chadwicks’!” he shouted. “You don’t know what you’re saying! At the Chadwicks’?”

“Why, Maurice, *whatever* is the matter with you! Of course you were at—oh, my darling! Maurice! My darling boy!”

For he had begun to laugh—soundlessly at

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first, a horrible, silent shaking; and then he was screaming, sobbing, laughing, calling out. . . .

### v

How soon afterward he did not know, he found himself on his knees, holding on tight to her, his head in her lap; and she was stroking his hair, soothing him, comforting him as if he were a tiny child. "There, there, my darling, Maurice, my darling, it will be all right. There's nothing to be frightened of. Nothing. Nothing. There, darling, there."

And presently he was calmer; quite quiet. He knelt, his arms around her, looking over toward the bookcase with wide eyes, realizing the truth. The breakdown—what he had been afraid of—it had come. This was it; all this. Everything. He had spent the afternoon unconsciously, an automaton, while his consciousness had been busy . . . here. The whole story—the precautions, the details, the vivid enactment—he could see it all now, the fantastic, pettifogging logic of the disordered mind. And the imagination—what he had done to Vera. Good God, if that was delusion, what was there to hold onto in life?

Steady—that was the way to go off again. He held on tight to Muriel for a minute; then,



## BREAKDOWN

calmer, he took another look at the floor, grimacing oddly.

“Do you know,” he blurted, “I thought I’d—” And then he broke off short. He’d have enough troubles without that. Least said, eh?

With gradually narrowing eyes, he listened to all the soothing things Muriel was saying over the top of his head. She’d been noticing how tired he was getting, how overdone. He needed a change. A nice rest, and a change. They’d go off together, down to the sea—

“That knife,” he exclaimed suddenly, looking up at her. “I haven’t had that for years. I remember now. I gave it away, years ago.”

“Yes, darling. Of course you did. Don’t worry about it any more,” and she was on again, how all he needed was a rest. Then he realized he needn’t trouble to guard his tongue. Anything he said she would attribute to his breakdown. Poor little Muriel! She was frightened, badly frightened, and putting a splendidly brave face on it.

He got up and sat beside her on the sofa, putting his arms around her, telling her not to be frightened.



# THE WITCH'S VENGEANCE

By

*W. B. Seabrook*

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**T**HE quarrel between Mère Tirelou and my young friend Philippe Ardet grew out of the fact that he had fallen in love with Maguelonne, the old woman's granddaughter.

Although Maguelonne was past nineteen, by far the prettiest girl in the village, she had no suitors among the local youths, for the native peasants of Les Baux, this savage mountain hamlet in the south of France which I had been visiting at intervals for years, were steeped in superstition and believed that old Mère Tirelou was a *sorcière*, a sort of witch.

Maguelonne, orphaned by the war, lived alone with the old woman in an ancient tumble-down stone *mas*, somewhat isolated from the village

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## CREEPS BY NIGHT

proper, among the ruins of the seigniorial castle close above it, and gossip whispered that Mère Tirelou had involved the girl, willingly or unwillingly, in her dark practices. They were not persecuted or hated—in fact, the peasants and shepherds of Les Baux and the surrounding mountainside sometimes consulted Mère Tirelou in certain emergencies—but save for such special consultations, paid for usually with a rabbit, a jug of wine or oil, the old beldam and her granddaughter “apprentice,” if such she really was, were generally avoided if not actually disliked and feared.

Philippe, however, who considered himself to be now of the great world—he had been to technical school in Marseilles and was working in an airplane plant at Toulon—regarded all this local superstition as stuff and nonsense. He had come up vacationing from Toulon on his motor cycle. We had known each other at Les Baux the previous summer. He and I were now staying at the same little hotel, the Hôtel René, perched on the edge of the cliff, run by Philippe’s aunt, Madame Plomb, and her husband Martin. And Philippe, as I have said, had fallen in love with Maguelonne.

This was the situation, briefly outlined, when

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the strange series of events began which first involved me only as a chance onlooker, but finally as an active participant.

They began one hot mid-afternoon when I lay reading in my room, which was in an angle of the wall with windows overlooking the valley and a side window immediately above the medieval rampart gate from which the road serpented downward.

Close beneath this window, all at once, I heard and recognized Mère Tirelou's querulous croaking voice raised angrily, and Philippe's in reply, half amiable, half derisive.

It was hazard rather than eavesdropping, impossible not to hear them, and then after some muttering the old woman raised her voice again, but this time in such a curious, unnatural tone that I got up to see what was occurring.

They were standing in the sunshine just beneath the window, he tall, blondish, ruddy, tousle-haired, bare-headed, in knickers, and sport shirt; she gray, bent and hawk-like—bat-like, rather, in her Arlésienne *coiffe* and cloak, with arms outstretched barring his path. And she was intoning a weird, singsong doggerel, at the same time weaving in the air with her claw-like hands:

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*“Go down, go down, my pretty youth,  
But you will not come up again.  
Tangled foot will twist and turn,  
And tangled brain will follow.  
You will go down, my pretty one,  
But you will not come up again.  
So tangle, tangle, twist and turn,  
Cobwebs and spider webs are woven.”*

She was now no longer barring Philippe's path but standing aside, inviting him to pass, so that her back was turned to me, while Philippe stood so that I could see his face and the expressions which flitted over it—first an interested, incredulous, surprised attention as if he couldn't believe his own ears, then a good-humored but derisive and defiant grin as the old woman repeated her doggerel.

“No, no, Mère Tirelou,” he said laughing. “You can't scare me off with stuff like that. Better get a broomstick if you want to drive me away. Save your cobwebs and incantations for Bléo and the shepherds.”

So with a defiant, gay salute and an *au revoir* he was off down the road whistling, while the old woman screamed after him, “Down, down, down

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you go, but not up, my pretty boy; not up, not up, not up!"

I watched Philippe descending the winding road into the valley while Mère Tirelou, leaning over the parapet, watched him too, until he became tiny far below and disappeared behind the orchard wall which skirts the road by the pavilion of the Reine-Jeanne. Then she picked up her stick, called Bléo her dog, and hobbled in through the gate.

"So," thought I, "that old woman really believes herself a witch, and probably thinks she has put an effective curse on Philippe!"

But it didn't occur to me to be in the least disturbed. I knew, or thought I knew, a good deal about witchcraft technically. I believed it all reduced finally to suggestion and auto-suggestion. I had known it to produce tangible results, but only in cases when the victim himself (usually among primitives or savages) was deeply superstitious and consequently amenable to fear. I felt absolutely sure that complete, hard-headed, skeptical disbelief, derision, laughter, constituted a stronger "counter-magic" than any amount of exorcism and holy water, and therefore it did not occur to me for an instant that Philippe could be in the slightest danger.

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Holding these convictions, and therefore regarding the safe return of Philippe as a foregone conclusion, I thought little more of the matter that afternoon; finished my reading, dined early, strolled to the top of the cliff to watch the sunset, and went early to bed.

Usually after ten o'clock at night the whole village of Les Baux, including the interior of the Hôtel René, is sound asleep and silent as the grave. It was the noise of hurrying footsteps clattering along the stone floor of the hotel corridor which awoke me late in the night, but at the same time I heard lowered voices in the road beneath my window, saw lights flashing, heard sabots clacking along the cobbled street.

I struck a light, saw that it was shortly past midnight, dressed and went downstairs. Martin Plomb was talking to a group of neighbors. His wife was standing in the doorway, wrapped in a quilted dressing gown.

"What has happened?" I asked her.

"We are worried about Philippe," she replied. "He went for a walk this afternoon down in the valley, and he hasn't returned. They are going to search for him. We thought nothing of it that he didn't come back for dinner, but it is now past



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midnight and we are afraid he may have had an accident."

Already the men, in groups of twos and threes, some with old-fashioned farm lanterns, a few with electric flash lights, were starting down the mountainside. I joined Martin Plomb, who was at the gate instructing them to go this way or that and to keep in touch with one another by shouting. He himself was going to search upward on the other slope, toward the Grotte des Fées where Philippe sometimes climbed, fearing that he might have fallen down a ravine. I went along with him . . .

It was just before dawn, after hours of fruitless search, that we heard a different shouting from the head of the valley. I could not distinguish the words, but Martin immediately said, "They've found him." We worked our way across and climbed toward the road along which we now could see lights flashing, returning toward Les Baux.

They were carrying Philippe on an improvised litter made with two saplings and pine branches interwoven. He was conscious; his eyes were open; but he seemed to be in a stupor and had been unable, they said, to explain what had happened to him. No bones were broken nor had he

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suffered any other serious physical injury, but his clothes were badly torn, particularly the knees of his knickerbockers, which were ripped and abraded as if he had been dragging himself along on hands and knees.

They all agreed as to what had probably happened: he had been climbing bareheaded among the rocks in the heat of the late afternoon and had suffered an *insolation*, a prostrating but not fatal sunstroke, had partially recovered and in seeking help, still delirious, had lost his way. He should be all right in a day or two, Martin said. They would have a doctor up from Arles in the morning.

Of course I had thought more than once that night about Mère Tirelou and had considered mentioning the matter to Martin Plomb, but this explanation was so reasonable, adequate, natural, that it seemed to me absurd now to view the episode as anything more than a pure coincidence, so I said nothing.

It was dawn when we reached Les Baux and got Philippe to bed, and when I awoke toward noon the doctor had already come and gone.

"He had a bad stroke," Martin told me. "His head is clear—but there's still something the matter that the doctor couldn't understand. When

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Philippe tried to get up from the bed, he couldn't walk. Yet his legs aren't injured. It's queer. We are afraid it may be something like paralysis. He seemed to twist and stumble over his own feet."

Sharply, as he spoke, the belated certainty came to me that here was an end to all coincidence; that I had been wrong; that something as sinister and darkly evil as I had ever known in the jungle had been happening here in Les Baux under my very eyes.

"Martin," I said, "something occurred yesterday afternoon which you do not know about. I am not prepared to say yet what it was. But I must see Philippe at once and talk with him. You say his mind is perfectly clear?"

"But assuredly," said Martin, puzzled; "though I can't understand what you're driving at. He will want to see you."

Philippe was in bed. He looked depressed rather than ill, and was certainly in complete possession of his senses.

I said, "Philippe, Martin tells me there is something wrong with your legs. I think perhaps I can tell you what——"

"Why, were you ever a doctor?" he interrupted eagerly. "If we'd known that! The fellow

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who came up from Arles didn't seem to be much good."

"No, I'm not a doctor. But I'm not sure this is a doctor's job. I want to tell you something. You know where my room is. I happened to be at the window yesterday and I heard and saw everything that occurred between you and Mère Tirelou. Haven't you thought that there may be some connection?"

He stared at me in surprise, and also with a sort of angry disappointment.

"*Tiens!*" he said. "You, an educated modern American, you believe in that fantastic foolishness! Why, I came from these mountains, I was born here, and yet I know that stuff is silly nonsense. I thought about it, of course, but it doesn't make any sense. How could it?"

"Maybe it doesn't," I said, "but just the same will you please tell me as well as you can remember what happened to you yesterday afternoon and last night?"

"Confound it, you know what happened. I had a stroke. And it has left me like this. Lord, I'd rather be dead than crippled or helpless."

He lapsed into somber silence. But I had heard enough. There are people who have lain paralyzed in bed for life through no organic

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ailment but only because they *believed* they couldn't arise and walk. If I helped him now, it could be only by overwhelming proof. My business was with Mère Tirelou. . . .

Neither the old woman nor her granddaughter had been near the hotel that morning. I climbed the winding cobbled street and tapped at their door. Presently Maguelonne reluctantly opened. I made no effort to enter, but said:

"I've come to see Mère Tirelou—about a serious matter."

She looked at me with worried, guarded eyes, as if uncertain how to answer, and finally said, "She is not here. She went over the mountain last night, beyond Saint-Remy. She will be gone several days." Sensing my doubt, she added defensively, almost pleadingly, "You can come in and see if you wish. She is not here."

The girl was obviously in great distress and I realized that she knew or suspected why I had come.

"In that case," I said, "we must talk. Shall it be like this, or would you prefer to have me come in?"

She motioned me inside.

I said, "Ma'm'selle Maguelonne, I beg you to be honest with me. You know what people say

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about your grandmother—and there are some who say it also about you. I hope that part isn't true. But your grandmother has done something which I am determined to have undone. I am so certain of what I know that if necessary I am going to take Martin Plomb into my confidence and go with him to the police at Arles. Ma'm'selle, I feel that you know exactly what I am talking about. It's Philippe—and I want to ask if you——”

“No, no, no!” the girl cried pitifully, interrupting. “I had nothing to do with it! I tried to stop it! I warned him! I begged him not to see me any more. I told him that something dreadful would happen, but he only laughed at me. He doesn't believe in such things. I have helped my grandmother in other things—she has forced me to help her—but never in anything so wicked as this—and against Philippe! No, no, Monsieur, never would I help in such a thing, not even if she——” Suddenly the girl began to sob, “Oh, what ought I to do?”

I said, “Do you mean there is something you could do?”

“I am afraid,” she said—“afraid of my grandmother. Oh, if you knew! I don't dare go in there

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—and besides, the door is locked—and it may not be in there.”

“Maguelonne,” I said gently, “I think you care for Philippe, and I think he cares for you. Do you know that he has lost the use of his legs?”

“Oh, oh, oh!” she sobbed; then she gathered courage and said, “Yes, I will do it, if my grandmother kills me. But you must find something to force the lock, for she always carries the key with her.”

She led me to the kitchen which was at the rear, built into the side of the cliff almost beneath the walls of the old castle ruins. While she was lighting a lamp I found a small hatchet.

“It is through there,” she said, pointing to a closet whose entrance was covered by a drawn curtain.

At the back of the closet hidden by some old clothes hung on nails was a small door, locked. It was made of heavy wood, but I had little difficulty forcing the lock, opening the door to disclose a narrow flight of steps, winding downward into the darkness.

(There was nothing mysterious in the fact that such a stairway should exist there. The whole side of the cliff beneath the castle was honey-combed with similar passages.)

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The girl went first and I followed close, lighting our way with the lamp held at her shoulder. The short stairway curved sharply downward, then emerged directly into an old forgotten rectangular chamber which at one time must have been a wine cellar or storeroom of the castle. But it now housed various strange and unpleasant objects on which the shadows flickered as I set the lamp in a niche and began to look about me. I had known that actual witches, practicing almost in the direct medieval tradition, still existed in certain parts of Europe, yet I was surprised to see the definite material paraphernalia of the craft so literally surviving.

No need to describe all of it minutely—the place was evil and many of the objects were grotesquely evil; against the opposite wall an altar surmounted by a pair of horns, beneath them “I N R I” reversed with the letters distorted into obscene symbols; dangling nearby a black, shriveled Hand of Glory—and there on the floor, cunningly contrived with infinite pains, covering a considerable space, was the thing which we had come to find and which, for all my efforts to rationalize, sent a shiver through me as I examined it.

Four upright wooden pegs had been set in



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the floor, like miniature posts, making a square field about five feet in diameter, surrounded by cords which ran from peg to peg. Within this area and attached to the surrounding cords was stretched a crisscross, labyrinthine, spider-web-like maze of cotton thread.

Tangled in its center like an insect caught in a web was a figure some eight inches high—a common doll, it had been, with china head sewed on its stuffed sawdust body; a doll such as might be bought for three francs in any toyshop—but whatever baby dress it may have worn when it was purchased had been removed and a costume crudely suggesting a man's knickerbocker sport garb had been substituted in its place. The eyes of this manikin were bandaged with a narrow strip of black cloth; its feet and legs tangled, fastened, enmeshed in the crisscross maze of thread.

It slumped, sagging there at an ugly angle, neither upright nor fallen, grotesquely sinister, like the body of a wounded man caught in barbed wire. All this may seem perhaps silly, childish in the telling. But it was not childish. It was vicious, wicked.

I disentangled that manikin gently and examined it carefully to see whether the body had

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been pierced with pins or needles. But there were none. The old woman had at least stopped short of attempted murder.

And then Maguelonne held it to her breast, sobbing, "Ah, Philippe! Philippe!"

I picked up the lamp and we prepared to come away. The place, however, contained one other object which I have not thus far mentioned and which I now examined more closely. Suspended by a heavy chain from the ceiling was a life-sized, open, cage-like contrivance of wood and blackened leather straps and iron—as perversely devilish a device as twisted human ingenuity ever invented, for I knew its name and use from old engravings in books dealing with the obscure sadistic element in medieval sorcery. It was a Witch's Cradle. And there was something about the straps that made me wonder. . . .

Maguelonne saw me studying it and shuddered.

"Ma'm'selle," I said, "is it possible——?"

"Yes," she answered, hanging her head; "since you have been here there is nothing more to conceal. But it has always been on my part unwillingly."

"But why on earth haven't you denounced her; why haven't you left her?"

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“Monsieur,” she said. “I have been afraid of what I knew. And where would I go? And besides, she is my grandmother.”

I was alone with Philippe in his bedroom. I had brought the manikin with me, wrapped in a bit of newspaper. If this were fiction, I should have found him magically cured from the moment the threads were disentangled. But magic in reality operates by more devious processes. He was exactly as I had left him, even more depressed. I told him what I had discovered.

He was at the same time skeptical, incredulous and interested, and when I showed him the manikin crudely dressed to represent himself and it became clear to him that Mère Tirelou had deliberately sought to do him a wicked injury, he grew angry, raised up from his pillows and exclaimed:

“Ah, the old hag! She really meant to harm me!”

I judged that the moment had come.

I stood up. I said, “Philippe, forget all this now! Forget all of it and get up! There is only one thing necessary. Believe that you can walk, and you will walk.”

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He stared at me helplessly, sank back and said, "I do not believe it."

I had failed. His mind lacked, I think, the necessary conscious imagination. But there was one more thing to try.

I said gently: "Philippe, you care for Ma'm'selle Maguelonne, do you not?"

"I love Maguelonne," he replied.

And then I told him brutally, briefly, almost viciously, of the thing that hung there in that cellar—and of its use.

The effect was as violent, as physical as if I had suddenly struck him in the face. "Ah! Ah! *Tonnerre de Dieu! La coquine! La vilaine coquine!*" he shouted, leaping from his bed like a crazy man.

The rest was simple. Philippe was too angry and concerned about Maguelonne to have much time for surprise or even gratitude at his sudden complete recovery, but he was sensible enough to realize that for the girl's sake it was better not to make a public row. So when he went to fetch Maguelonne away he took his aunt with him, and within the hour she was transferred with her belongings to Madame Plomb's room.

Martin Plomb would deal effectively with old Mère Tirelou. He was to make no accusation

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concerning the part she had played in Philippe's misadventure—an issue difficult of legal proof—but to warn her that if she ever tried to interfere with Maguelonne or the impending marriage he would swear out a criminal warrant against her for ill treatment of a minor ward.

There remain two unsolved elements in this case which require an attempted explanation. The belief which I have always held concerning malevolent magic is that it operates by imposed autosuggestion, and that therefore no incantation can work evil unless the intended victim believes it can. In this case, which seemed to contradict that thesis, I can only suppose that while Philippe's conscious mind reacted with complete skepticism, his unconscious mind (his family came from these same mountains) retained certain atavistic, superstitious fears which rendered him vulnerable.

The second element is, of course, the elaborate mummery of the enmeshed manikin, the doll, own cousin to the waxen images which in the Middle Ages were pierced with needles or slowly melted before a fire. The witch herself, if not a charlatan, implicitly believes that there is a literal, supernatural transference of identities.

My own belief is that the image serves simply

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as a focus for the concentrated, malevolent will power of the witch. I hold, in short, that sorcery is a real and dangerous force, but that its ultimate explanation lies not in any supernatural realm, but rather in the field of pathological psychology.

# THE RAT

By

*S. Fowler Wright*

---

**D**R. MERSON looked at the dying rat, and decided that, should he delay his experiment longer, it would be dead before morning.

He had nursed it now for nearly six months, and it had been very old and blind and feeble when he had bought it.

He had told Briggs that he would give him £5 for the oldest rat in Belsham, and the rat-catcher had earned his money.

It had surprised him, when he had first approached the subject, to realize how difficult it would be to find an animal that was really old and feeble. He had to observe that nature does not encourage the prolongation of pain and weariness: when health goes, life very quickly follows.

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But he knew that, in the course of their age-long warfare with the human race, the rats had arrived at some social organization, and had adopted some of our practices, and in particular, that when a disease of blindness (to which they are very liable) attacks them, they may be nursed and fed by members of their family, so that life is prolonged to an age which would otherwise be impossible.

So he had asked for an aged rat, and had watched its vitality recede, till now it was too weak to crawl toward the tempting food that was offered. . . . It was so dull with age that it did not flinch when the needle pricked it.

### II

The next morning it was not dead. It lay sleeping; old, and blind, and decrepit. It was not pleasant to look at, but it may have been less feeble than the night before—and the food had been eaten.

Dr. Merson, observing this, became aware that his heart was beating fast, with a sudden excitement, of which he had not supposed himself to be capable.

When he looked at it again at midday, and observed that it was feebly attending to a neg-



## THE RAT

lected toilet, he did a thing which was less wise than his usual custom, calling his wife to observe it.

Mrs. Merson disliked his experiments; and his own habit of professional reticence disinclined him from speech which had no immediate purpose. But this was a discovery of such momentous consequence that he was impelled to share it.

“You mean that no one need ever die?” she asked incredulously. She was not greatly impressed, even if she took it with any seriousness. She was a healthy young woman, utterly without imagination, and the cook had given notice an hour ago.

“Yes, it might mean that—or nearly—unless by accident. . . . You see,” he continued, to an auditor who scarcely heard him, “it isn’t really new. We’ve known for a long time that youth would continue if the cells of which the body is built could have the right stimuli, but it’s been difficult to find what they are. Some of the lower forms of life never die, as it is. The old ones break apart, and each part acquires a new impulse of growth from the shock of that division. But in the higher animals there is a change in the substance or activities of the cells as the years

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pass, the nature of which has been difficult to ascertain, though its results have been evident. . . .”

He stopped, as he became aware that Mrs. Merson had ceased to listen. She regarded the sleeping rat with disfavor.

“I shouldn’t think anything wants to live when it’s that old,” she said, with decision. She had the impatience of healthy youth for all signs of decrepitude. They seemed stupid.

She heard the voice of the butcher at the back door, and her mind reverted to matters of greater urgency. She went back to the kitchen.

### III

The rat improved very slowly. Its appetite increased. It moved more briskly. It gained weight. It gave more attention to its toilet. It became wilder, and more alert to the sounds around it. Finally, its sight returned.

The process was not rapid, but continuous. At the end of three months from when it had received the injection (which had not been repeated), it showed the bodily activity and physique of a young rat.

Dr. Merson did not mention it again to his wife, nor did he seek another confidant. He be-

## THE RAT

came thoughtful, and, at times, appeared to be suffering from acute depression. His patients complained, and his practice suffered.

The fact is that he was beginning to fear the consequences of his discovery.

At first, it had seemed simple—and stupendous. He was about to benefit his race as no man had done before him. Had he not found a way by which death itself was defeated? He saw that it would change the whole face of the earth. Old age would become an obscene tradition. Disease would be powerless to overcome the new vitality which he had discovered. Men would no longer die as their minds approached the threshold of wisdom.

He thought of his own patients. There was Mrs. Corner, who would be dead of tuberculosis within a year, unless he should use his new power for her rescue—Minnie Corner, with three young children, fighting her hopeless battle, always “a little better to-day” when he called to watch the slow, relentless progress of a disease that he could not conquer. He would be very glad to give her health. Having it in his power, it was a clear and simple duty, as her doctor, to do it. But (so far as he could suppose) he would do more than that. He would give her an approxi-

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mation to immortality. Not absolute immortality. Her body would still be liable to be damaged or destroyed by violence. Certainly, it would have no power to survive the planet on which it lived. It would be liable to drowning, or suffocation. But it would no longer be in subjection to the treachery of time. Fed, and guarded from violence, it would not age nor decay. There was something odd in imagining Minnie Corner immortal. But there was nothing repellent. He supposed it would mean treating her children in the same way. They would be annoyed if they observed themselves growing old and feeble, while their mother remained young. It would confuse the relationship. Neither would she thank him for such a tableau. He knew Mrs. Corner well enough to realize that there would be no rest for him till he had conferred the same boon upon her household that he should give to her. Well, why not?

About two of the children there would be no difficulty. But he disliked Peter. He disliked Peter intensely. He could not endure the thought of an immortal Peter. It wasn't the clubfoot, though it did seem a pity that it should become an abiding feature of a world grown static: it was certain qualities of meanness and cruelty.

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which the boy had shown from infancy, which his mother had lamented, but which she had been powerless to influence.

According to the law of nature which now prevailed, Peter would grow old, and in due course he would die, and his unpleasant characteristics would perish with him. He might have children, but these children would be different from himself, whether better or worse, and, in due course, they would have still different children, the race repeating itself with an unending variety.

Somehow, this seemed a better prospect than that of an enduring Peter.

Yet he could not imagine an arrangement being smoothly made by which Peter would be consigned to an exceptional mortality. However carefully his moral and physical inferiorities, and the importance of his early elimination, might be explained to him, Dr. Merson felt sure that he would resent it furiously. He imagined a violent assault upon his own person by an adult and desperate Peter to whom he was refusing the boon of immortality. Even a murderous assault. . . .

His mind was diverted to observe that murder would become a more serious crime than it now

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is—the risk of being murdered a more dreadful possibility. Indeed, all physical risks would be taken at an almost infinitely greater price, and—presumably—with a corresponding reluctance.

It was a relief to abandon these speculations to the task of lancing a boil on the neck of the landlord of the *Spotted Cow*.

### IV

The weeks went on, and the rat continued, and even increased its youthful vigor. Its eyes were bright. Its coat was smooth and glossy. Its movements were lithe and swift. It was fierce, and watchful for a chance of biting. Once its teeth met in the sleeve of Dr. Merson's coat, and the incident led him to wonder whether its new vitality could be communicated by the medium of a bite. He was aware that the thought gave him a sensation of a peril escaped, and he realized that he was already regarding his discovery with apprehension rather than pleasure. Certainly, he had no wish to have its benefits thrust upon him before he had deliberated more fully on their ultimate consequences.

Also, the rat was disconcertingly watchful for a chance of escaping from its confinement. Once it actually got its head through the closing door,

## THE RAT

and it needed a sharp blow to induce it to abandon the hope of freedom. Dr. Merson had an actual nightmare as the result of imagining that it had escaped, and that his invention was destroyed or forgotten, so that the world would pass at last to the dominion of a continually increasing army of immortal rats.

### v

After that incident, Dr. Merson became more careful to lock the door of the laboratory in which the rat was confined, and to keep the key in his pocket. Considering the possibilities which might follow should it be accidentally let loose, he realized how little he yet knew of the nature of his discovery. He could not even say whether the vitality it conferred would be passed on to succeeding generations. He imagined some prolific and noxious insect inoculated to immortality, and still exercising a blind fecundity. It might become uncontrollable, and destroy everything before it. That would be a weird ending to created life on this abortive planet, which must already be a joke to all surrounding intelligences.

Yet the idea was more than remotely possible. He imagined his discovery made public, and its

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advantages become the common property of mankind, and then some super-criminal threatening his race with the results of such an inoculation of some hostile vermin, unless they should do his pleasure eternally.

Day by day his mind renewed its efforts to probe the consequences of his discovery, and retired bewildered, as it encountered some new problem, or some obvious result which he had not previously contemplated.

He saw that the human race would become static. Not in brain, perhaps; but, at least, in body. That alone must make profound differences, produce profound cleavages. The ugly and deformed must remain so to all eternity, perhaps with an increased vitality: but vitality would not alter structure.

There might be an agitation to eliminate the obviously unfit in brain or body, and to replace them with healthier children. But who would decide? Would those who were judged inferior be content to be sacrificed? He imagined fierce and ruthless wars of extermination. Suppose, again, that the white races should attempt to confine his discovery to their own use. He imagined the black and yellow races attacking them with a mad ferocity, to force the priceless



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secret from them. Would the white race yield, or would they risk their potentially immortal bodies in such a conflict? If they should yield, would not the latent animosities of race and race still remain, to break out into wars which, under such conditions, must result in servitude or extermination?

He saw that, in the absence of widespread war, the world would soon reach a maximum population, and that children must cease . . . or, perhaps, an occasional child might be permitted to replace an accidental death . . . or a large number of children to replace the wastage of war. Would the race remain capable of these occasional fertilities? Or would it arrive at a position at which its numbers would be reduced (however slowly) by occasional misadventures, and these reductions would be irreplaceable?

Or if children should remain a potential possibility, would not the desire for them become at times irresistible with at least many of the unoccupied women? Might they not welcome a war which would throw upon them the duty of replacement?

He was roused from these visions by the consciousness that he was at Mrs. Empsey's bedside.

It was some years since Mrs. Empsey had

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walked across her bedroom floor. Her daughter, Ada, waited on her without complaint, and earned a little money by sewing and taking care of the neighbors' children. It was many years since Joe Horton had asked for any rent for the cottage. They had a few shillings weekly from the parish. So they lived.

Dr. Merson had not sent in a bill for ten years past. He never thought of doing so. He had fought as hard for Mrs. Empsey's life as for that of his wealthiest patient. It was all in the day's work.

But he had not been able to cure her. Indeed, he had not hoped to do so. Even now, he was not certain that her damaged interior could be reconstructed, though he could give her a new vitality. But he hoped, even for that. Anyway, she would be about again, and Ada could marry the booking-clerk at Belsham station, who had courted her long enough. They were both over thirty. Here was one of the first places to which his discovery would bring a joy almost beyond imagination. Mrs. Empsey had always clung to life with a desperate cowardice. But even here he would do nothing—would say nothing—too hastily. The whole prospect was so stupendous.

He checked himself in writing a prescription

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which would have placed his patient beyond the power of any drug to revive her. . . . That was another thought. . . . The power of poisons would continue. . . . If the certainty of death were removed, would the dread of such contingencies be increased until life would become an intolerable care to avoid them? Only experience could resolve that problem.

### VI

Out of much confusion, a thought came in the end, clearly born out of chaos. If he were right that his discovery could give perpetual youth to mankind, it could only mean that a limited number of people would live long, where, otherwise, a larger number of people would have lived for a shorter time. Putting aside all theories of a future life, all the speculations or dogmatisms of religion, its only result could be to make the single life longer, and the individual lives less numerous. Finally, therefore, it could only be advantageous if it resulted in higher and happier conditions of life than those which were prevailing around him. It would abolish children. It would abolish age. It would make youth perpetual. Youth was the desire of all men. Those who were young desired to retain it. Those who

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were old would give anything they had to recover it. So much was clear—if he were only sure. Aiming to abolish age, might it not be found—and perhaps too late—that it was youth that had left the world?

By all outward evidences, the rat had regained its youth. Why should he doubt that it was the perpetuity of youth which he would offer to a grateful world? Perhaps he vexed himself because his own mind was too small to understand the greatness of his own discovery.

Yet, could youth be perpetual? Youth was not only of the body, it was of the spirit. He did not know. . . . As a doctor, he was predisposed to consider the physical as dominant. But the freshness of youth——?

He considered another possibility. Perhaps age would come, though more gradually, as the spirit tired. Then the body might be periodically inoculated to a new youth, as he had done to the rat, with all the joy of a returning springtime. "If youth but knew!" How many men had wasted youth, and longed for its return in vain, when they had gained the experience which would have valued it more highly, and used it differently! To unite the experience of age with youth's vitality! . . . and then he saw his de-

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lusion . . . the joy of youth is not of experience, but of inexperience. It is because the adventure is new: the path untrodden.

He considered himself. He did not feel old. He was forty-three. He knew that he must appear old to the young people around him. If he were unmarried, and should he ask a young girl to share his life, she might make it a jest to her companions.

But he had a good constitution, and he had lived temperately. His body was still strong and vigorous. Yet he had not the outlook of youth. He realized that his youth would not return, though twenty years should be taken from the age of his body.

With a sudden clarity he realized that, to regain his youth, it was not so much a new body which would be needed; that which he had would serve his purpose well enough, could it only throw off the appearances of thinning hair and growing corpulence, which disguised it from the youth around it; it was a new youth of the soul, an intervening Lethe, which would be needed. . . . He had made no discovery in that direction. Physically, youth might continue, but, as the millenniums passed—even the centuries . . .

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### VII

He made efforts to regain the standpoint of his own youth, that he might explore its differences. He became absent-minded in reminiscence. . . . He used to write poetry then. He had not done anything quite so foolish for many years. All the same, he had done it rather well. The only weak point was that the poems were usually left unfinished. It was so much easier to get the first lines. The memories of youth moved him to the old impulse. With a sudden keen recovery of emotion he remembered his first meeting with Molly . . . the picnic under the trees . . . the first shy kiss on her shoulder. . . . That was before he had gone to college. . . . He had always been loyal to her, and she to him. . . . He was not of the shallower sort of those that change lightly. . . . He loved her now as he had loved her then—but oh! the world between. . . .

