

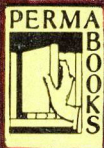
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IN THE GRIP OF TERROR

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P117

EDITED BY GROFF CONKLIN

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IN THE GRIP OF TERROR

Edited with an Introduction by

GROFF CONKLIN



PERMABOOKS

Garden City, New York

1951

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INTRODUCTION

I SUPPOSE that it is profitless, at this late date in the history of civilization, to ask why the human animal likes so much to be scared-on-paper, why he derives such a high degree of entertainment from reading about events which would literally frighten him out of his wits if he were actually confronted with them. The answer, if there is one, must lie within the province of the psychologist or the cultural anthropologist. We readers do not look for deep-rooted motives. We simply like to stretch out in a comfortable chair, safe and snug, and let somebody else's hair-raising imagination scare the living daylight out of us.

Certainly there is not an incident in this book which one would actually like to experience in the flesh. It is a pretty gruesome collection of horrors, some more subtle than others, but all calculated to strike terror in one way or another. A few stories slash you across the side of the face with an axe; other slip in between your ribs delicately, like a poisoned darning needle; still others dangle you mercilessly over an abyss into which you eventually drop with a scream—only to come to and find yourself still safe and sound in the land of humdrum reality. Even those stories which “come out all right in the end” (and there are precious few of them in this book) take you on a tour of the miseries of the damned before you finally see the light of day. That's the way it is with the tales in this book; don't say I didn't warn you.

This is no place for a pedantic analysis of the various kinds of terror and horror stories, such as those dealing with the scheming murderer, the sex maniac, other types of madmen, the psychological horror, the catastrophe, the weird or un-

known (of which the supernatural, represented hardly at all in this collection, is a large and motley section), the flight and pursuit, suspense, darkness and doom—for such analyses have been done by better (and windier) editors than this one. Suffice it to say that practically every type of terror story known to the connoisseur is represented by one or more examples in this collection.

The one great division of the terror story that is missing—the ghost, werewolf, black Sabbath and vampire narrative—is missing for the very good reason that tales so classified are not “pure” terror stories. They lean on non-human interventions for their effect, thereby creating for themselves an entirely separate and distinct *genre* which has its own fanatic devotees and calls for its own separate anthologies. It is true that tales such as Bradbury’s *Illustrated Man*, and perhaps Sturgeon’s *Bianca’s Hands*, rely somewhat for their effect on happenings which cannot actually be explained by everyday laws of physics and chemistry. However, they are borderline cases, not true ghost or vampire stories, certainly, and therefore acceptable to the lover of the *frisson* (French for shudder, if one is to be what Russell Lynes would call a Language Snob), provided he has a fairly broad mind.

It is also true that science fiction items like St. Clair’s *Hathor’s Pets* and Wandrei’s *Macklin’s Little Friend*—and even, perhaps, Gold’s *Problem in Murder*—are representative of a relatively new form of terror story not yet accepted into the classical horror pattern. You have to assume some extra-terrestrial mechanics (not necessarily supernatural) or some mad and unlikely inventions, to permit these stories into the arcane realm of pure horror. Frankly, I think that such tales as these add a new richness and variety to the type, and I have therefore set before you these excellent examples of the most recent development in terror stories.

An effort has been made to include largely unanthologized tales in this collection. It irks me, and I am sure that it

must irk others, to find in practically every anthology of terror stories some of the hoariest chestnuts in the field, as if the authors of those stories had never written anything else worth using. For example, Ambrose Bierce's *The Damned Thing* appeared in five out of the thirty-odd collections of terror and supernatural stories I have riffled through. Yet *A Resumed Identity*, surely an appalling little gem, has never appeared in any that I know of. E. F. Benson's *Caterpillars* has been included in a good many; but his remarkable *Horror Horn* seems never to have been tapped for an anthology. Saki's *Open Window* is another favorite, whereas *The Easter Egg*, though I suppose it has been picked by some literary magpie whose book has escaped my attention, certainly is not a common entry in collections of this sort.

On the other hand, I have not been able to resist using W. W. Jacobs' *The Well*, and Wilkie Collins' *A Terribly Strange Bed*, even though I know that they have been anthologized once or twice previously. They have not worn out their welcome, at any rate. I am certain they are not trite, and that even those who have read them once will find the old shuddery chill creeping across their chests and the familiar and delightful mess of goosepimples sprouting on their limbs as they reread them.

I am particularly proud of half a dozen extra-special finds, many of them completely unknown to aficionados of terror, which I believe give this collection a unique flavor. *The Cross of Carl*, one of the great horror stories of all time, was published in the early thirties as a separate book. Probably because it was promoted as an anti-war tract rather than a horror story, it never really found an audience. I am delighted to be able to reintroduce it to a new and, I am sure, more appreciative public than it had when it first was issued.

Bianca's Hands has a queer history. Turned down by

nearly every magazine in the United States that could possibly be interested in it, it finally found a home in the British *Argosy*. And what a home! The author submitted it as an entry in a prize contest the magazine was running some years ago, not knowing whether—due to the vagaries of the transatlantic mails at that time—it would even reach its destination before the contest closed. The next thing he knew, it had been awarded first prize (a sizable sum, too), and was especially honored by having as runner-up a horrid little chiller by the famed Graham Green!

Other modern tales, such as Will Jenkins' *Night Drive* (surely an odd tale to discover in an enormous-circulation woman's magazine of the type that usually prints romances, often roseate) and Samuel Blas' *Revenge* (which must have shocked the living daylights out of a couple of million *Collier's* readers when they came across it a few years ago) are included not only because of their intrinsic merit, which is extra-special, but because they show that the mass audience is beginning to appreciate strictly off-the-beaten-track stories, even though they are as horror-striking as these two items certainly are. My special thanks, incidentally, to Will Jenkins for calling the Blas story to my attention.

For the record, I had my mind set on including John Collier's *Bird of Prey* in this anthology, but I was prevented by the fact that Mr. Collier himself is planning to get out a new selection of his stories, including, in all probability, the one I wanted.

From this point on I shall let the tales in this book carry their own shock value. You need no more preliminaries from the editor, no explanations or defenses. Here they are—enjoy them in your own terrorized way!

IN THE GRIP OF TERROR

THE LAST KISS

by Maurice Level

"FORGIVE me . . . Forgive me."

His voice was less assured as he replied:

"Get up, dry your eyes. I, too, have a good deal to reproach myself with."

"No, no," she sobbed.

He shook his head.

"I ought never to have left you; you loved me. Just at first after it all happened . . . when I could still feel the fire of the vitriol burning my face, when I began to realize that I should never see again, that all my life I should be a thing of horror, of Death, certainly I wasn't able to think of it like that. It isn't possible to resign oneself all at once to such a fate . . . But living in this eternal darkness, a man's thoughts pierce far below the surface and grow quiet like those of a person falling asleep, and gradually calm comes. To-day, no longer able to use my eyes, I see with my imagination. I see again our little house, our peaceful days, and your smile. I see your poor little face the night I said that last good-bye. The judge couldn't imagine any of that, could he? And it was only fair to try to explain, for they thought only of your action, the action that made me into . . . what I am. They were going to send you to prison where you would slowly have faded . . . No years of such punishment for you could have given me back my eyes . . . When you saw me go into the witness-box you were afraid,

weren't you? You believed that I would charge you, have you condemned? No, I could never have done that, never . . ."

She was still crying, her face buried in her hands.

"How good you are! . . ."

"I am just . . ."

In a voice that came in jerks she repeated:

"I repent, I repent; I have done the most awful thing to you that a woman could do, and you—you begged for my acquittal! And now you can even find words of pity for me! What can I do to prove my sorrow? Oh, you are wonderful . . . wonderful . . ."

He let her go on talking and weeping; his head thrown back, his hands on the arms of his chair, he listened apparently without emotion. When she was calm again, he asked:

"What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know . . . I shall rest for a few days . . . I am so tired . . . Then I shall go back to work. I shall try to find a place in a shop or as a mannequin."

His voice was a little stifled as he asked:

"You are still as pretty as ever?"

She did not reply.

"I want to know if you are as pretty as you used to be?"

She remained silent. With a slight shiver, he murmured: "It is dark now, isn't it? Turn on the light. Though I can no longer see, I like to feel that there is light around me . . . Where are you? . . . Near the mantelpiece? . . . Stretch out your hand. You will find the switch there."

No sense even of light could penetrate his eyelids, but from the sudden sound of horror she stifled, he knew that the lamp was on. For the first time she was able to see the result of her work, the terrifying face streaked with white swellings, seamed with red furrows, a narrow black band round the eyes. While he had pleaded for her in court, she had crouched on her seat weeping, not daring to look at

him; now, before this abominable thing, she grew sick with a kind of disgust. But it was without any anger that he murmured:

"I am very different from the man you knew in the old days—I horrify you now, don't I? You shrink from me? . . ."

She tried to keep her voice steady.

"Certainly not. I am here, in the same place . . ."

"Yes, now . . . and I want you to come still nearer. If you knew how the thought of your hands tempt me in my darkness. How I should love to feel their softness once again. But I dare not . . . And yet that is what I wanted to ask you: to let me feel your hand for a minute in mine. We, the blind, can get such marvelous memories from just a touch."

Turning her head away, she held out her arm. Caressing her fingers, he murmured:

"Ah, how good. Don't tremble. Let me try to imagine we are lovers again just as we used to be . . . but you are not wearing my ring. Why? I have not taken yours off. Do you remember? You said, 'It is our wedding-ring.' Why have you taken it off?"

"I dare not wear it . . ."

"You must put it on again. You will wear it? Promise me."

She stammered:

"I promise you."

He was silent for a little while; then in a calmer voice:

"It must be quite dark now. How cold I am! If you only knew how cold it feels when one is blind. Your hands are warm; mine are frozen. I have not yet developed the fuller sense of touch. It takes time, they say . . . At present I am like a little child learning."

She let her fingers remain in his, sighing:

"Oh, *Mon Dieu* . . . *Mon Dieu* . . ."

Speaking like a man in a dream, he went on:

"How glad I am that you came. I wondered whether you would, and I felt I wanted to keep you with me for a long, long time: always . . . But that wouldn't be possible. Life with me would be too sad. You see, little one, when people have memories like ours, they must be careful not to spoil them, and it must be horrible to look at me now, isn't it?"

She tried to protest; what might have been a smile passed over his face.

"Why lie? I remember I once saw a man whose mistress had thrown vitriol over him. His face was not human. Women turned their heads away as they passed, while he, not being able to see and so not knowing, went on talking to the people who were shrinking away from him. I must be, I am like that poor wretch, am I not? Even you who knew me as I used to be, you tremble with disgust; I can feel it. For a long time you will be haunted by the remembrance of my face . . . it will come in between you and everything else . . . How the thought hurts . . . but don't let us go on talking about me . . . You said just now that you were going back to work. Tell me your plans; come nearer, I don't hear as well as I used to . . . Well?"

Their two armchairs were almost touching. She was silent. He sighed:

"Ah, I can smell your scent! How I have longed for it. I bought a bottle of the perfume you always used, but on me it didn't smell the same. From you it comes mixed with the scent of your skin and hair. Come nearer, let me drink it in . . . You are going away, you will never come back again; let me draw in for the last time as much of you as I can . . . You shiver . . . am I then so horrible?"

She stammered:

"No . . . it is cold . . ."

"Why are you so lightly dressed? I don't believe you brought a cloak. In November, too. It must be damp and

dreary in the streets. How you tremble! How warm and comfortable it was in our little home . . . do you remember? You used to lay your face on my shoulder, and I used to hold you close to me. Who would want to sleep in my arms now? Come nearer. Give me your hand . . . There . . . What did you think when your lawyer told you I had asked to see you?"

"I thought I ought to come."

"Do you still love me? . . ."

Her voice was only a breath:

"Yes . . ."

Very slowly, his voice full of supplication, he said:

"I want to kiss you for the last time. I know it will be almost torture for you . . . Afterwards I won't ask anything more. You can go . . . May I? . . . Will you let me? . . ."

Involuntarily she shrank back; then, moved by shame and pity, not daring to refuse a joy to the poor wretch, she laid her head on his shoulder, held up her mouth and shut her eyes. He pressed her gently to him, silent, prolonging the happy moment. She opened her eyes, and seeing the terrible face so near, almost touching her own, for the second time she shivered with disgust and would have drawn sharply away. But he pressed her closer to him, passionately.

"You would go away so soon? . . . Stay a little longer . . . You haven't seen enough of me . . . Look at me . . . and give me your mouth again . . . more of it than that . . . It is horrible, isn't it?"

She moaned:

"You hurt me . . ."

"Oh, no," he sneered, "I frighten you."

She struggled.

"You hurt me! You hurt me!"

In a low voice he said:

"Sh-h. No noise; be quiet. I've got you now and I'll keep you. For how many days have I waited for this moment

... Keep still, I say, keep still! No nonsense! You know I am much stronger than you."

He seized both her hands in one of his, took a little bottle from the pocket of his coat, drew out the stopper with his teeth, and went on in the same quiet voice:

"Yes, it is vitriol; bend your head . . . there . . . You will see; we are going to be incomparable lovers, made for each other . . . Ah, you tremble? Do you understand now why I had you acquitted, and why I made you come here to-day? Your pretty face will be exactly like mine. You will be a monstrous thing, and like me, blind! . . . Ah, yes, it hurts, hurts terribly."

She opened her mouth to implore. He ordered:

"No! Not that! Shut your mouth! I don't want to kill you, that would make it too easy for you."

Gripping her in the bend of his arm, he pressed his hand on her mouth and poured the acid slowly over her forehead, her eyes, her cheeks. She struggled desperately, but he held her too firmly and kept on pouring as he talked:

"There . . . a little more . . . you bite, but that's nothing . . . It hurts, doesn't it? It is Hell . . ."

Suddenly he flung her away, crying:

"I am burning myself."

She fell writhing on the floor. Already her face was nothing but a red rag.

Then he straightened himself, stumbled over her, felt about the wall to find the switch, and put out the light. And round them, as in them, was a great Darkness . . .

THE ILLUSTRATED MAN

by Ray Bradbury

"Hey, the Illustrated Man!"

A calliope screamed, and Mr. William Philippus Phelps stood, arms folded, high on the summer-night platform, a crowd unto himself.

He was an entire civilization. In the Main Country, his chest, the Vasties lived—nipple-eyed dragons swirling over his fleshpot, his almost feminine breasts. His navel was the mouth of a slit-eyed monster—an obscene, insucked mouth, toothless as a witch. And there were secret caves where Darklings lurked, his armpits, adrip with slow subterranean liquors, where the Darklings, eyes jealously ablaze, peered out through rank creeper and hanging vine.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps leered down from his freak platform with a thousand peacock eyes. Across the sawdust meadow he saw his wife, Lisabeth, far away, ripping tickets in half, staring at the silver belt buckles of passing men.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps' hands were tattooed roses. At the sight of his wife's interest, the roses shriveled, as with the passing of sunlight.

A year before, when he had led Lisabeth to the marriage bureau to watch her work her name in ink, slowly, on the form, his skin had been pure and white and clean. He glanced down at himself in sudden horror. Now he was like a great painted canvas, shaken in the night wind! How had it happened? Where had it all begun?

It had started with the arguments, and then the flesh, and then the pictures. They had fought deep into the summer nights, she like a brass trumpet forever blaring at him. And he had gone out to eat five thousand steaming hot dogs, ten million hamburgers, and a forest of green onions, and to drink vast red seas of orange juice. Peppermint candy formed his brontosaur bones, the hamburgers shaped his balloon flesh, and strawberry pop pumped in and out of his heart valves sickeningly, until he weighed three hundred pounds.

"William Philippus Phelps," Lisabeth said to him in the eleventh month of their marriage, "you're dumb and fat."

That was the day the carnival boss handed him the blue envelope. "Sorry, Phelps. You're no good to me with all that gut on you."

"Wasn't I always your best tent man, boss?"

"Once. Not any more. Now you sit, you don't get the work out."

"Let me be your Fat Man."

"I got a Fat Man. Dime a dozen." The boss eyed him up and down. "Tell you what, though. We ain't had a Tattooed Man since Gallery Smith died last year. . . ."

That had been a month ago. Four short weeks. From someone, he had learned of a tattoo artist far out in the rolling Wisconsin country, an old woman, they said, who knew her trade. If he took the dirt road and turned right at the river and then left . . .

He had walked out across a yellow meadow, which was crisp from the sun. Red flowers blew and bent in the wind as he walked, and he came to the old shack, which looked as if it had stood in a million rains.

Inside the door was a silent, bare room, and in the center of the bare room sat an ancient woman.

Her eyes were stitched with red resin-thread. Her nose was sealed with black wax-twine. Her ears were sewn, too,

as if a darning-needle dragonfly had stitched all her senses shut. She sat, not moving, in the vacant room. Dust lay in a yellow flour all about, unfootprinted in many weeks; if she had moved it would have shown, but she had not moved. Her hands touched each other like thin, rusted instruments. Her feet were naked and obscene as rain rubbers, and near them sat vials of tattoo milk—red, lightning-blue, brown, cat-yellow. She was a thing sewn tight into whispers and silence.

Only her mouth moved, unsewn: "Come in. Sit down. I'm lonely here."

He did not obey.

"You came for the pictures," she said in a high voice. "I have a picture to show you, first."

She tapped a blind finger to her thrust-out palm. "Seel!" she cried.

It was a tattoo-portrait of William Philippos Phelps.

"Me!" he said.

Her cry stopped him at the door. "Don't run."

He held to the edges of the door, his back to her. "That's me, that's me on your hand!"

"It's been there fifty years." She stroked it like a cat, over and over.

He turned. "It's an *old* tattoo." He drew slowly nearer. He edged forward and bent to blink at it. He put out a trembling finger to brush the picture. "Old. That's impossible! You don't know *me*. I don't know *you*. Your eyes, all sewed shut."

"I've been waiting for you," she said. "And many people." She displayed her arms and legs, like the spindles of an antique chair. "I have pictures on me of people who have already come here to see me. And there are other pictures of other people who are coming to see me in the next one hundred years. And you, you have come."

"How do you know it's me? You can't see!"

"You *feel* like the lions, the elephants, and the tigers, to me. Unbutton your shirt. You need me. Don't be afraid. My needles are as clean as a doctor's fingers. When I'm finished with illustrating you, I'll wait for someone else to walk along out here and find me. And someday, a hundred summers from now, perhaps, I'll just go lie down in the forest under some white mushrooms, and in the spring you won't find anything but a small blue cornflower. . . ."

He began to unbutton his sleeves.

"I know the Deep Past and the Clear Present and the even Deeper Future," she whispered, eyes knotted into blindness, face lifted to this unseen man. "It is on my flesh. I will paint it on yours, too. You will be the only *real* Illustrated Man in the universe. I'll give you special pictures you will never forget. Pictures of the Future on your skin."

She pricked him with a needle.

He ran back to the carnival that night in a drunken terror and elation. Oh, how quickly the old dust-witch had stitched him with color and design. At the end of a long afternoon of being bitten by a silver snake, his body was alive with portraiture. He looked as if he had dropped and been crushed between the steel rollers of a print press, and come out like an incredible rotogravure. He was clothed in a garment of trolls and scarlet dinosaurs.

"Look!" he cried to Lisabeth. She glanced up from her cosmetic table as he tore his shirt away. He stood in the naked bulb-light of their car-trailer, expanding his impossible chest. Here, the Tremblies, half-maiden, half-goat, leaping when his biceps flexed. Here, the Country of Lost Souls, his chins. In so many accordion pleats of fat, numerous small scorpions, beetles, and mice were crushed, held, hid, darting into view, vanishing, as he raised or lowered his chins.

"My God," said Lisabeth. "My husband's a freak."

She ran from the trailer and he was left alone to pose before the mirror. Why had he done it? To have a job, yes, but, most of all, to cover the fat that had larded itself impossibly over his bones. To hide the fat under a layer of color and fantasy, to hide it from his wife, but most of all from himself.

He thought of the old woman's last words. She had needed him two *special* tattoos, one on his chest, another for his back, which she would not let him see. She covered each with cloth and adhesive.

"You are not to look at these two," she had said.

"Why?"

"Later, you may look. The Future is in these pictures. You can't look now or it may spoil them. They are not quite finished. I put ink on your flesh and the sweat of you forms the rest of the picture, the Future—your sweat and your thought." Her empty mouth grinned. "Next Saturday night, you may advertise! The Big Unveiling! Come see the Illustrated Man unveil his picture! You can make money in that way. You can charge admission to the Unveiling, like to an Art Gallery. Tell them you have a picture that even *you* never have seen, that *nobody* has seen yet. The most unusual picture ever painted. Almost alive. And it tells the Future. Roll the drums and blow the trumpets. And you can stand there and unveil at the Big Unveiling."

"That's a good idea," he said.

"But only unveil the picture on your chest," she said.

"That is first. You must save the picture on your back, under the adhesive, for the following week. Understand?"

"How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing," she said. "If you walk with these pictures on you, I will be repaid with my own satisfaction. I will sit

here for the next two weeks and think how clever my pictures are, for I make them to fit each man himself and what is inside him. Now, walk out of this house and never come back. Good-by."

"Hey! The Big Unveiling!"

The red signs blew in the night wind: NO ORDINARY TATTOOED MAN! THIS ONE IS "ILLUSTRATED!" GREATER THAN MICHELANGELO! TONIGHT! ADMISSION 10 CENTS!

Now the hour had come. Saturday night, the crowd stirring their animal feet in the hot sawdust.

"In one minute—" the carny boss pointed his cardboard megaphone—"in the tent immediately to my rear, we will unveil the Mysterious Portrait upon the Illustrated Man's chest! Next Saturday night, the same hour, same location, we'll unveil the Picture upon the Illustrated Man's *back!* Bring your friends!"

There was a stuttering roll of drums.

Mr. William Philipppus Phelps jumped back and vanished; the crowd poured into the tent, and, once inside, found him re-established upon another platform, the band brassing out a jig-time melody.

He looked for his wife and saw her, lost in the crowd, like a stranger, come to watch a freakish thing, a look of contemptuous curiosity upon her face. For, after all, he was her husband, and this was a thing she didn't know about him herself. It gave him a feeling of great height and warmth and light to find himself the center of the jangling universe, the carnival world, for one night. Even the other freaks—the Skeleton, the Seal Boy, the Yoga, the Magician, and the Balloon—were scattered through the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the great moment!"

A trumpet flourish, a hum of drumsticks on tight cowhide.

Mr. William Philipppus Phelps let his cape fall. Dinosaurs,

trolls, and half-women-half-snakes writhed on his skin in the stark light.

Ah, murmured the crowd, for surely there had never been a tattooed man like this! The beast eyes seemed to take red fire and blue fire, blinking and twisting. The roses on his fingers seemed to expel a sweet pink bouquet. The tyrannosaurus-rex reared up along his leg, and the sound of the brass trumpet in the hot tent heavens was a prehistoric cry from the red monster throat. Mr. William Philip-pus Phelps was a museum jolted to life. Fish swam in seas of electric-blue ink. Fountains sparkled under yellow suns. Ancient buildings stood in meadows of harvest wheat. Rockets burned across spaces of muscle and flesh. The slightest inhalation of his breath threatened to make chaos of the entire printed universe. He seemed afire, the creatures flinching from the flame, drawing back from the great heat of his pride, as he expanded under the audience's rapt contemplation.

The carny boss laid his fingers to the adhesive. The audience rushed forward, silent in the oven vastness of the night tent.

"You ain't seen nothing yet!" cried the carny boss.

The adhesive ripped free.

There was an instant in which nothing happened. An instant in which the Illustrated Man thought that the Unveiling was a terrible and irrevocable failure.

But then the audience gave a low moan.

The carny boss drew back, his eyes fixed.

Far out at the edge of the crowd, a woman, after a moment, began to cry, began to sob, and did not stop.

Slowly, the Illustrated Man looked down at his naked chest and stomach.

The thing that he saw made the roses on his hands discolor and die. All of his creatures seemed to wither, turn inward, shrivel with the arctic coldness that pumped from

his heart outward to freeze and destroy them. He stood trembling. His hands floated up to touch that incredible picture, which lived, moved and shivered with life. It was like gazing into a small room, seeing a thing of someone else's life, so intimate, so impossible that one could not believe and one could not long stand to watch without turning away.

It was a picture of his wife, Lisabeth, and himself.

And he was killing her.

Before the eyes of a thousand people in a dark tent in the center of a black-forested Wisconsin land, he was killing his wife.

His great flowered hands were upon her throat, and her face was turning dark and he killed her and he killed her and did not ever in the next minute stop killing her. It was real. While the crowd watched, she died, and he turned very sick. He was about to fall straight down into the crowd. The tent whirled like a monster bat wing, flapping grotesquely. The last thing he heard was a woman, sobbing, far out on the shore of the silent crowd.

And the crying woman was Lisabeth, his wife.

In the night, his bed was moist with perspiration. The carnival sounds had melted away, and his wife, in her own bed, was quiet now, too. He fumbled with his chest. The adhesive was smooth. They had made him put it back.

He had fainted. When he revived, the carny boss had yelled at him, "Why didn't you *say* what that picture was like?"

"I didn't know, I didn't," said the Illustrated Man.

"Good God!" said the boss. "Scare hell outa everyone. Scared hell outa Lizzie, scared hell outa me. Christ, where'd you *get* that damn tattoo?" He shuddered. "Apologize to Lizzie, now."

His wife stood over him.

"I'm sorry, Lisabeth," he said, weakly, his eyes closed. "I didn't know."

"You did it on purpose," she said. "To scare me."

"I'm sorry."

"Either it goes or I go," she said.

"Lisabeth."

"You heard me. That picture comes off or I quit this show."

"Yeah, Phil," said the boss. "That's how it is."

"Did you lose money? Did the crowd demand refunds?"

"It ain't the money, Phil. For that matter, once the word got around, hundreds of people wanted in. But I'm runnin' a clean show. That tattoo comes off! Was this your idea of a practical joke, Phil?"

He turned in the warm bed. No, not a joke. Not a joke at all. He had been as terrified as anyone. Not a joke. That little old dust-witch, what had she *done* to him and how had she done it? Had she put the picture there? No; she had said that the picture was unfinished, and that he himself, with his thoughts and his perspiration, would finish it. Well, he had done the job all right.

But what, if anything, was the significance? He didn't want to kill anyone. He didn't want to kill Lisabeth. Why should such a silly picture burn here on his flesh in the dark?

He crawled his fingers softly, cautiously down to touch the quivering place where the hidden portrait lay. He pressed tight, and the temperature of that spot was enormous. He could almost feel that little evil picture killing and killing and killing all through the night.

I don't wish to kill her, he thought, insistently, looking over at her bed. And then, five minutes later, he whispered aloud: "Or *do* I?"

"What?" she cried, awake.

"Nothing," he said, after a pause. "Go to sleep."

The man bent forward, a buzzing instrument in his hand. "This costs five bucks an inch. Costs more to peel tattoos off than put 'em on. Okay, jerk the adhesive."

The Illustrated Man obeyed.

The skin man sat back. "Christ! No wonder you want that off! That's ghastly. *I* don't even want to look at it." He flicked his machine. "Ready? This won't hurt."

The carny boss stood in the tent flap, watching. After five minutes, the skin man changed the instrument head, cursing. Ten minutes later he scraped his chair back and scratched his head. Half an hour passed and he got up, told Mr. William Philipppus Phelps to dress, and packed his kit.

"Wait a minute," said the carny boss. "You ain't done the job."

"And I ain't going to," said the skin man.

"I'm paying good money. What's wrong?"

"Nothing, except that damn picture just won't come off. Damn thing must go right down to the bone."

"You're crazy."

"Mister, I'm in business thirty years and never seen a tattoo like this. An inch deep, if it's anything."

"But I've got to get it off!" cried the Illustrated Man.

The skin man shook his head. "Only one way to get rid of that."

"How?"

"Take a knife and cut off your chest. You won't live long, but the picture'll be gone."

"Come back here!"

But the skin man walked away.

They could hear the big Sunday-night crowd, waiting.

"That's a big crowd," said the Illustrated Man.

"But they ain't going to see what they came to see," said the carny boss. "You ain't going out there, except with the adhesive. Hold still now, I'm curious about this *other* pic-

ture, on your back. We might be able to give 'em an Unveiling on this one instead."

"She said it wouldn't be ready for a week or so. The old woman said it would take time to set, make a pattern."

There was a soft ripping as the carny boss pulled aside a flap of white tape on the Illustrated Man's spine.

"What do you see?" gasped Mr. Phelps, bent over.

The carny boss replaced the tape. "Buster, as a Tattooed Man, you're a washout, ain't you? Why'd you let that old dame fix you up this way?"

"I didn't know who she was."

"She sure cheated you on this one. No design to it. Nothing. No picture at all."

"It'll come clear. You wait and see."

The boss laughed. "Okay. Come on. We'll show the crowd part of you, anyway."

They walked out into an explosion of brassy music.

He stood monstrous in the middle of the night, putting out his hands like a blind man to balance himself in a world now tilted, now rushing, now threatening to spin him over and down into the mirror before which he raised his hands. Upon the flat, dimly lighted table top were peroxides, acids, silver razors, and squares of sandpaper. He took each of them in turn. He soaked the vicious tattoo upon his chest, he scraped at it. He worked steadily for an hour.

He was aware, suddenly, that someone stood in the trailer door behind him. It was three in the morning. There was a faint odor of beer. She had come home from town. He heard her slow breathing. He did not turn. "Lisabeth?" he said.

"You'd better get rid of it," she said, watching his hands move the sandpaper. She stepped into the trailer.

"I didn't want the picture this way," he said.

"You did," she said. "You planned it."

"I didn't."

"I know you," she said. "Oh, I know you hate me. Well, that's nothing. I hate you, I've hated you a long time now. Good God, when you started putting on the fat, you think anyone could love you then? I could teach you some things about hate. Why don't you ask me?"

"Leave me alone," he said.

"In front of that crowd, making a spectacle out of me!"

"I didn't know what was under the tape."

She walked around the table, hands fitted to her hips, talking to the beds, the walls, the table, talking it all out of her. And he thought: *Or did I know? Who made this picture, me or the witch? Who formed it? How? Do I really want her dead? No! And yet. . .* He watched his wife draw nearer, nearer, he saw the rosy strings of her throat vibrate to her shouting. This and this and *this* was wrong with him! That and that and *that* was unspeakable about him! He was a liar, a schemer, a fat, lazy, ugly man, a child. Did he think he could compete with the carny boss of the tenpeppers? Did he think he was sylphine and graceful, did he think he was a framed El Greco? DaVinci, huh! Michelangelo, my eye! She brayed. She showed her teeth. "Well, you can't scare me into staying with someone I don't want touching me with their sloppy paws!" she finished, triumphantly.

"Lisabeth," he said.

"Don't Lisabeth me!" she shrieked. "I know your plan. You had that picture put on to scare me. You thought I wouldn't *dare* leave you. Well!"

"Next Saturday night, the Second Unveiling," he said. "You'll be proud of me."

"Proud! You're silly and pitiful. God, you're like a whale. You ever see a beached whale? I saw one when I was a kid.

There it was, and they came and shot it. Some lifeguards shot it. Jesus, a whale!"

"Lisabeth."

"I'm leaving, that's all, and getting a divorce."

"Don't."

"And I'm marrying a man, not a fat woman—that's what you are, so much fat on you there ain't no sex!"

"You can't leave me," he said.

"Just watch!"

"I love you," he said.

"Oh," she said. "Go look at your pictures."

He reached out.

"Keep your hands off," she said.

"Lisabeth."

"Don't come near. You turn my stomach."

"Lisabeth."

All the eyes of his body seemed to fire, all the snakes to move, all the monsters to seethe, all the mouths to widen and rage. He moved toward her—not like a man, but a crowd.

He felt the great blooded reservoir of orangeade pump through him now, the sluice of cola and rich lemon pop pulse in sickening sweet anger through his wrists, his legs, his heart. All of it, the oceans of mustard and relish and all the million drinks he had drowned himself in in the last year were aboil; his face was the color of a steamed beef. And the pink roses of his hands became those hungry, carnivorous flowers kept long years in tepid jungle and now let free to find their way on the night air before him.

He gathered her to him, like a great beast gathering in a struggling animal. It was a frantic gesture of love, quickening and demanding, which, as she struggled, hardened to another thing. She beat and clawed at the picture on his chest.

"You've got to love me, Lisabeth."

"Let go!" she screamed. She beat at the picture that burned under her fists. She slashed at it with her fingernails.

"Oh, Lisabeth," he said, his hands moving up her arms.

"I'll scream," she said, seeing his eyes.

"Lisabeth." The hands moved up to her shoulders, to her neck. "Don't go away."

"Help!" she screamed. The blood ran from the picture on his chest.

He put his fingers about her neck and squeezed.

She was a calliope cut in midshriek.

Outside, the grass rustled. There was the sound of running feet.

Mr. William Phillipus Phelps opened the trailer door and stepped out.

They were waiting for him. Skeleton, Midget, Balloon, Yoga, Electra, Popeye, Seal Boy. The freaks, waiting in the middle of the night, in the dry grass.

He walked toward them. He moved with a feeling that he must get away; these people would understand nothing, they were not thinking people. And because he did not flee, because he only walked, balanced, stunned, between the tents, slowly, the freaks moved to let him pass. They watched him, because their watching guaranteed that he would not escape. He walked out across the black meadow, moths fluttering in his face. He walked steadily as long as he was visible, not knowing where he was going. They watched him go, and then they turned and all of them shuffled to the silent car-trailer together and pushed the door slowly wide. . . .

The Illustrated Man walked steadily in the dry meadows beyond the town.

"He went that way!" a faint voice cried. Flashlights bobbed over the hills. There were dim shapes, running.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps waved to them. He was tired. He wanted only to be found now. He was tired of running away. He waved again.

"There he is!" The flashlights changed direction. "Come on! We'll get the bastard!"

When it was time, the Illustrated Man ran again. He was careful to run slowly. He deliberately fell down twice. Looking back, he saw the tent stakes they held in their hands.

He ran toward a far crossroads lantern, where all the summer night seemed to gather; merry-go-rounds of fireflies whirling, crickets moving their song toward that light, everything rushing, as if by some midnight attraction, toward that one high-hung lantern—the Illustrated Man first, the others close at his heels.

As he reached the light and passed a few yards under and beyond it, he did not need to look back. On the road ahead, in silhouette, he saw the upraised tent stakes sweep violently up, up, and then *down!*

A minute passed.

In the country ravines, the crickets sang. The freaks stood over the sprawled Illustrated Man, holding their tent stakes loosely.

Finally they rolled him over on his stomach. Blood ran from his mouth.

They ripped the adhesive from his back. They stared down for a long moment at the freshly revealed picture. Someone whispered. Someone else swore, softly. The Thin Man pushed back and walked away and was sick. Another and another of the freaks stared, their mouths trembling, and moved away, leaving the Illustrated Man on the deserted road, the blood running from his mouth.

In the dim light, the unveiled Illustration was easily seen.

It showed a crowd of freaks bending over a dying fat man on a dark and lonely road, looking at a tattoo on his back which illustrated a crowd of freaks bending over a dying fat man on a . . .

THE UPTURNED FACE

by Stephen Crane

"WHAT will we do now?" said the adjutant, troubled and excited.

"Bury him," said Timothy Lean.

The two officers looked down close to their toes where lay the body of their comrade. The face was chalk-blue; gleaming eyes stared at the sky. Over the two upright figures was a windy sound of bullets, and on the top of the hill Lean's prostrate company of Spitzbergen infantry was firing measured volleys.

"Don't you think it would be better——" began the adjutant. "We might leave him until to-morrow."

"No," said Lean. "I can't hold that post an hour longer. I've got to fall back, and we've got to bury old Bill."

"Of course," said the adjutant, at once. "Your men got intrenching tools?"

Lean shouted back to his little line, and two men came slowly, one with a pick, one with a shovel. They started in the direction of the Rostina sharp-shooters. Bullets cracked near their ears. "Dig here," said Lean gruffly. The men, thus caused to lower their glances to the turf, became hurried and frightened merely because they could not look to see whence the bullets came. The dull beat of the pick striking the earth sounded amid the swift snap of close bullets. Presently the other private began to shovel.

"I suppose," said the adjutant, slowly, "we'd better search his clothes for—things."

Lean nodded. Together in curious abstraction they looked at the body. Then Lean stirred his shoulders suddenly, arousing himself.

"Yes," he said, "we'd better see what he's got." He dropped to his knees, and his hands approached the body of the dead officer. But his hands wavered over the buttons of the tunic. The first button was brick-red with drying blood, and he did not seem to dare touch it.

"Go on," said the adjutant, hoarsely.

Lean stretched his wooden hand, and his fingers fumbled the blood-stained buttons. At last he rose with ghastly face. He had gathered a watch, a whistle, a pipe, a tobacco pouch, a handkerchief, a little case of cards and papers. He looked at the adjutant. There was a silence. The adjutant was feeling that he had been a coward to make Lean do all the grisly business.

"Well," said Lean, "that's all, I think. You have his sword and revolver?"

"Yes," said the adjutant, his face working, and then he burst out in a sudden strange fury at the two privates. "Why don't you hurry up with that grave? What are you doing, anyhow? Hurry, do you hear? I never saw such stupid——"

Even as he cried out in his passion the two men were laboring for their lives. Ever overhead the bullets were spitting.

The grave was finished. It was not a masterpiece—a poor little shallow thing. Lean and the adjutant again looked at each other in a curious silent communication.

Suddenly the adjutant croaked out a weird laugh. It was a terrible laugh, which had its origin in that part of the mind which is first moved by the singing of the nerves. "Well," he said, humorously to Lean, "I suppose we had best tumble him in."

"Yes," said Lean. The two privates stood waiting, bent

over their implements. "I suppose," said Lean, "it would be better if we laid him in ourselves."

"Yes," said the adjutant. Then apparently remembering that he had made Lean search the body, he stooped with great fortitude and took hold of the dead officer's clothing. Lean joined him. Both were particular that their fingers should not feel the corpse. They tugged away; the corpse lifted, heaved, toppled, flopped into the grave, and the two officers, straightening, looked again at each other—they were always looking at each other. They sighed with relief.

The adjutant said, "I suppose we should—we should say something. Do you know the service, Tim?"

"They don't read the service until the grave is filled in," said Lean, pressing his lips to an academic expression.

"Don't they?" said the adjutant, shocked that he had made the mistake.

"Oh, well," he cried, suddenly, "let us—let us say something—while he can hear us."

"All right," said Lean. "Do you know the service?"

"I can't remember a line of it," said the adjutant.

Lean was extremely dubious. "I can repeat two lines, but——"

"Well, do it," said the adjutant. "Go as far as you can. That's better than nothing. And the beasts have got our range exactly."

Lean looked at his two men. "Attention," he barked. The privates came to attention with a click, looking much aggrieved. The adjutant lowered his helmet to his knee. Lean, bareheaded, he stood over the grave. The Rostina sharpshooters fired briskly.

"Oh, Father, our friend has sunk in the deep waters of death, but his spirit has leaped toward Thee as the bubble arises from the lips of the drowning. Perceive, we beseech, O Father, the little flying bubble, and——"

Lean, although husky and ashamed, had suffered no hesitation up to this point, but he stopped with a hopeless feeling and looked at the corpse.

The adjutant moved uneasily. "And from Thy superb heights——" he began, and then he too came to an end.

"And from Thy superb heights," said Lean.

The adjutant suddenly remembered a phrase in the back part of the Spitzbergen burial service, and he exploited it with the triumphant manner of a man who has recalled everything, and can go on.

"Oh, God, have mercy——"

"Oh, God, have mercy——" said Lean.

"Mercy," repeated the adjutant, in quick failure.

"Mercy," said Lean. And then he was moved by some violence of feeling, for he turned suddenly upon his two men and tigerishly said, "Throw the dirt in."

The fire of the Rostina sharpshooters was accurate and continuous.

* * * * *

One of the aggrieved privates came forward with his shovel. He lifted his first shovel-load of earth, and for a moment of inexplicable hesitation it was held poised above this corpse, which from its chalk-blue face looked keenly out from the grave. Then the soldier emptied his shovel on—on the feet.

Timothy Lean felt as if tons had been swiftly lifted from off his forehead. He had felt that perhaps the private might empty the shovel on—on the face. It had been emptied on the feet. There was a great point gained there—ha, ha!—the first shovelful had been emptied on the feet. How satisfactory!

The adjutant began to babble. "Well, of course—a man we've messed with all these years—impossible—you can't, you know, leave your intimate friends rotting on the field. Go on, for God's sake, and shovel, you!"

The man with the shovel suddenly ducked, grabbed his left arm with his right hand, and looked at his officer for orders. Lean picked the shovel from the ground. "Go to the rear," he said to the wounded man. He also addressed the other private. "You get under cover, too; I'll finish this business."

The wounded man scrambled hard still for the top of the ridge without devoting any glances to the direction whence the bullets came, and the other man followed at an equal pace; but he was different, in that he looked back anxiously three times.

This is merely the way—often—of the hit and unhit.

Timothy Lean filled the shovel, hesitated, and then in a movement which was like a gesture of abhorrence he flung the dirt into the grave, and as it landed it made a sound—plop! Lean suddenly stopped and mopped his brow—a tired laborer.

"Perhaps we have been wrong," said the adjutant. His glance wavered stupidly. "It might have been better if we hadn't buried him just at this time. Of course, if we advance to-morrow the body would have been——"

"Damn you," said Lean, "shut your mouth!" He was not the senior officer.

He again filled the shovel and flung the earth. Always the earth made that sound—plop! For a space Lean worked frantically, like a man digging himself out of danger.

Soon there was nothing to be seen but the chalk-blue face. Lean filled the shovel. "Good God," he cried to the adjutant. "Why didn't you turn him somehow when you put him in? This——" Then Lean began to stutter.

The adjutant understood. He was pale to the lips. "Go on, man," he cried, beseechingly, almost in a shout. Lean swung back the shovel. It went forward in a pendulum curve. When the earth landed it made a sound—plop!

THE INCREDIBLE ELOPEMENT OF LORD PETER WIMSEY

by Dorothy Sayers

"THAT house, señor?" said the landlord of the little *posada*. "That is the house of the American physician, whose wife, may the blessed saints preserve us, is bewitched." He crossed himself, and so did his wife and daughter.

"Bewitched, is she?" said Langley sympathetically. He was a professor of ethnology, and this was not his first visit to the Pyrenees. He had, however, never before penetrated to any place quite so remote as this tiny hamlet, clinging, like a rock-plant, high up the scarred granite shoulders of the mountain. He scented material here for his book on Basque folklore. With tact, he might persuade the old man to tell his story.

"And in what manner," he asked, "is the lady bespelled?"

"Who knows?" replied the landlord, shrugging his shoulders. "The man that asked questions on Friday was buried on Saturday.' Will your honour consent to take his supper?"

Langley took the hint. To press the question would be to encounter obstinate silence. Later, when they knew him better, perhaps—

His dinner was served to him at the family table—the oily, pepper-flavoured stew to which he was so well accustomed, and the harsh red wine of the country. His hosts chattered to him freely enough in that strange Basque language which has no fellow in the world, and is said

by some to be the very speech of our first fathers in Paradise. They spoke of the bad winter, and young Esteban Arramandy, so strong and swift at the pelota, who had been lamed by a falling rock and now halted on two sticks; of three valuable goats carried off by a bear; of the torrential rains that, after a dry summer, had scoured the bare ribs of the mountains. It was raining now, and the wind was howling unpleasantly. This did not trouble Langley; he knew and loved this haunted and impenetrable country at all times and seasons. Sitting in that rude peasant inn, he thought of the oak-panelled hall of his Cambridge college and smiled, and his eyes gleamed happily behind his scholarly pince-nez. He was a young man, in spite of his professorship and the string of letters after his name. To his university colleagues it seemed strange that this man, so trim, so prim, so early old, should spend his vacations eating garlic, and scrambling on mule-back along precipitous mountain-tracks. You would never think it, they said, to look at him.

There was a knock at the door.

"That is Martha," said the wife.

She drew back the latch, letting in a rush of wind and rain which made the candle gutter. A small, aged woman was blown in out of the night, her grey hair straggling in wisps from beneath her shawl.

"Come in, Martha, and rest yourself. It is a bad night. The parcel is ready—oh, yes. Dominique brought it from the town this morning. You must take a cup of wine or milk before you go back."

The old woman thanked her and sat down, panting.

"And how goes all at the house? The doctor is well?"

"He is well."

"And *shel*!"

The daughter put the question in a whisper, and the landlord shook his head at her with a frown.

"As always at this time of the year. It is but a month now to the Day of the Dead. Jesu-Maria! it is a grievous affliction for the poor gentleman, but he is patient, patient."

"He is a good man," said Dominique, "and a skilful doctor, but an evil like that is beyond his power to cure. You are not afraid, Martha?"

"Why should I be afraid? The Evil One cannot harm *me*. I have no beauty, no wits, no strength for him to envy. And the Holy Relic will protect me."

Her wrinkled fingers touched something in the bosom of her dress.

"You come from the house yonder?" asked Langley.

She eyed him suspiciously.

"The señor is not of our country?"

"The gentleman is a guest, Martha," said the landlord hurriedly. "A learned English gentleman. He knows our country and speaks our language as you hear. He is a great traveller, like the American doctor, your master."

"What is your master's name?" asked Langley. It occurred to him that an American doctor who had buried himself in this remote corner of Europe must have something unusual about him. Perhaps he also was an ethnologist. If so, they might find something in common.

"He is called Wetherall." She pronounced the name several times before he was sure of it.

"Wetherall? Not Standish Wetherall?"

He was filled with extraordinary excitement.

The landlord came to his assistance.

"This parcel is for him," he said. "No doubt the name will be written there."

It was a small package, neatly sealed, bearing the label of a firm of London chemists and addressed to "Standish Wetherall, Esq., M.D."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Langley. "But this is strange. Almost a miracle. I know this man. I knew his wife, too—"

He stopped. Again the company made the sign of the cross.

"Tell me," he said in great agitation, and forgetting his caution, "you say his wife is bewitched—afflicted—how is this? Is she the same woman I know? Describe her. She was tall, beautiful, with gold hair and blue eyes like the Madonna. Is this she?"

There was a silence. The old woman shook her head and muttered something inaudible, but the daughter whispered:

"True—it is true. Once we saw her thus, as the gentleman says—"

"Be quiet," said her father.

"Sir," said Martha, "we are in the hand of God."

She rose, and wrapped her shawl about her.

"One moment," said Langley. He pulled out his note-book and scribbled a few lines. "Will you take this letter to your master the doctor? It is to say that I am here, his friend whom he once knew, and to ask if I may come and visit him. That is all."

"You would not go to that house, excellence?" whispered the old man fearfully.

"If he will not have me, maybe he will come to me here." He added a word or two and drew a piece of money from his pocket. "You will carry my note for me?"

"Willingly, willingly. But the señor will be careful? Perhaps, though a foreigner, you are of the Faith?"

"I am a Christian," said Langley.

This seemed to satisfy her. She took the letter and the money, and secured them, together with the parcel, in a remote pocket. Then she walked to the door, strongly and rapidly for all her bent shoulders and appearance of great age.

Langley remained lost in thought. Nothing could have astonished him more than to meet the name of Standish

Wetherall in this place. He had thought that episode finished and done with over three years ago. Of all people! The brilliant surgeon in the prime of his life and reputation, and Alice Wetherall, that delicate piece of golden womanhood—exiled in this forlorn corner of the world! His heart beat a little faster at the thought of seeing her again. Three years ago, he had decided that it would be wiser if he did not see too much of that porcelain loveliness. That folly was past now—but still he could not visualise her except against the background of the great white house in Riverside Drive, with the peacocks and the swimming-pool and the gilded tower with the roof-garden. Wetherall was a rich man, the son of old Hiram Wetherall the automobile magnate. What was Wetherall doing here?

He tried to remember. Hiram Wetherall, he knew, was dead, and all the money belonged to Standish, for there were no other children. There had been trouble when the only son had married a girl without parents or history. He had brought her from "somewhere out west." There had been some story of his having found her, years before, as a neglected orphan, and saved her from something or cured her of something and paid for her education, when he was still scarcely more than a student. Then, when he was a man over forty and she a girl of seventeen, he had brought her home and married her.