*I can not stand where once I stood. It takes a  
life to learn  
That none may steer his course to shear the trail  
of light astern.*

That was well expressed. He would have written those lines down twenty years ago. He

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would have intended to make them into a complete poem. But he knew better now. He knew that they would never be finished. He knew so much—about himself, and others. He even knew his own weaknesses.

That was the trouble. The inexperience of youth was something which could never be recovered, and the experience of age was no substitute. He realized that to abolish age is to abolish youth also.

Seeing this, his mind startled itself with a further possibility—might it be equally true to say that to abolish death would be to abolish life? In a moment's vision he saw life and death in a conflict from which each wins recurrent victory: he saw them interdependent, and this strife as the condition on which they both existed. . . .

### VIII

He imagined his discovery applied to the vegetable world; an oak tree in perpetual vigor. . . . Would there be no place left for fruit-time and harvest? For the young growths of spring? There was the question of food—corn must still be grown for food, and mown down in due season—or perhaps there might be developed roots of a continuing vigor? But the question of food was

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not merely a human one. All life grew by feeding upon the life around it.

This was fundamental. It had an aspect of cruel rapacity, seeming inconsistent with the idea of a beneficent God. Yet if there be mortality at all, there can be no better end to the outworn or defeated body than to support the vigor of a new life. . . . His mind stooped, bewildered once again before the stupendous nature of the change which his discovery must bring to the earth's economy.

Perhaps the question was too great for one man to face. Would it not be well to announce his discovery, and for some small committee of selected men to consider whether it should be used? . . . But he knew that there would be no such question in the minds of men. They might doubt its advantages for other men, for alien races, for animal or vegetable creations, but for themselves there would be no doubt at all.

It was true that he might withhold the discovery itself, and merely announce that he possessed it, but even that announcement (if it were believed) might rouse an excitement that he could not estimate. . . . He imagined himself mobbed, beaten, even tortured, till he should consent to reveal it to a frantic world. . . .



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Pacing the laboratory restlessly, distracted with such thoughts as these, afraid to meet the reproaches of his wife, who could not understand why he was changed and aging so rapidly, so that he had acquired a habit of remaining there till it should be time to go out on his daily round, he regarded the rat, now running up the bars of his cage in a restless and tireless activity, with sudden hatred. He would kill the loathsome thing, and forget the horror he had discovered. Perhaps he might enjoy life once again. . . .

He looked at his watch, and was startled to see that it was half an hour after the usual time at which he set out on his daily round—and he had a consultation with Sir William Brett at 10:30. He went out hurriedly.

### IX

School was just commencing that morning when Peter Corner left it. He owed his freedom to his ability to take unscrupulous advantage of the caprice of circumstance, and the credulity of his fellows. His two sisters had colds, and his mother had kept them at home. Had he reported to his schoolmistress that his mother suspected measles he would have incurred the risk of ultimate retribution, which he was always adroit to

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avoid. Instead of that, he made the remark to Jessie Phipson, who could be relied upon to report it promptly. Challenged on the point, he strenuously denied the truth of the suggestion. His mother had never said so. He had told Jessie that they had not got measles *nor* scarlet fever. The mistress did not know what to believe, and sent him home till she could obtain more reliable information. He had expected that.

His expression was almost good-tempered as he dragged his clubfoot toward Dr. Merson's surgery. His sisters usually called for his mother's medicine, but as they had not come to school to-day the duty fell to him. He did not like going there. He hated Dr. Merson. He hated his eyes, which seemed to see through him without effort, and then to look elsewhere, as though he were not worth seeing. But he had to go to-day, and he had a hopeful idea this morning. He did not expect to get the medicine before noon. He knew that the doctor was not at home during the mornings. But he could not be blamed for calling on his way home.

He found the surgery door unlocked, as it was sometimes left when Dr. Merson was absent. He had expected that. He knew when and whether most of the doors in Belsham were

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locked or open. He did not often make use of this knowledge. His physical deformity, and the practical difficulties of secreting or disposing of illicit gains, had withheld him from active dishonesties. But in his waking dreams (for he had them, as much as more attractive children) he was most often a cat burglar of superhuman audacities.

Had he rung the surgery bell, the maid would have come, or the doctor's wife, but he turned the handle without haste or hesitation, and stood quietly inside, in an attitude of respectful waiting, till he was reassured by the surrounding silence. Then he passed through to the passage. He could not move very quietly, but a sound of crockery in the distant kitchen reassured him, and—beyond his hopes—the key was in the door on the other side of the passage.

Dr. Merson did not often experiment with living animals, but it was generally known that he held a vivisection certificate. It was the dream of Peter's life to enter that room, and view the horrors which he vaguely imagined to be concealed behind the frosted glass that could be seen sideways from the road, if you forced your face sufficiently far between the palings.

Now the door was not even locked, though

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the key was in it. Peter opened it quietly, entered, and closed it behind him.

### X

Dr. Merson had not gone far when he was vexed by a doubt as to whether he had locked the door. He was almost sure that he had—yes, he was quite sure—but he felt vaguely uneasy. He felt for the key in its usual pocket, but it was not there. He felt in his other pockets, with the same result. He must have left it in the door. He felt sure now that he had turned the key, but not removed it. That was what had made his mind uneasy. Really, it didn't matter. No one of his household would enter the room under such circumstances. Certainly Molly wouldn't. She hated the room, and never entered it except to seek him. More certainly still, the maid would not venture. She would not enter to dust it. Not that he wanted her to. Women are a curse where a man works. But he knew her feeling. It was, in fact, her talk in the village which was mainly responsible for the fact that Peter Corner was now inside it. But Dr. Merson didn't know that. He only thought that if the women of his household found the door locked and the key outside they would know that he couldn't be in, and

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would be unlikely to enter. But was he sure he had locked it?

Probably he wouldn't have turned back, being so late already, had he not discovered, to his added annoyance, that he had left behind some clinical notes which he should require at the consultation for which he was late already.

He went back hastily. On the way, he made a resolution that he would kill the rat that night, and destroy the serum he had invented. He perceived, with a sudden clarity, that the world's Creator might understand His job better than a local practitioner in Belsham village.

The relief that the decision gave him confirmed its wisdom. He was in better spirits than he had been for many weeks as he passed through the surgery, and crossed the passage to the room beyond.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sir William Brett waited for over half an hour at the house of the patient for the benefit of whose health, and relief of whose pocket, the consultation had been arranged. Then he rang up Dr. Merson's house for an explanation. He received a reply (after some delay) that the doctor had been seized with a sudden indisposi-

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tion, and greatly regretted that the appointment must be deferred until the following day.

### XI

The inquest on the body of Peter Corner had been twice adjourned by a coroner who had known Dr. Merson sufficiently well to regard it as incredible that he should have committed a crime so strange and so inexplicable. He hoped that the doctor might be found, and that his voluntary return would furnish some satisfactory explanation. But the police had not been retarded by any similar hesitation. Within twenty-four hours of the doctor's disappearance the dismembered body of Peter Corner had been discovered, and the facts that the doctor could not be found, and that he had drawn nearly four hundred pounds (practically the whole of his available balance) from his bank in Treasury notes on the previous day, had enabled them to obtain a warrant for his arrest without difficulty.

But the warrant had not been executed.

Dr. Merson had walked to the station quite openly. He had chatted with casual acquaintances on the platform. He had even got into a compartment containing others who knew him. He had traveled to London, saying that he was

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in search of certain surgical instruments which he required to renew, and had disappeared absolutely.

It was agreed that he had been in particularly good spirits. Indeed—and this was one of the minor mysteries of the case—there had been a noticeable change in his demeanor from the morning when Peter had been seen to enter the door of his surgery. Every one had noticed the change. It was as though a load of fear or trouble had been suddenly lifted from him.

Mrs. Merson—who had insisted on giving evidence, in spite of the coroner's warning—had confirmed this. She had entered the witness box to urge her conviction, against the weight of overwhelming evidence, that he had not murdered Peter at all, and to assert that he had himself been living in dread of some mysterious enemy, who must be responsible both for the fate of Peter, and for her husband's disappearance.

Her evidence, given with the convincing simplicity of an unimaginitive mind, had impressed its hearers with her sincerity, and increased the sympathy with which she was regarded, but it could not shake the weight of evidence which placed the crime upon the shoulders of the absent doctor.

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It was admitted by the police that the doctor could not have known that Peter would be released from school on the fatal morning, but their theory was that he had met the boy by chance in the street, and had recognized an unexpected opportunity for the commission of a crime which had been designed within his mind previously. He had told the boy to go to the surgery, and await his return. He had followed immediately, by a different route, entering the surgery unobserved, and promptly disposed of his unsuspecting victim. His household admitted that they had not known that he was at home till the telephone inquiry from Sir William Brett had caused them to seek him, and he had then replied through a half-opened door, that he was unwell, and the appointment must be deferred to the following day.

He had callously proceeded to the dissection of his victim's body, and it was only when the police had traced the missing boy to his own door, and the inquiries had become too close and pointed for his comfort, that he had decided that it would be best to bolt, without delaying for the added risk of attempting the destruction or removal of the dismembered corpse.

Such was the theory of the police, and while



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it failed to offer the explanation of any adequate motive for a deed so ghastly, and a risk so great, and while there was nothing in the doctor's previous record to support the suggestion of criminality at once so gross and so reckless, yet it had the advantage of meeting the admitted facts more plausibly than appeared otherwise possible, and even those who were least willing to believe that the doctor could have been guilty of such a murder were unable to put forward any reasonable supposition which could explain the presence of the boy's remains on his premises, and his subsequent flight and silence.

### XII

It was now two months since Dr. Merson had alighted at Paddington, and been seen to make a leisurely descent of the stairs to the Underground station which adjoins that terminus. Doubtless, the police would continue their inquiries, and the public would continue to keep them occupied with abortive "clues," but the coroner could see no reason for adjourning the inquest further, nor means of avoiding the obvious verdict which the jury would be expected to render. It would place him under the painful necessity of issuing a warrant against an old friend,

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of whose guilt his own mind was not easily convinced, but that would be of no practical importance, in view of the magistrate's warrant, on which the police were already acting. (The time had not arrived at which this duplication of procedure was reformed in practice.)

He had no further evidence to bring forward, except that of Sir Lionel Tipshift, the Home Office expert, who had conducted the post-mortem on the dismembered body, and would give his opinion upon the cause of death with the air of Olympic impartiality on which the police had relied so often for the hanging of suspected persons.

The coroner's court was small, and crowded. It was a rainy day, and the atmosphere within it was one of depression, and of damp umbrellas. The room was plainly furnished with a table for the legal profession, an armchair for the coroner, a partitioned corner for the jury, and some benches for the use of the waiting witnesses, and the general public. It was clean, and its windows were wide and high. Yet it had an aspect of invincible grime, as though it were washed incessantly and vainly to remove an ingrained dirt, against which no physical assault could be directed successfully.

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Mrs. Merson sat on the front bench, looking grave, but not acutely miserable. Her husband's cousin, Mr. Reginald Merson, sat beside her. This gentleman, of whose existence she had not known previously, had arrived from the Argentine about six weeks after Dr. Merson had disappeared. He had made a casual call upon a cousin whom he had not seen for over twenty years, and finding himself in the midst of circumstances so strange and tragic, and having time at his disposal, he had offered such help as he could give to his cousin's wife by remaining until the inquest should be over. He had declined her invitation to reside in the house, preferring to take a room at the *Spotted Cow*, but this discretion had not prevented some unkindly gossip, which had attributed Mrs. Merson's equanimity to the very opportune companionship which he was able to offer.

On this point gossip was not entirely wrong, but the emotions of the doctor's wife, being beyond her own analysis, were not likely to be understood by the observations of strangers. She had not wavered in her loyalty to her absent husband, nor had her affection lessened. She held a matter-of-course opinion that he had not murdered any one; she was quite sure that he was

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not dead; and she was equally sure that he would return at his own time, and deal with the situation with his usual efficiency. The whole trouble was the work of some enmity, as to the nature of which, as was natural in the case of one who was destitute of normal imagination, her imaginations were very wild indeed.

Mr. Reginald Merson attracted and sometimes bewildered her by a likeness, not so much to her husband as she had last seen him, as to that which he had been at the time of their engagement, and during the first years of her married life. His voice, though stronger in tone, was curiously similar: his hair, though abundant, whereas her husband had become partially bald, was of the same color and quality—or, perhaps, very slightly darker. His features were alike, except for the short hair on the upper lip, and even that was a reminder of how her husband once had worn it. He was slow and guarded in speech, but, even so, he would let fall remarks at times which showed a puzzling familiarity with the past events of the household.

She did not disguise from herself that his presence gave her confidence, though there was mystery even in that, for he never spoke with any conviction of the doctor's innocence, nor sug-

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gested that he might return and vindicate his reputation, and any plans he might casually indicate for her future appeared to assume that the doctor's disappearance was to be accepted as final.

Inspector Clawson, who was in charge of the case, had not overlooked the strangeness of the arrival of this young man, and his curiosity had been increased when he had failed to trace the name of Merson on the passenger lists of any recently arriving liners. He did not see how Mr. Reginald Merson could be associated with the crime, in the absence of any evidence that he had been in the neighborhood when it was committed, but he felt that he was a source from which valuable information might be obtained, that he might very probably be aware of the place in which the doctor was hiding, and might very possibly be induced to speak, if the penalties which are incurred by an accessory after the fact were judiciously indicated.

He had him watched, and discovered nothing. He appeared to have no acquaintances, except Mrs. Merson. He wrote no letters. He received none. The inspector decided to interview him.

Mr. Reginald received him genially. He alluded to the murder at once, and condoned

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with him on his failure to make any arrest. The position seemed to amuse him. The inspector could not see the joke, and did not like the tone he adopted. He asserted, with a confidence that he did not feel, that he expected that an arrest would soon be made. "Scotland Yard," he lied with the boldness of exasperation, "always gets its man in the end."

Mr. Reginald suggested humorously that he might himself be the doctor in disguise. Would the inspector like to arrest him? The inspector would have liked to do so very well, had a sufficient pretext arisen. He had already considered the possibility which was now suggested in an obvious mockery. The appearance of this mysterious cousin, at such a time, and of so vague an origin, would have attracted the notice of the dullest detective of fiction, and Inspector Clawson was a very capable officer.

But his judgment was too sound to lead him into an error so obvious. He knew how much may be done by disguise, and he knew its limitations. He had never seen Dr. Merson, but he had examined some recent photographs. He knew his age. He had discussed his appearance with local members of the force, who had seen him daily.

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Between the suddenly disappearing doctor and the suddenly arriving cousin there were more than the usual cousinly resemblances. But the differences were beyond the possibilities of disguise or explanation. A bald man can not disguise himself with a thick crop of natural hair. A man of a growing rotundity can not disguise himself in a few weeks by the production of a slim and obviously youthful figure. A man of forty-five can not disguise himself into an appearance of half his age which will deceive the hostile eyes of a detective who is standing two feet away in the open street, when the morning is sunny.

Inspector Clawson only remarked that it was a fine day.

### XIII

That was yesterday. In the coroner's court this morning the inspector's eyes were still drawn in the same direction. He was not greatly interested in the evidence of Sir Lionel Tipshift. For one reason, he knew what it was to be, and for another, he had no respect for the expert witness. He is useful to impress juries, but the police and lawyers knew that another can always be procured to contradict him. Sir Lionel Tipshift was a tame expert, regularly hired by the Crown.

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The nature of his evidence could be relied upon as certainly as that a prosecuting counsel would not point out the probable innocence of the prisoner against whom his brief was drawn.

So the inspector's attention wandered when Sir Lionel, with a manner suggesting that he was slightly bored by his own infallibility, gave the result of his post-mortem examination.

The body, he assured the court, had been dis-jointed after death—probably several hours later—by some one with considerable knowledge of anatomy. The internal organs had been preserved, and (with some technical qualifications) were healthy. There was no trace of poison. There were marks of violence upon the body, including certain bruises on the legs, which must have been caused before death, by some blunt instrument. (That was correct. They had been inflicted by Bunny Simpson's foot in the school playground on the afternoon before Peter's existence had abruptly terminated.)

The listeners were hypnotized by the coldly decisive voice to the belief that additional and important evidence had been given. The coroner only, being accustomed to analyze evidence, was conscious that nothing had been added to that which was already known, or could have been



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reasonably deduced from admitted circumstances, and he was about to address a final word to the jury, when Mr. Reginald Merson rose, and asked, in a deferential but self-possessed manner, if, as the nearest male relative of the absent doctor, whose reputation was so much concerned, the unfortunate death having taken place on his premises, he might ask Sir Lionel Tipshift a few questions upon the evidence he had given.

The coroner hesitated. A coroner's inquiry is somewhat less formal than are the proceedings in the criminal courts. Possibly the fact that not all coroners belong to the legal profession (many are doctors) may have produced a less rigid etiquette for preventing oral intercourse of any kind except through the medium of a paid lawyer. But it is not usual for a witness to be examined in such a manner. He was about to say that he would himself put any inquiry which he might approve, if Mr. Merson would let him know what was in his mind, when that gentleman, taking his pause of hesitation for consent, addressed a question to Sir Lionel Tipshift which was sufficiently unexpected to cause him to remain silent to await the answer.

“Can you tell me if any other body was dis-

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covered in the laboratory, besides that of Peter Corner?"

Sir Lionel, who had already moved some paces from the witness stand, turned back, as he answered with a dry precision:

"There were no other human remains. Dr. Merson appears to have been engaged in the dissection of a recently killed rat, on the last occasion on which he occupied the laboratory."

"Does not the fact that he could have been so occupied, at such a time, with the boy's body upon his hands, suggest that there must have been some connection between the two?" Mr. Reginald asked, but the coroner interposed before Sir Lionel could answer.

"If you have any information which may be of assistance to this inquiry, Mr. Merson, I must ask you to take the oath, and offer your evidence in the usual way; it can not be given in the form of suggestions to another witness."

Mr. Merson did not appear either disconcerted or annoyed by this rebuke. He answered easily. He apologized for his ignorance of the correct procedure. He regretted that he was not in a position to accept the coroner's offer. It had only occurred to him—and he submitted the suggestion with diffidence—that the doctor might

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have suddenly returned, having remembered, after starting out, that he had not locked the room in accordance with his usual practice, and found the boy trespassing within it. Suppose that the rat had been inoculated with some new and dreadful disease, and the boy had interfered with it, and been bitten, so that he would be certain to contract it, and would not only die himself, but might give it to others, would it not become a natural thing—even a duty, however unlawful—to take *any* steps, at whatever personal risk, to prevent such consequences?

The court listened in a tense silence to this unexpected theory, but Sir Lionel, though he had not been addressed, gave a reply which disposed of its probability, the coroner silently allowing his interposition, with the respect which was usually accorded to his name and title.

“The rat was not diseased. It was a remarkably fine specimen. Indeed, it was the finest and healthiest that I have ever seen. There were remarkable signs of vitality in every organ.”

“Then, if it were so exceptional in its physical development, might it not have sprung at the boy’s throat, when he opened the door of its cage—which would be about at the same level—and inflicted a serious, or even a fatal wound?”

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Sir Lionel, who was seldom disinclined to the sound of his own voice, was about to answer, but his opinion on this point will never be known, for this time the coroner interposed too quickly.

“I don’t think, Mr. Merson, that anything can be gained by pursuing hypothetical improbabilities. Such explanations, if put forward at all, should have come from Dr. Merson himself, or from some regularly appointed advocate on his behalf. I am not aware that you have any claim to represent him at all, beyond that of an alleged relationship, and even that has not been sworn to. Dr. Merson is absent. He went away voluntarily, leaving the body of this unhappy boy on his premises, at a time when he knew that inquiries were turning in his direction. I am afraid that the jury will draw their own conclusions.”

He paused a moment, and then commenced a brief and lucid charge to the jury, from which a verdict of willful murder against the absent doctor might be confidently expected.

Mr. Reginald Merson turned to the woman beside him, and said something in a low voice, on which she smiled, and rose with him. Evidently they did not propose to wait to hear the verdict given. The ease and confidence of his own demeanor appeared to have infected his companion,

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and she passed out somewhat briskly and buoyantly, as one who leaves an unpleasant incident with finality.

As they went down the steps which led to the street, Inspector Clawson touched Mr. Merson's arm, and he turned politely.

"I should just like to ask," said the inspector, "how you came to know that the boy opened the cage."

Mr. Merson appeared amused. "I dreamt it on Monday night, Inspector. I'm rather good at dreams," he added pleasantly.

The inspector's hand was in his pocket. His fingers closed upon the warrant which he was carrying. If only he had the courage to make the arrest to which his instinct urged him! It might make—or break—him. He became aware that Mr. Merson was speaking to him again, and in a voice of banter.

"It's no good, Inspector. You won't get a word more. The voluntary statement's played out. . . . It's no use worrying," he said kindly; "you'd better go home, and forget it."

The inspector felt that the advice was sound, though he did not like it. He thought of his wife and children, and of the comfortable pension which awaits the later years of frequently pro-

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moted officers who do not make mistakes which arouse adverse newspaper comment. He turned sadly away.

### XIV

Dr. Merson walked home very happily, beside a wife who did not know him. He was very fond of Molly. He wondered (as he had done before) if the time had come to show her the birthmark on his left arm. He wondered whether it would be expedient to use the hypodermic syringe in his right-hand pocket, which would restore her youth, and give her the vitality which he was already experiencing. He liked her very well as she was, but he did not doubt that he should like her quite as well if she were looking twenty years younger. But he was not quite clear as to the pretext on which he should make the injection. Not quite clear, either, that it would be morally defensible to do it without explaining its results beforehand. He felt that to convince her of the actual truth would not be the easiest of mental enterprises. But he felt also that, if she should be led to share his experiences, she would admit his identity more readily than would be otherwise probable.

Still, there was no hurry. There might even

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be advantages in delay. He imagined Inspector Clawson studying the metamorphosis of the wife of the missing doctor. It would be amusing. It could hardly be dangerous. Still, it was a needless risk. There was no hurry.

Yes—he would come in to tea.





# FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY

By

*Irvin S. Cobb*

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**J**UST outside a sizable New Mexico town the second section of the fast through train coming from the Coast made a short halt. Entering the stretch leading to the yards, the engineer had found the signal set against him; the track ahead was temporarily blocked.

It was a small delay though. Almost at once the semaphore like the finger of a mechanical wizard made the warning red light vanish and a green light appear instead; so, at that, the Limited got under way and rolled on into the station for her regular stop.

But before she started up, four travelers quitted her. They got out on the off side, the side farthest away from the town, and that probably

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explains why none of the crew and none of the other passengers saw them getting out. It helps also to explain why they were not missed until quite some time later.

Their manner of leaving her was decidedly unusual. First, one of the vestibule doors between the third sleeping car and the fourth sleeping car opened and the trap in the floor flipped up briskly under the pressure of an impatient foot on the operating lever. A brace of the departing ones came swiftly into view, one behind the other. True, there was nothing unusual about that. But as they stepped down on the earth they faced about and received the figure of a third person whose limbs dangled and whose head lolled back as they took the dead weight of him into their arms. Next there emerged the fourth and last member of the group, he being the one who had eased the limp figure of Number Three down the car steps into the grasp of his associates.

For a fractional space their shapes made a little huddle in the lee of the vestibule. Looking on, you might have guessed that there was a momentary period of indecision touching on the next step to be taken.

However, this muddle—if that was what it was

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—right away straightened itself out. Acting with movements which seemed difficult and awkward, the two burden-bearers carried their unconscious load down the short embankment and deposited it on the cindery underfooting close against the flank of the slightly built-up right of way.

Number Four bent over the sprawled form and fumbled at it, shoving his hands into first one pocket and then another. In half a minute or less he straightened up and spoke to the remaining pair, at the same time using both hands to shove some article inside the vent of his waistcoat.

“I have got them,” he said, speaking with a foreign accent. They pressed toward him, their hands extended.

“Not here and not yet, Señores,” he said sharply. “First we make sure of the rest. First you do, please, as I do.”

Thereupon he hopped nimbly up the shoulder of the roadbed and headed toward the rear of the halted train, slinking well in under the overhang of the Pullmans. His mates obeyed his example. They kept on until they had passed the tail coach, which was a combination coach, and then they stepped inward between the rails, still

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maintaining their single-file formation. Immediately the dusk swallowed them up.

There was something peculiar about the way each one of these three plodding pedestrians bore himself. The peculiarity was this: He bore himself like a person engaged in prayer—in a silent perambulating act of piety. His head was tucked in, his face turning neither to the right nor left; his eyes were set steadfastly forward as though upon some invisible goal, his hands clasped primly together in front of him.

Thus and so the marching three plodded on until the train, having got in motion, was out of sight beyond a curve in the approach to the station. Then they checked and came together in a clump, and then, had you been there, you would have understood the reason for their devotional pose. All three of them were wearing handcuffs.

The man who had spoken before unpalmed a key ring which he was carrying. Working swiftly even in the half-darkness, he made tests of the keys on the ring until he found the proper keys. He freed the wrists of his two fellows. Then one of them took the keys and unlocked his set of bracelets for him.

He, it would seem, was the most forethoughted

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of the trio. With his heel he kicked shallow gouges in the gritty soil beside the track and buried the handcuffs therein.

After that they briefly confabbed together, and the upshot of the confab was that, having matched for the possession of some object evidently held to be of great value, they separated forces.

One man set off alone on a detour to the southeast, which would carry him around the town. His late companions kept on in a general westerly direction, heading toward the desert which all that day they had been traversing. They footed it fast, as men might foot it who were fleeing for their lives and yet must conserve their strength. As a matter of fact, they were fleeing for their lives. So likewise the one from whom they had just parted was fleeing for his life.

It was partly by chance that these three had been making the transcontinental journey in company. Two of them, Lafitte the Frenchman, and Verdi the Italian who had Anglicized his name and called himself Green, met while lying in jail at San Francisco awaiting deportation to their respective countries. Within a space of

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a month each had been arrested as a refugee from justice; the formalities for extraditing the pair of them were swiftly completed.

So, to save trouble and expense; to kill, as it were, two birds with one stone, the authorities decided to send them together across to the eastern seaboard where, according to arrangements made by cable, they would be surrendered to police representatives coming from abroad to receive them and transport them back overseas. For the long trip to New York a couple of city detectives had them in custody.

When the train bearing the officers and their charges reached a junction in lower California where the main line connected with a branch line running south to the Mexican border, there came aboard a special agent of the Department of Justice who had with him a prisoner.

This prisoner was one Manuel Gaza, a Spaniard. He also recently had been captured and identified; and he also was destined for return to his own land. It was not by prior agreement that he had been retransferred at this junction point to the same train which carried the Italian and the Frenchman. It just happened so.

It having happened so, the man who had Gaza in tow lost no time in getting acquainted with

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his San Francisco brethren. For a number of reasons it seemed expedient to all the officers that from here on they should travel as a unit. Accordingly the special agent talked with the Pullman conductor and exchanged the reservations he previously had booked for a compartment adjoining the drawing-room in which the four from the city were riding.

It was on a Friday afternoon that the parties united. Friday evening, at the first call for dinner, the three officers herded their three prisoners forward to the dining car, the passage of the sextet through the aisles causing some small commotion. Their advent into the diner created another little sensation.

Since it was difficult for the handcuffed aliens to handle knife and fork, they were given such food as might readily be eaten with a spoon or with the fingers—soups and omelets and soft vegetables and pie or rice pudding. The detectives ate fish. They shared between them a double order of imported kippers.

Presumably they were the only persons on the train who that day had chosen the kippered herrings. Shortly, the special agent was giving private thanks that his church prescribed no dietetic regulations for Friday, because within an

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hour or two after leaving the table, the San Francisco men were suffering from violent cramps—ptomaine poison had them helpless.

One seemed to be dangerously ill. That night near the border between California and Arizona he was taken off the train and carried to a hospital. During the wait at the station, a local physician dosed the second and lesser sufferer, whose name was McAvoy, and when he had been somewhat relieved, the doctor gave him a shot of something in the arm and said he ought to be up and about within twenty-four hours.

Through the night McAvoy slept in the lower berth of the compartment and the special agent sat up, with the communicating door open, to guard the aliens, who were bedded in the so-called drawing-room.

Their irons stayed on their wrists; their lone warden was accepting no foolish odds against himself. He had taken the precaution to transfer the keys of the Frenchman's handcuffs and the Italian's handcuffs from McAvoy's keeping to his own, slipping them on his key ring, but this had been done in case McAvoy should become seriously ill en route and it should devolve upon him to make a lap of the journey single-handed.



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Next morning McAvoy was much easier but he felt weak, he said, and drowsy. Given a full twelve hours of rest, though, he thought he would be able to go on guard when the nightfall came.

So he lay in his berth, and the special agent occupied an end of the drawing-room sofa. The trapped fugitives sat smoking cigarets, and when the officer was not too near, talking among themselves.

Mainly they talked in English, a language which Gaza the Spaniard and Lafitte the Frenchman spoke fairly well. Verdi or Green, as the case might be, had little English at his command, but Gaza, who had spent three years in Naples, spoke Italian; and so when Verdi used his own tongue, Gaza could interpret for the Frenchman's benefit. They were allowed to quit the drawing-room only for meals.

When dinner hour came on that second evening of their trip, McAvoy was in a doze. So the Department of Justice man did not disturb him.

"Come on, boys," he said to the three aliens; "time to eat again."

He lined them up in front of him in the corridor and they started the regular processional. It was just at that moment that the train broke its rhythmic refrain and began to clack and creak

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and slow for that unscheduled stop outside that New Mexico town. By the time they had reached the second car on ahead, she'd almost stopped and was lurching and jerking.

In the vestibule beyond that second car the special agent was in the act of stepping across the iron floor lip of the connection when a particularly brisk joggle caused him to lose his hat. He gave a small exclamation and bent to recover it. Doing so, he jostled Gaza, the third man in the line and therefore the next to him.

The agile Spaniard was quick to seize his chance. He half turned, and bringing his chained wrists aloft, sent them down with all his might on the poll of the officer's unprotected skull. The victim of the assault never made a sound—just spraddled on his face and was dead to the world.

No outsider had been witness to the assault. No outsider came along during the few seconds which were required by the late prisoners to open an off-side car door and make their escape after the fashion which already has been described for you. Nobody missed them—for quite a while nobody did.

It wasn't until nearly nine o'clock, when Mc-Avoy had roused up and rung for the porter

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and begun to ask questions, that a search was made and an alarm raised.

Penned up together through that day, the aliens had matched stories, one story against another. A common plight made them communicative; a common peril caused each to turn with morbid reiteration to his own fatal predicament.

Said the Frenchman to the Spaniard: "He"—indicating his recent cellmate, the Italian—"he knows how with me it stands. With him, I have talked. He speaks not so well the English but sometimes he understands it. Now you shall hear and judge for yourself how bad my situation is."

Graphically, this criminal sketched his past. He had been a Marseilles dock hand. He had killed a woman. She deserved killing, so he killed her. He had been caught, tried, convicted, condemned. While lying in prison, with execution day only a few weeks distant, he had made a getaway.

In disguise he had reached America and here had stayed three years. Then another woman, in a fit of jealousy, betrayed him to the police. He had been living with that woman; to her he had

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given his confidence. It would appear that women had been his undoing.

"Me, I am as good as dead already. And what a death!" A spasm of shuddering possessed him. "For me the guillotine is waiting. The devil invented it. It is so they go at you with that machine: They strap you flat upon a board. Face downward you are, but you can look up, you can see—that is the worst part. They fit your throat into a grooved shutter; they make it fast. You bring your head back; your eyes are drawn upward, fascinated. Above you, waiting, ready, poised, your eyes see the—the knife."

"But only for a moment do you see it, my friend," said the Spaniard, in the tone of one offering comfort. "Only a moment and then—*pouff*—all over!"

"A moment! I tell you it is an eternity. It must be an eternity. Lying there, you must live a hundred lives, you must die a hundred deaths. And then to have your head taken off your body, to be all at once in two pieces. Me, I am not afraid of most deaths. But that death by the guillotine—ah-h!"

The Spaniard bent forward. He was sitting alone facing the other two, who shared a seat.

"Listen, Señor," he stated. "Compared with

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me, you are the lucky one. True, I have not yet been tried—before they could try me I fled away out of that accursed Spain of mine.”

“Not tried, eh?” broke in the Frenchman. “Then you have yet a loophole—a chance for escape; and I have none. My trial, as I told you, is behind me.”

“You do not know the Spanish courts. It is plain you do not, since you say that,” declared the Spaniard. “Those courts—they are greedy for blood. With them, to my kind, there is not mercy; there is only punishment.

“And such a punishment! Wait until you hear. To me when they get me before them they will say: ‘The proof is clear against you; the evidence has been thus and so. You are adjudged guilty. You took a life, so your life must be taken. It is the law.’

“Perhaps I say: ‘Yes, but that life I took swiftly and in passion and for cause. For that one the end came in an instant, without pain, without lingering, yes, without warning. Since I must pay for it, why cannot I also be made to die very quickly without pain?’