And now he had left his house and his money and one of the finest specialist practices in New York to come to live in the Basque country—in a spot so out of the way that men still believed in Black Magic, and could barely splutter more than a few words of bastard French or Spanish—a spot that was uncivilised even by comparison with the primitive civilisation surrounding it. Langley began to be sorry that he had written to Wetherall. It might be resented.

The landlord and his wife had gone out to see to their

cattle. The daughter sat close to the fire, mending a garment. She did not look at him, but he had the feeling that she would be glad to speak.

"Tell me, child," he said gently, "what is the trouble which afflicts these people who may be friends of mine?"

"Oh!" She glanced up quickly and leaned across to him, her arms stretched out over the sewing in her lap. "Sir, be advised. Do not go up there. No one will stay in that house at this time of the year, except Tomaso, who has not all his wits, and old Martha, who is—"

"What?"

"A saint—or something else," she said hurriedly.

"Child," said Langley again, "this lady when I knew—"

"I will tell you," she said, "but my father must not know. The good doctor brought her here three years ago last June, and then she was as you say. She was beautiful. She laughed and talked in her own speech—for she knew no Spanish or Basque. But on the Night of the Dead—"

She crossed herself.

"All-Hallows Eve," said Langley softly.

"Indeed, I do not know what happened. But she fell into the power of the darkness. She changed. There were terrible cries—I cannot tell. But little by little she became what she is now. Nobody sees her but Martha and she will not talk. But the people say it is not a woman at all that lives there now."

"Mad?" said Langley.

"It is not madness. It is—enchantment. Listen. Two years since on Easter Day—is that my father?"

"No, no."

"The sun had shone and the wind came up from the valley. We heard the blessed church bells all day long. That night there came a knock at the door. My father opened and one stood there like Our Blessed Lady herself, very pale like the image in the church and with a blue cloak over her

head. She spoke, but we could not tell what she said. She wept and wrung her hands and pointed down the valley path, and my father went to the stable and saddled the mule. I thought of the flight from bad King Herod. But then—the American doctor came. He had run fast and was out of breath. And she shrieked at sight of him.”

A great wave of indignation swept over Langley. If the man was brutal to his wife, something must be done quickly. The girl hurried on.

“He said—Jesu-Maria—he said that his wife was bewitched. At Easter-tide the power of the Evil One was broken and she would try to flee. But as soon as the Holy Season was over, the spell would fall on her again, and therefore it was not safe to let her go. My parents were afraid to have touched the evil thing. They brought out the Holy Water and sprinkled the mule, but the wickedness had entered into the poor beast and she kicked my father so that he was lame for a month. The American took his wife away with him and we never saw her again. Even old Martha does not always see her. But every year the power waxes and wanes—heaviest at Hallow-tide and lifted again at Easter. Do not go to that house, señor, if you value your soul! Hush! they are coming back.”

Langley would have liked to ask more, but his host glanced quickly and suspiciously at the girl. Taking up his candle, Langley went to bed. He dreamed of wolves, long, lean and black, running on the scent of blood.

Next day brought an answer to his letter:

“DEAR LANGLEY,—Yes, this is myself, and of course I remember you well. Only too delighted to have you come and cheer our exile. You will find Alice somewhat changed, I fear, but I will explain our misfortunes when we meet. Our household is limited, owing to some kind of superstitious avoidance

of the afflicted, but if you will come along about half-past seven, we can give you a meal of sorts. Martha will show you the way.

“Cordially,

“STANDISH WETHERALL.”

The doctor's house was small and old, stuck halfway up the mountain-side on a kind of ledge in the rock-wall. A stream, unseen but clamorous, fell echoing down close at hand. Langley followed his guide into a dim, square room with a great hearth at one end and, drawn close before the fire, an arm-chair with wide, sheltering ears. Martha, muttering some sort of apology, hobbled away and left him standing there in the half-light. The flames of the wood fire, leaping and falling, made here a gleam and there a gleam, and, as his eyes grew familiar with the room, he saw that in the centre was a table laid for a meal, and that there were pictures on the walls. One of these struck a familiar note. He went close to it and recognised a portrait of Alice Wetherall that he had last seen in New York. It was painted by Sargent in his happiest mood, and the lovely wild-flower face seemed to lean down to him with the sparkling smile of life.

A log suddenly broke and fell in the hearth, flaring. As though the little noise and light had disturbed something, he heard, or thought he heard, a movement from the big chair before the fire. He stepped forward, and then stopped. There was nothing to be seen, but a noise had begun; a kind of low, animal muttering, extremely disagreeable to listen to. It was not made by a dog or a cat, he felt sure. It was a sucking, slobbering sound that affected him in a curiously sickening way. It ended in a series of little grunts or squeals, and then there was silence.

Langley stepped backwards towards the door. He was positive that something was in the room with him that he did not care about meeting. An absurd impulse seized him

to run away. He was prevented by the arrival of Martha, carrying a big, old-fashioned lamp, and behind her, Wetherall, who greeted him cheerfully.

The familiar American accents dispelled the atmosphere of discomfort that had been gathering about Langley. He held out a cordial hand.

"Fancy meeting *you* here," said he.

"The world is very small," replied Wetherall. "I am afraid that is a hardy bromide, but I certainly am pleased to see you," he added, with some emphasis.

The old woman had put the lamp on the table, and now asked if she should bring in the dinner. Wetherall replied in the affirmative, using a mixture of Spanish and Basque which she seemed to understand well enough.

"I didn't know you were a Basque scholar," said Langley.

"Oh, one picks it up. These people speak nothing else. But of course Basque is your specialty, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes."

"I daresay they have told you some queer things about us. But we'll go into that later. I've managed to make the place reasonably comfortable, though I could do with a few more modern conveniences. However, it suits us."

Langley took the opportunity to mumble some sort of inquiry about Mrs. Wetherall.

"Alice? Ah, yes, I forgot—you have not seen her yet." Wetherall looked hard at him with a kind of half-smile. "I should have warned you. You were—rather an admirer of my wife in the old days."

"Like everyone else," said Langley.

"No doubt. Nothing specially surprising about it, was there? Here comes dinner. Put it down, Martha, and we will ring when we are ready."

The old woman set down a dish upon the table, which was handsomely furnished with glass and silver, and went out. Wetherall moved over to the fireplace, stepping side-

ways and keeping his eyes oddly fixed on Langley. Then he addressed the armchair.

"Alice! Get up, my dear, and welcome an old admirer of yours. Come along. You will both enjoy it. Get up."

Something shuffled and whimpered among the cushions. Wetherall stooped, with an air of almost exaggerated courtesy, and lifted it to its feet. A moment, and it faced Langley in the lamplight.

It was dressed in a rich gown of gold satin and lace, that hung rucked and crumpled upon the thick and slouching body. The face was white and puffy, the eyes vacant, the mouth drooled open, with little trickles of saliva running from the loose corners. A dry fringe of rusty hair clung to the half-bald scalp, like the dead wisps on the head of a mummy.

"Come, my love," said Wetherall. "Say how do you do to Mr. Langley."

The creature blinked and mouthed out some inhuman sounds. Wetherall put his hand under its forearm, and it slowly extended a lifeless paw.

"There, she recognises you all right. I thought she would. Shake hands with him, my dear."

With a sensation of nausea, Langley took the inert hand. It was clammy and coarse to the touch and made no attempt to return his pressure. He let it go; it pawed vaguely in the air for a moment and then dropped.

"I was afraid you might be upset," said Wetherall, watching him. "I have grown used to it, of course, and it doesn't affect me as it would an outsider. Not that you are an outsider—anything but that—eh? Premature senility is the lay name for it, I suppose. Shocking, of course, if you haven't met it before. You needn't mind, by the way, what you say. She understands nothing."

"How did it happen?"

"I don't quite know. Came on gradually. I took the best

advice, naturally, but there was nothing to be done. So we came here. I didn't care about facing things at home where everybody knew us. And I didn't like the idea of a sanatorium. Alice is my wife, you know—sickness or health, for better, for worse, and all that. Come along; dinner's getting cold."

He advanced to the table, leading his wife, whose dim eyes seemed to brighten a little at the sight of food.

"Sit down, my dear, and eat your nice dinner. (She understands that, you see.) You'll excuse her table-manners, won't you? They're not pretty, but you'll get used to them."

He tied a napkin round the neck of the creature and placed food before her in a deep bowl. She snatched at it hungrily, slavering and gobbling as she scooped it up in her fingers and smeared face and hands with the gravy.

Wetherall drew out a chair for his guest opposite to where his wife sat. The sight of her held Langley with a kind of disgusted fascination.

The food—a sort of salmis—was deliciously cooked, but Langley had no appetite. The whole thing was an outrage, to the pitiful woman and to himself. Her seat was directly beneath the Sargent portrait, and his eyes went helplessly from the one to the other.

"Yes," said Wetherall, following his glance. "There is a difference, isn't there?" He himself was eating heartily and apparently enjoying his dinner. "Nature plays sad tricks upon us."

"Is it always like this?"

"No; this is one of her bad days. At times she will be—almost human. Of course these people here don't know what to think of it all. They have their own explanation of a very simple medical phenomenon."

"Is there any hope of recovery?"

"I'm afraid not—not of a permanent cure. You are not eating anything."

"I—well, Wetherall, this has been a shock to me."

"Of course. Try a glass of burgundy. I ought not to have asked you to come, but the idea of talking to an educated fellow-creature once again tempted me, I must confess."

"It must be terrible for you."

"I have become resigned. Ah, naughty, naughty!" The idiot had flung half the contents of her bowl upon the table. Wetherall patiently remedied the disaster, and went on:

"I can bear it better here, in this wild place where everything seems possible and nothing unnatural. My people are all dead, so there was nothing to prevent me from doing as I liked about it."

"No. What about your property in the States?"

"Oh, I run over from time to time to keep an eye on things. In fact, I am due to sail next month. I'm glad you caught me. Nobody over there knows how we're fixed, of course. They just know we're living in Europe."

"Did you consult no American doctor?"

"No. We were in Paris when the first symptoms declared themselves. That was shortly after that visit you paid to us." A flash of some emotion to which Langley could not put a name made the doctor's eyes for a moment sinister. "The best men on this side confirmed my own diagnosis. So we came here."

He rang for Martha, who removed the salmis and put on a kind of sweet pudding.

"Martha is my right hand," observed Wetherall. "I don't know what we shall do without her. When I am away, she looks after Alice like a mother. Not that there's much one can do for her, except to keep her fed and warm and clean—and the last is something of a task."

There was a note in his voice which jarred on Langley. Wetherall noticed his recoil and said:

"I won't disguise from you that it gets on my nerves sometimes. But it can't be helped. Tell me about yourself. What have you been doing lately?"

Langley replied with as much vivacity as he could assume, and they talked of indifferent subjects till the deplorable being which had once been Alice Wetherall began to mumble and whine fretfully and scramble down from her chair.

"She's cold," said Wetherall. "Go back to the fire, my dear."

He propelled her briskly towards the hearth, and she sank back into the arm-chair, crouching and complaining and thrusting out her hands towards the blaze. Wetherall brought out brandy and a box of cigars.

"I contrive just to keep in touch with the world, you see," he said. "They send me these from London. And I get the latest medical journals and reports. I'm writing a book, you know, on my own subject; so I don't vegetate. I can experiment, too—plenty of room for a laboratory, and no Vivisection Acts to bother one. It's a good country to work in. Are you staying here long?"

"I think not very."

"Oh! If you had thought of stopping on, I would have offered you the use of this house while I was away. You would find it more comfortable than the *posada*, and I should have no qualms, you know, about leaving you alone in the place with my wife—under the peculiar circumstances."

He stressed the last words and laughed. Langley hardly knew what to say.

"Really, Wetherall—"

"Though, in the old days, *you* might have liked the prospect more and *I* might have liked it less. There was a time, I think, Langley, when you would have jumped at the idea of living alone with—*my wife*."

Langley jumped up.

"What the devil are you insinuating, Wetherall?"

"Nothing, nothing. I was just thinking of the afternoon when you and she wandered away at a picnic and got lost. You remember? Yes, I thought you would."

"This is monstrous," retorted Langley. "How dare you say such things—with that poor soul sitting there—"

"Yes, poor soul. You're a poor thing to look at now, aren't you, my kitten?"

He turned suddenly to the woman. Something in his abrupt gesture seemed to frighten her, and she shrank away from him.

"You devil!" cried Langley. "She's afraid of you. What have you been doing to her? How did she get into this state? I *will* know!"

"Gently," said Wetherall. "I can allow for your natural agitation at finding her like this, but I can't have you coming between me and *my wife*. What a faithful fellow you are, Langley. I believe you still want her—just as you did before when you thought I was dumb and blind. Come now, have you got designs on *my wife*, Langley? Would you like to kiss her, caress her, take her to bed with you—my beautiful wife?"

A scarlet fury blinded Langley. He dashed an inexperienced fist at the mocking face. Wetherall gripped his arm, but he broke away. Panic seized him. He fled stumbling against the furniture and rushed out. As he went he heard Wetherall very softly laughing.

The train to Paris was crowded. Langley, scrambling in at the last moment, found himself condemned to the corridor. He sat down on a suitcase and tried to think. He had not been able to collect his thoughts on his wild flight. Even now, he was not quite sure what he had fled from. He buried his head in his hands.

"Excuse me," said a polite voice.

Langley looked up. A fair man in a grey suit was looking down at him through a monocle.

"Fearfully sorry to disturb you," went on the fair man. "I'm just tryin' to barge back to my jolly old kennel. Ghastly crowd, isn't it? Don't know when I've disliked my fellow-creatures more. I say, you don't look frightfully fit. Wouldn't you be better on something more comfortable?"

Langley explained that he had not been able to get a seat. The fair man eyed his haggard and unshaven countenance for a moment and then said:

"Well, look here, why not come and lay yourself down in my bin for a bit? Have you had any grub? No? That's a mistake. Toddle along with me and we'll get hold of a spot of soup and so on. You'll excuse my mentioning it, but you look as if you'd been backing a system that's come unstuck, or something. Not my business, of course, but do have something to eat."

Langley was too faint and sick to protest. He stumbled obediently along the corridor till he was pushed into a first-class sleeper, where a rigidly correct man-servant was laying out a pair of mauve silk pyjamas and a set of silver-mounted brushes.

"This gentleman's feeling rotten, Bunter," said the man with the monocle, "so I've brought him in to rest his aching head upon thy breast. Get hold of the commissariat and tell 'em to buzz a plate of soup along and a bottle of something drinkable."

"Very good, my lord."

Langley dropped, exhausted, on the bed, but when the food appeared he ate and drank greedily. He could not remember when he had last made a meal.

"I say," he said, "I wanted that. It's awfully decent of you. I'm sorry to appear so stupid. I've had a bit of a shock."

"Tell me all," said the stranger pleasantly.

The man did not look particularly intelligent, but he seemed friendly, and above all, normal. Langley wondered how the story would sound.

"I'm an absolute stranger to you," he began.

"And I to you," said the fair man. "The chief use of strangers is to tell things to. Don't you agree?"

"I'd like—" said Langley. "The fact is, I've run away from something. It's queer—it's—but what's the use of bothering you with it?"

The fair man sat down beside him and laid a slim hand on his arm.

"Just a moment," he said. "Don't tell me anything if you'd rather not. But my name is Wimsey—Lord Peter Wimsey—and I am interested in queer things."

It was the middle of November when the strange man came to the village. Thin, pale and silent, with his great black hood flapping about his face, he was surrounded with an atmosphere of mystery from the start. He settled down, not at the inn, but in a dilapidated cottage high up in the mountains, and he brought with him five mule-loads of mysterious baggage and a servant. The servant was almost as uncanny as the master; he was a Spaniard and spoke Basque well enough to act as an interpreter for his employer when necessary; but his words were few, his aspect gloomy and stern, and such brief information as he vouchsafed, disquieting in the extreme. His master, he said, was a wise man; he spent all his time reading books; he ate no flesh; he was of no known country; he spoke the language of the Apostles and had talked with blessed Lazarus after his return from the grave; and when he sat alone in his chamber by night, the angels of God came and conversed with him in celestial harmonies.

This was terrifying news. The few dozen villagers

avoided the little cottage, especially at night-time; and when the pale stranger was seen coming down the mountain path, folded in his black robe and bearing one of his magic tomes beneath his arm, the women pushed their children within doors, and made the sign of the cross.

Nevertheless, it was a child that first made the personal acquaintance of the magician. The small son of the Widow Etcheverry, a child of bold and inquisitive disposition, went one evening adventuring into the unhallowed neighbourhood. He was missing for two hours, during which his mother, in a frenzy of anxiety, had called the neighbours about her and summoned the priest, who had unhappily been called away on business to the town. Suddenly, however, the child reappeared, well and cheerful, with a strange story to tell.

He had crept up close to the magician's house (the bold, wicked child, did ever you hear the like?) and climbed into a tree to spy upon the stranger (Jesu-Maria!). And he saw a light in the window, and strange shapes moving about and shadows going to and fro within the room. And then there came a strain of music so ravishing it drew the very heart out of his body, as though all the stars were singing together. (Oh, my precious treasure! The wizard has stolen the heart out of him, alas! alas!) Then the cottage door opened and the wizard came out and with him a great company of familiar spirits. One of them had wings like a seraph and talked in an unknown tongue, and another was like a wee man, no higher than your knee, with a black face and a white beard, and he sat on the wizard's shoulder and whispered in his ear. And the heavenly music played louder and louder. And the wizard had a pale flame all about his head, like the pictures of the saints. (Blessed St. James of Compostella, be merciful to us all! And what then?) Why, then he, the boy, had been very much frightened and wished he had not come, but the little dwarf spirit

had seen him and jumped into the tree after him, climbing—oh! so fast! And he had tried to climb higher and had slipped and fallen to the ground. (Oh, the poor, wicked, brave, bad boy!)

Then the wizard had come and picked him up and spoken strange words to him and all the pain had gone away from the places where he had bumped himself (Marvellous! marvellous!), and he had carried him into the house. And inside, it was like the streets of Heaven, all gold and glittering. And the familiar spirits had sat beside the fire, nine in number, and the music had stopped playing. But the wizard's servant had brought him marvellous fruits in a silver dish, like fruits of Paradise, very sweet and delicious, and he had eaten them, and drunk a strange, rich drink from a goblet covered with red and blue jewels. Oh, yes—and there had been a tall crucifix on the wall, big, big, with a lamp burning before it and a strange sweet perfume like the smell in church on Easter Day.

(A crucifix? That was strange. Perhaps the magician was not so wicked after all. And what next?)

Next, the wizard's servant had told him not to be afraid, and had asked his name and his age and whether he could repeat his Paternoster. So he had said that prayer and the Ave Maria and part of the Credo, but the Credo was long and he had forgotten what came after "*ascendit in coelum.*" So the wizard had prompted him and they had finished saying it together. And the wizard had pronounced the sacred names and words without flinching and in the right order, so far as he could tell. And then the servant had asked further about himself and his family, and he had told about the death of the black goat and about his sister's lover, who had left her because she had not so much money as the merchant's daughter. Then the wizard and his servant had spoken together and laughed, and the servant had said: "My master gives this message to your sister: that where

there is no love there is no wealth, but he that is bold shall have gold for the asking." And with that, the wizard had put forth his hand into the air and taken from it—out of the empty air, yes, truly—one, two, three, four, five pieces of money and given them to him. And he was afraid to take them till he had made the sign of the cross upon them, and then, as they did not vanish or turn into fiery serpents, he had taken them, and here they were!

So the gold pieces were examined and admired in fear and trembling, and then, by grandfather's advice, placed under the feet of the image of Our Lady, after a sprinkling with Holy Water for their better purification. And on the next morning, as they were still there, they were shown to the priest, who arrived, tardy and flustered upon his last night's summons, and by him pronounced to be good Spanish coin, whereof one piece being devoted to the Church to put all right with Heaven, the rest might be put to secular uses without peril to the soul. After which, the good padre made his hasty way to the cottage, and returned, after an hour, filled with good reports of the wizard.

"For, my children," said he, "this is no evil sorcerer, but a Christian man, speaking the language of the Faith. He and I have conversed together with edification. Moreover, he keeps very good wine and is altogether a very worthy person. Nor did I perceive any familiar spirits or flaming apparitions; but it is true that there is a crucifix and also a very handsome Testament with pictures in gold and colour. *Benedicite*, my children. This is a good and learned man."

And away he went back to his presbytery; and that winter the chapel of Our Lady had a new altar-cloth.

After that, each night saw a little group of people clustered at a safe distance to hear the music which poured out from the wizard's windows, and from time to time a few bold spirits would creep up close enough to peer through the chinks of the shutters and glimpse the marvels within.

The wizard had been in residence about a month, and sat one night after his evening meal in conversation with his servant. The black hood was pushed back from his head, disclosing a sleek poll of fair hair, and a pair of rather humorous grey eyes, with a cynical droop of the lids. A glass of Cockburn 1908 stood on the table at his elbow and from the arm of his chair a red-and-green parrot gazed unwinkingly at the fire.

"Time is getting on, Juan," said the magician. "This business is very good fun and all that—but is there anything doing with the old lady?"

"I think so, my lord. I have dropped a word or two here and there of marvellous cures and miracles. I think she will come. Perhaps even tonight."

"Thank goodness! I want to get the thing over before Wetherall comes back, or we may find ourselves in Queer Street. It will take some weeks, you know, before we are ready to move, even if the scheme works at all. Damn it, what's that?"

Juan rose and went into the inner room, to return in a minute carrying the lemur.

"Micky has been playing with your hair-brushes," he said indulgently. "Naughty one, be quiet! Are you ready for a little practice, my lord?"

"Oh, rather, yes! I'm getting quite a dab at this job. If all else fails, I shall try for an engagement with Maskelyn."

Juan laughed, showing his white teeth. He brought out a set of billiard-balls, coins and other conjuring apparatus, palming and multiplying them negligently as he went. The other took them from him, and the lesson proceeded.

"Hush!" said the wizard, retrieving a ball which had tiresomely slipped from his fingers in the very act of vanishing. "There's somebody coming up the path."

He pulled his robe about his face and slipped silently into the inner room. Juan grinned, removed the decanter and

glasses, and extinguished the lamp. In the firelight the great eyes of the lemur gleamed strongly as it hung on the back of the high chair. Juan pulled a large folio from the shelf, lit a scented pastille in a curiously shaped copper vase and pulled forward a heavy iron cauldron which stood on the hearth. As he piled the logs about it, there came a knock. He opened the door, the lemur running at his heels.

"Whom do you seek, mother?" he asked, in Basque.

"Is the Wise One at home?"

"His body is at home, mother; his spirit holds converse with the unseen. Enter. What would you with us?"

"I have come, as I said—ah, Mary! Is that a spirit?"

"God made spirits and bodies also. Enter and fear not."

The old woman came tremblingly forward.

"Hast thou spoken with him of what I told thee?"

"I have. I have shown him the sickness of thy mistress—her husband's sufferings—all."

"What said he?"

"Nothing; he read in his book."

"Think you he can heal her?"

"I do not know; the enchantment is a strong one; but my master is mighty for good."

"Will he see me?"

"I will ask him. Remain here, and beware thou show no fear, whatever befall."

"I will be courageous," said the old woman, fingering her beads.

Juan withdrew. There was a nerve-shattering interval. The lemur had climbed up to the back of the chair again and swung, teeth-chattering, among the leaping shadows. The parrot cocked his head and spoke a few gruff words from his corner. An aromatic steam began to rise from the cauldron. Then, slowly into the red light, three, four, seven white shapes came stealthily and sat down in a circle about the hearth. Then, a faint music, that seemed to roll in from

leagues away. The flame flickered and dropped. There was a tall cabinet against the wall, with gold figures on it that seemed to move with the moving firelight.

Then, out of the darkness, a strange voice chanted in an unearthly tongue that sobbed and thundered.

Martha's knees gave under her. She sank down. The seven white cats rose and stretched themselves, and came sidling slowly about her. She looked up and saw the wizard standing before her, a book in one hand and a silver wand in the other. The upper part of his face was hidden, but she saw his pale lips move and presently he spoke, in a deep, husky tone that vibrated solemnly in the dim room:

“ὦ πέπον, εἰ μὲν γὰρ, πόλεμον περὶ τόνδε φυγόντε,
αἰεὶ δὴ μέλλοιμεν ἀγήρω τ' ἀθανάτω τε
ἔσσεθ', οὔτε κεν αὐτὸς ἐνὶ πρώτοισι μαχοίμην,
οὔτε κέ οε στέλλοιμι μάχην ἐς κυδιάνειραν . . .”

The great syllables went rolling on. Then the wizard paused, and added, in a kinder tone:

“Great stuff, this Homer. ‘It goes so thunderingly as though it conjured devils.’ What do I do next?”

The servant had come back, and now whispered in Martha's ear.

“Speak now,” said he. “The master is willing to help you.”

Thus encouraged, Martha stammered out her request. She had come to ask the Wise Man to help her mistress, who lay under an enchantment. She had brought an offering—the best she could find, for she had not liked to take anything of her master's during his absence. But here were a silver penny, an oat-cake, and a bottle of wine, very much at the wizard's service, if such small matters could please him.

The wizard, setting aside his book, gravely accepted the

silver penny, turned it magically into six gold pieces and laid the offering on the table. Over the oat-cake and the wine he showed a little hesitation, but at length, murmuring:

"Ergo omnis longo solvit se Teucra luctu"

(a line notorious for its grave spondaic cadence), he metamorphosed the one into a pair of pigeons and the other into a curious little crystal tree in a metal pot, and set them beside the coins. Martha's eyes nearly started from her head, but Juan whispered encouragingly:

"The good intention gives value to the gift. The master is pleased. Hush!"

The music ceased on a loud chord. The wizard, speaking now with greater assurance, delivered himself with fair accuracy of a page or so from Homer's Catalogue of the Ships, and, drawing from the folds of his robe his long white hand laden with antique rings, produced from mid-air a small casket of shining metal, which he proffered to the suppliant.

"The master says," prompted the servant, "that you shall take this casket, and give to your lady of the wafers which it contains, one at every meal. When all have been consumed, seek this place again. And remember to say three Aves and two Paters morning and evening for the intention of the lady's health. Thus, by faith and diligence, the cure may be accomplished."

Martha received the casket with trembling hands.

"Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore," said the wizard, with emphasis. "Poluphloisboio thalasses. Ne plus ultra. Valet. Plaudite."

He stalked away into the darkness, and the audience was over.

"It is working, then?" said the wizard to Juan.

The time was five weeks later, and five more consignments of enchanted wafers had been ceremoniously dispatched to the grim house on the mountain.

"It is working," agreed Juan. "The intelligence is returning, the body is becoming livelier and the hair is growing again."

"Thank the Lord! It was a shot in the dark, Juan, and even now I can hardly believe that anyone in the world could think of such a devilish trick. When does Wetherall return?"

"In three weeks' time."

"Then we had better fix our grand finale for today fortnight. See that the mules are ready, and go down to the town and get a message off to the yacht."

"Yes, my lord."

"That will give you a week to get clear with the menagerie and the baggage. And—I say, how about Martha? Is it dangerous to leave her behind, do you think?"

"I will try to persuade her to come back with us."

"Do. I should hate anything unpleasant to happen to her. The man's a criminal lunatic. Oh, lord! I'll be glad when this is over. I want to get into a proper suit of clothes again. What Bunter would say if he saw this—"

The wizard laughed, lit a cigar and turned on the gramophone.

The last act was duly staged a fortnight later.

It had taken some trouble to persuade Martha of the necessity of bringing her mistress to the wizard's house. Indeed, that supernatural personage had been obliged to make an alarming display of wrath and declaim two whole choruses from Euripides before gaining his point. The final touch was put to the terrors of the evening by a demon-

stration of the ghastly effects of a sodium flame—which lends a very corpse-like aspect to the human countenance, particularly in a lonely cottage on a dark night, and accompanied by incantations and the *Danse Macabre* of Saint-Saëns.

Eventually the wizard was placated by a promise, and Martha departed, bearing with her a charm, engrossed upon parchment, which her mistress was to read and thereafter hang about her neck in a white silk bag.

Considered as a magical formula, the document was perhaps a little unimpressive in its language, but its meaning was such as a child could understand. It was in English, and ran:

“You have been ill and in trouble, but your friends are ready to cure you and help you. Don’t be afraid, but do whatever Martha tells you, and you will soon be quite well and happy again.”

“And even if she can’t understand it,” said the wizard to his man, “it can’t possibly do any harm.”

The events of that terrible night have become legend in the village. They tell by the fireside with bated breath how Martha brought the strange, foreign lady to the wizard’s house, that she might be finally and for ever freed from the power of the Evil One. It was a dark night and stormy, with the wind howling terribly through the mountains.

The lady had become much better and brighter through the wizard’s magic—though this, perhaps, was only a fresh glamour and delusion—and she had followed Martha like a little child on that strange and secret journey. They had crept out very quietly to elude the vigilance of old Tomaso, who had strict orders from the doctor never to let the lady stir one step from the house. As for that, Tomaso swore

that he had been cast into an enchanted sleep—but who knows? There may have been no more to it than overmuch wine. Martha was a cunning woman, and, some said, little better than a witch herself.

Be that as it might, Martha and the lady had come to the cottage, and there the wizard had spoken many things in a strange tongue, and the lady had spoken likewise. Yes—she who for so long had only grunted like a beast, had talked with the wizard and answered him. Then the wizard had drawn strange signs upon the floor round about the lady and himself. And when the lamp was extinguished, the signs glowed awfully, with a pale light of their own. The wizard also drew a circle about Martha herself, and warned her to keep inside it. Presently they heard a rushing noise, like great wings beating, and all the familiars leaped about, and the little white man with the black face ran up the curtain and swung from the pole. Then a voice cried out: “He comes! He comes!” and the wizard opened the door of the tall cabinet with gold images upon it, that stood in the centre of the circle, and he and the lady stepped inside it and shut the doors after them.

The rushing sound grew louder and the familiar spirits screamed and chattered—and then, all of a sudden, there was a thunder-clap and a great flash of light and the cabinet was shivered into pieces and fell down. And lo and behold! the wizard and the lady had vanished clean away and were never more seen or heard of.

This was Martha’s story, told the next day to her neighbours. How she had escaped from the terrible house she could not remember. But when, some time after, a group of villagers summoned up courage to visit the place again, they found it bare and empty. Lady, wizard, servant, familiars, furniture, bags and baggage—all were gone, leaving not a trace behind them, except a few mysterious lines and figures traced on the floor of the cottage.

This was a wonder indeed. More awful still was the disappearance of Martha herself, which took place three nights afterwards.

Next day, the American doctor returned, to find an empty hearth and a legend.

“Yacht ahoy!”

Langley peered anxiously over the rail of the *Abracadabra* as the boat loomed out of the blackness. When the first passenger came aboard, he ran hastily to greet him.

“Is it all right, Wimsey?”

“Absolutely all right. She’s a bit bewildered, of course—but you needn’t be afraid. She’s like a child, but she’s getting better every day. Bear up, old man—there’s nothing to shock you about her.”

Langley moved hesitatingly forward as a muffled female figure was hoisted gently on board.

“Speak to her,” said Wimsey. “She may or may not recognise you. I can’t say.”

Langley summoned up his courage. “Good evening, Mrs. Wetherall,” he said, and held out his hand.

The woman pushed the cloak from her face. Her blue eyes gazed shyly at him in the lamplight—then a smile broke out upon her lips.

“Why, I know you—of course I know you. You’re Mr. Langley. I’m so glad to see you.”

She clasped his hand in hers.

“Well, Langley,” said Lord Peter, as he manipulated the syphon, “a more abominable crime it has never been my fortune to discover. My religious beliefs are a little ill-defined, but I hope something really beastly happens to Wetherall in the next world. Say when!”

“You know, there were one or two very queer points

about that story you told me. They gave me a line on the thing from the start.

“To begin with, there was this extraordinary kind of decay or imbecility settlin’ in on a girl in her twenties—so conveniently, too, just after you’d been hangin’ round the Wetherall home and showin’ perhaps a trifle too much sensibility, don’t you see? And then there was this tale of the conditions clearin’ up regularly once a year or so—not like any ordinary brain-trouble. Looked as if it was being controlled by somebody.

“Then there was the fact that Mrs. Wetherall had been under her husband’s medical eye from the beginning, with no family or friends who knew anything about her to keep a check on the fellow. Then there was the determined isolation of her in a place where no doctor could see her and where, even if she had a lucid interval, there wasn’t a soul who could understand or be understood by her. Queer, too, that it should be a part of the world where you, with your interests, might reasonably be expected to turn up some day and be treated to a sight of what she had turned into. Then there were Wetherall’s well-known researches, and the fact that he kept in touch with a chemist in London.

“All that gave me a theory, but I had to test it before I could be sure I was right. Wetherall was going to America, and that gave me a chance; but of course he left strict orders that nobody should get into or out of his house during his absence. I had, somehow, to establish an authority greater than his over old Martha, who is a faithful soul, God bless her! Hence, exit Lord Peter Wimsey and enter the magician. The treatment was tried and proved successful—hence the elopement and the rescue.

“Well, now, listen—and don’t go off the deep end. It’s all over now. Alice Wetherall is one of those unfortunate people who suffer from congenital thyroid deficiency. You

know the thyroid gland in your throat—the one that stokes the engine and keeps the old brain going. In some people the thing doesn't work properly, and they turn out cretinous imbeciles. Their bodies don't grow and their minds don't work. But feed 'em the stuff, and they come absolutely all right—cheery and handsome and intelligent and lively as crickets. Only, don't you see, you have to *keep* feeding it to 'em, otherwise they just go back to an imbecile condition.

“Wetherall found this girl when he was a bright young student just learning about the thyroid. Twenty years ago, very few experiments had been made in this kind of treatment, but he was a bit of a pioneer. He gets hold of the kid, works a miraculous cure, and, bein' naturally bucked with himself, adopts her, gets her educated, likes the look of her, and finally marries her. You understand, don't you, that there's nothing fundamentally unsound about those thyroid deficient. Keep 'em going on the little daily dose, and they're normal in every way, fit to live an ordinary life and have ordinary healthy children.

“Nobody, naturally, knew anything about this thyroid business except the girl herself and her husband. All goes well till *you* come along. Then Wetherall gets jealous—”

“He had no cause.”

Wimsey shrugged his shoulders.

“Possibly, my lad, the lady displayed a preference—we needn't go into that. Anyhow, Wetherall did get jealous and saw a perfectly marvellous revenge in his power. He carried his wife off to the Pyrenees, isolated her from all help, and then simply sat back and starved her of her thyroid extract. No doubt he told her what he was going to do, and why. It would please him to hear her desperate appeals—to let her feel herself slipping back day by day, hour by hour, into something less than a beast—”

“Oh, God!”

"As you say. Of course, after a time, a few months, she would cease to know what was happening to her. He would still have the satisfaction of watching her—seeing her skin thicken, her body coarsen, her hair fall out, her eyes grow vacant, her speech die away into mere animal noises, her brain go to mush, her habits—"

"Stop it, Whimsey."

"Well, you saw it all yourself. But that wouldn't be enough for him. So, every so often, he would feed her the thyroid again and bring her back sufficiently to realise her own degradation—"

"If only I had the brute here!"

"Just as well you haven't. Well, then, one day—by a stroke of luck—Mr. Langley, the amorous Mr. Langley, actually turns up. What a triumph to let him see—"

Langley stopped him again.

"Right-ho! but it was ingenious, wasn't it? So simple. The more I think of it, the more it fascinates me. But it was just that extra refinement of cruelty that defeated him. Because, when you told me the story, I couldn't help recognising the symptoms of thyroid deficiency, and I thought, 'Just supposing'—so I hunted up the chemist whose name you saw on the parcel, and, after unwinding a lot of red tape, got him to admit that he had several times sent Wetherall consignments of thyroid extract. So then I was almost sure, don't you see.

"I got a doctor's advice and a supply of gland extract, hired a tame Spanish conjurer and some performing cats and things, and barged off complete with disguise and a trick cabinet devised by the ingenious Mr. Devant. I'm a bit of a conjurer myself, and between us we didn't do so badly. The local superstitions helped, of course, and so did the gramophone records. Schubert's Unfinished is first class for producing an atmosphere of gloom and mystery, so are luminous paint and the remnants of a classical education."

"Look here, Wimsey, will she get all right again?"

"Right as ninepence, and I imagine that any American court would give her a divorce on the grounds of persistent cruelty. After that—it's up to you!"

Lord Peter's friends greeted his reappearance in London with mild surprise.

"And what have *you* been doing with yourself?" demanded the Hon. Freddy Arbuthnot.

"Eloping with another man's wife," replied his lordship. "But only," he hastened to add, "in a purely Pickwickian sense. Nothing in it for yours truly. Oh, well! Let's toddle round to the Holborn Empire, and see what George Robey can do for us."

THE HORROR HORN

by E. F. Benson

FOR the past ten days Alhubel had basked in the radiant midwinter weather proper to its eminence of over six thousand feet. From rising to setting the sun (so surprising to those who have hitherto associated it with a pale, tepid plate indistinctly shining through the murky air of England) had blazed its way across the sparkling blue, and every night the serene and windless frost had made the stars sparkle like illuminated diamond dust. Sufficient snow had fallen before Christmas to content the skiers, and the big rink, sprinkled every evening, had given the skaters each morning a fresh surface on which to perform their slippery antics. Bridge and dancing served to while away the greater part of the night, and to me, now for the first time tasting the joys of a winter in the Engadine, it seemed that a new heaven and a new earth had been lighted, warmed, and refrigerated for the special benefit of those who like myself had been wise enough to save up their days of holiday for the winter.

But a break came in these ideal conditions: one afternoon the sun grew vapour-veiled and up the valley from the northwest a wind frozen with miles of travel over ice-bound hill-sides began scouting through the calm halls of the heavens. Soon it grew dusted with snow, first in small flakes driven almost horizontally before its congealing breath and then in larger tufts as of swansdown. And

though all day for a fortnight before the fate of nations and life and death had seemed to me of far less importance than to get certain tracings of the skate-blades on the ice of proper shape and size, it now seemed that the one paramount consideration was to hurry back to the hotel for shelter: it was wiser to leave rocking-turns alone than to be frozen in their quest.

I had come out here with my cousin, Professor Ingram, the celebrated physiologist and Alpine climber. During the serenity of the last fortnight he had made a couple of notable winter ascents, but this morning his weather-wisdom had mistrusted the signs of the heavens, and instead of attempting the ascent of the Piz Passug he had waited to see whether his misgivings justified themselves. So there he sat now in the hall of the admirable hotel with his feet on the hot-water pipes and the latest delivery of the English post in his hands. This contained a pamphlet concerning the result of the Mount Everest expedition of which he had just finished the perusal when I entered.

“A very interesting report,” he said, passing it to me, “and they certainly deserve to succeed next year. But who can tell what that final six thousand feet may entail? Six thousand feet more when you have already accomplished twenty-three thousand does not seem much, but at present no one knows whether the human frame can stand exertion at such a height. It may affect not the lungs and heart only, but possibly the brain. Delirious hallucinations may occur. In fact, if I did not know better, I should have said the one such hallucination had occurred to the climbers already.”

“And what was that?” I asked.

“You will find that they thought they came across the tracks of some naked human foot at a great altitude. That looks at first sight like an hallucination. What more natural than that a brain excited and exhilarated by the extreme

height should have interpreted certain marks in the snow as the footprints of a human being? Every bodily organ at these altitudes is exerting itself to the utmost to do its work, and the brain seizes on those marks in the snow and says, 'Yes, I'm all right, I'm doing my job, and I perceive marks in the snow which I affirm are human footprints.' You know, even at this altitude, how restless and eager the brain is, how vividly, as you told me, you dream at night. Multiply that stimulus and that consequent eagerness and restlessness by three, and how natural that the brain should harbour illusions! What after all is the delirium which often accompanies high fever but the effort of the brain to do its work under the pressure of feverish conditions? It is so eager to continue perceiving that it perceives things which have no existence!

"And yet you don't think that these naked human footprints were illusions," said I. "You told me you would have thought so, if you had not known better."

He shifted in his chair and looked out of the window a moment. The air was thick now with the density of the big snowflakes that were driven along by the squealing north-west gale.

"Quite so," he said. "In all probability the human footprints were real human footprints. I expect that they were the footprints, anyhow, of a being more nearly a man than anything else. My reason for saying so is that I know such beings exist. I have even seen quite near at hand—and I assure you I did not wish to be nearer in spite of my intense curiosity—the creature, shall we say, which would make such footprints. And if the snow was not so dense, I could show you the place where I saw him."

He pointed straight out of the window, where across the valley lies the huge tower of the Ungeheuerhorn with the carved pinnacle of rock at the top like some gigantic rhinoceros-horn. On one side only, as I knew, was the moun-

tain practicable, and that for none but the finest climbers; on the other three a succession of ledges and precipices rendered it unscalable. Two thousand feet of sheer rock form the tower; below are five hundred feet of fallen boulders, up to the edge of which grow dense woods of larch and pine.

"Upon the Ungeheuerhorn?" I asked.

"Yes. Up till twenty years ago it had never been ascended, and I, like several others, spent a lot of time in trying to find a route up it. My guide and I sometimes spent three nights together at the hut beside the Blumen glacier, prowling round it, and it was by luck really that we found the route, for the mountain looks even more impracticable from the far side than it does from this. But one day we found a long, transverse fissure in the side which led to a negotiable ledge; then there came a slanting ice couloir which you could not see till you got to the foot of it. However, I need not go into that."

The big room where we sat was filling up with cheerful groups driven indoors by this sudden gale and snowfall, and the cackle of merry tongues grew loud. The band, too, that invariable appanage of tea-time at Swiss resorts, had begun to tune up for the usual potpourri from the works of Puccini. Next moment the sugary, sentimental melodies began.

"Strange contrast!" said Ingram. "Here are we sitting warm and cozy, our ears pleasantly tickled with these little baby tunes and outside is the great storm growing more violent every moment, and swirling round the austere cliffs of the Ungeheuerhorn: the Horror-horn, as indeed it was to me."

"I want to hear all about it," I said. "Every detail: make a short story long, if it's short. I want to know why it's *your* Horror-horn?"

"Well, Chanton and I (he was my guide) used to spend

days prowling about the cliffs, making a little progress on one side and then being stopped, and gaining perhaps five hundred feet on another side and then being confronted by some insuperable obstacle, till the day when by luck we found the route. Chanton never liked the job, for some reason that I could not fathom. It was not because of the difficulty or danger of the climbing, for he was the most fearless man I have ever met when dealing with rocks and ice, but he was always insistent that we should get off the mountain and back to the Blumen hut before sunset. He was scarcely easy even when we had got back to shelter and locked and barred the door, and I well remember one night when, as we ate our supper, we heard some animal, a wolf probably, howling somewhere out in the night. A positive panic seized him, and I don't think he closed his eyes till morning. It struck me then that there might be some grisly legend about the mountain, connected possibly with its name, and next day I asked him why the peak was called the Horror-horn. He put the question off at first, and said that, like the Schreckhorn, its name was due to its precipices and falling stones; but when I pressed him further he acknowledged that there was a legend about it, which his father had told him. There were creatures, so it was supposed, that lived in its caves, things human in shape, and covered, except for the face and hands, with long black hair. They were dwarfs in size, four feet high or thereabouts, but of prodigious strength and agility, remnants of some wild primeval race. It seemed that they were still in an upward stage of evolution, or so I guessed, for the story ran that sometimes girls had been carried off by them, not as prey, and not for any such fate as for those captured by cannibals, but to be bred from. Young men also had been raped by them, to be mated with the females of their tribe. All this looked as if the creatures, as I said, were tending towards humanity. But naturally I did not believe a word

of it, as applied to the conditions of the present day. Centuries ago, conceivably, there may have been such beings, and, with the extraordinary tenacity of tradition, the news of this had been handed down and was still current round the hearths of the peasants. As for their numbers, Chanton told me that three had been once seen together by a man who owing to his swiftness on skis had escaped to tell the tale. This man, he averred, was no other than his grandfather, who had been benighted one winter evening as he passed through the dense woods below the Ungeheuerhorn, and Chanton supposed that they had been driven down to these lower altitudes in search of food during severe winter weather, for otherwise the recorded sights of them had always taken place among the rocks of the peak itself. They had pursued his grandfather, then a young man, at an extraordinarily swift canter, running sometimes upright as men run, sometimes on all-fours in the manner of beasts, and their howls were just such as that we had heard that night in the Blumen hut. Such at any rate was the story Chanton told me, and, like you, I regarded it as the very moonshine of superstition. But the very next day I had reason to reconsider my judgment about it.

"It was on that day that after a week of exploration we hit on the only route at present known to the top of our peak. We started as soon as there was light enough to climb by, for, as you may guess, on very difficult rocks it is impossible to climb by lantern or moonlight. We hit on the long fissure I have spoken of, we explored the ledge which from below seemed to end in nothingness, and with an hour's step-cutting ascended the couloir which led upwards from it. From there onwards it was a rock-climb, certainly of considerable difficulty, but with no heart-breaking discoveries ahead, and it was about nine in the morning that we stood on the top. We did not wait there long, for that side of the mountain is raked by falling stones loosened, when

the sun grows hot, from the ice that holds them, and we made haste to pass the ledge where the falls are most frequent. After that there was the long fissure to descend, a matter of no great difficulty, and we were at the end of our work by midday, both of us, as you may imagine, in the state of the highest elation.

“A long and tiresome scramble among the huge boulders at the foot of the cliff then lay before us. Here the hillside is very porous and great caves extend far into the mountain. We had unroped at the base of the fissure, and were picking our way as seemed good to either of us among these fallen rocks, many of them bigger than an ordinary house, when, on coming round the corner of one of these, I saw that which made it clear that the stories Chanton had told me were no figment of traditional superstition.

“Not twenty yards in front of me lay one of the beings of which he had spoken. There it sprawled naked and basking on its back with face turned up to the sun, which its narrow eyes regarded unwinking. In form it was completely human, but the growth of hair that covered limbs and trunk alike almost completely hid the sun-tanned skin beneath. But its face, save for the down on its cheeks and chin, was hairless, and I looked on a countenance the sensual and malevolent bestiality of which froze me with horror. Had the creature been an animal, one would have felt scarcely a shudder at the gross animalism of it; the horror lay in the fact that it was a man. There lay by it a couple of gnawed bones, and, its meal finished, it was lazily licking its protuberant lips, from which came a purring murmur of content. With one hand it scratched the thick hair on its belly, in the other it held one of these bones, which presently split in half beneath the pressure of its finger and thumb. But my horror was not based on the information of what happened to those men whom these creatures caught, it was due only to my proximity to a thing so human and so in-

fernal. The peak, of which the ascent had a moment ago filled us with such elated satisfaction, became to me an Ungeheuerhorn indeed, for it was the home of beings more awful than the delirium of nightmare could ever have conceived.

“Chanton was a dozen paces behind me, and with a backward wave of my hand I caused him to halt. Then withdrawing myself with infinite precaution, so as not to attract the gaze of that basking creature, I slipped back round the rock, whispered to him what I had seen, and with blanched faces we made a long detour, peering round every corner, and crouching low, not knowing but that at any step we might come upon another of these beings, or that from the mouth of one of these caves in the mountain-side there might not appear another of those hairless and dreadful faces, with perhaps this time the breasts and insignia of womanhood. That would have been the worst of all.

“Luck favoured us, for we made our way among the boulders and shifting stones, the rattle of which might at any moment have betrayed us, without a repetition of my experience, and once among the trees we ran as if the Furies themselves were in pursuit. Well now did I understand, though I dare say I cannot convey, the qualms of Chanton’s mind when he spoke to me of these creatures. Their very humanity was what made them so terrible, the fact that they were of the same race as ourselves, but of a type so abysmally degraded that the most brutal and inhuman of men would have seemed angelic in comparison.”

The music of the small band was over before he had finished the narrative, and the chattering groups round the tea-table had dispersed. He paused a moment.

“There was a horror of the spirit,” he said, “which I experienced then, from which, I verily believe, I have never entirely recovered. I saw then how terrible a living thing could be, and how terrible, in consequence, was life itself.

In us all I suppose lurks some inherited germ of that ineffable bestiality, and who knows whether, sterile as it has apparently become in the course of centuries, it might not fructify again. When I saw that creature sun itself, I looked into the abyss out of which we have crawled. And these creatures are trying to crawl out of it now, if they exist any longer. Certainly for the last twenty years there has been no record of their being seen, until we come to this story of the footprint seen by the climbers on Everest. If that is authentic, if the party did not mistake the footprint of some bear, or what not, for a human tread, it seems as if still this bestranded remnant of mankind is in existence."