“Will they listen? No, they send me to the garrote. To a great strong chair they tie you—your hands, your feet, your trunk. Your head is

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against a post, an upright. In that post is a collar—an iron band. They fit that collar about your neck. Then from behind you the executioner turns a screw.

“If he chooses he turns it slowly. The collar tightens, tightens, a knob presses into your spine. You begin to strangle. Oh, I have seen it myself! I know. You expire by inches! I am a brave man, Señores. When one’s time comes, one dies. But oh, Señores, if it were any death but that! Better the guillotine than that! Better anything than that!”

He slumped back against the cushions, and rigors passed through him.

It was the Italian’s turn. “I was tried in my absence,” he explained to the Spaniard. “I was not even there to make my defense—I had thought it expedient to depart. Such is the custom of the courts in my country. They try you behind your back.

“They found me guilty, those judges. In Italy there is no capital punishment, so they sentenced me to life imprisonment. It is to that—that—I now return.”

The Spaniard lifted his shoulders; the lifting was eloquent of his meaning.

“Not so fast,” said the Italian. “You tell me

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you lived once in Italy. Have you forgotten what life imprisonment for certain acts means in Italy? It means solitary confinement. It means you are buried alive. They shut you away from every one in a tight cell. It is a tomb, that is all. You see no one ever; you hear no voice ever. If you cry out, no one answers. Silence, darkness, darkness, silence, until you go mad or die.

“Can you picture what that means to one of my race, to an Italian who must have music, sunshine, talk with his fellows, sight of his fellows? It is in his nature—he must have these things or he is in torture, in constant and everlasting torment. Every hour becomes to him a year, every day a century, until his brain bursts asunder inside his skull.

“Oh, they knew—those fiends who devised this thing—what to an Italian is a million times worse than death—any death. I am the most unfortunate one of the three of us. My penalty is the most dreadful by far.”

The others would not have it so. They argued the point with him and with each other all through the day, and twilight found their beliefs unshaken.

Then, under the Spaniard's leadership, came their deliverance out of captivity. It was he who,

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on the toss-up, won the revolver which they had taken from the person of the senseless special agent. Also it was he who suggested to the Italian that for the time being, at least, they stick together. To this the Italian had agreed, the Marseilles man, Lafitte, already having elected to go on his own.

After the latter, heading east by south, had left them, the Spaniard said reflectively:

“He is optimistic, that one, for all that he seemed so gloomy and downhearted to-day when speaking of that guillotine of his. He said he now had faith that he would yet dodge his fate. Five minutes after he is off that train he speaks of faith!”

“I cannot go quite so far,” answered the Italian. “We are free, but for us there will be still a thousand dangers. So I have not much faith, but I have hope. And you, my friend?”

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders. His shrug might mean yes or it might mean no. Perhaps he needed his breath. He was going at a jog-trot down the tracks, the Italian alongside him.

Take the man who had faith. Set down as he was in a country utterly strange to him, this one



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of the fugitives nevertheless made steady progress. He got safely around and by the New Mexico town. He hid in the chaparral until day-break, then took to a highway running parallel with the railroad.

A "tin-canner," which is what they were beginning to call an itinerant motor tourist in those parts, overtook him soon after sunup and gave him a lift to a small way station some forty miles down the line. There he boarded a local train—he had some money on him; not much money but enough—and undetected, he rode that train clear on through to its destination a hundred miles or so farther along.

Other local trains carried him across a corner of Colorado and clear across Kansas. Some forty-eight hours later, he was a guest in a third-rate hotel on a back street in Kansas City, Missouri.

He stayed in that hotel for two days and two nights, biding most of the time in his room on the top floor of the six-story building, going down only for his meals and for newspapers. The food he had to have; the newspapers gave him information, of a sort, of the hunt for the three fugitives. It was repeatedly stated that all three

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were believed to be fleeing together. That cheered Lafitte very much. It strengthened his faith.

But on the morning of his third day in this cheap hotel, when he came out of his room and went down the hall to ring for the elevator—there was only one passenger elevator in this hotel—he saw something. Passing the head of the stairs, which ended approximately midway of the stretch between the door of his room and the wattled iron door opening on the elevator well, he saw, out of the corner of one watchful eye, two men in civilian garb on the steps below him.

They had halted there. Whether they were coming up or going down there was no way of telling. It seemed to him that at sight of him they ducked slightly and made as if to flatten themselves back against the side wall.

He gave no sign of having seen them. He stilled an impulse to make a dash for it. Where was he to dash for, with the stairs cut off? He followed the only course open to him. Anyhow he told himself he might be wrong. Perhaps his nerves were misbehaving. Perhaps those two who seemed to be lurking just there behind him on those steps were not interested in him at all. He kept telling himself that, while he was ringing

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the bell, while he was waiting for the car to come up for him.

The car did come up and, for a wonder, promptly; an old-fashioned car, creaky, musty. Except for its shirt-sleeved attendant, it was empty. As Lafitte stepped in, he glanced sideways over his shoulder, making the movement casual—no sight of those two fellows.

He rode down, the only passenger for that trip, so there were no stops on the descent. They reached the ground floor, which was the office floor. The elevator came to a standstill, then moved up a foot or so, then joltingly down six inches or so, as the attendant, who was not expert, maneuvered to bring the sill of the car flush with the tiling of the lobby.

The delay was sufficiently prolonged for Lafitte to realize, all in a flash, he had not been wrong. Through the intervening grille of the shaft door he saw two more men who pressed close up to that door, who stared in at him, whose looks and poses were watchful, eager, prepared. Besides, Lafitte knew plainclothes men when he saw them.

Up above and here below, he was cut off. There still was a chance for him, a poor one but the only one. If he could shoot the elevator aloft

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quickly enough, check it at the third floor or the fourth, say, and hop out, he might make a successful dart for the fire escape at the rear of the hotel—provided the fire escape was not guarded. In the space of time that the elevator boy was jockeying the car, he thought of this, and having thought it, acted on it.

Swinging his fist from behind with all his might, he hit that hapless fellow on the point of the jaw and deposited him, stunned and temporarily helpless, on his knees in a corner of the cage. Lafitte grabbed the lever, shoved it over hard, and up the shaft shot the car. Before he could get control of it, being unfamiliar with such mechanisms and in a panic besides, it was at the top of the house. But then he mastered it and made it reverse its course, and returning downward he pulled the lever, bringing it toward him.

That was the proper notion, that gentler manipulation, for now the car, more obedient, was crawling abreast of the third-floor level. It crept earthward, inch by inch, and without bringing it to a dead stop he jerked up the latch of the collapsible safety gate, telescoped the metal outer door back into its folded-up self, and stooping low because the gap was diminishing, he lunged forward.

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Now that elevator boy was a quick-witted, a high-tempered Irish boy. He might be half dazed but his instincts of belligerency were not asleep. He told afterward how, automatically and indignantly functioning, he grabbed at the departing assailant and caught him by one leg and for a fleeting moment, before the other kicked free, retarded him.

But by all that was good and holy he swore he did not touch the lever. Being down on all-fours at the rear side of the slowly sinking car, how could he touch it? Why, just at that precise fraction of a second, the elevator should pick up full speed was a mystery to him—to everybody else, for that matter.

But pick up full speed it did. And the Irish boy cowered down and screamed an echo to a still louder scream than his, and hid his eyes from the sight of Lafitte, with his head outside and his body inside the elevator, being decapitated as completely and almost as neatly as though a great weighted knife had sheared him off at the neck.

Take the Spaniard and the Italian: Steadily they traveled westward for nearly all of that night which followed their evacuation from the

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Limited. It put desirable distance between them and the spot where they had dumped the special agent down. Also it kept them warm. This was summertime but on the desert even summer nights are chilly and sometimes downright cold. Before dawn, they came on a freight train waiting in a siding. Its locomotive faced west. That suited their book.

They climbed nimbly aboard a flat and snuggled themselves down behind a barrier of farm implements. Here, breakfastless but otherwise comfortable, they rode until nearly mid-day. Then a brakeman found them. Harshly he ordered them to get out of there.

Immediately though, looking at them where they squatted half hidden, his tone softened, and he told them he'd changed his mind about it and they could stay aboard as long as they pleased. On top of this, he hurried forward as though he might have important news for the engine crew or somebody.

They chose to get off. They had noted the quick start as of recognition which the brakeman had given. They figured—and figured rightly—that by now the chase for them was on and that their descriptions had been telegraphed back and forth along the line. The train was traveling at

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least twenty miles an hour, but as soon as the brakeman was out of sight, they jumped for it, tumbling like shot rabbits down the slope of the right of way and bringing up jarred and shaken in the dry ditch at the bottom.

Barring bruises and scratches, Green had taken no hurt, but Gaza landed with a badly sprained ankle. With Green to give him a helping arm, he hobbled away from the railroad.

To get away from that railroad was their prime aim now. Choosing a course at random, they went north over the undulating waste lands and through the shimmering heat, toward a range of mottled high buttes rising on beyond.

It took them until deep into the afternoon to cover a matter roughly of five miles. By now, Gaza's lower left leg was elephantine in its proportions and every forced step he took meant a fresh stab of agony. He knew he could not go much farther. Green knew it too, and in his brain began shaping tentative plans. The law of self-preservation was one of the few laws for which he had respect. They panted from heat and from thirst and from weariness.

At the end of those five miles, having toiled laboriously up over a fold in the land, they saw close at hand and almost directly below them, a

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'dobe hut, and not quite so near at hand, a big flock of sheep. At the door of the cabin, a man in overalls was stripping the hide from a swollen dead cow.

Before they could dodge back below the sky line, he saw them and stood up expectantly. There was nothing for them to do except to go toward him. At their slow approach, an expression of curiosity crept over his brown face and stayed there. He looked like a Mexican or possibly a half-breed Indian.

When Gaza, stumbling nearer, hailed him in English, he merely shook his head dumbly. Then Gaza tried him in Spanish and to that he replied volubly. For minutes they palavered back and forth; then the stranger served them with deep drafts from a water bottle swinging in the doorway with a damp sack over it. The water was lukewarm and bitterish-tasting but it was grateful to their parched throats. Then he withdrew inside the little house and Gaza, for Green's benefit, translated into Italian what talk had passed.

"He says he is quite alone here, which is the better for us," explained the Spaniard, speaking swiftly. "He says that a week ago he came up from Old Mexico, seeking work. A gringo—



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a white man—gave him work. The white man is a sheepman. His home ranch is miles away. In a sheep wagon he brought this Mexican here and left him here in charge of that flock yonder, with provisions for a month.

“It will be three weeks then before the white man, his employer, comes again. Except for that white man he knows nobody hereabouts. Until we came just now, he had seen no one at all. So he is glad to see us.”

“And accounting for ourselves you told him what?” asked Green.

“I told him we were traveling across country in a car and that going down a steepness last night the car overturned and was wrecked and I crippled myself. I told him that, traveling light because of my leg, we started out to find some town, some house, and that, hoping to make a short cut, we left the road, but that since morning and until we blundered upon this camp, we had been quite lost in this ugly country. He believes me. He is simple, that one, an ignorant, credulous peon.

“But kind-hearted, that also is plain. For proof of it observe this.” He pointed to the bloated,

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half-flayed carcass. "He says three days ago he found this beast—a stray from somewhere, he knows not where. So far as he knows there are no cattle droves in these parts—only sheep.

"She was sick, she staggered, she was dizzy and turned in circles as if blind, and froth ran from her mouth. There is a weed which does that to animals when they eat it, he says. So, hoping to make her well again, he put a scrap of rope on her horns and led her here. But last night she died. So to-day he has been peeling her. Now he goes to make ready some food for us. He is hospitable, also, that one."

"And when we have eaten, then what? We can't linger here."

"Wait, please, Señor. To my mind already an idea comes." His tone was authoritative, confident. "First we fill our empty stomachs to give us strength, and then we smoke a cigaret, and while we smoke, I think. And then—we see."

On frijoles and rancid bacon and thin corn cakes and bad coffee, which the herder brought them on tin platters and in tin cups, they did fill their empty stomachs. Then they smoked together, all three of them, smoking cigarets rolled in corn-husk wrappers.

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The Mexican was hunkered on his heels, making smoke rings in the still, hot air when Gaza, getting on his feet with difficulty, limped toward the doorway, gesturing to show that he craved another swig from the water bottle. When he was behind the other two, almost touching them, he drew the special agent's pistol and fired once and their host tumbled forward on his face and spraddled his limbs and quivered a bit and was still, with a bullet hole in the back of his head.

This killing gave the Italian, seasoned killer as he was, a profound shock. It seemed so unnecessary, unless——? He started up, his features twitching, and backed away, fearing the next bullet would be for him.

“Remain tranquil, Señor,” said the Spaniard, almost gayly. “For you, my comrade, there is no danger. There is for you hope of deliverance, you who professed last night to have hope in your soul.

“Now me, I have charity in my soul—charity for you, charity for myself, charity also for this one lying here. Behold, he is now out of his troubles. He was a dolt, a clod of the earth, a creature of no refinement. He lived a hermit's life, lonely, miserable. Now he has been dispatched to a better and a brighter world. That

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was but kindness." With his foot he touched the sprawled corpse.

"But in dispatching him I had thought also for you—for both of us. I elucidate: First we bury him under the dirt floor of this house, taking care to leave no telltale traces of our work. Then you make a pack for your back of the food that is here. You take also the water bottle, filled. Furthermore, you take with you this pistol.

"Then, stepping lightly on rocky ground or on hard ground so that you make no tracks, you go swiftly hence and hide yourself in those mountains until—who can tell?—until those who will come presently here have ceased to search for you. With me along, lamed as I am, me to hamper you, there would be no chance for either of us. But you, going alone—you armed, provisioned, quick of foot—you have a hope."

"But—but you? What then becomes of you?—You—you sacrifice yourself?" In his bewilderment the Italian stammered.

"Me, I stay here to greet the pursuers. It is quite simple. In peaceful solitude I await their coming. It cannot be long until they come. That man of the freight train will be guiding them back to pick up our trail. By to-night at latest I expect them."

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At sight of the Italian's mystified face he broke now into a laugh.

"Still you are puzzled, eh? You think that I am magnanimous, that I am generous? Well, all that I am. But you think me also a fool and there you err. I save you perhaps but likewise perhaps I save myself. Observe, Señor."

He stooped and lifted the dead face of his victim. "See now what I myself saw the moment I beheld this herder of ours: This man is much my shape, my height, my coloring. He spoke a corrupt Spanish such as I can speak. Put upon me the clothes which he wears, and remove from my lip this mustache which I wear, and I would pass for him even before the very eyes of that white man who hired him.

"Well, very soon I shall be wearing his clothes, my own being hidden in the same grave with him. Within ten minutes I shall be removing this mustache. He being newly shaven, as you see for yourself, it must be that in this hovel we will find a razor. I shall pass for him. I shall be this mongrel dull-wit."

A light broke on the Italian. He ran and kissed the Spaniard, on both cheeks and on the mouth.

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“Ah, my brother!” he cried out delightedly. “Forgive me that for a moment I thought you hard-hearted for having in seeming wantonness killed the man who fed us. I see you are brilliant—a great thinker, a great genius. But, my beloved”—and here doubt once more assailed him—“what explanation do you make when they do come?”

“That is the best of all,” said Gaza. “Before you leave me you take a cord and you bind me most securely—my hands crossed behind my back—so; my feet fastened together—so. It will not be for very long that I remain so. I can endure it. Coming then, they find me thus. That I am bound makes more convincing the tale I shall tell them.

“And this is the tale that I shall tell: To them I shall say that as I sat under this shelter skinning my dead cow, there appeared suddenly two men who fell upon me without warning; that in the struggle they hurt my poor leg most grievously, then, having choked me into quietude, they tied my limbs, despoiled me of my provender and hurriedly departed, leaving me helpless. I shall describe these two brutal men—oh, most minutely I shall describe them. And my description will be accurate, for you I shall be describing

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as you stand now; myself I shall describe as I now am.

“The man from the train will say: ‘Yes, yes, that is true; those are surely the two I saw.’ He will believe me at once; that will help. Then they will inquire to know in which direction fled this pair of scoundrels and I will tell them they went that way yonder to the south across the desert, and they will set off in that direction, seeking two who flee together, when all the while you will be gone north into those mountains which will shelter you. And that, Señor, will be a rich part of the whole joke.

“Perhaps, though, they question me further. Then I say: ‘Take me before this gringo who within a week hired me to watch his sheep. Confront me with him. He will identify me, he will confirm my story.’ And if they do that and he does that—as most surely he will—why, then they must turn me loose and that, Señor, will be the very crown and peak of the joke.”

In the excess of his admiration and his gratitude, the Italian just naturally had to kiss him again.

They worked fast and they worked scientifically, carefully, overlooking nothing, providing against every contingency. But at the last min-

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ute, when the Italian was ready to resume his flight and the Spaniard, smoothly shaven and effectually disguised in the soiled shirt and messy overalls of the dead man, had turned around and submitted his wrists to be pinioned, it was discovered that there was no rope available with which to bind his legs. The one short scrap of rope about the spot had been used for tying his hands.

The Spaniard said this was just as well. Any binding that was drawn snugly enough to fetter his feet securely would certainly increase the pain in the inflamed and grossly swollen ankle joint.

However, it was apparent that he must be securely anchored, lest suspicion arise in the minds of his rescuers when they arrived. Here the Italian made a contribution to the plot. He was proud of his inspiration.

With the Mexican's butcher knife he cut long narrow strips from the fresh slick cowhide. Then the Spaniard sat down on the earth with his back against one of the slim tree trunks supporting the arbor, and the Italian took numerous turns about his waist and his arms and the upper part of his body, and tightly knotted the various ends of the skin ribbons behind the post. Unaided, no



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human being could escape out of that mesh. To the pressure of the prisoner's trunk, the moist, pliant lashings would give slightly but it was certain they neither would work loose nor snap apart.

So he settled himself in his bonds, and the Italian, having shouldered his pack, once more fervently kissed his benefactor in token of gratitude, wished him success and made off with many farewells.

So far as this empty country was concerned, the Italian was a greenhorn, a tenderfoot. Nevertheless, he made excellent progress. He marched northward until dark, lay that night under a murdered man's smelly blanket behind a many-colored butte and next morning struck deeper into the broken lands. He entered what he hoped might be a gap through the mountains, treading cautiously along a narrow natural trail halfway up a dauntingly steep cliff-side.

He was well into it when his foot dislodged a scrap of shaly rock which in sliding over the verge set other rocks to cascading down the slope. From above, yet larger boulders began toppling over into the scoured-out passageway thus provided, and during the next five minutes the

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walled-in declivity was alive and roaring with tumbling huge stones, with dislodged earth running fluid like a stream, with uprooted stunted piñons, with choking acrid dust clouds.

The Italian ran for dear life; he managed to get out of the avalanche's path. When at length he reached a safe place and looked back, he saw behind him how the landslide had choked the gorge almost to its brim. No human being—no, not even a goat, could from his side scale that jagged and overhanging parapet. Between him and pursuit was a perfect barrier.

Well content, he went on. But presently he made a discovery, a distressing discovery which took the good cheer right out of him. This was no gateway into which he had entered. It was a dead-end leading nowhere—what Westerners call a box canyon. On three sides of him, right, left and on ahead, rose tremendously high walls, sheer and unclimbable. They threatened him; they seemed to be closing in on him to pinch him flat. And, of course, back of him retreat was cut off. There he was, bottled up like a fly in a corked jug, like a frog at the bottom of a well.

Frantically he explored as best he could the confines of this vast prison cell of his. He stumbled upon a spring, and its waters, while

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tainted lightly with alkali, were drinkable. So he had water and he had food, some food. By paring his daily portions down almost to starvation point, he might make these rations last for months. But then, what? And in the meantime, what? Why, until hunger destroyed him, he was faced with that doom which he so dreaded—the doom of solitary confinement.

He thought it all out and then he knelt down and took out his pistol and he killed himself.

In one of his calculations that smart malefactor, the Spaniard, had been wrong. By his system of deductions, the searchers should reach the 'dobe hut where he was tethered within four hours or, at most, five. But it was nearer thirty hours before they appeared.

The trouble had been that the brakeman wasn't quite sure of the particular stretch where he had seen the fugitives nestled beneath a reaping machine on that flat car. Besides, it took time to spread the word; to summon county officials; to organize an armed searching party. When at length the posse did strike the five-mile trail leading from the railroad tracks to the camp of the late sheep herder, considerably more than a day had elapsed.

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The track was fairly plain—two sets of heavy footprints bearing north and only lacking where rocky outcrops broke through the surface of the desert. Having found it, they followed it fast, and when they mounted the fold in the earth above the cabin, they saw the figure of a man seated in front of it, bound snugly to one of the supports of the arbor.

Hurrying toward him they saw that he was dead—that his face was blackened and horribly distorted; that his glazed eyes goggled at them and his tongue protruded; that his stiffened legs were drawn up in sharp angles of agony.

They looked closer and they saw the manner of his death and were very sorry for him. He had been bound with strands of fresh rawhide, and all through that day he had been sitting there exposed to the baking heat of the day.

Now heat, operating on damp new rawhide, has an immediate effect. Heat causes certain substances to expand but green rawhide it causes to contract very fast to an ironlike stiffness and rigidity.

So in this case the sun glare had drawn tighter and tighter the lashings about this poor devil's body, squeezing him in at the stomach and the

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breast and the shoulders, pressing his arms tighter and tighter and yet tighter against his sides. That for him would have been a highly unpleasant procedure but it would not have killed him.

Something else had done that. One loop of the rawhide had been twisted about his neck and made fast at the back of the post. At first it might have been no more than a loosely fitting circlet but hour by hour it had shrunk into a choking collar, a diminishing noose, a terrible deadly yoke. Veritably it had garroted him by inches.



# MR. ARCULARIS

By

*Conrad Aiken*

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**M**R. ARCULARIS stood at the window of his room in the hospital and looked down at the street. There had been a light shower, which had patterned the sidewalks with large drops, but now again the sun was out, blue sky was showing here and there between the swift white clouds, a cold wind was blowing the poplar trees. An itinerant band had stopped before the building and was playing, with violin, harp, and flute, the finale of "Cavalleria Rusticana." Leaning against the window-sill—for he felt extraordinarily weak after his operation—Mr. Arcularis suddenly, listening to the wretched music, felt like crying. He rested the palm of one hand against a cold window-pane and stared down at

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the old man who was blowing the flute, and blinked his eyes. It seemed absurd that he should be so weak, so emotional, so like a child—and especially now that everything was over at last. In spite of all their predictions, in spite, too, of his own dreadful certainty that he was going to die, here he was, as fit as a fiddle—but what a fiddle it was, so out of tune!—with a long life before him. And to begin with, a voyage to England ordered by the doctor. What could be more delightful? Why should he feel sad about it and want to cry like a baby? In a few minutes Harry would arrive with his car to take him to the wharf; in an hour he would be on the sea, in two hours he would see the sunset behind him, where Boston had been, and his new life would be opening before him. It was many years since he had been abroad. June, the best of the year to come—England, France, the Rhine—how ridiculous that he should already be homesick!

There was a light footstep outside the door, a knock, the door opened, and Harry came in.

“Well, old man, I’ve come to get you. The old bus actually got here. Are you ready? Here, let me take your arm. You’re tottering like an octogenarian!”

Mr. Arcularis submitted gratefully, laughing,



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and they made the journey slowly along the bleak corridor and down the stairs to the entrance hall. Miss Hoyle, his nurse, was there, and the Matron, and the charming little assistant with freckles who had helped to prepare him for the operation. Miss Hoyle put out her hand.

“Good-by, Mr. Arcularis,” she said, “and *bon voyage*.”

“Good-by, Miss Hoyle, and thank you for everything. You were very kind to me. And I fear I was a nuisance.”

The girl with the freckles, too, gave him her hand, smiling. She was very pretty, and it would have been easy to fall in love with her. She reminded him of some one. Who was it? He tried in vain to remember while he said good-by to her and turned to the Matron.

“And not too many latitudes with the young ladies, Mr. Arcularis!” she was saying.

Mr. Arcularis was pleased, flattered, by all this attention to a middle-aged invalid, and felt a joke taking shape in his mind, and no sooner in his mind than on his tongue.

“Oh, no latitudes,” he said, laughing. “I’ll leave the latitudes to the ship!”

“Oh, come now,” said the Matron, “we don’t seem to have hurt him much, do we?”

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"I think we'll have to operate on him again and *really* cure him," said Miss Hoyle.

He was going down the front steps, between the potted palmettos, and they all laughed and waved. The wind was cold, very cold for June, and he was glad he had put on his coat. He shivered.

"Damned cold for June!" he said. "Why should it be so cold?"

"East wind," Harry said, arranging the rug over his knees. "Sorry it's an open car, but I believe in fresh air and all that sort of thing. I'll drive slowly. We've got plenty of time."

They coasted gently down the long hill towards Beacon Street, but the road was badly surfaced, and despite Harry's care Mr. Arcularis felt his pain again. He found that he could alleviate it a little by leaning to the right, against the arm-rest, and not breathing too deeply. But how glorious to be out again! How strange and vivid the world looked! The trees had innumerable green fresh leaves—they were all blowing and shifting and turning and flashing in the wind; drops of rainwater fell downward sparkling; the robins were singing their absurd, delicious little four-noted songs; even the street cars looked unusually bright and beautiful, just as they used

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to look when he was a child and had wanted above all things to be a motorman. He found himself smiling foolishly at everything, foolishly and weakly, and wanted to say something about it to Harry. It was no use, though—he had no strength, and the mere finding of words would be almost more than he could manage. And even if he should succeed in saying it, he would then most likely burst into tears. He shook his head slowly from side to side.

“Ain’t it grand?” he said.

“I’ll bet it looks good,” said Harry.

“Words fail me.”

“You wait till you get out to sea. You’ll have a swell time.”

“Oh, swell! . . . I hope not. I hope it’ll be calm.”

“Tut tut.”

When they passed the Harvard Club Mr. Arcularis made a slow and somewhat painful effort to turn in his seat and look at it. It might be the last chance to see it for a long time. Why this sentimental longing to stare at it, though? There it was, with the great flag blowing in the wind, the Harvard seal now concealed by the swift folds and now revealed, and there were the windows in the library, where he had spent so

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many delightful hours reading—Plato, and Kipling, and the Lord knows what—and the balconies from which for so many years he had watched the finish of the Marathon. Old Talbot might be in there now, sleeping with a book on his knee, hoping forlornly to be interrupted by any one, for anything.

“Good-by to the old club,” he said.

“The bar will miss you,” said Harry, smiling with friendly irony and looking straight ahead.

“But let there be no moaning,” said Mr. Arcularis.

“What’s *that* a quotation from?”

“‘The Odyssey.’”

In spite of the cold, he was glad of the wind on his face, for it helped to dissipate the feeling of vagueness and dizziness that came over him in a sickening wave from time to time. All of a sudden everything would begin to swim and dissolve, the houses would lean their heads together, he had to close his eyes, and there would be a curious and dreadful humming noise, which at regular intervals rose to a crescendo and then drawlingly subsided again. It was disconcerting. Perhaps he still had a trace of fever. When he got on the ship he would have a glass of whisky. . . . From one of these spells he opened his eyes

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and found that they were on the ferry, crossing to East Boston. It must have been the ferry's engines that he had heard. From another spell he woke to find himself on the wharf, the car at a standstill beside a pile of yellow packing-cases.

"We're here because we're here because we're here," said Harry.

"Because we're here," added Mr. Arcularis.

He dozed in the car while Harry—and what a good friend Harry was!—attended to all the details. He went and came with tickets and passports and baggage checks and porters. And at last he unwrapped Mr. Arcularis from the rugs and led him up the steep gangplank to the deck, and thence by devious windings to a small cold stateroom with a solitary porthole like the eye of a cyclops.

"Here you are," he said, "and now I've got to go. Did you hear the whistle?"

"No."

"Well, you're half asleep. It's sounded the all-ashore. Good-by, old fellow, and take care of yourself. Bring me back a spray of edelweiss. And send me a picture post card from the Absolute."

"Will you have it finite or infinite?"

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"Oh, infinite. But with your signature on it. Now you'd better turn in for a while and have a nap. Cheerio!"

Mr. Arcularis took his hand and pressed it hard, and once more felt like crying. Absurd! Had he become a child again?

"Good-by," he said.

He sat down in the little wicker chair, with his overcoat still on, closed his eyes, and listened to the humming of the air in the ventilator. Hurried footsteps ran up and down the corridor. The chair was not too comfortable, and his pain began to bother him again, so he moved, with his coat still on, to the narrow berth and fell asleep. When he woke up, it was dark, and the porthole had been partly opened. He groped for the switch and turned on the light. Then he rang for the steward.

"It's cold in here," he said. "Would you mind closing the port?"

The girl who sat opposite him at dinner was charming. Who was it she reminded him of? Why, of course, the girl at the hospital, the girl with the freckles. Her hair was beautiful, not quite red, not quite gold, nor had it been bobbed; arranged with a sort of graceful untidiness, it

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made him think of a Melozzo da Forli angel. Her face was freckled, she had a mouth which was both humorous and voluptuous. And she seemed to be alone.

He frowned at the bill of fare and ordered the thick soup.

"No hors d'œuvres?" asked the steward.

"I think not," said Mr. Arcularis. "They might kill me."

The steward permitted himself to be amused and deposited the menu card on the table against the water-bottle. His eyebrows were lifted. As he moved away, the girl followed him with her eyes and smiled.

"I'm afraid you shocked him," she said.

"Impossible," said Mr. Arcularis. "These stewards, they're dead souls. How could they be stewards otherwise? And they think they've seen and known everything. They suffer terribly from the *déjà vu*. Personally, I don't blame them."

"It must be a dreadful sort of life."

"It's because they're dead that they accept it."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm sure of it. I'm enough of a dead soul myself to know the signs!"

"Well, I don't know what you mean by that!"

"But nothing mysterious! I'm just out of

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hospital, after an operation. I was given up for dead. For six months I had given *myself* up for dead. If you've ever been seriously ill you know the feeling. You have a posthumous feeling—a mild, cynical tolerance for everything and everyone. What is there you haven't seen or done or understood? Nothing."

Mr. Arcularis waved his hands and smiled.

"I wish I could understand you," said the girl, "but I've never been ill in my life."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Good God!"

The torrent of the unexpressed and inexpressible paralyzed him and rendered him speechless. He stared at the girl, wondering who she was and then, realizing that he had perhaps stared too fixedly, averted his gaze, gave a little laugh, rolled a pill of bread between his fingers. After a second or two he allowed himself to look at her again and found her smiling.

"Never pay any attention to invalids," he said, "or they'll drag you to the hospital."

She examined him critically, with her head tilted a little to one side, but with friendliness.

"You don't *look* like an invalid," she said.

Mr. Arcularis thought her charming. His pain



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ceased to bother him, the disagreeable humming disappeared, or rather, it was dissociated from himself and became merely, as it should be, the sound of the ship's engines, and he began to think the voyage was going to be really delightful. The parson on his right passed him the salt.

"I fear you will need this in your soup," he said.

"Thank you. Is it as bad as that?"

The steward, overhearing, was immediately apologetic and solicitous. He explained that on the first day everything was at sixes and sevens. The girl looked up at him and asked him a question.

"Do you think we'll have a good voyage?" she said.

He was passing the hot rolls to the parson, removing the napkins from them with a deprecatory finger.

"Well, madam, I don't like to be a Jeremiah, but——"

"Oh, come," said the parson, "I hope we have no Jeremiahs."

"What do you mean?" said the girl.

Mr. Arcularis ate his soup with gusto—it was nice and hot.

"Well, maybe I shouldn't say it, but there's

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a corpse on board, going to Ireland; and I never yet knew a voyage with a corpse on board that we didn't have bad weather."

"Why, steward, you're just superstitious! What nonsense."

"That's a very ancient superstition," said Mr. Arcularis. "I've heard it many times. Maybe it's true. Maybe we'll be wrecked. And what does it matter, after all?" He was very bland.

"Then let's be wrecked," said the parson coldly.

Nevertheless, Mr. Arcularis felt a shudder go through him on hearing the steward's remark. A corpse in the hold—a coffin? Perhaps it was true. Perhaps some disaster would befall them. There might be fogs. There might be icebergs. He thought of all the wrecks of which he had read. There was the *Titanic*, which he had read about in the warm newspaper room at the Harvard Club—it had seemed dreadfully real, even there. That band, playing "Nearer My God to Thee" on the after-deck while the ship sank! It was one of the darkest of his memories. And the *Empress of Ireland*—all those poor people trapped in the smoking-room, with only one door between them and life, and that door locked for the night by the deck-steward, and the deck-

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steward nowhere to be found! He shivered, feeling a draft, and turned to the parson.

“How do these strange delusions arise?” he said.

The parson looked at him searchingly, appraisingly—from chin to forehead, from forehead to chin—and Mr. Arcularis, feeling uncomfortable, straightened his tie.