Now, Ingram had told his story well; but sitting in this warm and civilised room, the horror which he had clearly felt had not communicated itself to me in any very vivid manner. Intellectually, I agreed, I could appreciate his horror, but certainly my spirit felt no shudder of interior comprehension.

"But it is odd," I said, "that your keen interest in physiology did not disperse your qualms. You were looking, so I take it, at some form of man more remote probably than the earliest human remains. Did not something inside you say, 'This is of absorbing significance'?"

He shook his head.

"No: I only wanted to get away," said he. "It was not, as I have told you, the terror of what, according to Chanton's story, might await us if we were captured; it was sheer horror at the creature itself. I quaked at it."

The snowstorm and the gale increased in violence that night, and I slept uneasily, plucked again and again from slumber by the fierce battling of the wind that shook my windows as if with an imperious demand for admittance. It came in billowy gusts, with strange noises intermingled with it as for a moment it abated, with flutings and moanings that rose to shrieks as the fury of it returned. These

noises, no doubt, mingled themselves with my drowsed and sleepy consciousness, and once I tore myself out of a nightmare, imagining that the creatures of the Horrorhorn had gained footing on my balcony and were rattling at the window-bolts. But before morning the gale had died away, and I awoke to see the snow falling dense and fast in a windless air. For three days it continued, without intermission, and with its cessation there came a frost such as I have never felt before. Fifty degrees were registered one night, and more the next, and what the cold must have been on the cliffs of the Ungeheuerhorn I cannot imagine. Sufficient, so I thought, to have made an end altogether of its secret inhabitants: my cousin, on that day twenty years ago, had missed an opportunity for study which would probably never fall again either to him or another.

I received one morning a letter from a friend saying that he had arrived at the neighbouring winter resort of St. Luigi, and proposing that I should come over for a morning's skating and lunch afterwards. The place was not more than a couple of miles off, if one took the path over the low, pine-clad foothills above which lay the steep woods below the first rocky slopes of the Ungeheuerhorn; and accordingly, with a knapsack containing skates on my back, I went on skis over the wooded slopes and down by an easy descent again on to St. Luigi. The day was overcast, clouds entirely obscured the higher peaks though the sun was visible, pale and unluminous, through the mists. But as the morning went on, it gained the upper hand, and I slid down into St. Luigi beneath a sparkling firmament. We skated and lunched, and then, since it looked as if thick weather was coming up again, I set out early, about three o'clock, for my return journey.

Hardly had I got into the woods when the clouds gath-

ered thick above, and streamers and skeins of them began to descend among the pines through which my path threaded its way. In ten minutes more their opacity had so increased that I could hardly see a couple of yards in front of me. Very soon I became aware that I must have got off the path, for snow-cowled shrubs lay directly in my way, and, casting back to find it again, I got altogether confused as to direction. But, though progress was difficult, I knew I had only to keep on the ascent, and presently I should come to the brow of these low foothills, and descend into the open valley where Alhubel stood. So on I went, stumbling and sliding over obstacles, and unable, owing to the thickness of the snow, to take off my skis, for I should have sunk over the knees at each step. Still the ascent continued, and looking at my watch I saw that I had already been near an hour on my way from St. Luigi, a period more than sufficient to complete my whole journey. But still I stuck to my idea that though I had certainly strayed far from my proper route a few minutes more must surely see me over the top of the upward way, and I should find the ground declining into the next valley. About now, too, I noticed that the mists were growing suffused with rose-colour, and, though the inference was that it must be close on sunset, there was consolation in the fact that they were there and might lift at any moment and disclose to me my whereabouts. But the fact that night would soon be on me made it needful to bar my mind against that despair of loneliness which so eats out the heart of a man who is lost in woods or on mountain-side, that, though still there is plenty of vigour in his limbs, his nervous force is sapped, and he can do no more than lie down and abandon himself to whatever fate may await him. . . . And then I heard that which made the thought of loneliness seem bliss indeed, for there was a worse fate than loneliness. What I heard resembled

the howl of a wolf, and it came from not far in front of me where the ridge—was it a ridge?—rose still higher in a vestment of pines.

From behind me came a sudden puff of wind, which shook the frozen snow from the drooping pine-branches, and swept away the mists as a broom sweeps the dust from the floor. Radiant above me were the unclouded skies, already charged with the red of the sunset, and in front I saw that I had come to the very edge of the wood through which I had wandered so long. But it was no valley into which I had penetrated, for there right ahead of me rose the steep slope of boulders and rocks soaring upwards to the foot of the Ungeheuerhorn. What, then, was that cry of a wolf which had made my heart stand still? I saw.

Not twenty yards from me was a fallen tree, and leaning against the trunk of it was one of the denizens of the Horror-horn, and it was a woman. She was enveloped in a thick growth of hair grey and tufted, and from her head it streamed down over her shoulders and her bosom, from which hung withered and pendulous breasts. And looking on her face I comprehended not with my mind alone, but with a shudder of my spirit, what Ingram had felt. Never had nightmare fashioned so terrible a countenance; the beauty of sun and stars and of the beasts of the field and the kindly race of men could not atone for so hellish an incarnation of the spirit of life. A fathomless bestiality modelled the slaving mouth and the narrow eyes; I looked into the abyss itself and knew that out of that abyss on the edge of which I leaned the generations of men had climbed. What if that ledge crumbled in front of me and pitched me headlong into its nethermost depths? . . .

In one hand she held by the horns a chamois that kicked and struggled. A blow from its hindleg caught her withered thigh, and with a grunt of anger she seized the leg in her other hand, and, as a man may pull from its sheath a

stem of meadow grass, she plucked it off the body, leaving the torn skin hanging round the gaping wound. Then putting the red, bleeding member to her mouth she sucked at it as a child sucks a stick of sweetmeat. Through flesh and gristle her short, brown teeth penetrated, and she licked her lips with a sound of purring. Then dropping the leg by her side, she looked again at the body of the prey now quivering in its death convulsion, and with finger and thumb gouged out one of its eyes. She snapped her teeth on it, and it cracked like a soft-shelled nut.

It must have been but a few seconds that I stood watching her, in some indescribable catalepsy of terror, while through my brain there pealed the panic-command of my mind to my stricken limbs, "Begone, begone, while there is time." Then, recovering the power of my joints and muscles, I tried to slip behind a tree and hide myself from this apparition, but the woman—shall I say?—must have caught my stir of movement, for she raised her eyes from her living feast and saw me. She craned forward her neck, she dropped her prey, and half rising began to move towards me. As she did this, she opened her mouth and gave forth a howl such as I had heard a moment before. It was answered by another, but faintly and distantly.

Sliding and slipping, with the toes of my skis tripping in the obstacles below the snow, I plunged forward down the hill between the pine-trunks. The low sun already sinking behind some rampart of mountain in the west reddened the snow and the pines with its ultimate rays. My knapsack with the skates in it swung to and fro on my back, one ski-stick had already been twitched out of my hand by a fallen branch of pine, but not a second's pause could I allow myself to recover it. I gave no glance behind, and I knew not at what pace my pursuer was on my track, or indeed whether any pursued at all, for my whole mind and energy, now working at full power again under the stress of my

panic, were devoted to getting away down the hill and out of the wood as swiftly as my limbs could bear me. For a little while I heard nothing but the hissing snow of my headlong passage, and the rustle of the covered undergrowth beneath my feet, and then, from close at hand behind me, once more the wolf-howl sounded and I heard the plunging of footsteps other than my own.

The strap of my knapsack had shifted, and as my skates swung to and fro on my back it chafed and pressed on my throat, hindering free passage of air, of which, God knew, my labouring lungs were in dire need, and without pausing I slipped it free from my neck, and held it in the hand from which my ski-stick had been jerked. I seemed to go a little more easily for this adjustment, and now, not so far distant I could see below me the path from which I had strayed. If only I could reach that, the smoother going would surely enable me to out-distance my pursuer, who even on the rougher ground was but slowly overhauling me, and at the sight of that riband stretching unimpeded downhill, a ray of hope pierced the black panic of my soul. With that came the desire, keen and insistent, to see who or what it was that was on my tracks, and I spared a backward glance. It was she, the hag whom I had seen at her gruesome meal; her long grey hair flew out behind her, her mouth chattered and gibbered, her fingers made grabbing movements, as if already they closed on me.

But the path was now at hand, and the nearness of it I suppose made me incautious. A hump of snow-covered bush lay in my path, and, thinking I could jump over it, I tripped and fell, smothering myself in snow. I heard a maniac noise, half scream, half laugh, from close behind, and before I could recover myself the grabbing fingers were at my neck, as if a steel vise had closed there. But my right hand in which I held my knapsack of skates was free, and with a blind back-handed movement I whirled it behind me

at full length of its strap, and knew that my desperate blow had found its billet somewhere. Even before I could look round I felt the grip on my neck relax, and something subsided into the very bush which had entangled me. I recovered my feet and turned. There she lay, twitching and quivering. The heel of one of my skates piercing the thin alpaca of the knapsack had hit her full on the temple, from which the blood was pouring, but a hundred yards away I could see another such figure coming downwards on my tracks, leaping and bounding. At that panic arose again within me, and I sped off down the white smooth path that led to the lights of the village already beckoning. Never once did I pause in my headlong going: there was no safety until I was back among the haunts of men. I flung myself against the door of the hotel, and screamed for admittance, though I had but to turn the handle and enter; and once more as when Ingram had told his tale, there was the sound of the band, and the chatter of voices, and there, too, was he himself, who looked up and then rose swiftly to his feet as I made my clattering entrance.

"I have seen them too," I cried. "Look at my knapsack. Is there not blood on it? It is the blood of one of them, a woman, a hag, who tore off the leg of a chamois as I looked, and pursued me through the accursed wood. I—"

Whether it was I who spun round, or the room which seemed to spin round me, I knew not, but I heard myself falling, collapsed on the floor, and the next time that I was conscious at all I was in bed. There was Ingram there, who told me that I was quite safe, and another man, a stranger, who pricked my arm with the nozzle of a syringe, and reassured me. . . .

A day or two later I gave a coherent account of my adventure, and three or four men, armed with guns, went over my traces. They found the bush in which I had stumbled, with a pool of blood which had soaked into the snow, and,

still following my ski-tracks, they came on the body of a chamois, from which had been torn one of its hindlegs and one eye-socket was empty. That is all the corroboration of my story that I can give the reader, and for myself I imagine that the creature which pursued me was either not killed by my blow or that her fellows removed her body. . . .

Anyhow, it is open to the incredulous to prow! about the caves of the Ungeheuerhorn, and see if anything occurs that may convince them.

NIGHT DRIVE

by Will F. Jenkins

MADGE was ready to leave the house and in the act of turning out the lights when the telephone rang. She picked it up, and Mr. Tabor identified himself. He sounded as if he had a bad cold, although Madge hardly knew him well enough to identify his voice anyway. He said apologetically that he'd heard that Madge—he called her Mrs. Haley, of course—was driving over to Colchester tonight. It was an imposition for him to ask, but it would be a great favor if she could take a passenger with her. His niece, Eunice, who was in town for the day for the first time, wanted to go over there to get the train home.

Madge felt uncomfortable. When anyone in town mentioned Colchester and the Colchester Road, you felt uncomfortable these days. But to hear Mr. Tabor say it was even more disturbing.

"I was just about to leave," Madge said, "but if she can be ready fairly soon, I'll be delighted to take her along."

"She's ready now, Mrs. Haley," Mr. Tabor said faintly, as if from far away. "She'll be waiting on the porch. I have to leave, so I'll thank you now on her behalf."

He hung up, and Madge turned off the lights and went out to the car, still feeling uneasy. No woman liked to be reminded of what had happened to Mr. Tabor's wife. She'd been murdered while driving alone over the Colchester Road at night. The same thing had happened to another

girl, too, but that wasn't quite the same as someone you knew being murdered. Nobody in town knew the other girl. But Madge and Mrs. Tabor were nodding acquaintances in the town's supermarket and on Main Street.

The car started briskly, and Madge guided it two blocks ahead and one to the right. Through the gloom, she saw a figure waiting on the steps of Mr. Tabor's unlit house.

Madge opened the right-hand door.

"You're Eunice?" she called cheerfully. "I'm Mrs. Haley."

"It's very good of you," the girl answered in a flat voice. "I hope this doesn't put you out."

"Nonsense!" said Madge. "I'm glad to have company! Climb in. And toss your bag in back."

The girl obeyed silently. She was a little bit angular and a little bit clumsy. Her hat was severely plain. She wore spectacles that seemed to Madge to be tinted, although it was hard to tell in the faint glow from the street light up the block. She sat primly, her hands folded in her lap, as Madge turned and headed out of town.

Presently, the houses grew farther apart. Street lights no longer appeared. And on either side of the road, fields stretched out and dark masses of woodland showed beyond them. The road flowed smoothly toward them as Madge settled down for the forty-mile run to Colchester. It was really a beautiful evening; the pungent smells of growing things that rose out of the spring dark made Madge very glad to be young and alive and driving to meet her husband tonight. And at that, Madge was reminded again of Mrs. Tabor. One reason Mrs. Tabor's death had been especially horrible was because she was a bride and Mr. Tabor had been so happy and so proud of her.

"It's nice having someone with me," said Madge. "I really don't like driving at night. But my husband gets into Colchester at ten tonight, and if he waited for a bus he

wouldn't get home until after three in the morning. We have dreadful service here."

The girl was silent for a second, then said, "Yes." Madge's ear was caught again by the flat, low-pitched tone of Eunice's voice; it had no human quality at all. Eunice added, as if in apology for being curt, "But it isn't bad in the daytime."

"No," Madge agreed. She was silent for a space, then said, "How did Mr. Tabor know I was driving over?"

The girl hesitated before she answered. "I guess somebody mentioned it."

"They'd hardly—" Then Madge stopped. She realized that although she never would speak of the Colchester Road to Mr. Tabor, for fear of hurting him, others might not feel the same. "I got the gas and oil and tires checked today. I guess I mentioned to Bob—the filling-station attendant—where I was going. I guess that's the answer."

The girl said, "Probably," and sat quietly, her hands in her lap. The road made a sharp bend and woodland closed in on them. The air was chilly among the trees, and then it warmed again as the woods dropped away and they were on a clear stretch once more.

"Mrs. Haley," the girl said suddenly, "do you carry a pistol when you drive at night?"

Madge jumped a little. She laughed, although not quite with ease.

"Good heavens, no. Why?" Then she said, "But I suppose your uncle thinks women should."

She felt queer. She was going to drive over the highway on which Mrs. Tabor had been killed twelve months before. There had never been any clue to the killer. It was just assumed that somehow Mrs. Tabor—who also had been on her way to meet her husband—had been persuaded to stop her car and pick up someone. The car was found later. It had been sprinkled with gasoline and set on fire, and any

clues it might have yielded were destroyed. Mrs. Tabor, meanwhile, had been found bludgeoned to death. There were other details, but that was the way the local paper phrased it.

She heard herself saying with morbid interest, "How long had your uncle and—Mrs. Tabor been married?"

"About three months," the girl said. She added in the same expressionless manner, "We're near the turnoff, aren't we?"

"Why, yes," said Madge. She grew confused. One doesn't expect a newcomer to know such things. She didn't remember Mr. Tabor's niece ever having visited him before, and she'd more or less assumed that she was a complete stranger. As far as that went, Mr. Tabor wasn't a longtime resident himself. He'd come to town about a year and a half ago to accept a rather good position. And after three months he married and brought his bride to town.

Only three months after that, Mrs. Tabor had started to drive to Colchester one night, and the murder had occurred. Madge remembered clearly and uncomfortably the first time she'd seen Mr. Tabor after the murder. He was a small man, and he'd looked shrunken and mummy-like by then. But he didn't go away. He stayed on, living in the house in which he'd spent his honeymoon. Madge couldn't understand his doing that.

The car came to the turnoff. There was nothing conspicuous about it. It was just a secondary road that branched off the main highway and wound across country to Colchester. In thirty-five miles you could see on it only one small country store and maybe four or five farmhouses, set far back from the highway. Most of its length the road cut straight through heavy woods.

Madge turned into it. The air was fragrant with the aro-

matic smell of pine. It was cooler, too. But one no longer had the feeling of being in open space. Above and ahead there was a narrow ribbon of sky in which stars shone brightly. The headlights stabbed on and showed pine-tree trunks alongside, and more pine-tree trunks. There was a bare screen of underbrush at the road's edge.

The angular figure beside Madge said, "Lonely in here, isn't it?"

Madge pressed harder on the accelerator. The car picked up speed.

"One thing's certain," she said, trying to smile, "nobody could make *me* stop to pick them up on this road!"

"Mrs. Tabor—Aunt Clara, I suppose I should call her," Eunice said, "didn't pick up people, either. But that night she did."

Madge set her lips and drove. Presently she said awkwardly, "Eunice, has Mr. Tabor ever had any idea of who—who killed Mrs. Tabor?"

Eunice said impassively, "There's always the chance that the man who did it will be caught." There was a slight pause. "Another girl was killed six months later, you remember."

Madge suddenly regretted deeply that she had not made some excuse to avoid riding with Eunice. It was bad to be reminded of Mrs. Tabor. But to be reminded at the same time of that other battered body of an unknown girl made it worse. The police were never able to find out even so much as her name. All that was known was that she had been dead six weeks or so when her body was found by some local hunters.

"Your uncle," said Madge, "is staying in town, then, in the hope of catching his wife's murderer?"

Eunice answered quickly, "The same man killed that other girl. There was a scorched road map under her body

when they found it. Apparently she was driving, too. Only the killer got rid of her car. It's never been found. But obviously it was the same man. The crimes were identical."

Madge said, shocked, "But that means—"

"That the killer is still around," said the flat voice. "His name was even given to the police. But they didn't believe it for an instant. He's too well thought of."

"You—you talk as if you know who the killer is!" protested Madge.

Eunice said, almost scornfully, "Of course."

The car swept past a small field of shoulder-high weeds. Just before the woods enveloped them again, there was a sudden sweetness in the air. Honeysuckle. Then the damp, aromatic smell of pine once more. Madge was sensitive to odors. Consciously or otherwise, she associated some scent with everyone she knew. All her friends, certainly. Now she suddenly realized one of the things that made this girl Eunice seem strange. She did not use scent. Not even a scented soap.

Madge's forehead began to knit into a faint frown. Her heart started pounding oddly, as if in anticipation of something that would occur to her presently. She said uneasily, "Even if Mrs. Tabor's murderer were caught, I can see that it might be hard to convict him now. My husband's a lawyer, and he says the evidence in such cases has to be airtight."

The voice beside her said in a detached way, "There was no motive for those particular women to be killed. A jury wants to see a motive for a crime, naturally. Preferably a motive they could feel themselves."

Madge admitted uncomfortably, "My husband said something like that. . . ."

She fumbled in the handbag beside her.

"You drive," said the flat voice. "I'll light your cigarette."

Madge ignored the quick impulse she had to decline. She knew she shouldn't take her eyes off the road when she was driving this fast. She felt a cigarette touch her lips. Then Eunice snapped a lighter. Its tiny flame rose up before Madge's face. She glanced down. The car wavered. Then the wheel resisted the skidding tires and the car righted itself. The wheel was being held. Madge felt sheer paralysis numb every muscle in her body.

"I've got the wheel," Eunice said.

Madge remembered to puff. The cigarette was lit and the lighter withdrawn. The wheel was released.

Everything was as before. The car went swiftly between the tall tree trunks. There was the same clean smell of damp underbrush and pine. Everything seemed exactly as it was before.

But everything was very different. Madge's whole body was cold. Her heart was hammering hysterically.

In that one glance down at the flame as it was held to her cigarette, she had seen Eunice's hand closely and clearly lit. The fingernails were innocent of nail polish. Their ends were not rounded, but square, like a man's. The knuckles were like a man's. There were short black hairs on the back of the hand. Like a man's.

Eunice was a man!

A voice inside Madge's brain chattered hysterically, You aren't sure it was Mr. Tabor on the phone . . . he talked as if he had a cold . . . it could have been anybody. It wasn't Mr. Tabor at all! It was somebody who wanted to ride with you!

There was a light by the side of the road ahead. Numbed as she was, Madge drove on blindly. She saw other lights, which were windows, and knew dumbly that it was the single store between the cutoff and Colchester. But she was a quarter of a mile beyond it before she realized that she

could have stopped there. She could have swerved the car and crashed it against something, and people would have run out and she would have been safe.

But it was too late now. She went on driving. The muscles of her throat were constricted. The car sped through the darkness, its headlights flaring before it; and now and again a moth fluttered helplessly in their rays. Once a pair of eyes glittered by the roadside. As the car sped past she saw it was a cat, miles from any house, crouching in the grass at the road's edge.

"Women really should carry pistols when they drive at night," said the voice beside her. "But maybe they wouldn't have the nerve to use them."

Madge made an inarticulate sound. Then an idea came to her. If she could keep him talking. . . .

"I doubt that I could shoot anyone," she said. Listening to her own voice, she was astounded. It sounded quite human, almost convincing. "I couldn't imagine harming another human being."

Her passenger said quietly, "I don't know that the man who killed Mrs. Tabor and the girl who was never identified could be called human. He possibly couldn't help it. But—there used to be stories about werewolves."

"Oh, but that's nonsense! People can't turn into wolves," Madge said nervously.

"Some people turn into something," said the figure beside her. "Once in a year or once in six months they feel something stirring in their minds. Their eyes change. They glow—they're bright and restless and terribly intent. They feel unbearable tension. They're obsessed. And they have to kill."

Madge expected to hear herself scream. But her voice went on with incredible control. "Then the psychiatrists ought to watch out for the bright-eyed people."

"Oh, but people like that are cunning," her passenger said softly. "They don't let anybody notice their eyes." The unbecomingly hatted head turned toward Madge. In the dim light from the instrument panel the tinted spectacles regarded her in a wholly inhuman way.

"You see," Madge's passenger said confidentially, "I've studied about them. I wanted to understand. And it seems that there have always been such people. In old days they killed like wolves, and wolves were blamed. So the story of the werewolf began—the story of a person who got into a house in human form and then turned into a wild beast to kill and rend and tear his victim. It was wonderfully clever of the people who kill to start that story." The figure in the seat beside Madge seemed strangely amused.

"But I can't believe that—" Then Madge's throat clicked and she could not speak at all.

Her passenger sat quite still. The hands were folded primly. Somehow, the quiet was more menacing than any muttered threats would have been. Madge's hands and arms didn't tremble, because they felt paralyzed. But the wheel rolled a little unsteadily.

"I suppose they're frightened after they've killed," her companion went on. "They would be. But they learn cunning. They never live in one place very long. They kill once or twice or maybe three times, and then they move away. But they act like very nice people on the surface, and their friends are sorry to see them go. They never dare to get too prosperous, however. When they're doing well it would be a temptation to stay on. And then they'd kill maybe a fourth or fifth time in the same place. And that would hardly be wise. Oh, they're cunning. They have to be."

The woods thinned for a moment. Far away a single uninking dot of light indicated an isolated farmhouse, far from any neighbors. Then the trees closed in once more, and Madge knew that from here to the very outskirts of

Colchester there would be no other light. She heard her voice say brightly, "Let's talk of something else! Why choose such a gruesome subject, Eunice?"

"Mrs. Tabor was killed somewhere along here," her passenger said softly.

Then Madge's hands began to shake. It was not a mere trembling, but an uncontrollable shake. The road was very straight here, and a long way ahead there was a light—a tiny red light. She pressed on the accelerator and found herself praying agonizedly that the man beside her in a woman's dress wouldn't notice the spot of light until she had caught up with it.

The man beside her continued quietly.

"You had your car checked today, Mrs. Haley. You mentioned at the filling station that you would be driving to meet your husband at the Colchester station. That wasn't discreet. People still talk about Mrs. Tabor's murder. The filling-station attendant mentioned that you'd be driving the same way tonight—the same way she did. If the killer heard about it. . . ."

Madge was willing now to keep him talking on any subject—even this, until she caught up with whatever was ahead.

"Oh, but I'm sure no one would think—"

"Someone would. Somebody who was obsessed, who felt unbearable tension inside. Someone who knew the time had come when he had to kill."

"Why," Madge said with effort, "why—you speak as if someone planned to—to kill me!"

The figure beside her said softly, "I wouldn't be surprised. I wouldn't be surprised at all."

Then the voice changed. "There's something on the road ahead! It looks like an accident."

The light was not moving. She overhauled it swiftly. If she could only get to where someone else was, no matter who. . . . Then she knew not only what was in the road ahead but whose lights had been turned up, and she could see who it was. She recognized the red motorcycle on which Bob, the boy from the filling station, dashed about town. It lay there, its lights slanting brightly across the road. There was Bob, limping out into the glare. He had a bandage on one leg.

"I've got to stop," Madge said. "I know him. It's Bob, from the filling station. He was the one who checked my car today."

The figure beside her seemed to relax. A crazy, frantic hope came to Madge. The masquerading man must be armed. But wouldn't he hesitate to try to kill a man *and* a woman? A woman alone would be a certain victim. But if she could get Bob into the car, the figure that pretended to be Eunice might sit quietly and get out in Colchester—and nothing would happen at all. . . .

The brakes squealed shrilly. The car stopped. There was some spilled gasoline on the road, and Bob, limping, almost hopping, in the headlight rays. He came to the window beside Madge.

"Mrs. Haley!" he said with relief. "I was hoping you'd be coming along behind me, instead of having gone on ahead. I hit something in the road and skidded, and my leg's all messed up—"

He stopped. He'd seen that Madge was not alone.

She said unsteadily, "Bob, this is—Eunice. Mr. Tabor's niece. She's riding to Colchester with me."

"Oh," said Bob.

"Get in the back seat," said Madge urgently. "You'll want a doctor. I'll rush you over to Colchester."

Bob hesitated. "I don't know. . . . I hate to leave my

bike. All I need is somebody to help me get it standing up. With one bum leg I can't do it, but I don't need much help. It's not too heavy. . . ."

The quiet voice beside Madge said, "I'll help. I've got a pair of heavy gloves in my suitcase. I'll get them out and help, if you'll pull up a little so we won't block the road, Mrs. Haley."

Bob went limping back to his motorcycle to wait. Madge was buoyed by hope. She pulled ahead and over to the side of the road.

The man beside her said softly, "A little farther. Don't stop the motor, Mrs. Haley. . . ." And then he turned and spoke rapidly, intensely. "Mrs. Haley, I'm John Tabor. My wife was killed near here by someone she knew. She would never have given a stranger a ride. She'd had her car checked that day at the filling station—she was worried about driving alone at night."

Madge gasped and tried to speak.

"I've been watching everyone who could be a suspect," Mr. Tabor told her. "I finally singled out Bob. I noticed him acting strangely just after—just after my wife's death, and then again six months ago. Nothing happened immediately. Only—then they found that other girl's body and she'd been dead just six weeks. I knew then I was right, and I became sure of it as I watched. Tonight he knew you were coming. He said so. You'd have stopped for him, too; you know him. Just as my wife did."

Madge's hands worked together.

Mr. Tabor leaned closer. "He thinks I'm a woman. I'll start back. Then he'll call to you to stop your motor and help. He's quite sure he'll have both of us for victims tonight."

"But—what shall I do?" Madge was close to tears.

"Just drive on," John Tabor said. "That's all. I think he's going to be surprised tonight."

The angular figure went back along the highway's edge. Madge sat stiff as a doll at the wheel of the idling car.

There was no light except the narrow ribbon of stars overhead and the patch of road lighted by the motorcycle's beam. Bob was silhouetted against the lighted space. He watched the small, skirted figure as it approached him. And as Madge looked, Bob seemed to change.

He was a black shape against a lighted background. And the shape changed—very gradually—from that of a tall young man favoring an injured leg to that of an animal crouched to spring. One of the arms moved slowly, and it came back into silhouette, holding a heavy object. The hand that held it swayed it gently back and forth, making ready. . . .

Then Bob spoke. "Mrs. Haley," he called, "if you'll turn off your motor and come help, too, it won't be any jot at all to get the bike up and going."

Madge couldn't force an answer. Then the crouched figure began to move forward with a swift, rolling gait. And it did not limp! The injured leg was a trick, too.

Madge let in the clutch. She never remembered driving those last ten miles to Colchester. It was her body that did it, taking charge while her mind was filled with a kaleidoscope of terrifying scenes. So this was the way Mrs. Tabor had been killed. She'd stopped at the filling station, as Madge had done, to check her car for the night-drive. And she'd chatted with Bob and told him where she was headed.

The unknown girl must have been driving through. And she'd stopped for gasoline, too, and told Bob she planned to drive to Colchester that night. After her body was found, there still was nothing for the police to go on. Mr. Tabor's

talk of glittering eyes wasn't enough even to justify an investigation. It wasn't anything at all without evidence. So Mr. Tabor could only wait patiently for that look to come into Bob's eyes again, and then find out what woman would be driving alone and drive with her.

Madge drove like the wind until the lights of Colchester showed through the trees. Then she slowed the car and took it sedately into Colchester. She stopped at the town's one red traffic light and parked with trembling precision by the railroad station. Then she sat still, shaking. She couldn't speak. She couldn't tell anyone. . . .

For days after that, Madge stayed home, tense and shivering. The first time she went out she saw Mr. Tabor on the street. He lifted his hat politely. She nodded distantly and hurried on.

And shortly after that he moved to another town.

IN THE VAULT

by H. P. Lovecraft

THERE is nothing more absurd, as I view it, than that conventional association of the homely and the wholesome which seems to pervade the psychology of the multitude. Mention a bucolic Yankee setting, a bungling and thick-fibered village undertaker, and a careless mishap in a tomb, and no average reader can be brought to expect more than a hearty albeit grotesque phase of comedy. God knows, though, that the prosy tale which George Birch's death permits me to tell has in it aspects beside which some of our darkest tragedies are light.

Birch acquired a limitation and changed his business in 1881, yet never discussed the case when he could avoid it. Neither did his old physician, Doctor Davis, who died years ago. It was generally stated that the affliction and shock were results of an unlucky slip whereby Birch had locked himself for nine hours in the receiving-tomb of Peck Valley Cemetery, escaping only by crude and disastrous mechanical means; but while this much was undoubtedly true, there were other and blacker things which the man used to whisper to me in his drunken delirium toward the last. He confided in me because I was his doctor, and because he probably felt the need of confiding in some one else after Davis died. He was a bachelor, wholly without relatives.

Birch, before 1881, had been the village undertaker of Peck Valley, and was a very calloused and primitive speci-

men even as such specimens go. The practises I heard attributed to him would be unbelievable today, at least in a city; and even Peck Valley would have shuddered a bit had it known the easy ethics of its mortuary artist in such matters as the ownership of costly "laying-out" apparel invisible beneath the casket's lid, and the degrees of dignity to be maintained in posing and adapting the unseen members of lifeless tenants to containers not always calculated with sublimest accuracy. Most distinctly Birch was lax, insensitive, and professionally undesirable; yet I still think he was not an evil man. He was merely crass of fiber and function—thoughtless, careless, and liquorish, as his easily avoidable accident proves, and without that modicum of imagination which holds the average citizen within certain limits fixed by taste.

Just where to begin Birch's story I can hardly decide, since I am no practised teller of tales. I suppose one should start in the cold December of 1880, when the ground froze and the cemetery delvers found they could dig no more graves till spring. Fortunately the village was small and the death rate low, so that it was possible to give all of Birch's inanimate charges a temporary haven in the single antiquated receiving-tomb. The undertaker grew doubly lethargic in the bitter weather, and seemed to outdo even himself in carelessness. Never did he knock together flimsier and ungainlier caskets, nor disregard more flagrantly the needs of the rusty lock on the tomb door which he slammed open and shut with such nonchalant abandon.

At last the spring thaw came, and graves were laboriously prepared for the nine silent harvests of the grim reaper which waited in the tomb. Birch, though dreading the bother of removal and interment, began his task of transference one disagreeable April morning, but ceased before noon because of a heavy rain that seemed to irritate his horse, after having laid but one body to its permanent rest.

That was Darius Peck, the nonagenarian, whose grave was not far from the tomb. Birch decided that he would begin the next day with little old Matthew Fenner, whose grave was also near by; but actually postponed the matter for three days, not getting to work until Good Friday, the fifteenth. Being without superstition, he did not heed the day at all; though ever afterward he refused to do anything of importance on that fateful sixth day of the week. Certainly, the events of that evening greatly changed George Birch.

On the afternoon of Friday, April fifteenth, then, Birch set out for the tomb with horse and wagon to transfer the body of Matthew Fenner. That he was not perfectly sober, he subsequently admitted; though he had not then taken to the wholesale drinking by which he later tried to forget certain things. He was just dizzy and careless enough to annoy his sensitive horse, which as he drew it viciously up at the tomb neighed and pawed and tossed its head, much as on that former occasion when the rain had seemingly vexed it. The day was clear, but a high wind had sprung up; and Birch was glad to get to shelter, as he unlocked the iron door and entered the side-hill vault. Another might not have relished the damp, odorous chamber with the eight carelessly placed coffins; but Birch in those days was insensitive, and was concerned only in getting the right coffin for the right grave. He had not forgotten the criticism aroused when Hannah Bixby's relatives, wishing to transport her body to the cemetery in the city whither they had moved, found the casket of Judge Capwell beneath her headstone.

The light was dim, but Birch's sight was good, and he did not get Asaph Sawyer's coffin by mistake, although it was very similar. He had, indeed, made that coffin for Matthew Fenner; but had cast it aside at last as too awkward and flimsy, in a fit of curious sentimentality aroused by recalling how kindly and generous the little old man had been to

him during his bankruptcy five years before. He gave old Matt the very best his skill could produce, but was thrifty enough to save the rejected specimen, and to use it when Asaph Sawyer died of a malignant fever. Sawyer was not a lovable man, and many stories were told of his almost inhuman vindictiveness and tenacious memory for wrongs real or fancied. To him Birch had felt no compunction in assigning the carelessly made coffin which he now pushed out of the way in his quest for the Fenner casket.

It was just as he had recognized old Matt's coffin that the door slammed to in the wind, leaving him in a dusk even deeper than before. The narrow transom admitted only the feeblest rays, and the overhead ventilation funnel virtually none at all; so that he was reduced to a profane fumbling as he made his halting way among the long boxes toward the latch. In this funereal twilight he rattled the rusty handles, pushed at the iron panels, and wondered why the massive portal had grown so suddenly recalcitrant. In this twilight, too, he began to realize the truth and to shout loudly as if his horse outside could do more than neigh an unsympathetic reply. For the long-neglected latch was obviously broken, leaving the careless undertaker trapped in the vault, a victim of his own oversight.

The thing must have happened at about three-thirty in the afternoon. Birch, being by temperament phlegmatic and practical, did not shout long; but proceeded to grope about for some tools which he recalled seeing in a corner of the tomb. It is doubtful whether he was touched at all by the horror and exquisite weirdness of his position, but the bald fact of imprisonment so far from the daily paths of men was enough to exasperate him thoroughly. His day's work was sadly interrupted, and unless chance presently brought some rambler hither, he might have to remain all night or longer. The pile of tools soon reached, and a hammer and chisel selected, Birch returned over the coffins to

the door. The air had begun to be exceedingly unwholesome, but to this detail he paid no attention as he toiled, half by feeling, at the heavy and corroded metal of the latch. He would have given much for a lantern or bit of candle; but, lacking these, bungled semi-sightlessly as best he might.

When he perceived that the latch was hopelessly unyielding, at least to such meager tools and under such tenebrous conditions as these, Birch glanced about for other possible points of escape. The vault had been dug from a side-hill, so that the narrow ventilation funnel in the top ran through several feet of earth, making this direction utterly useless to consider. Over the door, however, the high, slit-like transom in the brick façade gave promise of possible enlargement to a diligent worker; hence upon this his eyes long rested as he racked his brains for means to reach it. There was nothing like a ladder in the tomb, and the coffin niches on the sides and rear, which Birch seldom took the trouble to use, afforded no ascent to the space above the door. Only the coffins themselves remained as potential stepping-stones, and as he considered these he speculated on the best mode of arranging them. Three coffin-heights, he reckoned, would permit him to reach the transom; but he could do better with four. The boxes were fairly even, and could be piled up like blocks; so he began to compute how he might most stably use the eight to rear a scalable platform four deep. As he planned, he could not but wish that the units of his contemplated staircase had been more securely made. Whether he had imagination enough to wish they were empty, is strongly to be doubted.

Finally he decided to lay a base of three parallel with the wall, to place upon this two layers of two each, and upon these a single box to serve as the platform. This arrangement could be ascended with a minimum of awkwardness, and would furnish the desired height. Better still, though, he would utilize only two boxes of the base to support the

superstructure, leaving one free to be piled on top in case the actual feat of escape required an even greater altitude. And so the prisoner toiled in the twilight, heaving the unresponsive remnants of mortality with little ceremony as his miniature Tower of Babel rose course by course. Several of the coffins began to split under the stress of handling, and he planned to save the stoutly built casket of little Matthew Fenner for the top, in order that his feet might have as certain a surface as possible. In the semi-gloom he trusted mostly to touch to select the right one, and indeed came upon it almost by accident, since it tumbled into his hands as if through some odd volition after he had unwittingly placed it beside another on the third layer.

The tower at length finished, and his aching arms rested by a pause during which he sat on the bottom step of his grim device, Birch cautiously ascended with his tools and stood abreast of the narrow transom. The borders of the space were entirely of brick, and there seemed little doubt but that he could shortly chisel away enough to allow his body to pass. As his hammer blows began to fall, the horse outside whinnied in a tone which may have been encouraging and may have been mocking. In either case, it would have been appropriate, for the unexpected tenacity of the easy-looking brickwork was surely a sardonic commentary on the vanity of mortal hopes, and the source of a task whose performance deserved every possible stimulus.

Dusk fell and found Birch still toiling. He worked largely by feeling now, since newly-gathered clouds hid the moon; and though progress was still slow, he felt heartened at the extent of his encroachments on the top and bottom of the aperture. He could, he was sure, get out by midnight; though it is characteristic of him that this thought was untinged with eery implications. Undisturbed by oppressive reflections on the time, the place, and the company

beneath his feet, he philosophically chipped away the stony brick-work, cursing when a fragment hit him in the face, and laughing when one struck the increasingly excited horse that pawed near the cypress tree. In time the hole grew so large that he ventured to try his body in it now and then, shifting about so that the coffins beneath him rocked and creaked. He would not, he found, have to pile another on his platform to make the proper height, for the hole was on exactly the right level to use as soon at its size would permit.

It must have been midnight at least when Birch decided he could get through the transom. Tired and perspiring despite many rests, he descended to the floor and sat a while on the bottom box to gather strength for the final wriggle and leap to the ground outside. The hungry horse was neighing repeatedly and almost uncannily, and he vaguely wished it would stop. He was curiously unelated over his impending escape, and almost dreaded the exertion, for his form had the indolent stoutness of early middle age.

As he remounted the splitting coffins he felt his weight very poignantly; especially when, upon reaching the top-most one, he heard that aggravated crackle which bespeaks the wholesale rending of wood. He had, it seems, planned in vain when choosing the stoutest coffin for the platform; for no sooner was his full bulk again upon it than the rotting lid gave way, jouncing him two feet down on a surface which even he did not care to imagine. Maddened by the sound, or by the stench which billowed forth even to the open air, the waiting horse gave a scream that was too frantic for a neigh, and plunged madly off through the night, the wagon rattling crazily behind it.

Birch, in his ghastly situation, was now too low for an easy scramble out of the enlarged transom, but gathered his energies for a determined try. Clutching the edges of

the aperture, he sought to pull himself up, when he noticed a queer retardation in the form of an apparent drag on both his ankles. In another moment he knew fear for the first time that night; for struggle as he would, he could not shake clear of the unknown grasp which held his feet in relentless captivity. Horrible pains, as of savage wounds, shot through his calves; and in his mind was a vortex of fright mixed with an unquenchable materialism that suggested splinters, loose nails, or some other attribute of a breaking wooden box. Perhaps he screamed. At any rate, he kicked and squirmed frantically and automatically whilst his consciousness was almost eclipsed in a half-swoon.

Instinct guided him in his wriggle through the transom, and in the crawl which followed his jarring thud on the damp ground. He could not walk, it appeared, and the emerging moon must have witnessed a horrible sight as he dragged his bleeding ankles toward the cemetery lodge, his fingers clawing the black mold in brainless haste, and his body responding with that maddening slowness from which one suffers when chased by the phantoms of nightmare. There was evidently, however, no pursuer; for he was alone and alive when Armington, the lodge-keeper, responded to his feeble clawing at the door.

Armington helped Birch to the outside of a spare bed and sent his little son Edwin for Doctor Davis. The afflicted man was fully conscious, but would say nothing of any consequence, merely muttering such things as "Oh, my ankles!", "Let go!", or ". . . shut in the tomb." Then the doctor came with his medicine-case and asked crisp questions, and removed the patient's outer clothing, shoes and socks. The wounds—for both ankles were frightfully lacerated about the Achilles tendons—seemed to puzzle the old physician greatly, and finally almost to frighten him. His questioning grew more than medically tense, and his

hands shook as he dressed the mangled members, binding them as if he wished to get the wounds out of sight as quickly as possible.

For an impersonal doctor, Davis's ominous and awe-struck cross-examination became very strange indeed as he sought to drain from the weakened undertaker every last detail of his horrible experience. He was oddly anxious to know if Birch were sure—absolutely sure—of the identity of that top coffin of the pile, how he had chosen it, how he had been certain of it as the Fenner coffin in the dark, and how he had distinguished it from the inferior duplicate coffin of vicious Asaph Sawyer. Would the firm Fenner casket have caved in so readily? Davis, an old-time village practitioner, had of course seen both at the respective funerals, as indeed he had attended both Fenner and Sawyer in their last illnesses. He had even wondered, at Sawyer's funeral, how the vindictive farmer had managed to lie straight in a box so closely akin to that of the diminutive Fenner.

After a full two hours Doctor Davis left, urging Birch to insist at all times that his wounds were due entirely to loose nails and splintering wood. What else, he added, could ever in any case be proved or believed? But it would be well to say as little as could be said, and to let no other doctor treat the wounds. Birch heeded this advice all the rest of his life until he told me his story, and when I saw the scars—ancient and whitened as they then were—I agreed that he was wise in so doing. He always remained lame, for the great tendons had been severed; but I think the greatest lameness was in his soul. His thinking processes, once so phlegmatic and logical, had become ineffably scarred, and it was pitiful to note his reaction to certain chance allusions such as "Friday," "tomb," "coffin," and words of less obvious concatenation. His frightened horse had gone home, but his frightened wits never quite did that. He changed

his business, but something always preyed upon him. It may have been just fear, and it may have been fear mixed with a queer belated sort of remorse for bygone crudities. His drinking, of course, only aggravated what he sought to alleviate.

When Doctor Davis left Birch that night, he had taken a lantern and gone to the old receiving-tomb. The moon was shining on the scattered brick fragments and marred façade, and the latch of the great door yielded readily to a touch from the outside. Steeled by old ordeals in dissecting-rooms, the doctor entered and looked about, stifling the nausea of mind and body that everything in sight and smell induced. He cried aloud once, and a little later gave a gasp that was more terrible than a cry. Then he fled back to the lodge and broke all the rules of his calling by rousing and shaking his patient, and hurling at him a succession of shuddering whispers that seared into the bewildered ears like the hissing of vitriol.

"It was Asaph's coffin, Birch, just as I thought! I knew his teeth, with the front ones missing on the upper jaw—never, for God's sake, show those wounds! The body was pretty badly gone, but if ever I saw vindictiveness on any face—or former face! . . . You know what a fiend he was for revenge—how he ruined old Raymond thirty years after their boundary suit, and how he stepped on the puppy that snapped at him a year ago last August. . . . He was the devil incarnate, Birch, and I believe his eye-for-an-eye fury could beat time and death! God, his rage—I'd hate to have it aimed at me!

"Why did you do it, Birch? He was a scoundrel, and I don't blame you for giving him a cast-aside coffin, but you always did go too damned far! Well enough to skimp on the thing in some way, but you knew what a little man old Fenner was.

"I'll never get the picture out of my head as long as I live.

You kicked hard, for Asaph's coffin was on the floor. His head was broken in, and everything was tumbled about. I've seen sights before, but there was one thing too much here. An eye for an eye! Great heavens, Birch, but you got what you deserved! The skull turned my stomach, but the other was worse—*those ankles cut neatly off to fit Matt Fenner's cast-aside coffin!*"

THE DIARY OF A MADMAN

by Guy de Maupassant

HE WAS dead—the head of a high tribunal, the upright magistrate, whose irreproachable life was a proverb in all the courts of France. Advocates, young counselors, judges had saluted, bowing low in token of profound respect, remembering that grand face, pale and thin, illumined by two bright, deep-set eyes.

He had passed his life in pursuing crime and in protecting the weak. Swindlers and murderers had no more redoubtable enemy, for he seemed to read in the recesses of their souls their most secret thoughts.

He was dead, now, at the age of eighty-two, honored by the homage and followed by the regrets of a whole people. Soldiers in red breeches had escorted him to the tomb, and men in white cravats had shed on his grave tears that seemed to be real.

But listen to the strange paper found by the dismayed notary in the desk where the judge had kept filed the records of great criminals! It was entitled:

WHY?

June 20, 1851. I have just left court. I have condemned Blonde to death! Now, why did this man kill his five children? Frequently one meets with people to whom killing is a pleasure. Yes, yes, it should be a pleasure—the greatest

of all, perhaps, for is not killing most like eating? To make and to destroy! These two words contain the history of the universe, the history of all worlds, all that is, all! Why is it not intoxicating to kill?

June 25. To think that there is a being who lives, who walks, who runs. A being? What is a being? An animated thing which bears in it the principle of motion, and a will ruling that principle. It clings to nothing, this thing. Its feet are independent of the ground. It is a grain of life that moves on the earth, and this grain of life, coming I know not whence, one can destroy at one's will. Then nothing—nothing more. It perishes; it is finished.

June 26. Why, then, is it a crime to kill? Yes, why? On the contrary, it is the law of nature. Every being has the mission to kill; he kills to live, and he lives to kill. The beast kills without ceasing, all day, every instant of its existence. Man kills without ceasing, to nourish himself; but since in addition he needs to kill for pleasure, he has invented the chase! The child kills the insects he finds, the little birds, all the little animals that come in his way. But this does not suffice for the irresistible need of massacre that is in us. It is not enough to kill beasts; we must kill man too. Long ago this need was satisfied by human sacrifice. Now, the necessity of living in society has made murder a crime. We condemn and punish the assassin! But as we cannot live without yielding to this natural and imperious instinct of death, we relieve ourselves, from time to time, by wars. Then a whole nation slaughters another nation. It is a feast of blood, a feast that maddens armies and intoxicates the civilians, women and children, who read, by lamplight at night, the feverish story of massacre.

And do we despise those picked out to accomplish these butcheries of men? No, they are loaded with honors. They are clad in gold and in resplendent stuffs; they wear plumes on their heads and ornaments on their breasts; and they

are given crosses, rewards, titles of every kind. They are proud, respected, loved by women, cheered by the crowd, solely because their mission is to shed human blood! They drag through the streets their instruments of death, and the passer-by, clad in black, looks on with envy. For to kill is the great law put by nature in the heart of existence! There is nothing more beautiful and honorable than killing!

June 30. To kill is the law, because Nature loves eternal youth. She seems to cry in all her unconscious acts: "Quick! quick! quick!" The more she destroys, the more she renews herself.

July 3. It must be a pleasure, unique and full of zest, to kill: to place before you a living, thinking being; to make therein a little hole, nothing but a little hole, and to see that red liquid flow which is the blood, which is the life; and then to have before you only a heap of limp flesh, cold, void of thought!

August 5. I, who have passed my life in judgment, condemning, killing by words pronounced, killing by the guillotine those who had killed by the knife, if I should do as all the assassins whom I have smitten have done, I, I—who would know it?

August 10. Who would ever know? Who would ever suspect me, especially if I should choose a being I had no interest in doing away with?

August 22. I could resist no longer. I have killed a little creature as an experiment, as a beginning. Jean, my servant, had a goldfinch in a cage hung in the office window. I sent him on an errand, and I took the little bird in my hand, in my hand where I felt its heart beat. It was warm. I went up to my room. From time to time I squeezed it tighter; its heart beat faster; it was atrocious and delicious. I was nearly choking it. But I could not see the blood.