“From nothing but fear,” said the parson. “Nothing on earth but fear.”

“How strange!” said the girl.

Mr. Arcularis again looked at her—she had lowered her face—and again tried to think of whom she reminded him. It wasn't only the little freckle-faced girl at the hospital—both of them had reminded him of some one else. Some one far back in his life: remote, beautiful, lovely. But he couldn't think. The meal came to an end, they all rose, the ship's orchestra played a feeble fox-trot, and Mr. Arcularis, once more alone, went to the bar to have his whisky. The room was stuffy, and the ship's engines were both audible and palpable. The humming and throbbing oppressed him, the rhythm seemed to be the rhythm of his own pain, and after a short time he found his way, with slow steps, holding on to the walls in his moments of weakness and dizziness, to

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his forlorn and white little room. The port had been—thank God!—closed for the night: it was cold enough anyway. The white and blue ribbons fluttered from the ventilator, the bottle and glasses clicked and clucked as the ship swayed gently to the long, slow motion of the sea. It was all very peculiar—it was all like something he had experienced somewhere before. What was it? Where was it? . . . He untied his tie, looking at his face in the glass, and wondered, and from time to time put his hand to his side to hold in the pain. It wasn't at Portsmouth, in his childhood, nor at Salem, nor in the rose-garden at his Aunt Julia's, nor in the schoolroom at Cambridge. It was something very queer, very intimate, very precious. The jackstones, the Sunday-School cards which he had loved when he was a child . . . He fell asleep.

The sense of time was already hopelessly confused. One hour was like another, the sea looked always the same, morning was indistinguishable from afternoon—and was it Tuesday or Wednesday? Mr. Arcularis was sitting in the smoking-room, in his favorite corner, watching the parson teach Miss Dean to play chess. On the deck outside he could see the people passing and repass-

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ing in their restless round of the ship. The red jacket went by, then the black hat with the white feather, then the purple scarf, the brown tweed coat, the Bulgarian mustache, the monocle, the Scotch cap with fluttering ribbons, and in no time at all the red jacket again, dipping past the windows with its own peculiar rhythm, followed once more by the black hat and the purple scarf. How odd to reflect on the fixed little orbits of these things—as definite and profound, perhaps, as the orbits of the stars, and as important to God or the Absolute. There was a kind of tyranny in this fixedness, too—to think of it too much made one uncomfortable. He closed his eyes for a moment, to avoid seeing for the fortieth time the Bulgarian mustache and the pursuing monocle. The parson was explaining the movements of knights. Two forward and one to the side. Eight possible moves, always to the opposite color from that on which the piece stands. Two forward and one to the side: Miss Dean repeated the words several times with reflective emphasis. Here, too, was the terrifying fixed curve of the infinite, the creeping curve of logic which at last must become the final signpost at the edge of nothing. After that—the deluge. The great white light of annihilation. The bright

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flash of death. . . . Was it merely the sea which made these abstractions so insistent, so intrusive? The mere notion of *orbit* had somehow become extraordinarily naked; and to rid himself of the discomfort and also to forget a little the pain which bothered his side whenever he sat down, he walked slowly and carefully into the writing-room, and examined a pile of superannuated magazines and catalogues of travel. The bright colors amused him, the photographs of remote islands and mountains, savages in sampans or sarongs or both—it was all very far off and delightful, like something in a dream or a fever. But he found that he was too tired to read and was incapable of concentration. Dreams! Yes, that reminded him. That rather alarming business—sleep-walking!

Later in the evening—at what hour he didn't know—he was telling Miss Dean about it, as he had intended to do. They were sitting in deck-chairs on the sheltered side. The sea was black, and there was a cold wind. He wished they had chosen to sit in the lounge.

Miss Dean was extremely pretty—no, beautiful. She looked at him, too, in a very strange and lovely way, with something of inquiry, something of sympathy, something of affection. It

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seemed as if, between the question and the answer, they had sat thus for a very long time, exchanging an unspoken secret, simply looking at each other quietly and kindly. Had an hour or two passed? And was it at all necessary to speak?

“No,” she said, “I never have.”

She breathed into the low words a note of interrogation and gave him a slow smile.

“That’s the funny part of it. I never had either until last night. Never in my life. I hardly ever even dream. And it really rather frightens me.”

“Tell me about it, Mr. Arcularis.”

“I dreamed at first that I was walking, alone, in a wide plain covered with snow. It was growing dark, I was very cold, my feet were frozen and numb, and I was lost. I came then to a signpost—at first it seemed to me there was nothing on it. Nothing but ice. Just before it grew finally dark, however, I made out on it the one word ‘Polaris.’”

“The Pole Star.”

“Yes—and you see, I didn’t myself know that. I looked it up only this morning. I suppose I must have seen it somewhere? And of course it rhymes with my name.”

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"Why, so it does!"

"Anyway, it gave me—in the dream—an awful feeling of despair, and the dream changed. This time, I dreamed I was standing *outside* my stateroom in the little dark corridor, or *cul-de-sac*, and trying to find the door-handle to let myself in. I was in my pajamas, and again I was very cold. And at this point I woke up. . . . The extraordinary thing is that's exactly where I was!"

"Good heavens! How strange!"

"Yes. And now the question is, *where had I been?* I was frightened, when I came to—not unnaturally. For among other things I *did* have, quite definitely, the feeling that I *had been* somewhere. Somewhere where it was very cold. It doesn't sound very proper. Suppose I had been seen!"

"That might have been awkward," said Miss Dean.

"Awkward! It might indeed. It's very singular. I've never done such a thing before. It's this sort of thing that reminds one—rather wholesomely, perhaps, don't you think?"—and Mr. Arcularis gave a nervous little laugh—"how extraordinarily little we know about the workings



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of our own minds or souls. After all, what *do* we know?"

"Nothing—nothing—nothing—nothing," said Miss Dean slowly.

"*Absolutely* nothing."

Their voices had dropped, and again they were silent; and again they looked at each other gently and sympathetically, as if for the exchange of something unspoken and perhaps unspeakable. Time ceased. The orbit—so it seemed to Mr. Arcularis—once more became pure, became absolute. And once more he found himself wondering who it was that Miss Dean—Clarice Dean—reminded him of. Long ago and far away. Like those pictures of the islands and mountains. The little freckle-faced girl at the hospital was merely, as it were, the stepping-stone, the signpost, or, as in algebra, the "equals" sign. But what was it they both "equaled"? The jackstones came again into his mind and his Aunt Julia's rose-garden—at sunset; but this was ridiculous. It couldn't be simply that they reminded him of his childhood! And yet why not?

They went into the lounge. The ship's orchestra, in the oval-shaped balcony among faded palms, was playing the finale of "Cavalleria Rusticana," playing it badly.

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“Good God!” said Mr. Arcularis, “can’t I ever escape from that damned sentimental tune? It’s the last thing I heard in America, and the last thing I *want* to hear.”

“But don’t you like it?”

“As music? No! It moves me too much, but in the wrong way.”

“What, exactly, do you mean?”

“Exactly? Nothing. When I heard it at the hospital—when was it?—it made me feel like crying. Three old Italians tootling it in the rain. I suppose, like most people, I’m afraid of my feelings.”

“Are they so dangerous?”

“Now then, young woman! Are you pulling my leg?”

The stewards had rolled away the carpets, and the passengers were beginning to dance. Miss Dean accepted the invitation of a young officer, and Mr. Arcularis watched them with envy. Odd, that last exchange of remarks—very odd; in fact, everything was odd. Was it possible that they were falling in love? Was that what it was all about—all these concealed references and recollections? He had read of such things. But at his age! And with a girl of twenty-two!

After an amused look at his old friend Polaris

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from the open door on the sheltered side, he went to bed.

The rhythm of the ship's engines was positively a persecution. It gave one no rest, it followed one like the Hound of Heaven, it drove one out into space and across the Milky Way and then back home by way of Betelgeuse. It was cold there, too. Mr. Arcularis, making the round trip by way of Betelgeuse and Polaris, sparkled with frost. He felt like a Christmas tree. Icicles on his fingers and icicles on his toes. He tinkled and spangled in the void, halloed to the waste echoes, rounded the buoy on the verge of the Unknown, and tacked glitteringly homeward. The wind whistled. He was barefooted. Snowflakes and tinsel blew past him. Next time, by George, he would go farther still—for altogether it was rather a lark. Forward into the untrodden! as somebody said. Some intrepid explorer of his own backyard, probably, some middle-aged professor with an umbrella: those were the fellows for courage! But give us time, thought Mr. Arcularis, give us time, and we will bring back with us the night-rime of the Obsolute. Or was it Absolute? If only there weren't this perpetual throbbing, this iteration of sound, like a pain, these circles and repetitions of light—the feeling

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as of everything coiling inward to a center of misery . . .

Suddenly it was dark, and he was lost. He was groping, he touched the cold, white, slippery woodwork with his fingernails, looking for an electric switch. The throbbing, of course, was the throbbing of the ship. But he was almost home—almost home. Another corner to round, a door to be opened, and there he would be. Safe and sound. Safe in his father's home.

It was at this point that he woke up: in the corridor that led to the dining saloon. Such pure terror, such horror, seized him as he had never known. His heart felt as if it would stop beating. His back was towards the dining saloon; apparently he had just come from it. He was in his pajamas. The corridor was dim, all but two lights having been turned out for the night, and—thank God!—deserted. Not a soul, not a sound. He was perhaps fifty yards from his room. With luck he could get to it unseen. Holding tremulously to the rail that ran along the wall, a brown, greasy rail, he began to creep his way forward. He felt very weak, very dizzy, and his thoughts refused to concentrate. Vaguely he remembered Miss Dean—Clarice—and the freckled girl, as if they were one and the same person. But he

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wasn't in the hospital, he was on the ship. Of course. How absurd. The Great Circle. Here we are, old fellow . . . steady round the corner . . . hold hard to your umbrella . . .

In his room, with the door safely shut behind him, Mr. Arcularis broke into a cold sweat. He had no sooner got into his bunk, shivering, than he heard the night watchman pass.

"But where—" he thought, closing his eyes in agony—"have I been? . . ."

A dreadful idea had occurred to him.

"It's nothing serious—how could it be anything serious? Of course it's nothing serious," said Mr. Arcularis.

"No, it's nothing serious," said the ship's doctor urbanely.

"I knew you'd think so. But just the same——"

"Such a condition is the result of worry," said the doctor. "Are you worried—do you mind telling me—about something? Just try to think."

"Worried?"

Mr. Arcularis knitted his brows. *Was* there something? Some little mosquito of a cloud disappearing into the southwest, the northeast?

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Some little gnat-song of despair? But no, that was all over. All over.

“Nothing,” he said, “nothing whatever.”

“It’s very strange,” said the doctor.

“Strange! I should say so. I’ve come to sea for a rest, not for a nightmare! What about a bromide?”

“Well, I can give you a bromide, Mr. Arcularis——”

“Then, please, if you don’t mind, give me a bromide.”

He carried the little phial hopefully to his stateroom, and took a dose at once. He could see the sun through his porthole. It looked northern and pale and small, like a little peppermint, which was only natural enough, for the latitude was changing with every hour. But why was it that doctors were all alike? and all, for that matter, like his father, or that other fellow at the hospital? Smythe, his name was. Doctor Smythe. A nice, dry little fellow, and they said he was a writer. Wrote poetry, or something like that. Poor fellow—disappointed. Like everybody else. Crouched in there, in his cabin, night after night, writing blank verse or something—all about the stars and flowers and love and

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death; ice and the sea and the infinite; time and tide—well, every man to his own taste.

“But it’s nothing serious,” said Mr. Arcularis, later, to the parson. “How could it be?”

“Why, of course not, my dear fellow,” said the parson, patting his back. “How could it be?”

“I know it isn’t and yet I worry about it.”

“It would be ridiculous to think it serious,” said the parson.

Mr. Arcularis shivered: it was colder than ever. It was said that they were near icebergs. For a few hours in the morning there had been a fog, and the siren had blown—devastatingly—at three-minute intervals. Icebergs caused fog—he knew that.

“These things always come,” said the parson, “from a sense of guilt. You feel guilty about something. I won’t be so rude as to inquire what it is. But if you could rid yourself of the sense of guilt——”

And later still, when the sky was pink:

“But is it anything to worry about?” said Miss Dean. “Really?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“Then don’t worry. We aren’t children any longer!”

“Aren’t we? I wonder!”

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They leaned, shoulders touching, on the deck-rail, and looked at the sea, which was multitudinously incarnadined. Mr. Arcularis scanned the horizon in vain for an iceberg.

"Anyway," he said, "the colder we are the less we feel!"

"I hope that's no reflection on *you*," said Miss Dean.

"Here . . . feel my hand," said Mr. Arcularis.

"Heaven knows it's cold!"

"It's been to Polaris and back! No wonder."

"Poor thing, poor thing!"

"Warm it."

"May I?"

"You can."

"I'll try."

Laughing, she took his hand between both of hers, one palm under and one palm over, and began rubbing it briskly. The decks were deserted, no one was near them, every one was dressing for dinner. The sea grew darker, the wind blew colder.

"I wish I could remember who you are," he said.

"And you—who are you?"

"Myself."

"Then perhaps *I* am yourself."



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“Don’t be metaphysical!”

“But I *am* metaphysical!”

She laughed, withdrew, pulled the light coat about her shoulders.

The bugle blew the summons for dinner—“The Roast Beef of Old England”—and they walked together along the darkening deck toward the door, from which a shaft of soft light fell across the deck-rail. As they stepped over the brass door-sill Mr. Arcularis felt the throb of the engines again; he put his hand quickly to his side.

“*Auf wiedersehen,*” he said. “*To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow.*”

Mr. Arcularis was finding it impossible, absolutely impossible, to keep warm. A cold fog surrounded the ship, had done so, it seemed, for days. The sun had all but disappeared, the transition from day to night was almost unnoticeable. The ship, too, seemed scarcely to be moving—it was as if anchored among walls of ice and rime. Monstrous, that merely because it was June, and supposed, therefore, to be warm, the ship’s authorities should consider it unnecessary to turn on the heat! By day, he wore his heavy coat and sat shivering in the corner of the smoking-room.

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His teeth chattered, his hands were blue. By night, he heaped blankets on his bed, closed the porthole's black eye against the sea, and drew the yellow curtains across it, but in vain. Somehow, despite everything, the fog crept in, and the icy fingers touched his throat. The steward, questioned about it, merely said, "Icebergs." Of course—any fool knew that. But how long, in God's name, was it going to last? They surely ought to be past the Grand Banks by this time! And surely it wasn't necessary to sail to England by way of Greenland and Iceland!

Miss Dean—Clarice—was sympathetic.

"It's simply because," she said, "your vitality has been lowered by your illness. You can't expect to be your normal self so soon after an operation! When *was* your operation, by the way?"

Mr. Arcularis considered. Strange—he couldn't be quite sure. It was all a little vague—his sense of time had disappeared.

"Heavens knows!" he said. "Centuries ago. When I was a tadpole and you were a fish. I should think it must have been at about the time of the Battle of Teutoburg Forest. Or perhaps when I was a Neanderthal man with a club!"

"Are you sure it wasn't farther back still?"

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What did she mean by that?

“Not at all. Obviously, we’ve been on this damned ship for ages—for eras—for æons. And even on this ship, you must remember, I’ve had plenty of time, in my nocturnal wanderings, to go several times to Orion and back. I’m thinking, by the way, of going farther still. There’s a nice little star off to the left, as you round Betelgeuse, which looks as if it might be right at the edge. The last outpost of the finite. I think I’ll have a look at it and bring you back a frozen rime-feather.”

“It would melt when you got it back.”

“Oh, no, it wouldn’t—not on *this* ship!”

Clarice laughed.

“I wish I could go with you,” she said.

“If only you would! If only——”

He broke off his sentence and looked hard at her—how lovely she was, and how desirable! No such woman had ever before come into his life; there had been no one with whom he had at once felt so profound a sympathy and understanding. It was a miracle, simply—a miracle. No need to put his arm around her or to kiss her—delightful as such small vulgarities would be. He had only to look at her, and to feel, gazing into those extraordinary eyes, that she knew him, had always

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known him. It was as if, indeed, she might be his own soul.

But as he looked thus at her, reflecting, he noticed that she was frowning.

“What is it?” he said.

She shook her head, slowly.

“I don’t know.”

“Tell me.”

“Nothing. It just occurred to me that perhaps you weren’t looking quite so well.”

Mr. Arcularis was startled. He straightened himself up.

“What nonsense! Of course this pain bothers me—and I feel astonishingly weak——”

“It’s more than that—much more than that. Something is worrying you horribly.” She paused, and then with an air of challenging him, added, “Tell me, did you?”

Her eyes were suddenly asking him blazingly the question he had been afraid of. He flinched, caught his breath, looked away. But it was no use, as he knew: he would have to tell her. He had known all along that he would have to tell her.

“Clarice,” he said—and his voice broke in spite of his effort to control it—“It’s killing me, it’s ghastly! Yes, I did.”

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His eyes filled with tears, he saw that her own had done so also. She put her hand on his arm.

"I knew," she said. "I knew. But tell me."

"It's happened twice again—*twice*—and each time I was farther away. The same dream of going round a star, the same terrible coldness and helplessness. That awful whistling curve . . ." He shuddered.

"And when you woke up—" she spoke quietly—"where were you when you woke up? Don't be afraid!"

"The first time I was at the farther end of the dining saloon. I had my hand on the door that leads into the pantry."

"I see. Yes. And the next time?"

Mr. Arcularis wanted to close his eyes in terror—he felt as if he were going mad. His lips moved before he could speak, and when at last he did speak it was in a voice so low as to be almost a whisper.

"I was at the bottom of the stairway that leads down from the pantry to the hold, past the refrigerating-plant. It was dark, and I was crawling on my hands and knees . . . *Crawling on my hands and knees! . . .*"

"Oh!" she said, and again, "Oh!"

He began to tremble violently; he felt the

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hand on his arm trembling also. And then he watched a look of unmistakable horror come slowly into Clarice's eyes, and a look of understanding, as if she saw . . . She tightened her hold on his arm.

"Do you think . . ." she whispered.

They stared at each other.

"I know," he said. "And so do you . . . Twice more—three times—and I'll be looking down into an empty . . ."

It was then that they first embraced—then, at the edge of the infinite, at the last signpost of the finite. They clung together desperately, forlornly, weeping as they kissed each other, staring hard one moment and closing their eyes the next. Passionately, passionately, she kissed him, as if she were indeed trying to give him her warmth, her life.

"But what nonsense!" she cried, leaning back, and holding his face between her hands, her hands which were wet with his tears. "What nonsense! It can't be!"

"It is," said Mr. Arcularis slowly.

"But how do you know? . . . How do you know where the——"

For the first time Mr. Arcularis smiled.

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"Don't be afraid, darling—you mean the coffin?"

"How could you know where it is?"

"I don't need to," said Mr. Arcularis . . .  
"I'm already almost there."

Before they separated for the night, in the smoking-room, they had several whisky cocktails.

"We must make it gay!" Mr. Arcularis said. "Above all, we must make it gay. Perhaps even now it will turn out to be nothing but a nightmare from which both of us will wake! And even at the worst, at my present rate of travel, I ought to need two more nights! It's a long way, still, to that little star."

The parson passed them at the door.

"What! turning in so soon?" he said. "I was hoping for a game of chess."

"Yes, both turning in. But to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, then, Miss Dean! And good-night!"

"Good-night."

They walked once round the deck, then leaned on the railing and stared into the fog. It was thicker and whiter than ever. The ship was moving barely perceptibly, the rhythm of the engines was slower, more subdued and remote, and at

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regular intervals, mournfully, came the long reverberating cry of the foghorn. The sea was calm, and lapped only very tenderly against the side of the ship, the sound coming up to them clearly, however, because of the profound stillness.

“‘On such a night as this——’” quoted Mr. Arcularis grimly.

“‘On such a night as this——’”

Their voices hung suspended in the night, time ceased for them, for an eternal instant they were happy. When at last they parted it was by tacit agreement on a note of the ridiculous.

“Be a good boy and take your bromide!” she said.

“Yes, mother, I’ll take my medicine!”

In his stateroom, he mixed himself a strong potion of bromide, a very strong one, and got into bed. He would have no trouble in falling asleep: he felt more tired, more supremely exhausted, than he had ever been in his life; nor had bed ever seemed so delicious. And that long, magnificent, delirious swoop of dizziness . . . the Great Circle . . . the swift pathway to Arcturus. . . .

It was all as before, but infinitely more rapid. Never had Mr. Arcularis achieved such phe-



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nomenal, such supernatural, speed. In no time at all he was beyond the moon, shot past the North Star, as if it were standing still (which perhaps it was?), swooped in a long, bright curve round the Pleiades, shouted his frosty greetings to Betelgeuse, and was off to the little blue star which pointed the way to the unknown. Forward into the untrodden! Courage, old man, and hold on to your umbrella! Have you got your garters on? Mind your hat! In no time at all we'll be back to Clarice with the frozen time-feather, the rime-feather, the snowflake of the Absolute, the Obsolete. If only we don't wake . . . if only we needn't wake . . . if only we don't wake in that—in that—time and space . . . somewhere or nowhere . . . cold and dark . . . "Cavalleria Rusticana" sobbing among the palms; if a lonely . . . if only . . . the coffers of the poor—not coffers, not coffers, not coffers, Oh, God, not coffers, but light, delight, supreme white and brightness, and above all whirling lightness, whirling lightness above all—and freezing—freezing—freezing . . .

At this point in the void the surgeon's last effort to save Mr. Arcularis's life had failed. He

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stood back from the operating table and made a tired gesture with a rubber-gloved hand.

"It's all over," he said. "As I expected."

He looked at Miss Hoyle, whose gaze was downward, at the basin she held. There was a moment's stillness, a pause, a brief flight of un-exchanged comment, and then the ordered life of the hospital was resumed.

# THE MUSIC OF ERICH ZANN

By

*H. P. Lovecraft*

---

I HAVE examined maps of the city with the greatest care, yet 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 an 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;

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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 any one 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 neighboring 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

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in a lofty ivied wall. Its paving was irregular, sometimes stone slabs, sometimes cobblestones, and sometimes bare earth with struggling greenish-gray 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 silent and reticent; but later decided 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 story; 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

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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 theater orchestra; adding that Zann's desire to play in the night after his return from the theater 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, satyrlike face, and nearly bald head; and at my first words seemed both angered and frightened. My obvious friendliness, however, finally melted

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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, toward 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

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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 satyrlike 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



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stop my mouth and silence the crude imitation. As he did this he further demonstrated his eccentricity by casting a startled glance toward 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 on 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 my 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 offense, his own anger seemed to subside. He tightened

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his relaxing grip, but this time in a friendly manner, forcing me into a chair; then with an appearance of wistfulness crossing to the littered table, where he wrote many words with a pencil, in the labored 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

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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 story. 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 theater 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

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first I would tip-toe up 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

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door; but received no response. Afterward I waited in the black hallway, shivering with cold and fear, till I heard the poor musician's feeble 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 mar-

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vels 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 neighboring 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

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it must be. The playing grew fantastic, delirious, and hysterical, yet kept to the last the qualities of supreme genius which I know this strange old man possessed. I recognized the air—it was a wild Hungarian dance popular in the theaters, 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

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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 toward 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



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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

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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 of 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

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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.



# THE STRANGE CASE OF MRS. ARKWRIGHT

*By*  
*Harold Dearden*

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**A**T FIRST, when she awoke, she was too terrified to move. She lay rigid in her bed for a minute or two, her heart pounding madly and her breathing strangled. Then, with an effort, she reached for the switch above her head and flooded the room with light.

It was a typical bedroom in an expensive English hotel, and the sight of it reassured her.

She got out of bed quickly, her breathing still rapid, her heart still racing like a runner's, and made her way unsteadily to a door across the room. Her hands trembled so that at first she could not open it; but at length she succeeded, and almost stumbled into the darkness it revealed.

"Derek!" she called, and again, "Derek! Derek!"

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A man's voice answered, sleepily, "Hello! What is it?"

A switch snapped, and a moment later she was in the arms of her husband. She clung frantically to him.

"That dream! That awful dream! It's come again!" she panted.

Her eyes were still wide and staring with the horror of its recollection.

Her husband comforted her, though he himself felt the skin crawl upon his back.

"Don't think of it," he urged her. "To-morrow you'll be seeing this Doctor Channing; and if he is half as good as they say, he'll certainly put an end to it."

Her grip tightened on his shoulders. "But suppose he can't? Suppose he's no better than all the others?" Her voice rose almost to a scream. "I can't stand it, Derek!" She was on the brink of hysteria.

Arkwright shivered. These scenes were awful. He suffered from them almost as much as she did. People in other rooms might hear her, too, and would think they were quarreling. The idea tortured him. He dreaded scenes. He hated anything disorderly, and his resentment at such times made him almost brutal.

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“That’s nonsense,” he told her sharply. “You’re giving way to an absurd extent, and as things are you’ve no right to let anything upset you. Every doctor has told you that.”

She regained control with an effort, and they sat silently for a time on the side of his bed. She was a tall woman, with a fine figure and still finer face; and it seemed strangely incongruous to see her clinging for support to this frail man beside her.

He was her second husband, and was, both physically and mentally, typical of those who commonly fulfill that function. He was slight, orderly and decorous; he combined a love of comfort with a complete inability to earn the wherewithal to achieve it; and he had, therefore, for this rich woman he had married, a genuine sentiment of affection not entirely unmixed with gratitude.

Of the two, she was clearly the better man. Her black hair hung down in two thick plaits, framing a dead-white face from which her eyes, deep, dark and intensely vital, stared out above a nose and chin more like a man’s than a woman’s in the strength and boldness of their outlines.

She scarcely spoke again, but continued to gaze rigidly before her; and gradually her habit-

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ual control asserted itself, and her momentary panic left her. But she did not return to her own bedroom. She could not bring herself to that yet. She spent the few hours that were left till morning, lying immobile by her husband's side, hoping with agonized intensity that in the hands of this new doctor she would at last be freed from her torment.

For it was no exaggeration to say that of late this dream had made her life unbearable. It had occurred for the first time shortly after she knew she was to be a mother, and as time went on it had recurred, exact in every detail, at rapidly increasing intervals.

In it she seemed to be walking on a long and lonely road. She was barefooted, for she could feel the rough stones upon the soles of her feet and a cold wind upon her ankles. She was not afraid, though she seemed strangely aware none the less that some dreadful thing was to occur; and on this point, in describing her dream, she was always quite clear and insistent.

"It seems as though it just had to happen," she would say; and the distinction between that conviction and the emotion of fear was in some way real to her. Then, after what seemed to her an age-long journey down that road of pain,



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hemmed in on either side with an almost tangible darkness, she would come at length to a point where, on her left-hand side, the blackness seemed less dense.

And it was here that she felt the first real access of overmastering terror. Through this gap, far away in the darkness, she saw that which froze the blood in her veins and filled her with an indescribable convulsion of horror.

“Great jets of smoke and flame, tearing up the sky,” she would say, when attempting to depict it later.

It seemed as though Hell gaped at her; and she knew, with that awful prescience so typical of dreams, that it was to Hell indeed that her bare feet were leading her—pitifully driven by some relentless urge—along that desolate road, alone.

She would stand there awhile, staring with agonized intensity at this appalling sight, and swept with a complexity of emotions she was always powerless to describe later. Horror, loneliness and self-pity seemed to strive with a feeling of overmastering tenderness towards some one whom she could not identify; till she would turn at length in her anguish to remove that horror from her view.

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So she would stand for a moment, her back to those leaping flames, and feeling in some way throughout her being unutterably deserted and defiled. Suddenly as she stood there she was freed, as by magic, from her anguish. She seemed now to be afraid no longer; but was filled instead with a sense of courage and companionship, as though she were protecting some one dearer and weaker than herself.

So encouraged, she would lift her head, and there—lighted as it seemed by those gigantic flames behind her—her eyes would rest upon the outline of a Cross. Filled now with a subtle sense of strength and purpose, and feeling no longer lonely or afraid, she would begin her painful progress down the road again; and as she did so she emerged, invariably, into the waking state.

This nightmare, for so she had at first described it, would have been terrible enough as a single event; but its recurrence had made it of late a thing to poison her hours of rest and reduce her to a point of genuine nervous exhaustion.

It was from this incubus of terror that she looked to Channing to free her, and she told him her story in the morning with the first real

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feeling of hopefulness she had had at any of her interviews with doctors. For she had heard great things of him from former patients, and his appearance and manner, in addition, seemed to inspire her with confidence. Moreover, he was the first nerve-specialist she had consulted, and she hoped that what had been a mystery to others might be capable of solution by one who had given his life to the study of such matters.

Channing listened intently to the account of her experience, and noticed at once the profound emotional upheaval produced in her even by its description. But he was puzzled, none the less, to explain it. He was silent for a time, after she had finished; and when he spoke it was to ask her a question which surprised her.

“Is this your first child that you are expecting, Mrs. Arkwright?”

She hesitated a moment.

“Yes,” she said at last; and Channing was quick to catch her meaning.

“You have lost a child, perhaps? Is that it?” he asked her gently.

She nodded; and again he noticed how moved she was at the recollection.

“I had a baby by my first husband,” she mur-

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mured. "It died at birth. I was very ill at the time, and very unhappy," she added.

Channing watched her with that veiled scrutiny which was habitual with him. This woman, he thought, would not be made unhappy easily. For it was to her marriage she had referred, he knew, in that simple statement. It would have been unnecessary otherwise. He must know more about that marriage.

But he must lead her to speak of it of her own accord, for only so would he hear the whole story. He knew too well the evasions and omissions so easy and so welcome in the direct answering of the most searching of questions. So he never asked direct questions except as a means of getting an unconscious answer to some other question which he dared not put. To get a patient to talk at all was usually sufficient for his purpose, for, once launched on a stream of conversation, it was rare that they did not at length let out the truth.

He began therefore by being strictly impersonal. No woman, when she generalizes, can avoid a personal application, so he started now with a little talk on dreams.

"They are just a hotchpotch of memories," he said easily, "like turning over a scrap-book at

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random, or picking up stray bits of a jig-saw puzzle. The scrap-book of your mind is what we call your subconsciousness, and its bits and pieces are the raw material of your dreams. That's why they are usually such rubbish, you know, and such meaningless jumbles of nonsense." He smiled encouragingly at her, but she did not smile in return.

"Mine isn't just a jumble," she said, with a shudder. "It's too terribly clear and vivid. And besides, it never varies. That's what makes it so awful."

"I know," replied Channing. "I've been told that so often that I've no doubt of it."

Mrs. Arkwright turned to him quickly. "You've known others, then, who have dreamed the same thing, like I do, over and over again?"

For the first time a note of relief sounded in her voice. It was something to feel that she was not the only one on whom this ghastly thing had fallen.

Channing turned in his swivel chair, and ruffled the pages of his bulky case-book, filled with the records of his patients' woes.

"I could read you plenty of stories here, just like your own," he said.

"And you cured them?"

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"I think I can say I helped all of them to cure themselves. That's getting as near boasting as I like to permit myself."

Again he smiled warmly at her, and this time he was rewarded. She sat a little straighter in her chair, and her voice shook when she spoke next.

"Then for heaven's sake help me!" she said huskily. "I thought when I married this time that I had done with horrors forever!"

Channing was never so casual as when he spoke with a purpose, and he toyed now with his tortoise-shell glasses as though he were making small talk over the tea-table.

"As a rule recurrent dreams are due to the fact that some original impression has been so violent that it emerges, not as a jumble, but as a whole, with every detail of the incident almost as vivid as the original. That was the case, of course, with the 'battle-dreams' of shell-shocked soldiers. In your case, of course, that can't be the explanation. But a recurrent dream may be the symbol of some such experience. It is sometimes a symbol, for instance, of some period when the dreamer was profoundly unhappy, living in terror of some one, or something of that sort, you know."

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Mrs. Arkwright's eyes were burning, and there was a flush on her high cheek-bones.

"You mean it would help you—to cure such a person—if you knew that?" she said.

Channing was even more casual than before. "That's the sort of thing," he answered, and continued to play with his glasses.

There was a long silence. He never so much as glanced at her; for he knew that a word of encouragement to a woman of her type would be fatal. If she was to confide at all, she herself must decide to do so. A trace of coaxing or sympathy would shut him out for good.

So he waited patiently, seemingly absorbed in his thoughts and his plaything.

Suddenly she spoke and, her reticence once abandoned, her words poured out in a torrent, low-pitched but quick, and almost staccato with emotion.

"I shall have to tell you about my first marriage," she began. "After what you have said I can see there is no help for me unless I do so."

"I think you are wise," Channing said quietly.

She looked away from him, sitting very still with her hands in her lap; but he saw how her fine eyes hardened, as though what she saw was disgusting. Then she told him her story, clearly

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and precisely, choosing her words with care, and only now and again betraying in her look or tone the effect it produced upon her.

“My first husband was a vile man, Doctor Channing. I was only a girl when I married him, but even I had heard stories of him which, though I understood only a part of them, had made him a sort of legend in our part of the country. But my father wished me to marry him. We were small yeoman farmers ourselves, my father was extravagant and ambitious, and the match was, materially, a brilliant one for me. So I married this rich man, and almost from the first day I regretted it.

“He was a large landowner in our part of Lancashire, and his collieries and steel-works in addition brought him in a very large income, every penny of which he used to gratify his vices. He was a libertine and a blackguard; and some of his villainies could have been possible only in so wild a district as that in which we lived. He was fifty and I was twenty, and my father on his deathbed asked my pardon for having urged me to marry him.”

She turned to Channing for a moment, and her eyes were filled with loathing.

“I am trying not to exaggerate,” she said,



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“but if ever the Devil took human form I believe he did so in the case of that man.”

“He ill-treated you, I suppose?” said Channing.

Mrs. Arkwright smiled grimly. “He did,” she said quietly—“once. He drank; and once when he could not move me to tears by his words, he struck me.” The knuckles glistened on her right hand. “He was a little man; and I thrashed him with a dog-whip till he was sober.”

“That was very brave of you,” said Channing impulsively. “But why did you not leave him?”

She answered him at once. “I was too proud,” she said. “We are a strange people in those parts, you know; there is a saying that we make good friends but worse enemies. But more than anything else we cannot bear to be beaten. I knew what had been said by others when I married, and I was determined not to give in. Besides, that was just what he wanted—to break my spirit. So I had every reason for staying.”

She stated the fact so quietly that it carried conviction, and the picture of these two bitter haters living under the same roof and sharing the same bed was not a pleasant one to contemplate.

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Mrs. Arkwright began again: "He never laid hands on me after that first time I've told you about, but I knew that because of it he hated me more than ever. He was clever and I am not; and he never missed a chance when alone or with others to hurt and humiliate me. And he could do it, too, in such a way as made me seem at all times in the wrong. He had a sneering way of talking which was detestable; and he seemed to take a savage delight in pointing out the evil side in every human relation."

A wave of crimson swept her neck and face, subsiding as suddenly as it had arisen, and leaving her paler even than before. For a second she was plainly unable to continue, and her lower lip whitened as she stilled it with her teeth. Never, thought Channing, had he seen such iron control. It was almost painful to witness in a woman.

"He was vile, too, in other ways," she said at length; and Channing did not press her to explain herself. "That was my life for three years, Doctor Channing; and every day of that time I thanked God that we had no children. I had made my own bed and I was prepared to lie on it, but the idea of exposing a child to his beastliness was something I dared not think

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about. So you can imagine how I felt when, after three years of this life with him, I knew I was going to be a mother."

Her voice shook and faltered; but her eyes remained dry and hard as ever.

"It filled me with despair," she went on. "It was the one thing I had dreaded. I had beaten him so far, for nothing he could say or do could hurt me. My heart was like a stone. But a baby would soften it; and then he would break us both. He told me that himself."

Channing was silent. Of all the glimpses he had had of broken lives and human shame and folly, this seemed to him the worst.

"I don't know how I got through those next few months," the quiet voice continued. "He was always watching me with his bright little eyes and his tongue was always ready with some sly remark to show me he was waiting.

"He drank now more than ever. Night after night I had to sit opposite him at the dinner table. And night after night I left him there, still drinking; till hours later I would hear him come stumbling up the bare oak stairs into his bedroom at the far end of the corridor from mine.

"He was always a bad sleeper. He used to

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dose himself with brandy when he woke, as he usually did, in the early hours of the morning. The result was, of course, that he slept late; and we used to be as quiet as ever we could in the mornings, so as not to wake him."

Channing could imagine the suspense which gripped that silent household, till the master should descend—white, stupid and venomous—to start another day again. But the impersonal interest of the chief sufferer was abnormal enough to arouse him.

"You were telling me about your baby," he said. Anything was better than that attitude of mind.

"I lost it," she said simply. "It was born too soon. I don't know what happened. I was delirious, I think, at the time. And when I recovered they told me my husband was dead."

"Your husband——" began Channing; but she had scarcely stopped when she went on again.

"He had gone to bed sodden with drink as usual and had apparently smothered himself in his pillows."

"Yes," agreed Channing. "I have known that to happen in other cases."

She continued as though he never had spoken.

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“He was found there by his servants in the morning, when they went to tell him about me.” She pressed her fingers to her eyes again. “I think that’s all,” she said quietly. “I had prayed for one or the other to be taken. But of course there was no need for both.”

She dropped her hands in her lap again, and looked straight at Channing. She was as composed and as dignified as when she had first shaken hands with him.

He began at once to explain to her the value of what she had told him. She asked for help; and it was likely, he told himself, that he was the first human being to whom she had made that appeal.

He interpreted her dream for her, therefore, using all his skill and persuasiveness to make himself convincing.

The rough and painful road she had traveled was surely the life she had described to him, with its hopeless and terrifying prospect such as she herself had visualized at the time. Through that gap in the darkness she had looked upon that future, lighted with the flames that always are associated with the extremes of mental or physical pain.

The symbol of the Cross she saw when she

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turned her back on those leaping flames needed no interpretation. For it was that symbol which, with its promise of divine help, had encouraged her to continue.

He elaborated this in detail. He told her that, had she not sought so violently to bury it, the memory of that unhappy life of hers long ago would have faded. It was her own refusal to think of it which forced it to seek this back-door entrance to her consciousness, and to emerge in disguise as a dream.

What she had to do now was clear enough. She must dig up from the recesses of her memory every detail, no matter how painful, of those dreadful years; and she must force herself to recall them, not with a stony and impersonal rigidity, but with the natural emotions of a sentient human being. Then only would those memories be at rest, and no longer haunt the confines of her dreams.

She agreed to take his advice. Day after day, at his instructions, she came and laid bare before him the whole of that period of her life. And gradually, as she did so, she recovered, and her increased confidence helped her to persevere.

She still dreamed, it is true, of the same appalling sequence of events; but the occurrence

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became rarer, and distressed her, in addition, progressively less and less. Finally, after some months of treatment, Channing told her to desist. "What you want now is a holiday," he said. "You've worked hard enough, too, to deserve one."

It was autumn when they had finished, and a dense fog hung over the West End of London; but to Mrs. Arkwright the day seemed bright and cheerful enough. She looked at him, with her deep eyes free from a trace of strain or sleeplessness; and in her heavy furs, with her splendid figure, she looked, Channing thought, magnificent.

"Yes," she said, in that rich voice of hers, "I'm free. I know that now. But do you know what I'm going to do to prove it?"

Channing watched her, smiling. These were the rare moments which made his work worth while. He had set a bond-slave free again.

"What are you going to do?" he said.

"I'm going down into Lancashire to open the old house. It will be my first visit since my husband died. I shall spend Christmas there; and my baby will be born there, too. That's just to prove to you, and myself, that I'm afraid of the past no longer."

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She put out her hand, and her eyes were warm and friendly. "I can't thank you," she said, "for what you've done for me."

He took her hand, and a moment later she had gone.

For two months Channing heard no news of her; but he was too busy usually to give much thought to patients, once they had passed out of his hands. He was aware, too, that the gratitude of patients such as his, rare enough in itself, still more rarely led them to a desire to see more of him. He knew too much about them to make social intercourse easy for them.

But early in December he was surprised to receive from Mrs. Arkwright a cordial letter of invitation to spend Christmas in Lancashire.

He accepted with a readiness which surprised him, for he was a lonely man in spite of a thousand acquaintances, and at five o'clock on the twenty-fourth of December he arrived at his destination. He was amazed at the beauty of the property they owned.

The house stood high on a ridge looking down a valley, just where the fields gave place to open moors; and for miles in all directions the land was just as it had been before the great industrial wave had engulfed the country as a



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whole. Only over the end of the valley hung the heavy pall of smoke which marked the town of coal and iron-works whose pits and furnaces, day and night, belched out money for these distant owners. He was the only guest, since Mrs. Arkwright expected her baby early in the new year.

It amused him to see the change which had come over the relative attitudes of his host and hostess. She was quietly and deeply contented. She had had no recurrence of her dream and the peace of prospective motherhood lay upon her like a mantle.

But Arkwright, also, had developed. As she had become gentle, his dominance had increased. He was a magistrate now, and his talk was full of the duties of his position.

"We had a lot to live down when we came here," he said, as he showed Channing to his room. "But I think we are known now for what we are, and this house and its owners are respected in the county."

"Well, the house has a very different master, in the first place," said Channing.

The little man glowed with the flattery implied. "I hope so," he said, with a mock of humility which delighted Channing. "There is

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nothing to hide from the world in my life, at any rate."

The comparison to the man he had supplanted clearly gave him pleasure.

"By the way, this is the room he died in," he said suddenly. "I hope you don't mind?"

Channing chuckled. "Not the least," he answered. "It's a charming room, and I'll sleep none the worse in it for its previous occupant."

After dinner Mrs. Arkwright left them. She was tired, she said. And for some reason, as she admitted to Channing, she felt a little nervous in addition.

"It's foolish of me," she said laughingly, "but for the first time since we came here I feel I rather regret it." She looked around her almost with apprehension. "The past seems so close around me," she said slowly. "I expect that's the approach of Christmas making me sentimental."

She finished bravely enough; but Channing knew that her nerves were ruffled, nevertheless.

"Or having me here," he said. "And getting my room ready," he added significantly.

She flushed a little, for she was always quick to see his meaning.

"Well, it's nonsense at any rate, whatever it

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is." She was ashamed to confess to backsliding. "I'm in my old room, too; and I mean to stay there. Good night. I won't fail you."

She smiled bravely as she left him, but Channing could see that the smile had not been achieved without an effort. He hoped from the bottom of his heart that his visit would not provoke disaster.

Arkwright, however, had no such qualms.

"She'll laugh at herself for that to-morrow," he asserted confidently. "I always told her that was the best thing to do, long before she saw you at all."

"A woman will always obey a stranger in preference to a husband," remarked Channing. "I sometimes think it's my main function to tell unpleasant truths to ladies."

Arkwright puffed contentedly at his cigar. The world was plainly in excellent order as far as he was concerned.

"She made quite a mystery of that wretched dream at one time. Talked of warnings, you know, and all sorts of nonsense."

Channing was momentarily nettled. It annoyed him that this woman's gallantry should have seemed nonsense. And especially that it should have seemed nonsense to Arkwright.

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Definitely Arkwright must not be permitted to disparage her. When he spoke next, therefore, he said perhaps just a little more than was wise of him.

"I don't think she made a mystery of it, really," he said. "It *was* a mystery, you know. In fact, to tell you the truth, it is to some extent a mystery to me still."

Arkwright looked at him in surprise. "But you explained it all to her," he said, almost resentfully. "She told me so. I thought that was how you did it. Cured people, I mean."

"I gave your wife an explanation which happily satisfied her," Channing admitted. "But I should hate to have it criticized by another psychologist, all the same."

"Oh, well," said Arkwright, "it worked anyway. That is the only thing that matters, after all." He had no patience with these experts, quibbling over details.

"That's true," replied Channing, and hoped that would be the end of it. He was angry with himself for having been led to say so much.

There was a pause for a while in the conversation, and the two men smoked and stared into the fire, listening to the wind roaring in the big

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chimney, as a storm swept down the valley from the moors behind the house.

But Arkwright's mind was troubled. He detested irregularities and things incomplete, in disorder. "What was there about it you didn't understand?" he asked suddenly.

Channing, faced with the direct question, could find no room for evasion.

"I'll tell you," he said after a moment's hesitation. "The fact that the dream was recurrent in type was, and is still, my chief difficulty. Most dreams are symbols of the dreamer's state of mind, since they are his own elaboration of a meaningless picture. But recurrent dreams are in a class apart. There one is dealing with the emergence into the sleeper's mind, not of a jumble of detached and disconnected memories, but of one whole memory, of a complete incident which has actually happened."

"Actually happened?" broke in Arkwright. "But surely you don't suggest that my wife's dream ever happened?"

"That's precisely one of the difficulties I referred to," replied Channing quietly. "Obviously such an incident never happened. But we are dealing with a recurrent dream none the less, and it ought to have happened," he

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ended obstinately. And in a few words he explained, as he had done to his patient, the significance of the battle-dreams of soldiers.

“But that is simply quibbling!” cried Arkwright when he had finished. “Just because my wife’s case is different, you say you’re not satisfied. The whole thing seems absurd.”

He was brusque almost to the point of rudeness. It offended him that his wife’s case was different from the rest. She was a normal and proper person; and her dreams—though they might be unpleasant, of course—must be normal and proper too. Any suggestion to the contrary was objectionable and absurd.

Channing noticed his annoyance and understood also the cause of it; for the mind of his host was of a shallowness which presented few difficulties to his acutely trained perceptions. Moreover, the fact that this was his host disarmed Channing. He gave way therefore, retreating so skillfully that the other was satisfied that his ridiculous quibbles were silenced, and Arkwright finished the evening in the somewhat pompous complacency habitual to him.

They ascended the staircase at length together, chatting amiably of commonplace matters, and paused at its head to say good night.

## THE CASE OF MRS. ARKWRIGHT

The landing on which they stood formed part of a corridor running the full length of the house. Channing's room was down on the right, at the opposite end to the Arkwrights'; and his host waited, with typical punctiliousness, while he walked along the corridor towards it.

Suddenly Channing halted, turned round to his host and called: "Arkwright, come here a moment, will you!" His voice was low and tense.

Arkwright joined him and, obeying his gesture, looked to his left from the window in the corridor which gave a view over the valley.

"Oh, yes," he said casually, "those are our blast-furnaces. They're never let out, day or night, you know." He glanced at Channing as he spoke; and what he saw startled him.

Channing was speaking, too, almost to himself. "Great jets of smoke and flame, tearing up the sky."

"What do you mean?" Arkwright said testily. But the phrase was too familiar to escape recognition; and it was in a different tone that he said again, "Channing! What do you mean?"

But Channing had not done yet.

"Look behind you," he said. And this time there was something in his voice which terrified

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Arkwright. "Look on the wall behind you," repeated Channing; and as he spoke he turned the switch at his elbow and plunged the corridor in darkness. "Do you see?" he continued, almost in a whisper. "The shadows of these window-bars form a gigantic Cross."

Arkwright looked and shuddered. Then he turned and, like a man in a trance, stared silently down that long corridor towards his own room—and his wife's. But his head was out-thrust and rigid, as though he stared at something that he feared.

And Channing stared also, as in the minds of both of them the same picture took form and grew. In that picture, from that distant door they saw a woman come. A woman of matchless resolution and indomitable purpose, blindly obeying, in the grip of her delirium, an urge which consciously would have filled her with abhorrence. It seemed to Channing that he saw her, wide-eyed and muttering, stumbling on bare and dragging feet to the spot where now they stood.

He saw her recoil in terror from the window, to draw fresh courage to her tortured mind from the symbol of that shadow on the opposite wall. And he saw her still, that Roman woman,



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entering the room which now was his, forcing those hands, which once had used a dog-whip, to fulfill a task more dreadful but more sure. "I had always prayed that one or the other should be taken," she had told him.

But she had done more than pray. He knew that now, though she herself was unaware of it.

"So it was a battle-dream, after all," he said; and his voice in the silence startled him.

He heard a noise of shuffling at his elbow, and turned in time to catch Arkwright as he fell.



# THE KING OF THE CATS

By

*Stephen Vincent Benét*

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**B**UT, my dear," said Mrs. Culverin, with a tiny gasp, "you can't actually mean—a tail!"

Mrs. Dingle nodded impressively. "Exactly. I've seen him. Twice. Paris, of course, and then, a command appearance at Rome—we were in the Royal box. He conducted—my dear, you've never heard such effects from an orchestra—and, my dear," she hesitated slightly, "he conducted *with it.*"

"How perfectly, fascinatingly too horrid for words!" said Mrs. Culverin in a dazed but greedy voice. "We *must* have him to dinner as soon as he comes over—he is coming over, isn't he?"

"The twelfth," said Mrs. Dingle with a gleam

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in her eyes. "The New Symphony people have asked him to be guest-conductor for three special concerts—I do hope you can dine with *us* some night while he's here—he'll be very busy, of course—but he's promised to give us what time he can spare——"

"Oh, thank you, dear," said Mrs. Culverin, abstractedly, her last raid upon Mrs. Dingle's pet British novelist still fresh in her mind. "You're always so delightfully hospitable—but you mustn't wear yourself out—the rest of us must do *our* part—I know Harry and myself would be only too glad to——"

"That's very sweet of you, darling." Mrs. Dingle also remembered the larceny of the British novelist. "But we're just going to give Monsieur Tibault—sweet name, isn't it! They say he's descended from the Tybalt in 'Romeo and Juliet' and that's why he doesn't like Shakespeare—we're just going to give Monsieur Tibault the simplest sort of time—a little reception after his first concert, perhaps. He hates," she looked around the table, "large, mixed parties. And then, of course, his—er—little idiosyncrasy——" she coughed delicately. "It makes him feel a trifle shy with strangers."

"But I don't understand yet, Aunt Emily,"

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said Tommy Brooks, Mrs. Dingle's nephew. "Do you really mean this Tibault bozo has a tail? Like a monkey and everything?"

"Tommy dear," said Mrs. Culverin, crushingly, "in the first place Monsieur Tibault is not a bozo—he is a very distinguished musician—the finest conductor in Europe. And in the second place——"

"He has," Mrs. Dingle was firm. "He has a tail. He conducts with it."

"Oh, but honestly!" said Tommy, his ears pinkening, "I mean—of course, if you say so, Aunt Emily, I'm sure he has—but still, it sounds pretty steep, if you know what I mean! How about it, Professor Tatto?"

Professor Tatto cleared his throat. "Tck," he said, putting his fingertips together cautiously, "I shall be very anxious to see this Monsieur Tibault. For myself, I have never observed a genuine specimen of *homo caudatus*, so I should be inclined to doubt, and yet . . . In the Middle Ages, for instance, the belief in men—er—tailed or with caudal appendages of some sort, was both widespread and, as far as we can gather, well-founded. As late as the Eighteenth Century, a Dutch sea-captain with some character for veracity, recounts the discovery of a pair of

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such creatures in the island of Formosa. They were in a low state of civilization, I believe, but the appendages in question were quite distinct. And in 1860, Dr. Grimbrook, the English surgeon, claims to have treated no less than three African natives with short but evident tails—though his testimony rests upon his unsupported word. After all, the thing is not impossible, though doubtless unusual. Web feet—rudimentary gills—these occur with some frequency. The appendix we have with us always. The chain of our descent from the ape-like form is by no means complete. For that matter,” he beamed around the table, “what can we call the last few vertebræ of the normal spine but the beginnings of a concealed and rudimentary tail? Oh, yes—yes—it’s possible—quite—that in an extraordinary case—a reversion to type—a survival—though, of course——”

“I told you so,” said Mrs. Dingle triumphantly. “*Isn’t* it fascinating? *Isn’t* it, Princess?”

The Princess Vivrakanarda’s eyes, blue as a field of larkspur, fathomless as the center of heaven, rested lightly for a moment on Mrs. Dingle’s excited countenance.

“Ve-ry fascinating,” she said, in a voice like

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stroked, golden velvet. "I should like—I should like ve-ry much to meet this Monsieur Tibault."

"Well, *I* hope he breaks his neck!" said Tommy Brooks, under his breath—but nobody ever paid much attention to Tommy.

Nevertheless, as the time for Mr. Tibault's arrival in these States drew nearer and nearer, people in general began to wonder whether the Princess had spoken quite truthfully—for there was no doubt of the fact that, up till then, she had been the unique sensation of the season—and you know what social lions and lionesses are.

It was, if you remember, a Siamese season, and genuine Siamese were at quite as much of a premium as Russian accents had been in the quaint old days when the Chauve-Souris was a novelty. The Siamese Art Theater, imported at terrific expense, was playing to packed houses at the Century Theater. "Gushuptzgu," an epic novel of Siamese farm life, in nineteen closely-printed volumes, had just been awarded the Nobel prize. Prominent pet-and-newt dealers reported no cessation in the appalling demand for Siamese cats. And upon the crest of this wave of interest in things Siamese, the Princess Vivrakanarda poised with the elegant nonchalance of a Hawaiian water-baby upon his

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surf-board. She was indispensable. She was incomparable. She was everywhere.

Youthful, enormously wealthy, allied on one hand to the Royal Family of Siam and on the other to the Cabots (and yet with the first eighteen of her twenty-one years shrouded from speculation in a golden zone of mystery), the mingling of races in her had produced an exotic beauty as distinguished as it was strange. She moved with a feline, effortless grace, and her skin was as if it had been gently powdered with tiny grains of the purest gold—yet the blueness of her eyes, set just a trifle slantingly, was as pure and startling as the sea on the rocks of Maine. Her brown hair fell to her knees—she had been offered extraordinary sums by the Master Barbers' Protective Association to have it shingled. Straight as a waterfall tumbling over brown rocks, it had a vague perfume of sandalwood and suave spices and held tints of rust and the sun. She did not talk very much—but then she did not have to—her voice had an odd, small, melodious huskiness that haunted the mind. She lived alone and was reputed to be very lazy—at least it was known that she slept during most of the day—but at night she bloomed like a moonflower and a depth came into her eyes.



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It was no wonder that Tommy Brooks fell in love with her. The wonder was that she let him. There was nothing exotic or distinguished about Tommy—he was just one of those pleasant, normal young men who seem created to carry on the bond business by reading the newspapers in the University Club during most of the day, and can always be relied upon at night to fill an unexpected hole in a dinner-party. It is true that the Princess could hardly be said to do more than tolerate any of her suitors—no one had ever seen those aloofly arrogant eyes enliven at the entrance of any male. But she seemed to be able to tolerate Tommy a little more than the rest—and that young man's infatuated day-dreams were beginning to be beset by smart solitaires and imaginary apartments on Park Avenue, when the famous M. Tibault conducted his first concert at Carnegie Hall.

Tommy Brooks sat beside the Princess. The eyes he turned upon her were eyes of longing and love, but her face was as impassive as a Benda mask, and the only remark she made during the preliminary bustlings was that there seemed to be a number of people in the audience. But Tommy was relieved, if anything, to find her

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even a little more aloof than usual, for, ever since Mrs. Culverin's dinner-party, a vague disquiet as to the possible impression which this Tibault creature might make upon her, had been growing in his mind. It shows his devotion that he was present at all. To a man whose simple Princetonian nature found in "Just a Little Love, a Little Kiss," the quintessence of musical art, the average symphony was a positive torture, and he looked forward to the evening's program itself with a grim, brave smile.

"Ssh!" said Mrs. Dingle, breathlessly. "He's coming!" It seemed to the startled Tommy as if he were suddenly back in the trenches under a heavy barrage, as M. Tibault made his entrance to a perfect bombardment of applause.

Then the enthusiastic noise was sliced off in the middle and a gasp took its place—a vast, windy sigh, as if every person in that multitude had suddenly said "Ah." For the papers had not lied about him. The tail was there.

They called him theatric—but how well he understood the uses of theatricalism! Dressed in unrelieved black from head to foot (the black dress-shirt had been a special token of Mussolini's esteem), he did not walk on, he strolled, leisurely, easily, aloofly, the famous tail curled

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nonchalantly about one wrist—a suave, black panther lounging through a summer garden with that little mysterious weave of the head that panthers have when they pad behind bars—the glittering darkness of his eyes unmoved by any surprise or elation. He nodded, twice, in regal acknowledgment, as the clapping reached an apogee of frenzy. To Tommy there was something dreadfully reminiscent of the Princess in the way he nodded. Then he turned to his orchestra.

A second and louder gasp went up from the audience at this point, for, as he turned, the tip of that incredible tail twined with dainty carelessness into some hidden pocket and produced a black baton. But Tommy did not even notice. He was looking at the Princess instead.

She had not even bothered to clap, at first, but now—— He had never seen her moved like this, never. She was not applauding, her hands were clenched in her lap, but her whole body was rigid, rigid as a steel bar, and the blue flowers of her eyes were bent upon the figure of M. Tibault in a terrible concentration. The pose of her entire figure was so still and intense that for an instant Tommy had the lunatic idea that any moment she might leap from her seat beside him

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as lightly as a moth, and land, with no sound, at M. Tibault's side to—yes—to rub her proud head against his coat in worship. Even Mrs. Dingle would notice in a moment.

“Princess—” he said, in a horrified whisper, “Princess——”

Slowly the tenseness of her body relaxed, her eyes veiled again, she grew calm.

“Yes, Tommy?” she said, in her usual voice, but there was still something about her . . .

“Nothing, only—oh, hang—he’s starting!” said Tommy, as M. Tibault, his hands loosely clasped before him, turned and *faced* the audience. His eyes dropped, his tail switched once impressively, then gave three little preliminary taps with his baton on the floor.

Seldom has Gluck's overture to “Iphigenie in Aulis” received such an ovation. But it was not until the Eighth Symphony that the hysteria of the audience reached its climax. Never before had the New Symphony been played so superbly—and certainly never before had it been led with such genius. Three prominent conductors in the audience were sobbing with the despairing admiration of envious children toward the close, and one at least was heard to offer

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wildly ten thousand dollars to a well-known facial surgeon there present for a shred of evidence that tails of some variety could by any stretch of science be grafted upon a normally decaudate form. There was no doubt about it—no mortal hand and arm, be they ever so dexterous, could combine the delicate élan and powerful grace displayed in every gesture of M. Tibault's tail.

A sable staff, it dominated the brasses like a flicker of black lightning; an ebon, elusive whip, it drew the last exquisite breath of melody from the woodwinds and ruled the stormy strings like a magician's rod. M. Tibault bowed and bowed again—roar after roar of frenzied admiration shook the hall to its foundations—and when he finally staggered, exhausted, from the platform, the president of the Wednesday Sonata Club was only restrained by force from flinging her ninety-thousand-dollar string of pearls after him in an excess of esthetic appreciation. New York had come and seen—and New York was conquered. Mrs. Dingle was immediately besieged by reporters, and Tommy Brooks looked forward to the "little party" at which he was to meet the new hero of the hour with feelings only a little less lugubrious than those that would

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have come to him just before taking his seat in the electric chair.

The meeting between his Princess and M. Tibault was worse and better than he expected. Better because, after all, they did not say much to each other—and worse because it seemed to him, somehow, that some curious kinship of mind between them made words unnecessary. They were certainly the most distinguished-looking couple in the room, as he bent over her hand. “So darlingly foreign, both of them, and yet so different,” babbled Mrs. Dingle—but Tommy couldn’t agree.

They were different, yes—the dark, lithe stranger with that bizarre appendage tucked carelessly in his pocket, and the blue-eyed, brown-haired girl. But that difference only accentuated what they had in common—something in the way they moved, in the suavity of their gestures, in the set of their eyes. Something deeper, even, than race. He tried to puzzle it out—then, looking around at the others, he had a flash of revelation. It was as if that couple were foreign, indeed—not only to New York but to all common humanity. As if they were polite guests from a different star.

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Tommy did not have a very happy evening, on the whole. But his mind worked slowly, and it was not until much later that the mad suspicion came upon him in full force.

Perhaps he is not to be blamed for his lack of immediate comprehension. The next few weeks were weeks of bewildered misery for him. It was not that the Princess's attitude toward him had changed—she was just as tolerant of him as before, but M. Tibault was always there. He had a faculty of appearing as out of thin air—he walked, for all his height, as lightly as a butterfly—and Tommy grew to hate that faintest shuffle on the carpet that announced his presence as he had never hated the pound of the guns.

And then, hang it all, the man was so smooth, so infernally, unruffably smooth! He was never out of temper, never embarrassed. He treated Tommy with the extreme of urbanity, and yet his eyes mocked, deep-down, and Tommy could do nothing. And, gradually, the Princess became more and more drawn to this stranger, in a soundless communion that found little need for speech—and that, too, Tommy saw and hated, and that, too, he could not mend.

He began to be haunted not only by M. Tibault in the flesh but by M. Tibault in the

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spirit. He slept badly, and when he slept, he dreamed—of M. Tibault, a man no longer, but a shadow, a specter, the limber ghost of an animal whose words came purringly between sharp little pointed teeth. There was certainly something odd about the whole shape of the fellow—his fluid ease, the mold of his head, even the cut of his fingernails—but just what it was escaped Tommy's intensest cogitation. And when he did put his finger on it at length, at first he refused to believe.

A pair of petty incidents decided him, finally, against all reason. He had gone to Mrs. Dingle's, one winter afternoon, hoping to find the Princess. She was out with his aunt, but was expected back for tea, and he wandered idly into the library to wait. He was just about to switch on the lights, for the library was always dark even in summer, when he heard a sound of light breathing that seemed to come from the leather couch in the corner. He approached it cautiously and dimly made out the form of M. Tibault, curled up on the couch, peacefully asleep.

The sight annoyed Tommy so that he swore under his breath and was back near the door on his way out, when the feeling we all know and



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hate, the feeling that eyes we cannot see are watching us, arrested him. He turned back—M. Tibault had not moved a muscle of his body to all appearance—but his eyes were open now. And those eyes were black and human no longer. They were green—Tommy could have sworn it—and he could have sworn that they had no bottom and gleamed like little emeralds in the dark. It only lasted a moment, for Tommy pressed the light-button automatically—and there was M. Tibault, his normal self, yawning a little but urbanely apologetic, but it gave Tommy time to think. Nor did what happened a trifle later increase his peace of mind.

They had lit a fire and were talking in front of it—by now, Tommy hated M. Tibault so thoroughly that he felt that odd yearning for his company that often occurs in such cases. M. Tibault was telling some anecdote and Tommy was hating him worse than ever for basking with such obvious enjoyment in the heat of the flames and the ripple of his own voice.

Then they heard the street-door open, and M. Tibault jumped up—and jumping, caught one sock on a sharp corner of the brass fire-rail and tore it open in a jagged flap. Tommy looked down mechanically at the tear—a second's

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glance, but enough—for M. Tibault, for the first time in Tommy's experience, lost his temper completely. He swore violently in some spitting, foreign tongue—his face distorted suddenly—he clapped his hand over his sock. Then, glaring furiously at Tommy, he fairly sprang from the room, and Tommy could hear him scaling the stairs in long, agile bounds.

Tommy sank into a chair, careless for once of the fact that he heard the Princess's light laugh in the hall. He didn't want to see the Princess. He didn't want to see anybody. There had been something revealed when M. Tibault had torn that hole in his sock—and it was not the skin of a man. Tommy had caught a glimpse of—black plush. Black velvet. And then had come M. Tibault's sudden explosion of fury. Good *Lord*—did the man wear black velvet stockings under his ordinary socks? Or could he—could he—but here Tommy held his fevered head in his hands.

He went to Professor Tatto that evening with a series of hypothetical questions, but as he did not dare confide his real suspicions to the Professor, the hypothetical answers he received served only to confuse him the more. Then he thought of Billy Strang. Billy was a good sort,

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and his mind had a turn for the bizarre. Billy might be able to help.

He couldn't get hold of Billy for three days and lived through the interval in a fever of impatience. But finally they had dinner together at Billy's apartment, where his queer books were, and Tommy was able to blurt out the whole disordered jumble of his suspicions.

Billy listened without interrupting until Tommy was quite through. Then he pulled at his pipe. "But, my dear *man*——" he said, protestingly.

"Oh, I know—I know——" said Tommy, and waved his hands, "I know I'm crazy—you needn't tell me that—but I tell you, the man's a cat all the same—no, I don't see how he could be, but he is—why, hang it, in the first place, everybody knows he's got a *tail!*"

"Even so," said Billy, puffing. "Oh, my dear Tommy, I don't doubt you saw, or think you saw, everything you say. But, even so——" He shook his head.

"But what about those other birds, werwolves and things?" said Tommy.

Billy looked dubious. "We-ll," he admitted, "you've got me there, of course. At least—a tailed man *is* possible. And the yarns about wer-

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wolves go back far enough, so that—well, I wouldn't say there aren't or haven't been wer-wolves—but then I'm willing to believe more things than most people. But a wer-cat—or a man that's a cat and a cat that's a man—honestly, Tommy——”

“If I don't get some real advice I'll go clean off my hinge. For Heaven's sake, tell me something to *do!*”

“Lemme think,” said Billy. “First, you're pizen-sure this man is——”

“A cat. Yeah,” and Tommy nodded violently.

“Check. And second—if it doesn't hurt your feelings, Tommy—you're afraid this girl you're in love with has—er—at least a streak of—felinity—in her—and so she's drawn to him?”

“Oh, Lord, Billy, if I only knew!”

“Well—er—suppose she really is, too, you know—would you still be keen on her?”

“I'd marry her if she turned into a dragon every Wednesday!” said Tommy, fervently.

Billy smiled. “H'm,” he said, “then the obvious thing to do is to get rid of this M. Tibault. Lemme think.”

He thought about two pipes full, while Tommy sat on pins and needles. Then, finally, he burst out laughing.

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"What's so darn funny?" said Tommy, aggrievedly.