Then I took scissors, short nail scissors, and I cut its throat in three strokes, quite gently. It opened its bill, it

struggled to escape me, but I held it, oh! I held it—I could have held a mad dog—and I saw the blood trickle.

And then I did as assassins do—real ones. I washed the scissors and washed my hands. I sprinkled water, and took the body, the corpse, to the garden to hide it. I buried it under a strawberry-plant. It will never be found. Every day I can eat a strawberry from that plant. How one can enjoy life, when one knows how!

My servant cried; he thought his bird flown. How could he suspect me? Ah!

August 25. I must kill a man! I must!

August 30. It is done. But what a little thing! I had gone for a walk in the forest of Vernes. I was thinking of nothing; literally nothing. See! a child on the road, a little child eating a slice of bread and butter. He stops to see me pass and says, "Good day, Mr. President."

And the thought enters my head: "Shall I kill him?"

I answer: "You are alone, my boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"All alone in the wood?"

"Yes, sir."

The wish to kill him intoxicated me like wine. I approached him quite softly, persuaded that he was going to run away. And suddenly I seized him by the throat. He held my wrists in his little hands, and his body writhed like a feather on the fire. Then he moved no more. I threw the body in the ditch, then some weeds on top of it. I returned home and dined well. What a little thing it was! In the evening I was very gay, light, rejuvenated, and passed the evening at the Prefect's. They found me witty. But I have not seen blood! I am not tranquil.

August 31. The body has been discovered. They are hunting for the assassin. Ah!

September 1. Two tramps have been arrested. Proofs are lacking.

September 2. The parents have been to see me. They wept! Ah!

October 6. Nothing has been discovered. Some strolling vagabond must have done the deed. Ah! If I had seen the blood flow it seems to me I should be tranquil now!

October 10. Yet another. I was walking by the river, after breakfast. And I saw, under a willow, a fisherman asleep. It was noon. A spade, as if expressly put there for me, was standing in a potato-field near by.

I took it. I returned; I raised it like a club, and with one blow of the edge I cleft the fisherman's head. Oh! he bled, this one!—rose-colored blood. It flowed into the water quite gently. And I went away with a grave step. If I had been seen! Ah! I should have made an excellent assassin.

October 25. The affair of the fisherman makes a great noise. His nephew, who fished with him, is charged with the murder.

October 26. The examining magistrate affirms that the nephew is guilty. Everybody in town believes it. Ah! ah!

October 27. The nephew defends himself badly. He had gone to the village to buy bread and cheese, he declares. He swears that his uncle had been killed in his absence! Who would believe him?

October 28. The nephew has all but confessed, so much have they made him lose his head! Ah! Justice!

November 15. There are overwhelming proofs against the nephew, who was his uncle's heir. I shall preside at the sessions.

January 25, 1852. To death! to death! to death! I have had him condemned to death! The advocate-general spoke like an angel! Ah! Yet another! I shall go to see him executed!

March 10. It is done. They guillotined him this morning. He died very well! very well! That gave me pleasure! How fine it is to see a man's head cut off!

Now, I shall wait, I can wait. It would take such a little thing to let myself be caught.

The manuscript contained more pages, but told of no new crime.

Alienist physicians to whom the awful story has been submitted declare that there are in the world many unknown madmen, as adroit and as terrible as this monstrous lunatic.

THE TOOL

by William Fryer Harvey

I LIKE the long south corridor, with its light-coloured walls and low windows looking on to the garden. I do my writing there, for it is very quiet, especially when Jellerby is off colour and is obliged to keep to his room. He calls himself a Social Democrat, and is eloquent on the rights of man—a wonderfully fluent speaker, with facts and figures at his finger-tips to drive home every argument. But one tires of that sort of thing very easily. Of the two I would rather listen to Charlie Lovel recite his endless pedigree, as he sits dribbling over his knitting.

I cannot help smiling to myself when I think of yesterday's sermon. Canon Eldred was the preacher, and was obviously ill at ease, as indeed I should have been in similar circumstances. He has a red cheerful face, with comfortable folds of flesh about the chin; a typical healthy-minded Philistine, whom it did one good to see. However, he was there to speak to us. He took as his theme the Duty of Cheerfulness. The subject was excellent, and what he said was to the point; but I could not help wondering whether he had the slightest idea of the condition of those whom he addressed. Evidently he realized our need, but there was a tendency to regard us less as men than as children. He spoke incautiously of the man in the street, and, in so doing, showed the falsity of his position. We have no use for arguments

calculated to satisfy the ordinary man, since we are extraordinary men in an extraordinary position.

No, 'the man in the street' was, to say the least of it, a most unhappy phrase!

I should like to tell Canon Eldred my own story. He told us that next week he was going away to enjoy a well-earned holiday. Two years ago I was taking my summer holiday too. Autumn holiday it was, in fact, for our vicar—I was senior curate at the time in a big working-class parish in the north of England—had gone off to the sea with his children in July, and Legge, my junior, had claimed August for the Tyrol.

I had made no definite plans for myself that year. Something, I felt sure, would turn up, and if all my friends were booked elsewhere, I knew that I could depend on ten days at my uncle's place in Devonshire, or a fortnight of fresh air and plain living on Bob's disreputable old ketch. But somehow everything fell through. My uncle, who was beginning to be troubled about death duties, had let the shooting for the first time in fifty years; Bob was busy running his craft aground on Danish shoals, and I was left to my own resources. I set off finally at twelve hours' notice on a ten days' walking-tour, determined to hunt out some weather-proof barn within easy distance of a river or the sea, where Legge and I could take our boys to camp at Easter.

I left on a Monday (and I would have Canon Eldred, if he ever reads this, to note the date, because the dates are an important part of my narrative) and Legge came with me to the station, for I had several matters to arrange with him connected with the parish work. I took a ten days' ticket. It was stamped 22nd September, and, as I said, the 22nd was a Monday.

That night I slept at Dunsley. It was the end of the sea-

son. Nearly all the visitors had left the place, but the harbour was jammed with the herring fleet, storm-bound for over three days, and all the alley-ways in the old town were crowded with fishermen. On the Tuesday I started off with my rucksack, intending to follow the line of the cliff, but the easterly gale was too much for me, and I struck inland on to the moors. I walked the whole of the day, a good thirty-five miles, and towards dusk got a lift in a farmer's cart. He was going to Chedsholme, and there I spent the night at the Ship Inn, a stone's-throw from the abbey church. I felt disinclined for a long tramp on Wednesday, so I walked on into Rapmoor in the morning, left my things with old Mr. Robinson at the 'Crown,' borrowed a rod and tackle from him, and spent the afternoon fishing the Lansdale beck. I found a splendid camping-ground, but no barn or building, and saw the farmer, a churchwarden, who readily gave permission for the setting up of our tents, if ever we brought the boys that way. Wednesday night I spent at Rapmoor, Thursday at Frankstone Edge, where I dined with the vicar, a college friend of Legge's, and Friday at Gorton. The landlady of the inn at Gorton kept a green parrot in a cage in the parlour. It was remarkably tame, and though I am not usually fond of such birds, I remember spending quite a long time talking to it in the evening.

I set out on the morning of Saturday prepared for a long walk and a probable soaking. Not that the rain was falling, but there was a mist sweeping inland over the moors from the sea, which I was obliged to face, since my track lay eastwards. I followed up the road to the end of the dale, and then took a rough path that skirted a plantation of firs past a disused quarry on to the moor. By noon I was right on the top of the table-land. I ate my sandwiches in the shelter of a peat shooting-butt, while I tried to find my exact position on the map. It was not altogether easy, but I made a rough approximation, and then looked to see which was

the nearest village where I could find lodging for the night. Chedsholme, where I had slept on Tuesday, seemed to be the easiest of access, and though they had charged me just double of what was reasonable for supper, bed, and breakfast, the fare was good and the house quiet, no small consideration on a Saturday night.

It was after two when I left the shelter of the butt. I had at first some difficulty in finding my way. There were no landmarks on the moor to guide me; the flat expanse was only broken by mound after mound of unclothed shale, running in parallel lines from north to south, which marked the places where men had searched for ironstone many years before. Gradually the mounds grew less and less frequent, and I was beginning to think that I had left them all behind, when one larger than the rest loomed up out of the mist.

Every man has experienced at some period of his life that strange intuition of danger which compels us, if only it be strong enough, to alter some course of action, substituting for a reasonable motive the blind force of fear. I was walking straight towards the mound, when I came to a standstill. Something seemed to repel me from the spot, while at the same time I became conscious of my intense isolation, alone on the moor miles away from any fellow creature. I stopped for half a minute, half in doubt as to whether to proceed. Then I told myself that fear is always strongest when in pursuit and, smiling at my folly, I went on.

At the farther side of the mound was the body of a dead man. He was a foreigner, with dark skin and long oily locks of hair. A scarlet handkerchief was tied loosely round his throat. There were ear-rings in his ears. He lay on his back, with his eyes wide open and glazed.

My first feeling was one, not of surprise or pity, but of intense, overpowering nausea. Then with an effort I pulled

myself together and examined the body more closely. I could see at once that he had been dead several days. The hands were white and cold, and the limbs strangely limp. His clothes were little more than rags. The shirt was torn open, and tattooed on the chest—even in my horror I could not help but marvel at the skill with which the thing was done—was a great green parrot with wings outstretched.

At first I could see no sign of how the man had met his death. It was not until I turned the body over that I noticed an ugly wound at the back of the skull, that might have been made by some blunt instrument or a stone. There was nothing for me to do except report the matter to the police as quickly as possible. The nearest constable would be stationed at Chedsholme, ten miles away; and I decided that the best way of getting there in the mist would be to walk eastwards until I struck the mineral line that runs from the Bleadale ironstone quarries. This I did; and I shall not easily forget the joyful feeling of companionship in a living world that I experienced on hearing the distant whistle of an engine, and saw five minutes later through a break in the clouds the long train of trucks crawling along the sky-line.

Once on the permanent way my progress became less slow. Freed from the necessity of maintaining a sense of direction, I began to think more of my horrible discovery. Who could the man be, and why had he been killed? He seemed to have nothing in common with this wild, cold country—a mariner, whom one might have seen without surprise in the days of the Spanish Main, marooned with empty treasure-chests on some spit of dazzling, shadeless sand. And then, the man being killed, why had the murderer done nothing to hide the traces of his crime? What could have been easier than to have covered the body with the loose shale from the mound? 'I could have done the thing in five minutes,' I said to myself, 'if only I had a

trowel.' But it was useless for me to wonder what might be the meaning of this illustration to a story I could never hope to read. I left the line at the point where it crossed the road, and then followed the latter down the ridge to Chedsholme. I must have been a mile or more from the village, when the silence of the late afternoon was suddenly broken by the tolling of a bell.

I remember once on Bob's ketch being overtaken by a sea fog. The current was running strong, and Bob was a stranger to the coast. 'It's all right; we shall worry through!' he said, and had hardly finished speaking when we heard the wild, mad clanging of the bell-buoy. I did not soon forget the look of utter surprise on Bob's face. 'There's some mistake,' he said, with all his old lack of logic; 'it's no earthly business to be there.'

That was how I felt on that September evening two years ago. What right had the church bell to be ringing? There would be no evening service on Saturday in a place the size of Chedsholme. It was too late in the day for a funeral. And yet what else could it be? For, as I passed down the village street, I noticed that the windows of the shops were shuttered. There were men, too, hanging about the green, dressed in their Sunday black.

I found the police-station without difficulty, or rather the cottage where the constable lived. He was away, so his wife told me, but would be back in the morning, and as there seemed to be no way of communicating with the authorities, I was obliged for the time being to keep my secret to myself.

The door of the Ship Inn was shut, and I had to knock twice before the landlady appeared. She recognized me at once. 'Yes,' she said, 'we can put you up, to be sure. You can have the same room as before, number three, to the right at the top of the stair. The girl's out, so I'm afraid I can only give you a cold supper.'

Ten minutes later I was standing before a cheerful fire in the parlour, while Mrs. Shaftoe spread the cloth, dealing out to me in the meantime the gossip of the week. There were few visitors now; the season was too late, but she expected to have a houseful in a fortnight's time, when Mr. Somerset from Steelborough was coming back with a party for another week's shooting. 'It's a pity we only get people in the spring and summer,' she said. 'A village like this is terrible poor, and every visitor makes a difference. I suppose they find it too lonely; but, bless my life, there's nothing to be afraid of on these moors. You could walk all day without meeting anybody. There's no one to harm you. Well, sir, there's your supper ready. If you want anything, you've only got to touch the bell.'

'How is it,' I asked, as I sat down, 'that the place is so quiet tonight? I always thought that Saturday evenings were your busiest times.'

'So they are,' said Mrs. Shaftoe; 'we do very little business on a Sunday. It's only a six days' license, you see. If you'll excuse me, sir, I think that's one of the children calling; I'm only single-handed just at present, for the girl's away at church.'

She left the room, seeing nothing of the effect that her words had on me. 'Sunday!' I thought. 'What can she mean? Surely she must be mistaken!' Yet there in front of me was the calendar; Sunday, the 28th. Less than a hour before I had heard the church bell calling to evening prayer. The men whom I had seen lounging about the street were only the ordinary Sunday idlers. Somewhere in the last week I must have missed a day.

But where? I pulled out my pocket diary. The space allotted to each day was filled with brief notes. 'First,' I said to myself, 'let me make certain of a date from which to reckon.' I was positive that I had started on my holiday on Monday, the 22nd. For further information there was the

return half of my ticket stamped with the date. On Monday I slept at Dunsley; Tuesday at this same inn at Chedsholme, Wednesday at Rapmoor, Thursday at Frankstone Edge, and Friday at Gorton. Each day, as I looked back, seemed well filled; my recollection of each was clearly defined. And yet somewhere there was a gap of twenty-four hours about which I knew nothing.

I have always been absent-minded—ludicrously so, my friends might say—it is, in fact, a trait in my character that has on more than one occasion put me into an embarrassing situation; but here was something of a nature completely different. In vain I groped about in my memory in search for even the shadow of an explanation. The week came back to me as no sequence of indistinguishable grey days, but the clearest of well-ordered processions. But was it really Sunday? Could the whole thing be a hoax, explicable as the result of some absurd wager? In default of a better the hypothesis was worth testing. I made a pretence of finishing the meal and, taking my hat from the stand, hurried out of the house. I walked in the direction of the church, but as I approached the building my heart sank within me. I passed half a dozen young fellows hanging about the churchyard gate, waiting to walk back home with their girls. 'It's been a dreary Sunday,' I said, and one stopped in the act of lighting a cigarette to agree. I stood in the porch to listen. They were singing Bishop Ken's evening hymn. Then came the thin piping voice of the priest, asking for defence against the perils and dangers of the night.

Under a feeling of almost unbearable depression, I made my way back to the inn and its empty parlour.

'After all,' I said to myself, 'there's nothing that I can do. Other men before now have lost their memory. I should be thankful for regaining it so quickly, and that no harm has been done. No good, at any rate, can result from my pon-

dering over the thing.' But in spite of my resolution I found it impossible to control my thoughts. Again and again I found myself returning to the subject, fascinated by this sudden break in the past and the possibilities that sprang from it. Where had I been? What had I done?

I believe that it was the sight of an ordinary cottage hospital collecting-box on the mantelpiece that suggested to me a new way of approaching the problem. I have always kept accurate accounts, jotting down the expenses of each day, not in my diary, but in a separate pocket cash-book. This, I thought, might throw new light on the matter. I took it out and hastily turned over the pages. At first sight it told me nothing. There was the same list of villages and their inns; no new names appeared. Then I read it through again. This time I made a discovery. The amounts I had paid in bills for a night's lodging, for supper, bed and breakfast, were much the same at all the inns, with the exception of the 'Ship' at Chedsholme. The bill there seemed to be just twice as much as what it should have been. I only remembered to have spent one night there, Tuesday. It might be that I had spent Wednesday night as well.

I rang the bell and ordered what I wanted for breakfast; then, as Mrs. Shaftoe was leaving the room, I asked when it was that I had slept at the inn.

'Tuesday and Wednesday,' she said. 'You left us on Thursday morning for Rapmoor. Good night, sir! I'll see that you are called at half-past seven.'

So my supposition was right. The day had been lost at Chedsholme. I wished, as soon as she had gone, that I had asked the woman more. She might have told me something of what I had done. And yet how could I have asked such questions except in the most general terms, without arousing the suspicion that I was mad? From her behaviour it was evident that I had conducted myself in a normal fashion. Very likely I had been out all day walking, only to re-

turn to the inn at night dead tired. Why should I worry about this thing, so small compared to the tragedy that centred in my discovery of the afternoon?

It was clear, however, that I should not find peace sitting by the fire in the parlour. The clock had struck half-past nine; I took my candle from the sideboard and went upstairs to bed.

My room was much the same as other rooms in country inns, but there was a hanging bookshelf in the corner, holding half a dozen books: Dr. Meiklejohn's *Sermons in Advent*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Yorkshire Anecdotes*, *The House by the Sea*, and two bound volumes, one of the *Boys' Own Paper*, and the other of some American magazine. The latter I took down and, turning over the pages, saw that the type was good and that the stories were illustrated by some fine half-tone engravings. I got into bed and, placing the candle on the chair by my side, began to read. The story dealt with a young Methodist minister in a New England town. The girl he loved had promised herself in marriage to a sailor, who had been washed ashore from a stranded brig, bound for Baltimore from Smyrna. Mattered by the girl's love for the foreigner, he forged a letter arranging for a rendezvous on the sand dunes, met his rival there, and shot him through the heart. There was nothing remarkable about the story. I read it to the end unmoved. But on turning the last page over, I came across a full-page illustration, that held me fascinated.

It showed the scene on the dunes; the minister in his suit of black gazing down on the dead body of the Syrian sailor, just as I had stood that afternoon, and underneath were the words, taken from the letterpress of the story:

What would he not have given to blot out the sight from his memory?

I suppose that up to the time of which I am writing, my life had been a very ordinary one, filled with ordinary week-day pleasures and cares, regulated by ordinary routine. Within the space of a few hours I had experienced two great emotional shocks, the sudden discovery of the body of the moor, and this inexplicable loss of memory. Each by itself had proved sufficiently disturbing, but I had at least looked upon them as unconnected. A mere chance had shown me that I might be mistaken. I had stood, as it were, on the watershed at the source of two rivers. I had assumed that they flowed into two oceans. The clouds lifted, and I saw that they joined each other to form a torrent of irresistible force that would inevitably overwhelm me.

The whole thing seemed impossible; but I had a sickening feeling that the impossible was true, that I was the instrument, the unwilling tool, in this ghastly tragedy.

It was useless to lie in bed. I got up and paced the room. Again and again I tried to shut in the horrible thought behind a high wall of argument, built so carefully that there seemed to be no loop-hole for its escape. My best efforts were of no avail. I was seized with an overmastering fear of myself and the deed I might have done. I could think of only one thing to do, to report the whole matter to the police, to inform them of my inability to account for my doings on the Wednesday, and to welcome every investigation. 'Anything,' I told myself, 'is better than this intolerable uncertainty.'

And yet it seemed a momentous step to take. Supposing that I had nothing to do with this man's death, but at the same time had been the last person seen with him, I might run the risk of being punished for another's crime. I owed something to the position I held, to my future career; and so at last, dazed and weary, I lay down to wait for sleep. I did so with the firm determination that on the morrow I would retrace the path I had followed that afternoon. I

might discover some fresh clue to the tragedy. I might find that the whole thing was but the fancy of an over-wrought brain.

Slowly I became aware of a narrowing of the field of consciousness. A warm soft mist surrounded me and enfolded me. I heard the church clock strike the hour. But was too weary to count the strokes. The bell seemed to be tolling, tolling; every note grew fainter and I fell asleep.

When I awoke it was nine o'clock. The sun was shining in through the window and, pulling up the blind, I saw a sky of cloudless blue. Sleep had brought hope. I dressed quickly, laughing at the night's fears. In certain moods nothing is so strong as the force of unexpected coincidence. I told myself that I had been in a morbidly sensitive mood on the preceding evening; and in the clear light of day I took up the bound volume which had been the source of so much uneasiness. Really there was nothing in the story of the Methodist minister and the sailor, and as to the illustration, I turned the last page over and found that the illustration did not exist. Evidently I had imagined the whole thing.

'Another lovely day!' said Mrs. Shaftoe, as she brought in the breakfast. 'Will you be out walking again, sir? If you like, I could put up some sandwiches for you.' I thought the idea a good one, and telling her I should not be back until four or five, set out soon after eleven.

For the first few miles I had no difficulty in retracing my steps, but after I crossed the mineral line there were no landmarks to guide me. More than once I asked myself why I went on. I could give no satisfactory reply. I think now it must have been the desire to be brought face to face with facts that impelled me. I had had enough of the unbridled fancies of the preceding evening, and longed to discover some clue to the mystery, however faint.

At last I found myself among the old ironstone workings.

There was the long line of mounds, thrown up like ramparts, and there was the one standing alone in advance of the rest, beside which the body lay. Slowly I walked towards it. It seemed smaller in the light of a cloudless noon than in Sunday's mist. What was I to find? With beating heart I scrambled up the slope of shale. I stood on the top and looked around. There was nothing, only the wide expanse of moor and sky.

My first thought was that I had mistaken the place. Eagerly I scanned the ground for footprints. I found them almost immediately. They corresponded exactly to my nailed walking-boots. Evidently the place was the same.

Then what had happened? There was but one explanation possible—that I had imagined the whole thing.

And strange as it may seem, I accepted the explanation gladly, for it was the cold reality that I dreaded, linked as it had been with the awful idea that I had done the deed myself in a fit of unconscious frenzy; and in my thankfulness I knelt down on the heather and praised the God of the blue sky and sunlight for having saved me from the terrors of the night.

With a mind at peace with itself I walked back across the moor. I determined to end my holiday on the morrow, to consult some nerve specialist and, if need be, to go abroad for a month or two. I dined that night at the Ship Inn with a talkative old gentleman, who succeeded in keeping me from thinking of my own affairs, and, feeling sure of sleep, went early to bed.

My story does not end there. I wish that it did; but, Canon Eldred said in yesterday's sermon, it is often our duty to accept things as they are, not to waste the limited amount of energy that is given for the day's work in vain regret or morbid anticipation.

For, as I was sitting at breakfast on the morrow, I heard a man in the bar ask Mrs. Shaftoe for the morning's paper.

She told him that the gentleman in the parlour was reading it, but that 'Tuesday's was in the kitchen.

'Tuesday's?' I said to myself. 'Monday's, she means. To-day is Tuesday'; and I looked at the calendar on the mantelpiece. The calendar said Wednesday. I looked at the newspaper and saw on every page, 'Wednesday, 1st October.' I got up half-dazed and walked into the bar. I suppose Mrs. Shaftoe must have seen that there was something wrong, for, before I spoke, she offered me a glass of brandy.

'I'm losing my memory,' I said. 'I think I can't be quite well. I can't remember anything I did yesterday.'

'Why, bless you, sir!' she said, 'you were out on the moors all day. I made you some sandwiches, and in the evening you were talking to the old gentleman who left this morning on Free Trade and Protection.'

'Then what did I do on Monday? I thought that was Monday.'

'Oh! Monday!' said Mrs. Shaftoe. 'You were out on the moors all that day too. Don't you recollect borrowing my trowel? There was something you wanted to bury, a green parrot, I think you said it was. I remember, because it seemed so strange. You came in quite late in the evening, and looked regular knocked up, just the same as last week. It's my belief, sir, that you've been walking too far.'

I asked for my account and, while she was making it out, I went upstairs to my bedroom. I took down the bound volume from the shelf and turned to the story of the Methodist minister. The illustration at the end was certainly not there, but on close inspection I found that a page was missing. For some reason it had been carefully removed. I turned to the index of illustrations, and saw that the picture, with the words beneath that had so strangely affected me, should have been found on the missing page.

I walked to the nearest station and took the train to Steelborough, where I told my story to an inspector of po-

lice, who evidently disbelieved it. But in the course of a day or two they made discoveries. The body of an unknown sailor, a foreigner, with curiously distinctive tattooings on the breast, was found in the place I described. For some time there was nothing to connect me with the crime. Then a gamekeeper came forward, who said that on Wednesday, the 24th, he had seen two men, one of whom seemed to be a clergyman, the other a tramp, walking across the moor. He had called to them, but they had not stopped. I stood my trial. I was examined, of course, by alienists, and here I am. No, Canon Eldred, the world is a little more complicated than you think. I agree with you as to the necessity for cheerfulness, but I want better reasons than yours. These are mine—they may be only a poor lunatic's, but they are none the worse for that.