"Nothing, Tommy, only I've just thought of a stunt—something so blooming crazy—but if he is—h'm—what you think he is—it *might* work——" And, going to the bookcase, he took down a book.

"If you think you're going to quiet my nerves by reading me a bedtime story——"

"Shut up, Tommy, and listen to this—if you really want to get rid of your feline friend."

"What is it?"

"Book of Agnes Repplier's. About cats. Listen.

"There is also a Scandinavian version of the ever famous story which Sir Walter Scott told to Washington Irving, which Monk Lewis told to Shelley and which, in one form or another, we find embodied in the folklore of every land'—now, Tommy, pay attention—'the story of the traveler who saw within a ruined abbey, a procession of cats, lowering into a grave a little coffin with a crown upon it. Filled with horror, he hastened from the spot; but when he had reached his destination, he could not forbear relating to a friend the wonder he had seen. Scarcely had the tale been told when his friend's cat, who lay

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curled up tranquilly by the fire, sprang to its feet, cried out, "Then I am the King of the Cats!" and disappeared in a flash up the chimney.'

"Well?" said Billy, shutting the book.

"By gum!" said Tommy, staring. "By gum! Do you think there's a chance?"

"I think we're both in the booby-hatch. But if you want to try it——"

"Try it! I'll spring it on him the next time I see him. But—listen—I can't make it a ruined abbey——"

"Oh, use your imagination! Make it Central Park—anywhere. Tell it as if it happened to you—seeing the funeral procession and all that. You can lead into it somehow—let's see—some general line—oh, yes—'Strange, isn't it, how fact so often copies fiction. Why, only yesterday——' See?"

"Strange, isn't it, how fact so often copies fiction," repeated Tommy dutifully, "Why, only yesterday——"

"I happened to be strolling through Central Park when I saw something very odd."

"I happened to be strolling through—here, gimme that book!" said Tommy, "I want to learn the rest of it by heart!"

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Mrs. Dingle's farewell dinner to the famous Monsieur Tibault, on the occasion of his departure for his Western tour, was looked forward to with the greatest expectations. Not only would everybody be there, including the Princess Vivakanarda, but Mrs. Dingle, a hinter if there ever was one, had let it be known that at this dinner an announcement of very unusual interest to Society might be made. So every one, for once, was almost on time, except for Tommy. He was at least fifteen minutes early, for he wanted to have speech with his aunt alone. Unfortunately, however, he had hardly taken off his overcoat when she was whispering some news in his ear so rapidly that he found it difficult to understand a word of it.

"And you mustn't breathe it to a soul!" she ended, beaming. "That is, not before the announcement—I think we'll have *that* with the salad—people never pay very much attention to salad——"

"Breathe what, Aunt Emily?" said Tommy, confused.

"The Princess, darling—the dear Princess and Monsieur Tibault—they just got engaged this afternoon, dear things! Isn't it *fascinating?*"

"Yeah," said Tommy, and started to walk

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blindly through the nearest door. His aunt restrained him.

“Not there, dear—not in the library. You can congratulate them later. They’re just having a sweet little moment alone there now——” And she turned away to harry the butler, leaving Tommy stunned.

But his chin came up after a moment. He wasn’t beaten yet.

“Strange, isn’t it, how often fact copies fiction?” he repeated to himself in dull mnemonics, and, as he did so, he shook his fist at the library door.

Mrs. Dingle was wrong, as usual. The Princess and M. Tibault were not in the library—they were in the conservatory, as Tommy discovered when he wandered aimlessly past the glass doors.

He didn’t mean to look, and after a second he turned away. But that second was enough.

Tibault was seated in a chair and she was crouched on a stool at his side, while his hand, softly, smoothly, stroked her brown hair. Black cat and Siamese kitten. Her face was hidden from Tommy, but he could see Tibault’s face. And he could hear.

They were not talking, but there was a sound between them. A warm and contented sound like



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the murmur of giant bees in a hollow tree—a golden, musical rumble, deep-throated, that came from Tibault's lips and was answered by hers—a golden purr.

Tommy found himself back in the drawing-room, shaking hands with Mrs. Culverin, who said, frankly, that she had seldom seen him look so pale.

The first two courses of the dinner passed Tommy like dreams, but Mrs. Dingle's cellar was notable, and by the middle of the meat course, he began to come to himself. He had only one resolve now.

For the next few moments he tried desperately to break into the conversation, but Mrs. Dingle was talking, and even Gabriel will have a time interrupting Mrs. Dingle. At last, though, she paused for breath and Tommy saw his chance.

“Speaking of that,” said Tommy, piercingly, without knowing in the least what he was referring to, “Speaking of that——”

“As I was saying,” said Professor Tatto. But Tommy would not yield. The plates were being taken away. It was time for salad.

“Speaking of that,” he said again, so loudly and strangely that Mrs. Culverin jumped and

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an awkward hush fell over the table. "Strange, isn't it, how often fact copies fiction?" There, he was started. His voice rose even higher. "Why, only to-day I was strolling through——" and, word for word, he repeated his lesson. He could see Tibault's eyes glowing at him, as he described the funeral. He could see the Princess, tense.

He could not have said what he had expected might happen when he came to the end. But it was not bored silence, everywhere, to be followed by Mrs. Dingle's acrid, "Well, Tommy, is that *quite* all?"

He slumped back in his chair, sick at heart. He was a fool and his last resource had failed. Dimly he heard his aunt's voice, saying, "Well, then——" and realized that she was about to make the fatal announcement.

But just then Monsieur Tibault spoke.

"One moment, Mrs. Dingle," he said, with extreme politeness, and she was silent. He turned to Tommy.

"You are—positive, I suppose, of what you saw this afternoon, Brooks?" he said, in tones of light mockery.

"Absolutely," said Tommy sullenly. "Do you think I'd——"

"Oh, no, no, no," Monsieur Tibault waved the

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implication aside, "but—such an interesting story—one likes to be sure of the details—and, of course, you *are* sure—*quite* sure—that the kind of crown you describe was on the coffin?"

"Of course," said Tommy, wondering, "but——"

"Then I'm the King of the Cats!" cried Monsieur Tibault in a voice of thunder, and, even as he cried it, the house-lights blinked—there was the soft thud of an explosion that seemed muffled in cotton-wool from the minstrel gallery—and the scene was lit for a second by an obliterating and painful burst of light that vanished in an instant and was succeeded by heavy, blinding clouds of white, pungent smoke.

"Oh, those *horrid* photographers," came Mrs. Dingle's voice in a melodious wail. "I *told* them not to take the flashlight picture till dinner was over, and now they've taken it *just* as I was nibbling lettuce!"

Some one tittered a little nervously. Some one coughed. Then, gradually the veils of smoke dislimned and the green-and-black spots in front of Tommy's eyes died away.

They were blinking at each other like people who have just come out of a cave into brilliant sun. Even yet their eyes stung with the fierce-

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ness of that abrupt illumination and Tommy found it hard to make out the faces across the table from him.

Mrs. Dingle took command of the half-blinded company with her accustomed poise. She rose, glass in hand. "And now, dear friends," she said in a clear voice, "I'm sure all of us are very happy to——" Then she stopped, open-mouthed, an expression of incredulous horror on her features. The lifted glass began to spill its contents on the tablecloth in a little stream of amber. As she spoke, she had turned directly to Monsieur Tibault's place at the table—and Monsieur Tibault was no longer there.

Some say there was a bursting flash of fire that disappeared up the chimney—some say it was a giant cat that leaped through the window at a bound, without breaking the glass. Professor Tatto puts it down to a mysterious chemical disturbance operating only over M. Tibault's chair. The butler, who is pious, believes the devil in person flew away with him, and Mrs. Dingle hesitates between witchcraft and a malicious ectoplasm dematerializing on the wrong cosmic plane. But be that as it may, one thing is certain—in the instant of fictive darkness which followed the glare of the flashlight, Monsieur

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Tibault, the great conductor, disappeared forever from mortal sight, tail and all.

Mrs. Culverin swears he was an international burglar and that she was just about to unmask him, when he slipped away under cover of the flashlight smoke, but no one else who sat at that historic dinner-table believes her. No, there are no sound explanations, but Tommy thinks he knows, and he will never be able to pass a cat again without wondering.

Mrs. Tommy is quite of her husband's mind regarding cats—she was Gretchen Woolwine, of Chicago (*you* know the Woolwines!)—for Tommy told her his whole story, and while she doesn't believe a great deal of it, there is no doubt in her heart that one person concerned in the affair was a *perfect* cat. Doubtless it would have been more romantic to relate how Tommy's daring finally won him his Princess—but, unfortunately, it would not be veracious. For the Princess Vivrakanarda, also, is with us no longer. Her nerves, shattered by the spectacular dénouement of Mrs. Dingle's dinner, required a sea-voyage, and from that voyage she has never returned to America.

Of course, there are the usual stories—one hears of her, a nun in a Siamese convent, or a

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masked dancer at *Le Jardin de ma Sœur*—one hears that she has been murdered in Patagonia or married in Trebizond—but, as far as can be ascertained, not one of these gaudy fables has the slightest basis in fact. I believe that Tommy, in his heart of hearts, is quite convinced that the sea-voyage was only a pretext, and that by some unheard-of means, she has managed to rejoin the formidable Monsieur Tibault, wherever in the world of the visible or the invisible he may be—in fact, that in some ruined city or subterranean palace they reign together now, King and Queen of all the mysterious Kingdom of Cats. But that, of course, is quite impossible.

# THE RED BRAIN

By

*Donald Wandrei*

---

ONE by one the pale stars in the sky overhead had twinkled fainter and gone out. One by one those flaming lights had dimmed and darkened. One by one they had vanished forever, and in their places had come patches of ink that blotted out immense areas of a sky once luminous with stars.

Years had passed; centuries had fled backward; the accumulating thousands had turned into millions, and they, too, had faded into the oblivion of eternity. The earth had disappeared. The sun had cooled and hardened, and had dissolved into the dust of its grave. The solar system and innumerable other systems had broken up and vanished, and their fragments had swelled

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## CREEPS BY NIGHT

the clouds of dust which were engulfing the entire universe. In the billions of years which had passed, sweeping everything on toward the gathering doom, the huge bodies, once countless, that had dotted the sky and hurtled through unmeasurable immensities of Space had lessened in number and disintegrated until the black pall of the sky was broken only at rare intervals by dim spots of light—light ever growing paler and darker.

No one knew when the dust had begun to gather, but far back in the forgotten dawn of time the dead worlds had vanished, unremembered and unmourned.

Those were the nuclei of the dust. Those were the progenitors of the universal dissolution which now approached its completion. Those were the stars which had first burned out, died, and wasted away in myriads of atoms. Those were the mushroom growths which had first passed into nothingness in a puff of dust.

Slowly the faint wisps had gathered into clouds, the clouds into seas, and the seas into monstrous oceans of gently heaving dust, dust that drifted from dead and dying worlds, from interstellar collisions of plunging stars, from



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rushing meteors and streaming comets which flamed from the void and hurtled into the abyss.

The dust had spread and spread. The dim luminosity of the heavens had become fainter as great blots of black appeared far in the outer depths of Space. In all the millions and billions and trillions of years that had fled into the past, the cosmic dust had been gathering, and the starry horde had been dwindling. There was a time when the universe consisted of hundreds of millions of stars, planets, and suns; but they were ephemeral as life or dreams, and they faded and vanished, one by one.

The smaller worlds were obliterated first, then the larger, and so in ever-ascending steps to the unchecked giants which roared their fury and blazed their whiteness through the conquering dust and the realms of night. Never did the Cosmic Dust cease its hellish and relentless war on the universe; it choked the little aerolites; it swallowed the helpless satellites; it swirled around the leaping comets that rocketed from one black end of the universe to the other, flaming their trailing splendor, tearing paths of wild adventure through horizonless infinitudes the dust already ruled; it clawed at the planets and sucked their very being; it washed, hateful and

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brooding, about the monarchs and plucked at their lands and deserts.

Thicker, thicker, always thicker grew the Cosmic Dust, until the giants no longer could watch each others' gyres far across the void. Instead, they thundered through the waste, lonely, despairing, and lost. In solitary grandeur they burned their brilliant beauty. In solitary defeat and death they disappeared.

Of all the stars in all the countless host that once had spotted the heavens, there remained only Antares. Antares, immensest of the stars, alone was left, the last body in the universe, inhabited by the last race ever to have consciousness, ever to live. That race, in hopeless compassion, had watched the darkening skies and had counted with miserly care the stars which resisted. Every one that twinkled out wrenched their hearts; every one that ceased to struggle and was swallowed by the tides of dust added a new strain to the national anthem, that indescribable melody, that infinitely somber pæan of doom which tolled a solemn harmony in every heart of the dying race. The dwellers had built a great crystal dome around their world in order to keep out the dust and to keep in the atmosphere, and under this dome the watchers kept

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their silent sentinel. The shadows had swept in faster and faster from the farther realms of darkness, engulfing more rapidly the last of the stars. The astronomers' task had become easier, but the saddest on Antares: that of watching Death and Oblivion spread a pall of blackness over all that was, all that would be.

The last star, Mira, second only to Antares, had shone frostily pale, twinkled more darkly—and vanished. There was nothing in all Space except an illimitable expanse of dust that stretched on and on in every direction; only this, and Antares. No longer did the astronomers watch the heavens to glimpse again that dying star before it succumbed. No longer did they scan the upper reaches—everywhere swirled the dust, enshrouding Space with a choking blackness. Once there had been sown through the abyss a multitude of morbidly beautiful stars, whitely shining, wan—now there was none. Once there had been light in the sky—now there was none. Once there had been a dim phosphorescence in the vault—now it was a heavy-hanging pall of ebony, a rayless realm of gloom, a smothering thing of blackness eternal and infinite.

“We meet again in this Hall of the Mist, not in the hope that a remedy has been found, but

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that we find how best it is fitting that we die. We meet, not in the vain hope that we may control the dust, but in the hope that we may triumph even as we are obliterated. We can not win the struggle, save in meeting our death heroically."

The speaker paused. All around him towered a hall of Space rampant. Far above spread a vague roof whose flowing sides melted into the lost and dreamy distances, a roof supported by unseen walls and by the mighty pillars which rolled upward at long intervals from the smoothly marbled floor. A faint haze seemed always to be hanging in the air because of the measureless lengths of that architectural colossus. Dim in the distance, the speaker reclined on a metal dais raised above the sea of beings in front of him. But he was not, in reality, a speaker, nor was he a being such as those which had inhabited the world called Earth.

Evolution, because of the unusual conditions on Antares, had proceeded along lines utterly different from those followed on the various bodies which had dotted the heavens when the deep was sprinkled with stars in the years now gone. Antares was the hugest sun that had leaped from the primeval chaos. When it cooled, it

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cooled far more slowly than the others, and when life once began it was assured of an existence not of thousands, not of millions, but of billions of years.

That life, when it began, had passed from the simple forms to the age of land juggernauts, and so by steps on and on up the scale. The civilizations of other worlds had reached their apex and the worlds themselves become cold and lifeless at the time when the mighty civilization of Antares was beginning. The star had then passed through a period of warfare until such terrific and fearful scourges of destruction were produced that in the Two Days War seven billion of the eight and one-half billion inhabitants were slaughtered. Those two days of carnage ended war for eons.

From then on, the golden age began. The minds of the people of Antares became bigger and bigger, their bodies proportionately smaller, until the cycle eventually was completed. Every being in front of the speaker was a monstrous heap of black viscosity, each mass an enormous brain, a sexless thing that lived for Thought. Long ago it had been discovered that life could be created artificially in tissue formed in the laboratories of the chemists. Sex was thus destroyed,

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and the inhabitants no longer spent their time in taking care of families. Nearly all the countless hours that were saved were put into scientific advance, with the result that the star leaped forward in an age of progress never paralleled.

The beings, rapidly becoming Brains, found that by the extermination of the parasites and bacteria on Antares, by changing their own organic structure, and by *willing* to live, they approached immortality. They discovered the secrets of Time and Space; they knew the extent of the universe, and how Space in its farther reaches became self-annihilating. They knew that life was self-created and controlled its own period of duration. They knew that when a life, tired of existence, killed itself, it was dead forever; it could not live again, for death was the final chemical change of life.

These were the shapes that spread in the vast sea before the speaker. They were shapes because they could assume any form they wished. Their all-powerful minds had complete control of that which was themselves. When the Brains were desirous of traveling, they relaxed from their usual semi-rigidity and flowed from place to place like a stream of ink rushing down a hill; when they were tired, they flattened into disks;

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when expounding their thoughts, they became towering pillars of rigid ooze; and when lost in abstraction, or in a pleasurable contemplation of the unbounded worlds created in their minds, within which they often wandered, they resembled huge, dormant balls.

From the speaker himself had come no sound although he had imparted his thoughts to his sentient assembly. The thoughts of the Brains, when their minds permitted, emanated to those about them instantly, like electric waves. Antares was a world of unbroken silence.

The Great Brain's thoughts continued to flow out. "Long ago, the approaching doom became known to us all. We could do nothing. It does not matter greatly, of course, for existence is a useless thing which benefits no one. But nevertheless, at that meeting in an unremembered year, we asked those who were willing to try to think of some possible way of saving our own star, at least, if not the others. There was no reward offered, for there was no reward adequate. All that the Brain would receive would be glory as one of the greatest which has ever been produced. The rest of us, too, would receive only the effects of that glory in the knowledge that we had conquered Fate, hitherto, and still, con-

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sidered inexorable; we would derive pleasure only from the fact that we, self-creating and all but supreme, had made ourselves supreme by conquering the most powerful menace which has ever attacked life, time, and the universe: the Cosmic Dust.

“Our most intelligent Brains have been thinking on this one subject for untold millions of years. They have excluded from their thoughts everything except the question: How can the dust be checked? They have produced innumerable plans which have been tested thoroughly. All have failed. We have hurled into the void uncontrollable bolts of lightning, interplanetary sheets of flame, in the hope that we might fuse masses of the dust into new, incandescent worlds. We have anchored huge magnets throughout Space, hoping to attract the dust, which is faintly magnetic, and thus to solidify it or clear much of it from the waste. We have caused fearful disturbances by exploding our most powerful compounds in the realms about us, hoping to set the dust so violently in motion that the chaos would become tempestuous with the storms of creation. With our rays of annihilation, we have blasted billion-mile paths through the ceaselessly surging dust. We have destroyed the life on Betelgeuse



## THE RED BRAIN

and rooted there titanic developers of vacua, sprawling, whirring machines to suck the dust from Space and heap it up on that star. We have liberated enormous quantities of gas, lit them, and sent the hot and furious fires madly flashing through the affrighted dust. In our desperation, we have even asked for the aid of the Ether-Eaters. Yes, we have in finality exercised our Will-Power to sweep back the rolling billows! In vain! What has been accomplished? The dust has retreated for a moment, has paused—and has welled onward. It has returned silently triumphant, and it has again hung its pall of blackness over a fear-haunted, nightmare-ridden Space.”

Swelling in soundless sorrow through the Hall of the Mist rose the racing thoughts of the Great Brain. “Our chemists with a bitter doggedness never before displayed have devoted their time to the production of Super-Brains, in the hope of making one which could defeat the Cosmic Dust. They have changed the chemicals used in our genesis; they have experimented with molds and forms; they have tried every resource. With what result? There have come forth raging monstrosities, mad abominations, satanic horrors and ravenous foul things howling wildly the nameless and indescribable phantoms that thronged their

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minds. We have killed them in order to save ourselves. And the Dust has pushed onward! We have appealed to every living Brain to help us. We appealed, in the forgotten, dream-veiled centuries, for aid in any form. From time to time we have been offered plans, which for a while have made terrific inroads on the Dust, but plans which have always failed.

“The triumph of the Cosmic Dust has almost come. There is so little time left us that our efforts now must inevitably be futile. But today, in the hope that some Brain, either of the old ones or of the gigantic new ones, has discovered a possibility not yet tried, we have called this conference, the first in more than twelve thousand years.”

The tense, alert silence of the hall relaxed and became soft when the thoughts of the Great Brain had stopped flowing. The electric waves which had filled the vast Hall of the Mist sank, and for a long time a strange tranquillity brooded there. But the mass was never still; the sea in front of the dais rippled and billowed from time to time as waves of thought passed through it. Yet no Brain offered to speak, and the seeth-

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ing expanse, as the minutes crept by, again became quiet.

In a thin column on the dais, rising high into the air, swayed the Great Brain; again and again it swept its glance around the hall, peering among the rolling, heaving shapes in the hope of finding somewhere in those thousands one which could offer a suggestion. But the minutes passed, and time lengthened, with no response; and the sadness of the fixed and changeless end crept across the last race. And the Brains, wrapped in their meditation, saw the Dust pushing at the glass shell of Antares with triumphant mockery.

The Great Brain had expected no reply, since for centuries it had been considered futile to combat the Dust; and so, when its expectation, though not its wish, was fulfilled, it relaxed and dropped, the signal that the meeting was over.

But the motion had scarcely been completed, when from deep within the center of the sea there came a violent heave; in a moment, a section collected itself and rushed together; like a waterspout it swished upward and went streaming toward the roof until it swayed thin and tenuous as a column of smoke, the top of the Brain peering down from the dimness of the upper hall.

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"I have found an infallible plan! The Red Brain has conquered the Cosmic Dust!"

A terrific tenseness leaped upon the Brains, numbed by the cry that wavered in silence down the Hall of the Mist into the empty and dreamless tomb of the farther marble. The Great Brain, hardly relaxed, rose again. And with a curious whirling motion the assembled horde suddenly revolved. Immediately, the Red Brain hung upward from the middle of a sea which had become an amphitheater in arrangement, all Brains looking toward the center. A suppressed expectancy and hope electrified the air.

The Red Brain was one of the later creations of the chemists, and had come forth during the experiments to produce more perfect Brains. Previously, they had all been black; but, perhaps because of impurities in the chemicals, this one had evolved in an extremely dark, dull-red color. It was regarded with wonder by its companions, and more so when they found that many of its thoughts could not be grasped by them. What it allowed the others to know of what passed within it was to a large extent incomprehensible. No one knew how to judge the Red Brain, but much had been expected from it.

Thus, when the Red Brain sent forth its an-

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nouncement, the others formed a huge circle around, their minds passive and open for the explanation. Thus they lay, silent, while awaiting the discovery. And thus they reclined, completely unprepared for what followed.

For, as the Red Brain hung in the air, it began a slow but restless swaying; and as it swayed, its thoughts poured out in a rhythmic chant. High above them it towered, a smooth, slender column, whose lofty end was moving ever faster and faster while nervous shudders rippled up and down its length. And the alien chant became stronger, stronger, until it changed into a wild and dithyrambic pæan to the beauty of the past, to the glory of the present, to the splendor of the future. And the lay became a moaning praise, an exaltation; a strain of furious joy ran through it, a repetition of, "The Red Brain has conquered the Dust. Others have failed, but he has not. Play the national anthem in honor of the Red Brain, for he has triumphed. Place him at your head, for he has conquered the Dust. Exalt him who has proved himself the greatest of all. Worship him who is greater than Antares, greater than the Cosmic Dust, greater than the Universe."

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Abruptly it stopped. The puzzled Brains looked up. The Red Brain had ceased its nodding motion for a moment, and had closed its thoughts to them. But along its entire length it began a gyratory spinning, until it whirled at an incredible speed. Something antagonistic suddenly emanated from it. And before the Brains could grasp the situation, before they could protect themselves by closing their minds, the will-impulses of the Red Brain, laden with hatred and death, were throbbing about them and entering their open minds. Like a whirlwind spun the Red Brain, hurtling forth its hate. Like half-inflated balloons the other Brains had lain around it; like cooling glass bubbles they tautened for a second; and like pricked balloons, as their thoughts and thus their lives were annihilated, since Thought was Life, they flattened, instantaneously dissolving into pools of evanescent slime. By tens and by hundreds they sank, destroyed by the sweeping, unchecked thoughts of the Red Brain which filled the hall; by groups, by sections, by paths around the whole circle fell the doomed Brains in that single moment of carelessness, while pools of thick ink collected, flowed together, crept onward, and became rivers of

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pitch rushing down the marble floor with a soft, silken swish.

The hope of the universe had lain with the Red Brain.

And the Red Brain was mad.





# THE PHANTOM BUS

By

*W. Elwyn Backus*

---

**O**UT of the vagueness of the half-dawn a dark bulk loomed to the accompaniment of a dull rumble. To Arthur Strite, waiting for his regular bus—the big, orange six-forty-five to the city—this nondescript contraption which usually preceded it by a minute or two seemed more like a ghostly coffin than a public conveyance. Its sweating black sides glistened oilily in the gray light as it passed him. A single dim incandescent lamp seen through the windows silhouetted stiffly nodding heads against the background of a dingy interior. Then the black bus was gone, swallowed up in the swirling December mist and fog.

As always, a feeling of odd disquiet possessed Strite with the passing of this conveyance—a

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fleeting impression of mystery, strangely repellent and defying description; of ill omen. What manner of passengers it carried or whence and whither it traveled, he did not know—and cared less. Yet, queerly enough, the affair had increasingly irritated and disturbed him ever since his moving to Emerymont three weeks before.

“Just an old junk-heap that loops out through Norwood and back over this direction,” a fellow commuter said in answer to his question. Until this morning Strite had refrained from what he deemed the weakness of a query about this thing. For he had hesitated to give definite shape to his senseless disquiet by admitting any curiosity, even to himself. “I believe a couple of death-traps like that one comprise the company’s entire rolling-stock,” his informant finished.

“Oh,” said Strite, mentally categorizing the bus line with several that operated a sort of cross-country service between outlying sections of Cincinnati. Of course, he reflected, *some* concern had to serve this need. But he was conscious of a feeling of relief that he did not have to use that service.

Arthur Strite was boarding in Emerymont with the Ransons, not because of any liking for

## THE PHANTOM BUS

the make-believes, the rabble of bourgeoisie and scandalmongers that peopled the little suburb, but because he did enjoy the shrubbery and lawns and the quaintly designed houses, despite the crazy butting of garbage-can-studded back yards against living-room windows of adjoining homes. He minded his own business, displaying no curiosity in the neighbors or affairs of the place—which was one of the reasons why he had not discovered sooner the purpose of the bus line mentioned.

The night of the same day he had asked about the bus, he found himself pondering, with some intentness in the midst of an absent-minded perusal of the evening comic sheet, on the dingy conveyance that passed him each morning. Why should that silly bus thus intrude itself into his mind? He smiled self-indulgently and turned over to the sports page. The thing actually was becoming a nuisance! And for no logical reason. What should it matter to him how uninviting, how disagreeable a box on wheels those people rode in every morning?

Nevertheless, he dropped off to sleep thinking about the ghostly bus.

The same thing began to be the rule on the nights that followed. Always that ridiculous

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opened his eyes from a troubled sleep. This meant that he would be late to the office where he worked, on the other side of the city. Of course he missed his regular bus, and, with it, the other. Too, the daylight put a different aspect upon things. It would have been ridiculous, after all, to board a bus bound for another part of the city merely to humor a crazy impulse.

Yet, when that night came, Strite hesitated to go to bed. He told himself that he was hopeless, a fool and a coward. Then he undressed and resolutely turned out the light.

His hesitancy had not been unfounded. Again he found himself boarding the mysterious, sweating conveyance with its leaning operator and strange, illusive odor. And again a sudden, agonized awakening.

But this time he saw the other occupants before he awoke. They all—there were six of them—had their eyes closed as they sat nodding slightly with the almost imperceptible swaying of the bus. There was a repellent something about those faces, other than their closed eyelids, that struck a chill into Strite's heart. He wondered whether they were just weary, like him, or——

A cold finger touched his wrist. He managed

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to turn and face the operator. The latter, his face still hidden, was pointing to the fare box. Of course, these ill-built, ill-kept buses *would* reverse things by demanding their fare when one entered. He reached into his pocket for a dime, and in that moment caught sight of a seventh passenger, seated in front on the other side. The operator's head and shoulders had partly hidden her from him before, despite her slender tallness.

As his fingers found and automatically brought forth a dime, he observed that this passenger's eyes were not closed like the rest—that they were pale gray and staring at him. They were like—oh, God, it couldn't be—Doris! But it was—it was! How could he have failed to recognize her sooner, despite her position on the other side of the operator? Now he could understand why this bus had drawn him so strangely, irresistibly.

As he stared back at her, speechless with amazement, her eyes left his face, turned toward the windshield. Her pale lips twitched oddly, as if, mute with fear at what she saw there, she sought vainly to scream.

Then abruptly the spell was broken. She leaped to her feet, throwing one arm across her

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face in a gesture of one warding off some fearful harm. A shrill, hysterical scream pierced the quiet of that closed space like the stab of a knife!

That cry jarred Strite back to consciousness with a suddenness that jerked him upright in bed.

As he sat there trembling with the realism of his dream and that agonized scream, he became aware that he held something tightly in one closed hand. A fresh chill passed through his body at the familiar feel of that something. He needed no light to tell him that it was a dime he clutched—the dime he had been ready to drop in the fare box of his dream!

### 3

Of course he found that the coin evidently had fallen out of his vest when he sat on the bed while undressing. In fact, he usually kept some change in his vest pocket so as to have it handy for tips, newspapers, and such. Perhaps the accidental finding and touching of that coin in his slumbers had even started the train of thought that had made him dream of the fare box—and the other things. But there was no

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more sleep for Strite. After tossing about for the rest of the night, he got up about five o'clock.

This morning he was determined upon one thing. He would ride the black bus—"the phantom bus," as he had come to term it privately—this morning, and kill for once and all this persistent subconscious illusion that had taken root in his mind from the seed of his first absurd impression of the rickety conveyance in the eery light of half-dawn.

Once more his intention was to be defeated, however. The black bus failed to appear before the six-forty-five, though he had arrived at its stop more than a quarter-hour before it was due. He even waited for it ten minutes after his regular bus had gone—only to learn later that the other line finally had been discontinued.

His first reaction to this information was an overwhelming relief. No longer would he be reminded by this shadowy, rumbling hulk each morning, of things he wanted to forget.

But on the heels of this thought came the realization that the very discontinuance of the line had removed all chance of his ever killing the illusion if the latter continued to trouble him.

That day at noon as he walked along a downtown street a peculiar odor halted him. There

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was an illusive, dread familiarity about it. He was before a florist's open shop, and a great bowl of tuberose, those once choice flowers for all those departed, was set out in front. He knew now where he had smelled their scent before—on the phantom bus of his dream.

### 4

Once again Strite was in the phantom bus—in his subconscious mind. This time he knew exactly what was coming. He seemed powerless to change a single detail of it all. The pause just inside the doorway as he forced his gaze up to where the six passengers sat in plain view, their eyes closed, in death-like weariness or worse. The icy touch of a finger on his wrist, the reaching for a coin, and the discovery of the slender, tall girl up front. Doris!

At this point the sequence of events suddenly galvanized him into a feverish alertness for the next thing. As Doris' hysterical scream rang in his ears, he was abruptly released from the grip of immobility. He turned quickly and looked out of the front of the bus.

What he saw there made him throw up his hands in an involuntary gesture similar to her own instinctive gesture of terror. He heard the



## THE PHANTOM BUS

brakes squealing shrilly—felt the bus skid on the sleet-covered road even as he caught a side glimpse of the operator's face—saw with sudden added horror that half the face was missing. Beyond that fleeting glimpse, he had time for no further examination; for just ahead a heavily loaded truck was emerging from a narrow bridge-end, blocking their way. Then a terrific, rending crash. . . .

### 5

The six-forty-five bus was four minutes late on account of the icy condition of the roads; they had been that way for two days. A little group of commuters on the roadside were talking in subdued tones, for once unmindful of the delay as they waited.

“Personally,” a pompous, red-faced man was saying, “I believe Ranson killed and—mauled—him for attentions to Mrs. Ranson.”

“But Strite didn't appear to be that type,” objected a young member of the group. “Nor is Mrs. Ranson the sort who would encourage him. Besides, consider the condition of the body. Why, Ranson or no one else could have so mangled another—to say nothing of leaving it in bed and persistently claiming that he didn't know how it happened, except that he and his

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

wife were awakened in the middle of the night by a frightful cry—and found him that way! No, I say there is some deeper mystery about the affair, the nature of which we haven't suspected."

The big, orange-colored bus hove into view at this juncture, interrupting the discussion for the time. Presently they all had boarded it and found seats at various vantage-points. A little distance along the road one of them pointed out to his neighbor a twisted and splintered mass of wreckage at the foot of an embankment of the narrow bridge they were just then crossing.

"Lucky it jumped off when it struck—didn't even delay us yesterday when we followed a few minutes after it was discovered."

"Queer thing about how it got there," said the other. "Nobody witnessed the accident, and the defunct bus company's officials swear that the last they saw of their 'death trap' was when it was locked away in an old garage on the other side of Norwood. Can you imagine any one swiping a can like that for a ride? But the present-day young coke-head will grab anything for a joy-ride."

"No queerer than that—that mess inside the wreck—as if some one had been crushed like—well, like poor Strite, for instance. Yet they could find no trace of a body!"

# BEYOND THE DOOR

By

*Paul Suter*

---

**Y**OU haven't told me yet how it happened," I said to Mrs. Malkin.

She set her lips and eyed me, sharply.

"Didn't you talk with the coroner, sir?"

"Yes, of course," I admitted; "but as I understand you found my uncle, I thought——"

"Well, I wouldn't care to say anything about it," she interrupted, with decision.

This housekeeper of my uncle's was somewhat taller than I, and much heavier—two physical preponderances which afford any woman possessing them an advantage over the inferior male. She appeared a subject for diplomacy rather than argument.

Noting her ample jaw, her breadth of cheek,

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## CREEPS BY NIGHT

the unsentimental glint of her eye, I decided on conciliation. I placed a chair for her, there in my Uncle Godfrey's study, and dropped into another, myself.

"At least, before we go over the other parts of the house, suppose we rest a little," I suggested, in my most unctuous manner. "The place rather gets on one's nerves—don't you think so?"

It was sheer luck—I claim no credit for it. My chance reflection found the weak spot in her fortifications. She replied to it with an undoubted smack of satisfaction:

"It's more than seven years that I've been doing for Mr. Sarston, sir: bringing him his meals regular as clockwork, keeping the house clean—as clean as he'd let me—and sleeping at my own home o' nights; and in all that time I've said, over and over, there ain't a house in New York the equal of this for queerness."

"Nor anywhere else," I encouraged her, with a laugh; and her confidences opened another notch:

"You're likely right in that, too, sir. As I've said to poor Mr. Sarston, many a time, 'It's all well enough,' says I, 'to have bugs for a hobby. You can afford it; and being a bachelor and by yourself, you don't have to consider other

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people's likes and dislikes. And it's all well enough if you want to,' says I, 'to keep thousands and thousands o' them in cabinets, all over the place, the way you do. But when it comes to pinnin' them on the walls in regular armies,' I says, 'and on the ceiling of your own study; and even on different parts of the furniture, so that a body don't know what awful thing she's a-goin' to find under her hand of a sudden when she does the dusting; why, then,' I says to him, 'it's drivin' a decent woman too far.' "

"And did he never try to reform his ways when you told him that?" I asked smiling.

"To be frank with you, Mr. Robinson, when I talked like that to him, he generally raised my pay. And what was a body to do then?"

"I can't see how Lucy Lawton stood the place as long as she did," I observed, watching Mrs. Malkin's red face very closely.

She swallowed the bait, and leaned forward, hands on knees.

"Poor girl, it got on her nerves. But she was the quiet kind. You never saw her, sir?"

I shook my head.

"One of them slim, faded girls, with light hair, and hardly a word to say for herself. I don't believe she got to know the next-door neigh-

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

bor in the whole year she lived with your uncle. She was an orphan, wasn't she, sir?"

"Yes," I said. "Godfrey Sarston and I were her only living relatives. That was why she came from Australia to stay with him, after her father's death."

Mrs. Malkin nodded. I was hoping that, by putting a check on my eagerness, I could lead her on to a number of things I greatly desired to know. Up to the time I had induced the house-keeper to show me through this strange house of my Uncle Godfrey's, the whole affair had been a mystery of lips which closed and faces which were averted at my approach. Even the coroner seemed unwilling to tell me just how my uncle had died.

"Did you understand she was going to live with him, sir?" asked Mrs. Malkin, looking hard at me.

I confined myself to a nod.

"Well, so did I. Yet, after a year, back she went."

"She went suddenly?" I suggested.

"So suddenly that I never knew a thing about it till after she was gone. I came to do my chores one day, and she was here. I came the next, and

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she had started back to Australia. That's how sudden she went."

"They must have had a falling-out," I conjectured. "I suppose it was because of the house."

"Maybe it was and maybe it wasn't."

"You know of other reasons?"

"I have eyes in my head," she said. "But I'm not going to talk about it. Shall we be getting on now, sir?"

I tried another lead:

"I hadn't seen my uncle in five years, you know. He seemed terribly changed. He was not an old man, by any means, yet when I saw him at the funeral——" I paused, expectantly.

To my relief, she responded readily: "He looked that way for the last few months, especially the last week. I spoke to him about it, two days before—before it happened, sir—and told him he'd do well to see the doctor again. But he cut me off short. My sister took sick the same day, and I was called out of town. The next time I saw him, he was——"

She paused, and then went on, sobbing: "To think of him lyin' there in that awful place, and callin' and callin' for me, as I know he must, and me not around to hear him!"

As she stopped again, suddenly, and threw a

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suspicious glance at me, I hastened to insert a matter-of-fact question:

“Did he appear ill on that last day?”

“Not so much ill, as——”

“Yes?” I prompted.

She was silent a long time, while I waited, afraid that some word of mine had brought back her former attitude of hostility. Then she seemed to make up her mind.

“I oughtn’t to say another word. I’ve said too much, already. But you’ve been liberal with me, sir, and I know somethin’ you’ve a right to be told, which I’m thinkin’ no one else is a-goin’ to tell you. Look at the bottom of his study door a minute, sir.”

I followed her direction. What I saw led me to drop to my hands and knees, the better to examine it.

“Why should he put a rubber strip on the bottom of his door?” I asked, getting up.

She replied with another enigmatical suggestion: “Look at these, if you will, sir. You’ll remember that he slept in this study. That was his bed, over there in the alcove.”

“Bolts!” I exclaimed. And I reinforced sight with touch by shooting one of them back and forth a few times. “Double bolts on the inside of

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his bedroom door! An upstairs room, at that. What was the idea?"

Mrs. Malkin portentously shook her head and sighed, as one unburdening her mind.

"Only this can I say, sir: He was afraid of something—*terribly* afraid, sir. Something that came in the night."

"What was it?" I demanded.

"I don't know, sir."

"It was in the night that—it happened?" I asked.

She nodded; then, as if the prologue were over, as if she had prepared my mind sufficiently, she produced something from under her apron. She must have been holding it there all the time.

"It's his diary, sir. It was lying here on the floor. I saved it for you, before the police could get their hands on it."

I opened the little book. One of the sheets near the back was crumpled, and I glanced at it, idly. What I read there impelled me to slap the covers shut again.

"Did you read this?" I demanded.

She met my gaze, frankly.

"I looked into it, sir, just as you did—only just *looked* into it. Not for worlds would I do even that again!"

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"I noticed some reference here to a slab in the cellar. What slab is that?"

"It covers an old, dried-up well, sir."

"Will you show it to me?"

"You can find it for yourself, sir, if you wish. I'm not goin' down there," she said, decidedly.

"Ah, well, I've seen enough for today," I told her. "I'll take the diary back to my hotel and read it."

I did not return to my hotel, however. In my one brief glance into the little book, I had seen something which had bitten into my soul; only a few words, but they had brought me very near to that queer, solitary man who had been my uncle.

I dismissed Mrs. Malkin, and remained in the study. There was the fitting place to read the diary he had left behind him.

His personality lingered like a vapor in that study. I settled into his deep morris chair, and turned it to catch the light from the single, narrow window—the light, doubtless, by which he had written much of his work on entomology.

That same struggling illumination played shadowy tricks with hosts of wall-crucified insects, which seemed engaged in a united effort to

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crawl upward in sinuous lines. Some of their number, impaled to the ceiling itself, peered quiveringly down on the aspiring multitude. The whole house, with its crisp dead, rustling in any vagrant breeze, brought back to my mind the hand that had pinned them, one by one, on wall and ceiling and furniture. A kindly hand, I reflected, though eccentric; one not to be turned aside from its single hobby.

When quiet, peering Uncle Godfrey went, there passed out another of those scientific enthusiasts, whose passion for exact truth in some one direction has extended the bounds of human knowledge. Could not his unquestioned merits have been balanced against his sin? Was it necessary to even-handed justice that he die face-to-face with Horror, struggling with the thing he most feared? I ponder the question still, though his body—strangely bruised—has been long at rest.

The entries in the little book began with the fifteenth of June. Everything before that date had been torn out. There, in the room where it had been written, I read my Uncle Godfrey's diary:

“It is done. I am trembling so that the words

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will hardly form under my pen, but my mind is collected. My course was for the best. Suppose I had married her? She would have been unwilling to live in this house. At the outset, her wishes would have come between me and my work, and that would have been only the beginning.

“As a married man, I could not have concentrated properly, I could not have surrounded myself with the atmosphere indispensable to the writing of my book. My scientific message would never have been delivered. As it is, though my heart is sore, I shall stifle these memories in work.

“I wish I had been more gentle with her, especially when she sank to her knees before me, tonight. She kissed my hand. I should not have repulsed her so roughly. In particular, my words could have been better chosen. I said to her, bitterly: ‘Get up, and don’t nuzzle my hand like a dog.’ She rose, without a word, and left me. How was I to know that, within an hour——

“I am largely to blame. Yet had I taken any other course afterward than the one I did, the authorities would have misunderstood.”

Again, there followed a space from which the sheets had been torn; but from the sixteenth of

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July, all the pages were intact. Something had come over the writing, too. It was still precise and clear—my Uncle Godfrey's characteristic hand—but the letters were less firm. As the entries approached the end, this difference became still more marked.

Here follows, then, the whole of his story; or as much of it as will ever be known. I shall let his words speak for him, without further interruption:

“My nerves are becoming more seriously affected. If certain annoyances do not shortly cease, I shall be obliged to procure medical advice. To be more specific, I find myself, at times, obsessed by an almost uncontrollable desire to descend to the cellar and lift the slab over the old well.

“I never have yielded to the impulse, but it has persisted for minutes together with such intensity that I have had to put work aside, and literally hold myself down in my chair. This insane desire comes only in the dead of night, when its disquieting effect is heightened by the various noises peculiar to the house.

“For instance, there often is a draft of air along the hallways, which causes a rustling among the specimens impaled on the walls.

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Lately, too, there have been other nocturnal sounds, strongly suggestive of the busy clamor of rats and mice. This calls for investigation. I have been at considerable expense to make the house proof against rodents, which might destroy some of my best specimens. If some structural defect has opened a way for them, the situation must be corrected at once.

“July 17th. The foundations and cellar were examined today by a workman. He states positively that there is no place of ingress for rodents. He contented himself with looking at the slab over the old well, without lifting it.

“July 19th. While I was sitting in this chair, late last night, writing, the impulse to descend to the cellar suddenly came upon me with tremendous insistence. I yielded—which, perhaps, was as well. For at least I satisfied myself that the disquiet which possessed me has no external cause.

“The long journey through the hallways was difficult. Several times, I was keenly aware of the same sounds (perhaps I should say, the same *impressions* of sounds) that I had erroneously laid to rats. I am convinced now that they are mere symptoms of my nervous condition. Further indications of this came in the fact that, as I opened



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the cellar door, the small noises abruptly ceased. There was no final scamper of tiny footfalls to suggest rats disturbed at their occupations.

“Indeed, I was conscious of a certain impression of expectant silence—as if the thing behind the noises, whatever it was, had paused to watch me enter its dominion. Throughout my time in the cellar, I seemed surrounded by this same atmosphere. Sheer ‘nerves,’ of course.

“In the main, I held myself well under control. As I was about to leave the cellar, however, I unguardedly glanced back over my shoulder at the stone slab covering the old well. At that, a violent tremor came over me, and, losing all command, I rushed back up the cellar stairs, thence to this study. My nerves are playing me sorry tricks.

“July 30th. For more than a week, all has been well. The tone of my nerves seems distinctly better. Mrs. Malkin, who has remarked several times lately upon my paleness, expressed the conviction this afternoon that I am nearly my old self again. This is encouraging. I was beginning to fear that the severe strain of the past few months had left an indelible mark upon me. With continued health, I shall be able to finish my book by spring.

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

“July 31st. Mrs. Malkin remained rather late tonight in connection with some item of housework, and it was quite dark when I returned to my study from bolting the street door after her. The blackness of the upper hall, which the former owner of the house inexplicably failed to wire for electricity, was profound. As I came to the top of the second flight of stairs, something clutched at my foot, and, for an instant, almost pulled me back. I freed myself and ran to the study.

“August 3rd. Again the awful insistence. I sat here, with this diary upon my knee, and it seems that fingers of iron are tearing at me. I will not go! My nerves may be utterly unstrung again (I fear they are), but I am still their master.

“August 4th. I did not yield, last night. After a bitter struggle, which must have lasted nearly an hour, the desire to go to the cellar suddenly departed. I must not give in at any time.

“August 5th. Tonight, the rat noises (I shall call them that for want of a more appropriate term) are very noticeable. I went to the length of unbolting my door and stepping into the hallway to listen. After a few minutes, I seemed to be aware of something large and gray watching me from the darkness at the end of the passage.

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This is a bizarre statement, of course, but it exactly describes my impression. I withdrew hastily into the study, and bolted the door.

“Now that my nervous condition is so palpably affecting the optic nerve, I must not much longer delay seeing a specialist. But—how much shall I tell him?

“August 8th. Several times, tonight, while sitting here at my work, I have seemed to hear soft footsteps in the passage. ‘Nerves’ again, of course, or else some new trick of the wind among the specimens on the walls.

“August 9th. By my watch it is four o’clock in the morning. My mind is made up to record the experience I have passed through. Calmness may come that way.

“Feeling rather fatigued last night, from the strain of a weary day of research, I retired early. My sleep was more refreshing than usual, as it is likely to be when one is genuinely tired. I awakened, however (it must have been about an hour ago), with a start of tremendous violence.

“There was moonlight in the room. My nerves were ‘on edge,’ but, for a moment, I saw nothing unusual. Then, glancing toward the door, I perceived what appeared to be thin, white fingers, thrust under it—exactly as if some one outside

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the door were trying to attract my attention in that manner. I rose and turned on the light, but the fingers were gone.

“Needless to say, I did not open the door. I write the occurrence down, just as it took place, or as it seemed; but I can not trust myself to comment upon it.

“August 10th. Have fastened heavy rubber strips on the bottom of my door.

“August 15th. All quiet, for several nights. I am hoping that the rubber strips, being something definite and tangible, have had a salutary effect upon my nerves. Perhaps I shall not need to see a doctor.

“August 17th. Once more I have been aroused from sleep. The interruptions seem to come always at the same hour—about three o’clock in the morning. I had been dreaming of the well in the cellar—the same dream, over and over—everything black except the slab, and a figure with bowed head and averted face sitting there. Also, I had vague dreams about a dog. Can it be that my last words to her have impressed that on my mind? I must pull myself together. In particular, I must not, under any pressure, yield, and visit the cellar after nightfall.

“August 18th. Am feeling much more hope-

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ful. Mrs. Malkin remarked on it, while serving dinner. This improvement is due largely to a consultation I have had with Dr. Sartwell, the distinguished specialist in nervous diseases. I went into full details with him, excepting certain reservations. He scouted the idea that my experiences could be other than purely mental.

“When he recommended a change of scene (which I had been expecting), I told him positively that it was out of the question. He said then that, with the aid of a tonic and an occasional sleeping-draft, I am likely to progress well enough at home. This is distinctly encouraging. I erred in not going to him at the start. Without doubt, most, if not all, of my hallucinations could have been averted.

“I have been suffering a needless penalty from my nerves for an action I took solely in the interests of science. I have no disposition to tolerate it further. From today I shall report regularly to Dr. Sartwell.

“August 19th. Used the sleeping-draft last night, with gratifying results. The doctor says I must repeat the dose for several nights, until my nerves are well under control again.

“August 21st. All well. It seems that I have found the way out—a very simple and prosaic

## CREEPS BY NIGHT

way. I might have avoided much needless annoyance by seeking expert advice at the beginning. Before retiring, last night, I unbolted my study door and took a turn up and down the passage. I felt no trepidation. The place was as it used to be, before these fancies assailed me. A visit to the cellar after nightfall will be the test for my complete recovery, but I am not yet quite ready for that. Patience!

“August 22nd. I have just read yesterday’s entry, thinking to steady myself. It is cheerful—almost gay; and there are other entries like it in preceding pages. I am a mouse, in the grip of a cat. Let me have freedom for ever so short a time, and I begin to rejoice at my escape. Then the paw descends again.

“It is four in the morning—the usual hour. I retired rather late, last night, after administering the draft. Instead of the dreamless sleep, which heretofore has followed the use of the drug, the slumber into which I fell was punctuated by recurrent visions of the slab, with the bowed figure upon it. Also, I had one poignant dream in which the dog was involved.

“At length, I awakened, and reached mechanically for the light switch beside my bed. When my hand encountered nothing, I suddenly real-

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ized the truth. I was standing in my study, with my other hand upon the doorknob. It required only a moment, of course, to find the light and switch it on. I saw then that the bolt had been drawn back.

“The door was quite unlocked. My awakening must have interrupted me in the very act of opening it. I could hear something moving restlessly in the passage outside the door.

“August 23rd. I must beware of sleeping at night. Without confiding the fact to Dr. Sartwell, I have begun to take the drug in the daytime. At first, Mrs. Malkin’s views on the subject were pronounced, but my explanation of ‘doctor’s orders’ has silenced her. I am awake for breakfast and supper, and sleep in the hours between. She is leaving me, each evening, a cold lunch to be eaten at midnight.

“August 26th. Several times I have caught myself nodding in my chair. The last time, I am sure that, on arousing, I perceived the rubber strip under the door bent inward, as if something were pushing it from the other side. I must not, under any circumstances, permit myself to fall asleep.

“September 2nd. Mrs. Malkin is to be away, because of her sister’s illness. I can not help

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dreading her absence. Though she is here only in the daytime, even that companionship is very welcome.

“September 3rd. Let me put this into writing. The mere labor of composition has a soothing influence upon me. God knows, I need such an influence now, as never before!

“In spite of all my watchfulness, I fell asleep, tonight—across my bed. I must have been utterly exhausted. The dream I had was the one about the dog. I was patting the creature’s head, over and over.

“I awoke, at last, to find myself in darkness, and in a standing position. There was a suggestion of chill and earthiness in the air. While I was drowsily trying to get my bearings, I became aware that something was nuzzling my hand, as a dog might do.

“Still saturated with my dream, I was not greatly astonished. I extended my hand, to pat the dog’s head. That brought me to my senses. I was standing in the cellar.

*“The thing before me was not a dog!*

“I can not tell how I fled back up the cellar stairs. I know, however, that, as I turned, the slab was visible, in spite of the darkness, with



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something sitting upon it. All the way up the stairs, hands snatched at my feet."

This entry seemed to finish the diary, for blank pages followed it; but I remembered the crumpled sheet, near the back of the book. It was partly torn out, as if a hand had clutched it, convulsively. The writing on it, too, was markedly in contrast to the precise, albeit nervous penmanship of even the last entry I had perused. I was forced to hold the scrawl up to the light to decipher it. This is what I read:

"My hand keeps on writing, in spite of myself. What is this? I do not wish to write, but it compels me. Yes, yes, I will tell the truth, I will tell the truth."

A heavy blot followed, partly covering the writing. With difficulty, I made it out:

"The guilt is mine—mine only. I loved her too well, yet I was unwilling to marry, though she entreated me on her knees—though she kissed my hand. I told her my scientific work came first. She did it, herself. I was not expecting that—I swear I was not expecting it. But I was afraid the authorities would misunderstand. So I took what seemed the best course. She had no friends here who would inquire.

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“It is waiting outside my door. I *feel* it. It compels me, through my thoughts. My hand keeps on writing. I must not fall asleep. I must think only of what I am writing. I must——”

Then came the words I had seen when Mrs. Malkin had handed me the book. They were written very large. In places, the pen had dug through the paper. Though they were scrawled, I read them at a glance:

“Not the slab in the cellar! Not that! Oh, my God, anything but that! Anything——”

By what strange compulsion was the hand forced to write down what was in the brain; even to the ultimate thoughts; even to those final words?

The gray light from outside, slanting down through two dull little windows, sank into the sodden hole near the inner wall. The coroner and I stood in the cellar, but not too near the hole.

A small, demonstrative, dark man—the chief of detectives—stood a little apart from us, his eyes intent, his natural animation suppressed. We were watching the stooped shoulders of a police constable, who was angling in the well.

“See anything, Walters?” inquired the detective, raspingly.

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The policeman shook his head.

The little man turned his questioning to me.

"You're quite sure?" he demanded.

"Ask the coroner. He saw the diary," I told him.

"I'm afraid there can be no doubt," the coroner confirmed, in his heavy, tired voice.

He was an old man, with lack-luster eyes. It had seemed best to me, on the whole, that he should read my uncle's diary. His position entitled him to all the available facts. What we were seeking in the well might especially concern him.

He looked at me opaquely now, while the policeman bent double again. Then he spoke—like one who reluctantly and at last does his duty. He nodded toward the slab of gray stone, which lay in the shadow to the left of the well.

"It doesn't seem very heavy, does it?" he suggested, in an undertone.

I shook my head. "Still, it's stone," I demurred. "A man would have to be rather strong to lift it."

"To lift it—yes." He glanced about the cellar. "Ah, I forgot," he said, abruptly. "It is in my office, as part of the evidence." He went on, half to himself. "A man—even though not very strong—could take a stick—for instance, the

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stick that is now in my office—and prop up the slab, if he wished to look into the well,” he whispered.

The policeman interrupted, straightening again with a groan, and laying his electric torch beside the well.

“It’s breaking my back,” he complained. “There’s dirt down there. It seems loose, but I can’t get through it. Somebody’ll have to go down.”

The detective cut in, “I’m lighter than you, Walters.”

“I’m not afraid, sir.”

“I didn’t say you were,” the little man snapped. “There’s nothing down there, anyway—though we’ll have to prove that, I suppose.” He glanced truculently at me, but went on talking to the constable: “Rig the rope around me, and don’t bungle the knot. I’ve no intention of falling into the place.”

“There *is* something there,” whispered the coroner, slowly, to me. His eyes left the little detective and the policeman, carefully tying and testing knots, and turned again to the square slab of stone.

“Suppose—while a man was looking into that hole—with the stone propped up—he should

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accidentally knock the prop away?" He was still whispering.

"A stone so light that he could prop it up wouldn't be heavy enough to kill him," I objected.

"No." He laid a hand on my shoulder. "Not to *kill* him—to *paralyze* him—if it struck the spine in a certain way. To render him helpless, but not unconscious. The *post mortem* would disclose that, through the bruises on the body."

The policeman and the detective had adjusted the knots to their satisfaction. They were bickering now as to the details of the descent.

"Would that cause death?" I whispered.

"You must remember that the housekeeper was absent for two days. In two days, even that pressure"—he stared at me hard, to make sure that I understood—"with the head down——"

Again the policeman interrupted: "I'll stand at the well, if you gentlemen will grab the rope behind me. It won't be much of a pull. I'll take the brunt of it."

We let the little man down, with the electric torch strapped to his waist, and some sort of implement—a trowel or a small spade—in his hand. It seemed a long time before his voice, curiously

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hollow, directed us to stop. The hole must have been deep.

We braced ourselves. I was second, the coroner last. The policeman relieved his strain somewhat by snagging the rope against the edge of the well, but I marveled, nevertheless, at the ease with which he held the weight. Very little of it came to me.

A noise like muffled scratching reached us from below. Occasionally the rope shook and shifted slightly at the edge of the hole. At last the detective's hollow voice spoke.

"What does he say?" the coroner demanded.

The policeman turned his square, dogged face toward us.

"I think he's found something," he explained.

The rope jerked and shifted again. Some sort of struggle seemed to be going on below. The weight suddenly increased, and as suddenly lessened, as if something had been grasped, then had managed to elude the grasp and slip away. I could catch the detective's rapid breathing now, also the sound of inarticulate speech in his hollow voice.

The next words I caught came more clearly. They were a command to pull up. At the same

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moment, the weight on the rope grew heavier, and remained so.

The policeman's big shoulders began straining, rhythmically.

"All together," he directed. "Take it easy. Pull when I do."

Slowly, the rope passed through our hands. With each fresh grip that we took, a small section of it dropped to the floor behind us. I began to feel the strain. I could tell from the coroner's labored breathing that he felt it more, being an old man. The policeman, however, seemed untiring.

The rope tightened, suddenly, and there was an ejaculation from below—just below. Still holding fast, the policeman contrived to stoop over and look. He translated the ejaculation for us.

"Let down a little. He's stuck with it against the side."

We slackened the rope, until the detective's voice gave us the word again.

The rhythmic tugging continued. Something dark appeared, quite abruptly, at the top of the hole. My nerves leapt in spite of me, but it was merely the top of the detective's head—his dark hair. Something white came next—his pale face,

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with staring eyes. Then his shoulders, bowed forward, the better to support what was in his arms. Then——

I looked away; but, as he laid his burden down at the side of the well, the detective whispered to us:

“He had her covered up with dirt—covered up. . . .”

He began to laugh—a little, high cackle, like a child’s—until the coroner took him by the shoulders and deliberately shook him. Then the policeman led him out of the cellar.

It was not then, but afterward, that I put my question to the coroner.

“Tell me,” I demanded. “People pass there at all hours. Why didn’t my uncle call for help?”

“I have thought of that,” he replied. “I believe he did call. I think, probably, he screamed. But his head was down, and he couldn’t raise it. His screams must have been swallowed up in the well.”

“You are sure he didn’t murder her?” He had given me that assurance before, but I wished it again.

“Almost sure,” he declared, “though it was on his account, undoubtedly, that she killed herself.



## BEYOND THE DOOR

Few of us are punished as accurately for our sins as he was.”

One should be thankful, even for crumbs of comfort. I am thankful.

But there are times when my uncle's face rises before me. After all, we were the same blood; our sympathies had much in common; under any given circumstances, our thoughts and feelings must have been largely the same. I seem to see him in that final death march along the unlighted passageway—obeying an imperative summons—going on, step by step—down the stairway to the first floor, down the cellar stairs—at last, lifting the slab.

I try not to think of the final expiation. Yet *was* it final? I wonder. Did the last Door of all, when it opened, find him willing to pass through? Or was Something waiting beyond *that* Door?



# PERCHANCE TO DREAM

By

*Michael Joyce*

---

**I**T seemed to him that he was a commercial traveler, sitting in the corner of a third class smoker on a train bound for a small town on the East Coast. It seemed that he was making this journey not on account of business, but of some family affair. In his pocket, he knew, was a letter from his sister, the first she had written him for some years; an urgent letter begging for his help, yet so vague in its terms that he wondered whether she herself knew from what danger or misfortune she was asking him to save her. It seemed that her fears were in some way related to her husband, but she did not suggest ill-treatment; there was a reference to her little boy, but she did not say that he was ill. He had never seen

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his sister's child, but, looking back into the dim past, he found an old dislike of her husband, whom he remembered as a tall, raw-boned, red-headed Scot, a chemist in a small way of business and a dabbler, he seemed to have been told, in chemical experiment.

The vagueness of the letter was tiresome to a man who, though he had no living interest in his sister and had made no effort to see her for several years, was yet too much a brother to leave her appeal unanswered; for there was no doubt that she longed for his support, whether in fact she needed it or not, and for this reason, perhaps, her ill-chosen words had given him uneasiness, her very poverty of expression leaving in the mind a dim fear, too shadowy to combat. Such feelings, however, the traveler determined to ignore, finding it more comfortable to fancy that the husband's business was failing and that this was merely a request for money to avert impending bankruptcy—the plain meaning tortured into the likeness of an indefinable foreboding by the sense of shame that begging excites in decent people. So, his mind was at rest; he hoped that the loan—common sense would call it a gift—need not be large; but money was at least a thing he understood, and on this understanding

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he settled down to read a magazine for the rest of his journey.

This was not, it seemed, his first visit to the town; perhaps he had been there on business. On leaving the station he found that he knew how to reach the road his sister lived in, although he had certainly never called at the house itself. It was a desolate evening at the dead end of autumn; what few visitors the town could boast had left it long ago, and indeed it was hard to imagine what could ever have brought them there, for the front was low and undistinguished, the beach poor and dirty, the buildings cheap and tawdry; the speculators who had hoped to popularize the place had run mean streets of semi-villas out into the fields, where the roadway and the pavement petered out in heaps of rubble and clay. The whole place was stamped with squalid failure.

He found his sister's house on the outskirts of the town, where a nagging wind set the peeling posters flapping on an abandoned hoarding and drove a flock of straws and papers along the empty street. The house was badly built and out of repair like all the rest. For some time there was no answer to his knock, and when at length the door was opened it was slowly, as with sus-

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picion. It seemed that for the moment he did not recognize his sister, so changed was she from the plump easy woman whom he had pictured as the writer of that letter. Now he could better understand his uneasiness at her appeal, for she was pale and thin, disordered in her dress and harassed in expression. She had acquired little nervous movements which seemed new to him and which distressed him. He had expected her to greet him with some warmth of gratitude for his prompt response to her letter, and was surprised to find her manner cold and constrained.

The front door opened into a dark and airless lobby, at the end of which he could see a door paneled with colored glass. In there, his sister whispered, the Chemist conducted his experiments; their combined sitting- and dining-room was on the first floor. Ascending the stairs they reached the first landing which led to two short flights of five stairs each—the house was as clumsily planned as it was badly built—one leading to a bedroom in the front of the house and the other to another landing out of which the sitting-room opened. Where the stairs met this second landing a Japanese bead curtain hung across the way. The Traveler noticed how the long strings of beads clicked together as they

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closed behind him, and wondered why women loved to hang such ugly, useless things about the place. The sitting-room was at once cold and stuffy, the smoldering fire serving rather to raise a draught than to warm the room. They sat on either side of the hearth in constrained silence.

Well? he said, at last. I'm glad you came, she said; it's the child I'm troubled about. The child? he said; I thought perhaps it was money. No, you needn't have thought that, she protested; my husband earns enough to keep us, though it's true we're not rich; he's all right about money. No, it's the child; I'm terribly anxious about him; it gets worse and worse; it's horrible, it's horrible.

She spoke the last words more to herself than to him, and it was clear that now she had persuaded him to come down to help her she was unwilling to talk about her trouble. Her womanish unreason tried his temper, but he was sorry for her at the same time. He tried, clumsily enough, to soothe and coax her. At the first kind word she began crying silently; he left her time to recover a little and then began to question her. Was it, he asked, the child's health? Yes, it was his health; he had been ailing for a long time now; but it was more than that, she said, something worse

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than that. Do you mean it's his mind? the Traveler asked. Yes, I suppose so, she replied with hesitation; I don't know, I don't know.

It seemed that at this moment the child entered, moving with an unnatural staidness which argued an appalling lack of vitality. It was impossible to guess his age from his gray, expressionless face; his head was large, far too large for his flimsy body and mean limbs. Good evening, Uncle, said the child. Do you know me, then? asked the Traveler, eyeing him curiously. Why, yes, replied the child; you're my mother's brother. But how do you know that? asked his mother uneasily; I never told you he was coming. The child shook his head indifferently and walked soberly out of the room, not troubling to close the door. The bead curtain could be heard clicking outside as he passed through. The Traveler rose and closed the door after him.

Well, he said, sitting down, what's wrong with the child then? is he always like that? Yes, always the same, she said. And what does he do all day? asked the Traveler, does he play? No. Does he read, or what? No, she said, he doesn't often read; he just sits there quite quiet, thinking to himself; he doesn't speak much. Well, said the Traveler, he certainly doesn't look very



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healthy; do you think this place doesn't suit him? No, replied his sister, it's a poor place, but the air is good; and she went on to explain that they had settled here simply on account of the child, the doctor recommending the East Coast, and the Chemist being offered the business, cheap, a day or two later. But the child did not seem to have benefited by the change; indeed it rather seemed that he was gradually getting worse, though it would be hard to define what was wrong with him. The Traveler asked whether the child was in the hands of a good doctor. No, his sister said, her husband would have nothing to do with doctors. Why? he asked; does he think that the child is well? No, she said, but he insists on treating the child himself; that's what frightens me.

The Traveler, sitting with his back to the door, became aware that he was being watched. He turned sharply. The door, which he remembered having closed after the child, was open, and an enormous red-headed man was standing framed in the doorway, his hand on the knob. He took two silent steps into the room, still staring at the Traveler, who noticed that he walked in his socks. You gave me a turn, he said; do you always go about like that? The Chemist nodded, chuckled

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softly, and walked out again. The Traveler closed the door after him. I don't like people to creep about the place like that, he said, shaking himself. He opened the door again, suddenly, but there was no one on the landing. Let's light the gas, he said, and draw the curtains; it's a wretched evening.

So he treats the child himself? he asked after a minute or two had passed. Yes, she said. Gives him medicine, does he? Yes, she said. He's not qualified to prescribe, said the Traveler; he's no right to do that; even doctors don't treat their own family. He *will* do it, she said, though I beg him to let me take the child to a doctor; but he won't hear of it. Does he give any reason? He says the doctors don't know their job, she said; he gives the child a dose of some kind night and morning; he mixes it himself in the room downstairs I showed you; sometimes he makes me give it him. And have you no idea what the stuff is? asked her brother. No; but he thinks it's something wonderful.

The Traveler asked her why she did not take the child to see a doctor without letting her husband know, but she said she would not dare. He would find out somehow, however dark she kept it; the child might tell him, for she knew that the

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two talked together sometimes when they were alone. And suppose he did get to know, her brother asked, what then? I don't know, she said, but I'm frightened of him. And so was he, a little, the Traveler realized; still, he must do what he could for his sister, who was clearly ready to break down. He told her that if she would tell her husband, in front of him, that she insisted on the child's being properly treated and refused to give him any more of the drug, he would support her as best he could. But she must nerve herself to face it out this evening, for to-morrow business would call him back to London. She seemed grateful for the offer, but was afraid, she said, to be left alone with her husband afterwards. Nonsense, he said; he's never ill-treated you, has he? Look, you speak to him to-night, and to-morrow morning we'll both take the child along to see the doctor; then we'll come back here together and the three of us can talk it over quietly and see whether he'll abide by what the doctor says: if the doctor says, as he's sure to, that the child must take nothing but what he prescribes himself, then your husband will have to agree to it, of course, and if he goes back on his word you just send a wire to me and let me know. In the meantime I'll make a few inquiries and

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find out the rights of the case in law. What can he do to you, anyway? You mustn't let your nerves get out of hand, you know. Why, even suppose the man was a homicidal lunatic, you've got the neighbors at hand to help you; and perhaps you could get some one in to sleep with you. . . .

This time he was prepared and turned as the door opened. The Chemist entered noiselessly, placing on the table a medicine glass half full of a clear liquid. He looked across at his wife with an air of malevolent inquiry. She gazed back at him helplessly and at last gave a timid answer, Very well. He nodded and silently left the room.

He knows, he knows, she whispered when the door was shut; didn't you see the way he looked at me? Well, he may have guessed, said her brother uneasily; you should have told him then, you know. I couldn't, she said. The Traveler found himself infected by her fear. It was absurd; the Chemist was a big brute, far more powerful than himself, but it was ridiculous to suppose that there would be appeal to physical force. Angry with himself for his qualms he took up the glass and threw its contents into the fire. There, he said, that's the end of that; I'll speak to him when he comes back; don't you worry.

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She left him to put the child to bed, coming back later to lay the cold supper. The Chemist joined them in his shirt-sleeves, his fingers browned with acid. Not two words were spoken throughout the meal. As they rose from the table the Chemist said, Did you give it him? No, said the Traveler, she did not. The Chemist ignored him and asked his wife again, Did you give it him? No, she said, very white, I . . . knocked it over. That's not true, said her brother; I threw it on the fire; the child must see a doctor; you can't go on treating him yourself, he's getting worse and worse. The Chemist still looked across the table at his wife. You won't give it him, then? he asked. The Traveler nodded urgently at his sister. No, she said desperately, I won't. The Chemist gave a low chuckle, nodded, and left the room in his stockinged feet.

There, said the Traveler when he was gone, that's over now; that wasn't so bad, was it? She was still white with the strain. That's not all, she said; he'll not take it as quietly as that. Nonsense, said her brother; what can he do? After all, there are two of us. I don't know, she said; but he'll come back, I know he will. The Traveler, although he laughed at his sister's fears, was careful to take a seat from which he could command

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the door. They sat there in uncomfortable silence until gradually, since all was quiet, the woman's color returned and they found themselves in conversation. They spoke of old friends, names forgotten for ten or twenty years, reviving childish memories as the only common ground between them. The Traveler, a lonely man, wondered why he had seen his sister so rarely in the past, resented her marriage with this dour brute of a husband. It was true, he said to himself, blood was thicker than water after all; and he told her that if this trouble should end in a breach with her husband she might look to him; she could keep house for him and bring the child; he was not a marrying man, but he found it a poor life that was spent in furnished rooms and commercial hotels.

The evening passed for them both in a gentle melancholy which made them loth to leave the fireside. Well, said the Traveler at last, it's getting late; it's been a quiet evening after all, you see; you'll be all right now, won't you? I'll sit up with you if you'd rather. Yes, I'm all right now, she said; thank you, you've been very kind to me. . . . I'll show you to your room. That's all right, he said; and we'll go and see the doctor in the morning. He opened the door while his sis-

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ter drew back the curtains and opened the window top and bottom to air the room. Outside there was a high wind which made a sudden draught in the close atmosphere. The stairs and landing were dark and the house was in complete silence.

As he stood there with his hand on the door knob he heard his sister behind him give a little gasp. What's up now? he said, looking round. She was staring at the gas-burner over the mantelpiece. The flame flickered and then ceased, leaving the room dark except for what dim, diffused light filtered through the driving clouds and in at the narrow window. He said, What's wrong with it; does it want a shilling? No, she said breathlessly, it's not a slot meter; I've never known it do this before. Well, he said, there's not much odds now we're off to bed; you've got candles. . . . Hush, she said, didn't you hear it, didn't you. . . . She stopped, breathless. He could hear a slight rustling like wind among the leaves, a tiny click-click from the landing; then suddenly, framed in the doorway, enormous in the gloom, stood the Chemist, an axe raised above his shoulder. The Traveler recoiled instinctively, and on the instant the man was through the door and making straight across the room at his wife.

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There was a scream, a scuffle, and a crash. Crossing the room in panic the Traveler found his sister still cowering against the further wall while the Chemist lay inert upon the floor, his head in the hearth. The Traveler examined his face in what small glow came from the dying fire; the forehead was wet with blood. Realizing quickly that he had tripped and stunned himself he feverishly tried to turn his mind to action. Quick, he said, we must tie him up before he comes round; what have you got? Have you got any rope? Quick, for God's sake; tear the table-cloth into strips; if he comes round first he'll kill the two of us; he's killing-mad. He struck a match to find the axe, which he hid in a corner. Here you are, said his sister; will these do? She was stuttering with fear, but she had kept her nerve. That's right, he said; here, you must help me; we must do it in the dark, there's no time to get a candle. In the dim light they fumbled with the limp wrists and ankles, lashing them together as tightly as they could with the clumsy strips of serge. Pull, said the Traveler; never mind hurting him; it's either him or us. At last they had him tied, dragged and pushed him towards the table, and made him fast as best they could to the legs. Now, said the Traveler, get a candle, sev-



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eral, and some rope or cord; here are the matches; I'll watch him till you come back. I'm frightened, she said; I daren't go downstairs alone. You must, he said urgently; I can't leave you with him, he isn't safe like this; quick, now, there's a good girl. She went.

Left alone, the Traveler examined the body again. The heart was still beating and the blood on the forehead was already nearly dry; soon he would be coming round. If only she would hurry with that cord—their makeshift lashings would not hold him long, a great brute of a man with a maniac's strength at that. At a pinch they might both cut and run while he was struggling to get free; but if he did get loose he'd kill some one before he'd finished. He wondered whether there was a telephone in the place. His sister came back with a candle, the only one, she said, in the house, and a good length of stout box-cord. The light was cheering, and the Traveler was able to secure the brute's hands and feet carefully and at his leisure. There, he said at last, straightening his back; he's safe enough for the present; now, is there a 'phone in the house? Good; go down and ring up the police and tell them to send round several men, with a strait-jacket, if they've got one, as soon as they can. Oh, but I'm frightened,

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she said; it's so dark on the stairs; don't make me go. I'm afraid you'll have to, he said; here, you can take the candle; come, it's nearly over now; run along quick, there's a good girl, and the police will be along in a minute or two, and then everything will be all right. He could see that she was ready to collapse at any minute, but she took the candle and went downstairs.

In the dark he heard a low moan; soon his eyes growing accustomed to the absence of the candle, he could see some movement in the huge figure on the floor. He knew that the brute had come to and was trying to free himself. The table creaked. You can't get loose, said the Traveler sharply; you'll only hurt yourself trying. There was another moan followed by silence. The woman returned with the candle. Are they coming? he asked. Yes, she said, they promised to send the men at once. How far, he asked, is the police station? The other end of the town, she said, but it won't. . . . She broke off with a scream as her eye fell on the Chemist. Look, she whispered, look, he's watching us. At that the Chemist shut his eyes and moaned again. For God's sake loose me, he whined; these cords are killing me. Don't answer him, said the Traveler; we can't take any risks. For God's sake, the Chemist whined again

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in his vile Greenock speech, for God's sake let go my legs from the table so I can lie straight. We could do that, couldn't we? said the woman weakly. No, snapped her brother; we can't take any risks.

The Chemist began to talk, lucidly enough; he was all right now, he said, they need not be afraid; he didn't mind being tied up so long as they would ease him a little; he was suffering terribly. When the Traveler ignored him he began to excite himself, threatening and imploring them by turns. He strained at the cords without effect, groaning and gasping, his face distorted, saliva trickling from his mouth. Then he lay still and began to talk rapidly about the child; it was *his* child, he said, and it was to be a genius, a superman, the greatest man that ever lived; fools that they were to stop the treatment, they should not stop it, he was the father and it was for him to say. His speech grew thicker, his accent so strong as to make his words barely intelligible. The boy was to be the greatest man that ever lived; it was simple, it was easy, but no one else had found the way to do it. Hemp, Indian Hemp, Cannabis Indica; they understood it in the East; but here, what did the doctors use it for? Chlorodyne and corn cures; no one knew

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but him, it was his discovery; steady dosing, minute at first but increasing month by month, from early childhood, and there was your genius, there was your pure intellect; fools were afraid of drugs, the doctors said they were harmful, yet all the great men had taken drugs in one form or another, all of them; they had suffered because the effect on the adult brain was to disintegrate the mental controls and unbalance the faculties; but steady assimilation by the growing brain, that was *his* discovery, no one else had seen it; it was simple but all the clever people missed it. The child would be the greatest man the world had ever seen; and but for meddling fools. . . . He broke off, panting.

There was a silence. The woman sat cowering in a chair, gazing fascinated at her husband. They're a long time coming, said the Traveler at last. Yes, said his sister, they should have been here by now. The Chemist was eyeing them cunningly; he began to whine and wheedle. He was safe now, he said; they could let him go; he must have his way with the child, that was all; cross him there and he was fighting-mad, but, that apart, he was as sane as they were. There was no response. He moaned, pulling feebly at the cords. Water, he gasped, for the love of Christ. Give

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him some water, said the woman, if you think it's safe. The Traveler filled a glass from the carafe on the sideboard and, kneeling warily beside the Chemist's head, poured the water into his open mouth. The Chemist spluttered and spat it out. You'll choke me, he said between his coughs; loose my hands and let me take it myself; I can't drink lying here. The Traveler shook his head. For the love of Christ, whined the Chemist, just let my hands go from the table so I can sit up. The Traveler shook his head.

There came a loud knocking at the front door which echoed through the still house. Quick, said the Traveler, run down and let them in; here, take the candle. Between them, in their haste, they dropped it and were in the dark. Quick, where are the matches? said the Traveler, fumbling on the table. I left them downstairs, she said. Then you'll have to go in the dark, there's nothing else for it; there's not a spark left in the fire. I can't, I daren't, she whimpered; I can't face those stairs again. The knocking was repeated. For God's sake, said the Traveler sharply, pull yourself together; you *must* go—very well, then, I'll go myself and you must watch him. There came a low groan from the floor. No, cried the woman, don't leave me with him, I can't bear it,

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he'll kill me, he'll kill me. While the Traveler stood perplexed the knocking was repeated, louder. Then we must leave him, he said desperately, and both go down. No, no, she sobbed; he'll break loose and kill us on the stairs; we mustn't leave him. . . . I'll go. She went to the door but drew back in terror from the dark landing. It's no good, she said helplessly; you go, you'll have to. Yes, I'll have to, he said; there they are again, that's the last time they'll knock; they'll think it's a hoax and clear off. Now watch him and don't answer a word; don't give him the water whatever he says; I'll be back with the police in thirty seconds. Now, watch him.

As he ran downstairs there suddenly came into his mind an explanation which he had not been seeking: that the Chemist had turned the gas off at the main before making his attack. Reaching the hall he flung open the front door. There was no one on the step. The high wind had cleared the sky and the street lay in bright moonlight. He stepped out onto the pavement, looked to the left—there was no one—looked to the right, and there, turning the corner at the end of the street, was a posse of policemen. They were gone. He shouted, too late. He could not make up his mind to leave his sister alone with that brute any

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longer, trussed up though he was; he was afraid that her nerve would go completely. But if he rang up the station they might have decided that it was a hoax and merely ring off. Every moment as he considered the policemen were further away. He must ring up and take his chance of persuading them. He stepped back to the open door; in front of him the hall yawned velvet black after the moonlight. As he stood, half in the light, half in the shadow, he heard the tiny sound of a scuffle upstairs, a crash, a scream cut short as it began, then nothing. The house was silent. Then he heard a quiet click-click at the head of the stairs. Silence again; he could hear nothing and see nothing in the darkness. There was the least sound of a little shuffle on the stairs like a faint breeze, and his ears, keyed up by fear, caught the sound of rough fingertips feeling their way down the wall. He felt sick; his heart shook him, but he could not move. There was a dim whiteness in the gloom and then the glint of steel; then it seemed that he heard a slow deep chuckle from the foot of the stairs. . . .





# A VISITOR FROM EGYPT

By

*Frank Belknap Long, Jr.*

---

**O**N a dismal rainy afternoon in August a tall, very thin gentleman tapped timidly on the frosted glass window of the curator's office in a certain New England museum. He wore a dark blue Chinchilla overcoat, olive-green Homburg hat with high tapering crown, yellow gloves, and spats. A blue silk muffler with white dots encircled his neck and entirely concealed the lower portion of his face and virtually all of his nose. Only a small expanse of pink and very wrinkled flesh was visible above the muffler and below his forehead, but as this exposed portion of his physiognomy contained his eyes it was as arresting as it was meager. So arresting indeed was it that it commanded instant respect, and the at-

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tendants, who were granted liberal weekly emoluments for merely putting yards of red tape between the main entrance and the narrow corridor that led to the curator's office, waived all of their habitual and asinine inquiries and conducted the muffled gentleman straight to what a Victorian novelist would have called the sacred precincts.

Having tapped, the gentleman waited. He waited patiently, but something in his manner suggested that he was extremely nervous and perturbed and decidedly on edge to talk to the curator. And yet when the door of the office at last swung open, and the curator peered out fastidiously from behind gold-rimmed spectacles, he merely coughed and extended a visiting-card.

The card was conservatively fashionable in size and exquisitely engraved, and as soon as the curator perused it his countenance underwent an extraordinary alteration. He was ordinarily a supremely reticent individual with long, pale face and lugubrious, condescending eyes, but he suddenly became preposterously friendly and greeted his visitor with an effusiveness that was almost hysterical. He seized his visitor's somewhat flabby gloved hand and gave it a Bab-bittesque squeeze. He nodded and bowed and

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smirked and seemed almost beside himself with gratification.

"If only I had known, Sir Richard, that you were in America! The papers were unusually silent—outrageously silent, you know. I can not imagine how you managed to elude the reporters. They are usually so persistent, so indecently curious. I really can not imagine how you achieved it!"

"I did not wish to talk to idiotic old women, to lecture before mattoids, to have my photo reproduced in your absurd papers." Sir Richard's voice was oddly high-pitched, almost effeminate, and it quivered with the intensity of his emotion. "I *detest* publicity, and I regret that I am not utterly unknown in this—er—region."

"I quite understand, Sir Richard," murmured the curator soothingly. "You naturally desired leisure for research, for discussion. You were not interested in what the vulgar would say or think about you. A commendable and eminently scholarly attitude to take, Sir Richard! A splendid attitude! I quite understand and sympathize. We Americans have to be polite to the press occasionally, but you have no idea how it cramps our style, if I may use an expressive but exceedingly coarse colloquialism. It really does, Sir

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Richard. You have no idea—but do come in. Come in, by all means. We are honored immeasurably by the visit of so eminent a scholar.”

Sir Richard bowed stiffly and preceded the curator into the office. He selected the most comfortable of the five leather-backed chairs that encircled the curator’s desk and sank into it with a faintly audible sigh. He neither removed his hat nor withdrew the muffler from his pinkish visage.

The curator selected a seat on the opposite side of the table and politely extended a box of Havana panetelas. “Extremely mild,” he murmured. “Won’t you try one, Sir Richard?”

Sir Richard shook his head. “I have never smoked,” he said, and coughed.

There ensued a silence. Then Sir Richard apologized for the muffler. “I had an unfortunate accident on the ship,” he explained. “I stumbled in one of the deck games and cut my face rather badly. It’s in a positively unpresentable condition. I know you’ll pardon me if I don’t remove this muffler.”

The curator gasped. “How horrible, Sir Richard! I can sympathize, believe me. I hope that it will not leave a scar. One should have the

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most expert advice in such matters. I hope—Sir Richard, have you consulted a specialist, may I ask?”

Sir Richard nodded. “The wounds are not deep—nothing serious, I assure you. And now, Mr. Buzzby, I should like to discuss with you the mission that has brought me to Boston. Are the predynastic remains from Luxor on exhibition?”

The curator was a trifle disconcerted. He had placed the Luxor remains on exhibition that very morning, but he had not as yet arranged them to his satisfaction, and he would have preferred that his distinguished guest should view them at a later date. But he very clearly perceived that Sir Richard was so intensely interested that nothing that he could say would induce him to wait, and he *was* proud of the remains and flattered that England’s ablest Egyptologist should have come to the city expressly to see them. So he nodded amiably and confessed that the bones were on exhibition, and he added that he would be delighted and honored if Sir Richard would view them.

“They are truly marvelous,” he explained. “The pure Egyptian type—dolichocephalic, with

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relatively primitive features. And they date—  
Sir Richard, they date from at least 8,000 B. C.”

“Are the bones tinted?”

“I should say so, Sir Richard! They are wonderfully tinted, and the original colors have scarcely faded at all. Blue and red, Sir Richard, with red predominating.”

“Hm. A most absurd custom,” murmured Sir Richard.

Mr. Buzzby smiled. “I have always considered it pathetic, Sir Richard. Infinitely amusing, but pathetic. They thought that by painting the bones they could preserve the vitality of the corruptible body. Corruption putting on incorruption, as it were.”

“It was blasphemous!” Sir Richard had arisen from his chair. His face, above the muffler, was curiously white, and there was a hard, metallic glitter in his small dark eyes. “They sought to cheat Osiris! They had no conception of hyper-physical realities!”

The curator stared curiously. “Precisely what do you mean, Sir Richard?”

Sir Richard started a trifle at the question, as though he were awakening from some strange nightmare, and his emotion ebbed as rapidly as it had arisen. The glitter died out of his eyes and

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he sank listlessly back in his chair. "I—I was merely amused by your comment. As though by merely painting their mummies they could restore the circulation of the blood!"

"But that, as you know, Sir Richard, would occur in the other world. It was one of the most distinctive prerogatives of Osiris. He alone could restore the dead."

"Yes, I know," murmured Sir Richard. "They counted a good deal on Osiris. It is curious that it never occurred to them that the god might be offended by their presumptions."

"You are forgetting the Book of the Dead, Sir Richard. The promises in that are very definite. And it is an inconceivably ancient book. I am strongly convinced that it was in existence in 10,000 B. C. You have read my brochure on the subject?"

Sir Richard nodded. "A very scholarly work. But I believe that the Book of the Dead as we know it was a forgery!"

"Sir Richard!"

"Parts of it are undoubtedly predynastic, but I believe that the Judgment of the Dead, which defines the judicial prerogatives of Osiris, was inserted by some meddling priest as late as the historical period. It is a deliberate attempt

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to modify the relentless character of Egypt's supreme deity. Osiris does not judge, he *takes*."

"He takes, Sir Richard?"

"Precisely. Do you imagine any one can ever cheat death? Do you imagine that, Mr. Buzzby? Do you imagine for one moment that Osiris would restore to life the fools that returned to him?"

Mr. Buzzby colored. It was difficult to believe that Sir Richard was really in earnest. "Then you honestly believe that the character of Osiris as we know it is——"

"A myth, yes. A deliberate and childish evasion. No man can ever comprehend the character of Osiris. He is the Dark God. *But he treasures his own.*"

"Eh?" Mr. Buzzby was genuinely startled by the tone of ferocity in which the last remark was uttered. "What did you say, Sir Richard?"

"Nothing." Sir Richard had risen and was standing before a small revolving bookcase in the center of the room. "Nothing, Mr. Buzzby. But your taste in fiction interests me extremely. I had no idea you read young Finchley!"

Mr. Buzzby blushed and looked genuinely distressed. "I don't ordinarily," he said. "I despise fiction ordinarily. And young Finchley's ro-



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mances are unutterably silly. He isn't even a passable scholar. But that book has—well, there are a few good things in it. I was reading it this morning on the train and put it with the other books temporarily because I had no other place to put it. You understand, Sir Richard? We all have our little foibles, eh? A work of fiction now and then is sometimes—er—well, suggestive. And H. E. Finchley is rather suggestive occasionally.”

“He is, indeed. His Egyptian redactions are imaginative masterpieces!”

“You amaze me, Sir Richard. Imagination in a scholar is to be deplored. But of course, as I said, H. E. Finchley is not a scholar and his work is occasionally illuminating if one doesn't take it too seriously.”

“He knows his Egypt.”

“Sir Richard, I can't believe you really approve of him. A mere fictionist——”

Sir Richard had removed the book and opened it casually. “May I ask, Mr. Buzzby, if you are familiar with Chapter 13, *The Transfiguration of Osiris?*”

“Bless me, Sir Richard, I am not. I skipped that portion. Such purely grotesque rubbish repelled me.”

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“Did it, Mr. Buzzby? But the repellent is usually arresting. Just listen to this:

“It is beyond dispute that Osiris made his worshipers dream strange things of him, and that he possessed their bodies and souls forever. There is a devilish wrath against mankind with which Osiris was for Death’s sake inspired. In the cool of the evening he walked among men, and upon his head was the Crown of Upper Egypt, and his cheeks were inflated with a wind that slew. His face was veiled so that no man could see it, but assuredly it was an old face, very old and dead and dry, for the world was young when tall Osiris died.”

Sir Richard snapped the book shut and replaced it in the shelf. “What do you think of that, Mr. Buzzby?” he inquired.

“Rot,” murmured the curator. “Sheer, unadulterated rot.”

“Of course, of course. Mr. Buzzby, did it ever occur to you that a god may live, figuratively, a dog’s life?”

“Eh?”

“Gods are transfigured, you know. They go up in smoke, as it were. In smoke and flame. They become pure flame, pure spirit, creatures with no visible body.”

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“Dear, dear, Sir Richard, that had not occurred to me.” The curator laughed and nudged Sir Richard’s arm. “Beastly sense of humor,” he murmured, to himself. “The man is unutterably silly.”

“It would be dreadful, for example,” continued Sir Richard, “if the god had no control over his transfiguration; if the change occurred frequently and unexpectedly; if he shared, as it were, the ghastly fate of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.”

Sir Richard was advancing toward the door. He moved with a curious, shuffling gait and his shoes scraped peculiarly upon the floor. Mr. Buzzby was instantly at his elbow. “What is the matter, Sir Richard? What has happened?”

“Nothing!” Sir Richard’s voice rose in hysterical denial. “Nothing. Where is the lavatory, Mr. Buzzby?”

“Down one flight of stairs on your left as you leave the corridor,” muttered Mr. Buzzby. “Are—are you ill?”

“It is nothing, nothing,” murmured Sir Richard. “I must have a drink of water, that is all. The injury has—er—affected my throat. When it becomes too dry it pains dreadfully.”

“Good heavens!” murmured the curator. “I

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can send for water, Sir Richard. I can indeed. I beg you not to disturb yourself."

"No, no, I insist that you do not. I shall return immediately. Please do not send for anything."

Before the curator could renew his protestations Sir Richard had passed through the door and disappeared down the corridor.

Mr. Buzzby shrugged his shoulders and returned to his desk. "A most extraordinary person," he muttered. "Erudite and original, but queer. Decidedly queer. Still, it is pleasant to reflect that he has read my brochure. A scholar of his distinction might very pardonably have overlooked it. He called it a scholarly work. A scholarly work. Hmm. Very gratifying, I'm sure."

Mr. Buzzby clipped and lit a cigar.

"Of course he is wrong about the Book of the Dead," he mused. "Osiris was a most benevolent god. It is true that the Egyptians feared him, but only because he was supposed to judge the dead. There was nothing essentially evil or cruel about him. Sir Richard is quite wrong about that. It is curious that a man so eminent could go so sensationally astray. I can use no other phrase.

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Sensationally astray. I really believe that my arguments impressed him, though. I could see that he was impressed.”

The curator's pleasant reflections were coarsely and unexpectedly interrupted by a shout in the corridor. “Get them extinguishers down! Quick, you b——”

The curator gasped and rose hastily to his feet. Profanity violated all the rules of the museum and he had always firmly insisted that the rules should be obeyed. Striding quickly to the door he threw it open and stared incredulously down the corridor.

“What was that?” he cried. “Did any one call?”

He heard hurried steps and the sound of some one shouting, and then an attendant appeared at the end of the corridor. “Come quickly, sir!” he exclaimed. “There's fire and smoke comin' out of the basement!”

Mr. Buzzby groaned. What a dreadful thing to happen when he had such a distinguished guest! He raced down the corridor and seized the attendant angrily by the arm. “Did Sir Richard get out?” he demanded. “Answer me! Is Sir Richard down there now?”

“Who?” gasped the attendant.

“The gentleman who went down a few minutes

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ago, you idiot. A tall gentleman wearing a blue coat?"

"I dunno, sir. I didn't see nobody come up."

"Good God!" Mr. Buzzby was frantic. "We must get him out immediately. I believe that he was ill. He's probably fainted."

He strode to the end of the corridor and stared down the smoke-filled staircase leading to the lavatory. Immediately beneath him three attendants were cautiously advancing. Wet handkerchiefs, bound securely about their faces, protected them from the acrid fumes, and each held at arm's length a cylindrical fire extinguisher. As they descended the stairs they squirted the liquid contents of the extinguishers into the rapidly rising spirals of lethal blue smoke.

"It was much worse a minute ago," exclaimed the attendant at Mr. Buzzby's elbow. "The smoke was thicker and had a most awful smell. Like them dinosaur eggs smelt when you first unpacked 'em last spring, sir."

The attendants had now reached the base of the staircase and were peering cautiously into the lavatory. For a moment they peered in silence, and then one of them shouted up at Mr. Buzzby. "The smoke's dreadfully dense here, sir. We can't see any flames. Shall we go in, sir?"

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“Yes, do!” Mr. Buzzby’s voice was tragically shrill. “Do all you can. Please!”

The attendants disappeared into the lavatory and the curator waited with an agonized and expectant air. His heart was wrung at the thought of the fate which had in all probability overtaken his distinguished guest, but he could not think of anything further to do. Sinister forebodings crowded into his mind, but he was powerless to act.

Then it was that the shrieks commenced. From whatever cause arising they were truly ghastly, but they began so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that at first the curator could form no theory as to what had caused them. They issued so horribly and suddenly from the lavatory, echoing and re-echoing through the empty corridors, that the curator could only stare and gasp.

But when they became fairly coherent, when the screams of affright turned to appeals for mercy, for pity, and when the language in which they found grim expression changed too, becoming familiar to the curator but incomprehensible to the man beside him, a dreadful incident occurred which the latter has never

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been able to consign to a merciful mnemonic oblivion.

The curator fell upon his knees, literally went down upon his knees at the head of the staircase and raised both arms in an unmistakable gesture of supplication. And then from his ashen lips there poured a torrent of grotesque gibberish:

“sdmw stn Osiris! sdmw stn Osiris! sdmw stn Osiris! sdm-f Osiris! Oh, sdm-f Osiris! sdmw stn Osiris!”

“Fool!” A muffled form emerged from the lavatory and ponderously ascended the stairs. “Fool! You—you have sinned irretrievably!” The voice was guttural, harsh, remote, and seemed to come from an immeasurable distance.

“Sir Richard! Sir Richard!” The curator got stumblingly to his feet and staggered toward the ascending figure. “Protect me, Sir Richard. There’s something unspeakable down there. I thought—for a moment I thought—Sir Richard, did you *see* it? Did you hear anything? those shrieks——”

But Sir Richard did not reply. He did not even look at the curator. He brushed past the unfortunate man as though he were a mere meddling fool, and grimly began to climb the stairs



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that led to the Hall of Egyptian Antiquities. He ascended so rapidly that the curator could not catch up with him, and before the frightened man had reached the half-way landing his steps were resounding on the tiled floor above.

“Wait, Sir Richard!” shrieked Buzzby. “Wait, please! I am sure that you can explain everything. I am afraid. Please wait for me!”

A spasm of coughing seized him, and at that moment there ensued a most dreadful crash. Fragments of broken glass tinkled suggestively upon the stone floor, and awoke ominous echoes in the corridor and up and down the winding stairway. Mr. Buzzby clung to the banisters and moaned. His face was purplish and distorted with fear and beads of sweat glistened on his high forehead. For a moment he remained thus cowering and whimpering on the staircase. Then, miraculously, his courage returned. He ascended the last flight three steps at a time and dashed wildly forward.

An intolerable thought had abruptly been born in the poor, bewildered brain of Mr. Buzzby. It had suddenly occurred to him that Sir Richard was an impostor, a murderous madman intent only upon destruction, and that his collections were in immediate danger. Whatever

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Mr. Buzzby's human deficiencies, in his professional capacity he was conscientious and aggressive to an almost abnormal degree. And the crash had been unmistakable and susceptible of only one explanation. Mr. Buzzby completely forgot his fear in his concern for his precious collections. Sir Richard had smashed one of the cases and was extracting its contents! There was little doubt in Mr. Buzzby's mind as to which of the cases Sir Richard had smashed. "The Luxor remains can never be duplicated," he moaned. "I have been horribly duped!"

Suddenly he stopped, and stared. At the very entrance to the Hall lay an assortment of garments which he instantly recognized. There was the blue Chinchilla coat and the Alpine Homburg with its high tapering crown, and the blue silk muffler that had concealed so effectively the face of his visitor. And on the very top of the heap lay a pair of yellow suede gloves.

"Good God!" muttered Mr. Buzzby. "The man has shed all of his clothes!"

He stood there for a moment staring in utter bewilderment and then with long, hysterical strides he advanced into the hall. "A hopeless maniac," he muttered, under his breath. "A sheer, raving lunatic. Why did I not——"

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Then, abruptly, he ceased to reproach himself. He forgot entirely his folly, the heap of clothes, and the smashed case. Everything that had up to that moment occupied his mind was instantly extruded and he shriveled and shrank with fear. Never had the unwilling gaze of Mr. Buzzby encountered such a sight.

Mr. Buzzby's visitor was bending over the shattered case and only his back was visible. But it was not an ordinary back. In a lucid, unemotional moment Mr. Buzzby would have called it a nasty, malignant back, but in juxtaposition with the crown that topped it there is no Aryan polysyllable suggestive enough to describe it. For the crown was very tall and ponderous with jewels and unspeakably luminous, and it accentuated the vileness of the back. It was a green back. *Sapless* was the word that ran through Mr. Buzzby's mind as he stood and stared at it. And it was wrinkled, too, horribly wrinkled, all crisscrossed with centuried grooves.

Mr. Buzzby did not even notice his visitor's neck, which glistened and was as thin as a bean-pole, nor the small round scaly head that bobbed and nodded ominously. He saw only the hideous back, and the unbelievably awesome crown. The crown shed a fiery radiance upon the reddish tiles

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of the dim, vast hall, and the starkly nude body twisted and turned and writhed shockingly.

Black horror clutched at Mr. Buzzby's throat, and his lips trembled as though he were about to cry out. But he spoke no word. He had staggered back against the wall and was making curious futile gestures with his arms, as though he sought to embrace the darkness, to wrap the darkness in the hall about him, to make himself as inconspicuous as possible and invisible to the thing that was bending over the case. But apparently he soon found to his infinite dismay that the thing was aware of his presence, and as it turned slowly toward him he made no further attempt to obliterate himself, but went down on his knees and screamed and screamed and screamed.

Silently the figure advanced toward him. It seemed to glide rather than to walk, and in its terribly lean arms it held a queer assortment of brilliant scarlet bones. And it cackled loathsomely as it advanced.

And then it was that Mr. Buzzby's sanity departed utterly. He groveled and gibbered and dragged himself along the floor like a man in the grip of an instantaneous catalepsy. And all the while he murmured incoherently about how

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spotless he was and would Osiris spare him and how he longed to reconcile himself with Osiris.

But the figure, when it got to him, merely stooped and breathed on him. Three times it breathed on his ashen face and one could almost see the face shrivel and blacken beneath its warm breath. For some time it remained in a stooping posture, glaring glassily, and when it arose Mr. Buzzby made no effort to detain it. Holding the scarlet bones very firmly in its horribly thin arms it glided rapidly away in the direction of the stairs. The attendants did not see it descend. No one ever saw it again.

And when the coroner, arriving in response to the tardy summons of an attendant, examined Mr. Buzzby's body, the conclusion was unavoidable that the curator had been dead for a long, long time.