The world, I consider, is governed by God through a hierarchy of spirits. Little Charlie Lovel, by the way, says that he saw the Archangel Gabriel yesterday evening, as he was coming from the bath-room, and for all I know he may be right. It is governed by a hierarchy of spirits, some greater and more wise than others, and to each is given its appointed task. I suppose that for some reason, which I may never know, it was necessary for his salvation that he should die in a certain way, that his soul at the last might be purged by sudden terror. I cannot say, for I was only the tool. The great and powerful (but not all-powerful) spirit did his work as far as concerned the sailor, and then, with a workman's love for his tool, he thought of me. It was not needful that I should remember what I had done—I had been lent by God, as Gog was lent to Satan—but, my work finished, this spirit in his pity took from me all memory of my deed. But, as I said before, he was not omnipotent, and I suppose the longing of the brute in me to see again his handiwork guided me unconsciously to the bank of shale on the moor, though even at the last minute I had felt

something urging me not to go on. That and the chance reading of an idle magazine story had been my undoing; and, when for the second time I lost my memory, and some power outside myself took control in order to cover up the traces before I revisited the scene, the issue of events had passed into other hands.

Sometimes I find myself wondering who that sailor was and what his life had been.

Nobody knows.

BIANCA'S HANDS

by Theodore Sturgeon

BIANCA'S mother was leading her when Ran saw her first. Bianca was squat and small, with dank hair and rotten teeth. Her mouth was crooked and it drooled. Either she was blind or she just didn't care about bumping into things. It didn't really matter because Bianca was an imbecile. Her hands . . .

They were lovely hands, graceful hands, hands as soft and smooth and white as snowflakes, hands whose colour was lightly tinged with pink like the glow of Mars on snow. They lay on the counter side by side, looking at Ran. They lay there half closed and crouching, each pulsing with a movement like the panting of a field creature, and they looked. Not watched. Later, they watched him. Now they looked. They did, because Ran felt their united gaze, and his heart beat strongly.

Bianca's mother demanded cheese stridently. Ran brought it to her in his own time while she berated him. She was a bitter woman, as any woman has a right to be who is wife of no man and mother to a monster. Ran gave her the cheese and took her money and never noticed that it was not enough, because of Bianca's hands. When Bianca's mother tried to take one of the hands, it scuttled away from the unwanted touch. It did not lift from the counter, but ran on its fingertips to the edge and leaped into a fold

of Bianca's dress. The woman took the unresisting elbow and led Bianca out.

Ran stayed there at the counter unmoving, thinking of Bianca's hands. Ran was strong and bronze and not very clever. He had never been taught about beauty and strangeness, but he did not need that teaching. His shoulders were wide and his arms were heavy and thick, but he had great soft eyes and thick lashes. They curtained his eyes now. He was seeing Bianca's hands again dreamily. He found it hard to breathe . . .

Harding came back. Harding owned the store. He was a large man whose features barely kept his cheeks apart. He said, "Sweep up, Ran. We're closing early today." Then he went behind the counter, squeezing past Ran.

Ran got the broom and swept slowly.

"A woman bought cheese," he said suddenly. "A poor woman, with very old clothes. She was leading a girl. I can't remember what the girl looked like, except— Who was she?"

"I saw them go out," said Harding. "The woman is Bianca's mother, and the girl is Bianca. I don't know their other name. They don't talk to people much. I wish they wouldn't come in here. Hurry up, Ran."

Ran did what was necessary and put away his broom. Before he left he asked, "Where do they live, Bianca and her mother?"

"On the other side. A house on no road, away from people. Good night, Ran."

Ran went from the shop directly over to the other side, not waiting for his supper. He found the house easily, for it was indeed away from the road, and stood rudely by itself. The townspeople had cauterized the house by wrapping it in empty fields.

Harshly, "What do you want?" Bianca's mother asked as she opened the door.

"May I come in?"

"What do you want?"

"May I come in?" he asked again. She made as if to slam the door, and then stood aside. "Come."

Ran went in and stood still. Bianca's mother crossed the room and sat under an old lamp, in the shadow. Ran sat opposite her, on a three-legged stool. Bianca was not in the room.

The woman tried to speak, but embarrassment clutched at her voice. She withdrew into her bitterness, saying nothing. She kept peeping at Ran, who sat quietly with his arms folded and the uncertain light in his eyes. He knew she would speak soon, and he could wait.

"Ah, well . . ." She was silent after that, for a time, but now she had forgiven him his intrusion. Then, "It's a great while since anyone came to see me; a great while . . . it was different before. I was a pretty girl—"

She bit her words off and her face popped out of the shadows, shrivelled and sagging as she leaned forward. Ran saw that she was beaten and cowed and did not want to be laughed at.

"Yes," he said gently. She sighed and leaned back so that her face disappeared again. She said nothing for a moment, sitting looking at Ran, liking him.

"We were happy, the two of us," she mused, "until Bianca came. He didn't like her, poor thing, he didn't, no more than I do now. He went away. I stayed by her because I was her mother. I'd go away myself, I would, but people know me, and I haven't a penny—not a penny . . . They'd bring me back to her, they would, to care for her. It doesn't matter much now, though, because people don't want me any more than they want her, they don't . . ."

Ran shifted his feet uneasily, because the woman was crying. "Have you room for me here?" he asked.

Her head crept out into the light. Ran said swiftly, "I'll give you money each week, and I'll bring my own bed and things." He was afraid she would refuse.

She merged with the shadows again. "If you like," she said, trembling at her good fortune. "Though why you'd want to . . . still, I guess if I had a little something to cook up nice, and a good reason for it, I could make someone real cosy here. But—*why?*" She rose. Ran crossed the room and pushed her back into the chair. He stood over her, tall.

"I never want you to ask me that," he said, speaking very slowly. "Hear?"

She swallowed and nodded. "I'll come back tomorrow with the bed and things," he said.

He left her there under the lamp, blinking out of the dimness, folded round and about with her misery and her wonder.

People talked about it. People said, "Ran has moved to the house of Bianca's mother." "It must be because—" "Ah," said some, "Ran was always a strange boy. It must be because—" "Oh, *no!*" cried others, appalled. "Ran is such a good boy. He wouldn't—"

Harding was told. He frightened the busy little woman who told him. He said, "Ran is very quiet, but he is honest and he does his work. As long as he comes here in the morning and earns his wage, he can do what he wants, where he wants, and it is not my business to stop him." He said this so very sharply that the little woman dared not say anything more.

Ran was very happy, living there. Saying little, he began to learn about Bianca's hands.

He watched Bianca being fed. Her hands would not feed her, the lovely aristocrats. Beautiful parasites they were,

taking their animal life from the heavy squat body that carried them, and giving nothing in return. They would lie one on each side of her plate, pulsing, while Bianca's mother put food into the disinterested drooling mouth. They were shy, those hands, of Ran's bewitched gaze. Caught out there naked in the light and open of the table-top, they would creep to the edge and drop out of sight—all but four rosy fingertips clutching the cloth.

They never lifted from a surface. When Bianca walked, her hands did not swing free, but twisted in the fabric of her dress. And when she approached a table or the mantel-piece and stood, her hands would run lightly up and leap, landing together, resting silently, watchfully, with that pulsing peculiar to them.

They cared for each other. They would not touch Bianca herself, but each hand groomed the other. It was the only labour to which they would bend themselves.

Three evenings after he came, Ran tried to take one of the hands in his. Bianca was alone in the room, and Ran went to her and sat beside her. She did not move, nor did her hands. They rested on a small table before her, preening themselves. This, then, was when they really began watching him. He felt it, right down to the depths of his enchanted heart. The hands kept stroking each other, and yet they knew he was there, they knew of his desire. They stretched themselves before him, archly, languorously, and his blood pounded hot. Before he could stay himself he reached and tried to grasp them. He was strong, and his move was sudden and clumsy. One of the hands seemed to disappear, so swiftly did it drop into Bianca's lap. But the other—

Ran's thick fingers closed on it and held it captive. It writhed, all but tore itself free. It took no power from the arm on which it lived, for Bianca's arms were flabby and weak. Its strength, like its beauty, was intrinsic, and it was

only by shifting his grip to the puffy forearm that Ran succeeded in capturing it. So intent was he on touching it, holding it, that he did not see the other hand leap from the idiot girl's lap, land crouching at the table's edge. It reared back, fingers curling spiderlike, and sprang at him, fastening on his wrist. It clamped down agonizingly, and Ran felt bones give and crackle. With a cry he released the girl's arm. Her hands fell together and ran over each other, feeling for any small scratch, any tiny damage he might have done them in his passion. And as he sat there clutching his wrist, he saw the hands run to the far side of the little table, hook themselves over the edge and, contracting, draw her out of her place. She had no volition of her own—ah, but her hands had! Creeping over the walls, catching obscure and precarious holds in the wainscoting, they dragged the girl from the room.

And Ran sat there and sobbed, not so much from the pain in his swelling arm, but in shame for what he had done. They might have been won to him in another, gentler way . . .

His head was bowed, yet suddenly he felt the gaze of those hands. He looked up swiftly enough to see one of them whisk round the doorpost. It had come back, then, to see . . . Ran rose heavily and took himself and his shame away. Yet he was compelled to stop in the doorway, even as had Bianca's hands. He watched covertly and saw them come into the room dragging the unprotesting idiot girl. They brought her to the long bench where Ran had sat with her. They pushed her on to it, flung themselves to the table, and began rolling and flattening themselves most curiously about. Ran suddenly realized that there was something of his there, and he was comforted, a little. They were rejoicing, drinking thirstily, revelling in his tears.

Afterwards, for nineteen days, the hands made Ran do penance. He knew them as inviolate and unforgiving; they

would not show themselves to him, remaining always hidden in Bianca's dress or under the supper table. For those nineteen days Ran's passion and desire grew. More—his love became true love, for only true love knows reverence . . . and the possession of the hands became his reason for living, his goal in the life which that reason had given him.

Ultimately they forgave him. They kissed him coyly when he was not looking, touched him on the wrist, caught and held him for one sweet moment. It was at table . . . a great power surged through him, and he gazed down at the hands, now returned to Bianca's lap. A strong muscle in his jaw twitched and twitched, swelled and fell. Happiness like a golden light flooded him; passion spurred him, love imprisoned him, reverence was the gold of the golden light. The room wheeled and whirled about him and forces unimaginable flickered through him. Battling with himself yet lax in the glory of it, Ran sat unmoving, beyond the world, enslaved and yet possessor of all. Bianca's hands flushed pink, and if ever hands smiled to each other, then they did.

He rose abruptly, flinging his chair from him, feeling the strength of his back and shoulders. Bianca's mother, by now beyond surprise, looked at him and away. There was that in his eyes which she did not like, for to fathom it would disturb her, and she wanted no trouble. Ran strode from the room and outdoors, to be by himself that he might learn more of this new thing that had possessed him.

It was evening. The crooked-bending skyline drank the buoyancy of the sun, dragged it down, sucking greedily. Ran stood on a knoll, his nostrils flaring, feeling the depth of his lungs. He sucked in the crisp air and it smelled new to him, as though the sunset shades were truly in it. He knotted the muscles of his thighs and stared at his smooth, solid fists. He raised his hands high over his head and

stretching, sent out such a great shout that the sun sank. He watched it, knowing how great and tall he was, how strong he was, knowing the meaning of longing and belonging. And then he lay down on the clean earth and he wept.

When the sky grew cold enough for the moon to follow the sun beyond the hills, and still an hour after that, Ran returned to the house. He struck a light in the room of Bianca's mother, where she slept on a pile of old clothes. Ran sat beside her and let the light wake her. She rolled over to him and moaned, opened her eyes and shrank from him. "Ran . . . what do you want?"

"Bianca. I want to marry Bianca."

Her breath hissed between her gums. "No!" It was not a refusal, but astonishment. Ran touched her arm impatiently. Then she laughed.

"To—marry—Bianca. It's late, boy. Go back to bed, and in the morning you'll have forgotten this thing, this dream."

"I've not been to bed," he said patiently, but growing angry. "Will you give me Bianca, or not?"

She sat up and rested her chin on her withered knees. "You're right to ask me, for I'm her mother. Still and all—Ran, you've been good to us, Bianca and me. You're—you are a good boy but—Forgive me, lad, but you're something of a fool. Bianca's a monster. I say it though I am what I am to her. Do what you like, and never a word will I say. You should have known. I'm—sorry you asked me, for you have given me the memory of speaking so to you. I don't understand you; but do what you like, boy."

It was to have been a glance, but it became a stare as she saw his face. He put his hands carefully behind his back, and she knew he would have killed her else.

"I'll—marry her, then?" he whispered.
She nodded, terrified. "As you like, boy."
He blew out the light and left her.

Ran worked hard and saved his wages, and made one room beautiful for Bianca and himself. He built a soft chair, and a table that was like an altar for Bianca's sacred hands. There was a great bed, and heavy cloth to hide and soften the walls, and a rug.

They were married, though marrying took time. Ran had to go far afield before he could find one who would do what was necessary. The man came far and went again afterwards, so that none knew of it, and Ran and his wife were left alone. The mother spoke for Bianca, and Bianca's hand trembled frighteningly at the touch of the ring, writhed and struggled and then lay passive, blushing and beautiful. But it was done. Bianca's mother did not protest, for she didn't dare. Ran was happy, and Bianca—well, nobody cared about Bianca.

After they were married Bianca followed Ran and his two brides into the beautiful room. He washed Bianca and used rich lotions. He washed and combed her hair, and brushed it many times until it shone, to make her more fit to be with the hands he had married. He never touched the hands, though he gave them soaps and creams and tools with which they could groom themselves. They were pleased. Once one of them ran up his coat and touched his cheek and made him exultant.

He left then and returned to the shop with his heart full of music. He worked harder than ever, so that Harding was pleased and let him go home early. He wandered the hours away by the bank of a brook, watching the sun on the face of the chuckling water. A bird came to circle him, flew unafraid through the aura of gladness about him. The delicate tip of a wing brushed his wrist with the touch of

the first secret kiss from the hands of Bianca. The singing that filled him was part of the nature of laughing, the running of water, the sound of the wind in the reeds by the edge of the stream. He yearned for the hands, and he knew he could go now and clasp them and own them; instead he stretched out on the bank and lay smiling, all lost in the sweetness and poignance of waiting, denying desire. He laughed for pure joy in a world without hatred, held in the stainless palms of Bianca's hands.

As it grew dark he went home. All during that nuptial meal Bianca's hands twisted about one of his while he ate with the other, and Bianca's mother fed the girl. The fingers twined about each other and about his own, so that three hands seemed to be wrought of one flesh, to become a thing of lovely weight at his arm's end. When it was quite dark they went to the beautiful room and lay where he and the hands could watch, through the window, the clean, bright stars swim up out of the forest. The house and the room were dark and silent. Ran was so happy that he hardly dared to breathe.

A hand fluttered up over his hair, down his cheek, and crawled into the hollow of his throat. Its pulsing matched the beat of his heart. He opened his own hands wide and clenched his fingers, as though to catch and hold this moment.

Soon the other hand crept up and joined the first. For perhaps an hour they lay there passive with their coolness against Ran's warm neck. He felt them with his throat, each smooth convolution, each firm small expanse. He concentrated, with his mind and his heart on his throat, on each part of the hands that touched him, feeling with all his being first one touch and then another, though the contact was there unmoving. And he knew it would be soon now, soon.

As if at a command, he turned on his back and dug his

head into the pillow. Staring up at the vague dark hangings on the wall, he began to realize what it was for which he had been working and dreaming so long. He put his head back yet farther and smiled, waiting. This would be possession, completion. He breathed deeply, twice, and the hands began to move.

The thumbs crossed over his throat and the fingertips settled one by one under his ears. For a long moment they lay there, gathering strength. Together, then, in perfect harmony, each co-operating with the other, they became rigid, rock-hard. Their touch was still light upon him, still light . . . no, now they were passing their rigidity to him, turning it to a contraction. They settled to it slowly, their pressure measured and equal. Ran lay silent. He could not breathe now, and did not want to. His great arms were crossed on his chest, his knotted fists under his armpits, his mind knowing a great peace. Soon, now . . .

Wave after wave of engulfing, glorious pain spread and receded. He saw colour impossible, without light. He arched his back, up, up . . . the hands bore down with all their hidden strength, and Ran's body bent like a bow, resting on feet and shoulders. Up, up . . .

Something burst within him—his lungs, his heart—no matter. It was complete.

There was blood on the hands of Bianca's mother when they found her in the morning in the beautiful room, trying to soothe Ran's neck. They took Bianca away, and they buried Ran, but they hanged Bianca's mother because she tried to make them believe Bianca had done it, Bianca whose hands were quite dead, drooping like brown leaves from her wrists.

THE CROSS OF CARL

by Walter Owen

Note on "The Cross of Carl"

DURING the years 1916 and 1917 the writer was prevented from taking active part in the war by a physical affliction accompanied by severe pain which induced him to take quantities of opium as a sedative. In the first half of 1917 his mind became increasingly preoccupied with the moral and spiritual issues of the conflict. He suffered from attacks of melancholia which culminated in emotional crises. For some time these crises were confined to the chaotic nervous aberrations classified as hysteria by neurologists. But towards the end of the month of June, 1917, he observed that the termination of the nervous paroxysm marked the commencement of a third phase. The general characteristics of this third phase were in complete opposition to those of the preceding condition. There was a great sense of well-being, of peace, poise and power. The mind was exceptionally lucid and alert. Physical discomfort and disabilities were nonexistent. Spiritually there was a feeling of integration, dispassion and purposiveness.

So marked and peculiar was this condition that he made notes, from which he compiled the following table of observations.

PHYSICAL:

Partial analgesia, not localised, i.e. sensibility diminished, *in degree*, to pain, cold, hunger, fatigue and bodily weakness. Hyperæsthesia specifically localised in the sensations of sound, light and touch. Motor automatism of varying intensity (automatic and semi-automatic script). Pulse 10 to 20 above normal (100 average).

Breathing very slow (3 to 4 per minute).

Temperature above normal (99°).

MENTAL:

Rapid and clear perception of phenomena. Supernormal lucidity, alertness and coordination.

Effortless recollection of all past impressions. Expansion of sense of space and time. Imaginative luxuriance.

Exceptional power of rhythmical and musical speech.

Impairment of the power of verbal visualisation (bad spelling).

PSYCHIC:

Obliteration of the psychic diaphragm normally existing between the conscious and subconscious elements of personality. Extinction of the passional and egocentric emotions such as fear, anger, aversion, hatred, acquisitiveness.

Voluntary heteræsthesia, i.e., the power of projecting the sensibility into any selected object, whether organic or inorganic, conscious or unconscious.

Occasional polylocationary consciousness (involuntary); by this is meant the sensation of being in two or more places at the same time.

Visual and auditive automatisms manifesting as flashes of pale blue light of great intensity; and a sound of singing voices accompanied by music.

A sense of spiritual completeness and exaltation.

Whether the abnormal condition described was induced by the administration of opium or whether the opium was merely a contributory factor, the writer is unable to say. About the middle of the month of July, 1917, he suffered a particularly severe attack of depression which was relieved by the usual nervous paroxysm, but, this time, of exceptional violence, which gradually subsided into the third phase. At the commencement of the third phase on this occasion he experienced a vivid bilocation of consciousness. So clear and complete was his sensation of being in two places at once that his entire personality appeared to be double. One of these personalities was his customary one, with the modifications tabulated above. The other was that of a soldier in the trenches of one of the battlefields, who was about to take part in a dawn attack. A circumstance which he observed particularly was that, making allowance for the difference in locality, the hour in both places synchronised perfectly. The secondary personality was in no sense a mental marionette of his own, but an individual with whose name, history, relatives, social ties and mental and spiritual make-up he was as familiar as with his own. At the same moment that he experienced this bilocation of consciousness he was prompted to record in writing the experiences of this soldier. It is this record, without alteration except for the condensation of certain portions of the chapter entitled Golgotha (which seemed to him of too revolting detail), that forms the narrative of "The Cross of Carl." During the writing of it he was a spectator of, and actor in, the events related; and he underwent the experiences of his "alter ego" even more vividly than if they had been actually objective, as a consequence of the heightened sensitiveness and lucidity which accompanied his condition of dual consciousness. The partial analgesia mitigated, but did not render him entirely immune from, the physical suffering inherent in Carl's experiences. As it was, there was repercussion from the body—

real or illusory—of Carl to his own body, to the extent that he felt the external physical impact of the wounds described, and that a superficial stigmatisation appeared at the seat of the injuries and endured for a few hours. He also while writing suffered occasionally from nervous collapse and underwent in a milder degree the other sensations described, with the exception of the attack of nausea which was violent and prolonged.

The foregoing will explain why the writer disclaims for "The Cross of Carl" any pretension to form a narrative of actual objective experience in the customary sense of the words. He believes, however, that he is warranted in putting it forward as an authentic personal record of an abnormal pathological process induced by the psychic perturbations which formed the background of the physical conflict. He is not prepared to assert that the impressions received by him through his bilocated consciousness have any other validity. They may have been objectively veridical; they may have been hallucinatory; or they may have been impressions received from some extraneous source and which possess a purely symbolic significance. The immediate recipient of those impressions may have been a material frame inhabited by a separate consciousness between which and his own a rapport was established of such immediacy as to constitute a temporary fusion of personalities. It may have been a phantasmal vehicle disengaged from his own physical body and utilised in an actual psychical excursion. Or, again, it may have been a vision originating in his own mind. Upon such matters he has formed no judgment. But there is no doubt in his mind that there are subtler and more potent forces in operation in the world than those externalised to the senses, and that during the late war the spiritual and mental atmosphere of humanity underwent far-reaching modifications as the result of a period of agitation manifesting the essential symptoms of a neurotic paroxysm. His own particular temperament, conditioned by his hypersensitised condition, probably rendered him specially sus-

ceptible to those forces and induced in him a temporary functional activity of faculties latent in the normal consciousness. It is to his mind suggestive that in his case the neurotic explosion was superseded, albeit temporarily, by a third phase in which the higher faculties of the ego appeared to be liberated and expanded; and it may not be beyond the bounds of probability that that third phase may be in some degree the foreshadowing of a development in the collective consciousness of mankind of which the first indications are gradually becoming apparent at the present time.

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me, Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Psalm xxiii. 5.

I. Gethsemane

CARL shifted his weight from one foot to the other on the fire-step and leaned his body as much as possible against the front wall of the trench. Usually such relief was not to be had, for Carl was sturdy and inclined to fat, but here the rain, which for the last three days had ceaselessly poured, had carved a little gully that ran from the parapet to the step, so that Carl lay half cradled in the embrace of the earth, and his legs, which since he left his home a week ago had gradually grown wearier, till they were a permanent ache to him, found thus, for a space, relief from a portion of his weight.

His rifle lay across the parapet in front of him, bayonet fixed, but Carl's eyes did not rove forward, for that way here the unwary soul departs quickly, and the red spout of blood in a trench that waits the signal for a dawn attack is not beloved even by the best-tempered lieutenant.

So at intervals picked snipers peered, here and there a periscope poked its inquiring nose, and the trench was like a queer beast that felt the air with horns. And Carl kept his nose low, like the rabbit that the good soldier knows so wholly how to be; while overhead death zipped and sang,

and the rifle shots of the snipers pinpricked here and there the thunder of the guns, like an impish tickle on a mammoth's flank or the puny staccato of crews of foundering barques over whom the ocean rolls.

The guns were terrible that morning, dreadful, like the voice of some Behemoth of man's making, whose works indeed when he strays from God are more terrible than God's, not greater, but grotesque and unholily deformed, dreadful as the abortions of an angel. And truly the ground on which Carl lay was like some beast that heaved in birth-pang, in the throes of a pain too big, too big for earth, and the air shuddered with the breath of its woe. Now it grumbled like Vulcan, far off in bowels of adamant and granite, and then a gust took it and it shook afresh, gathering its blast; and the scale of its breath was the gamut of madness, and the anthem that it sang, the anthem of the agony of all the choir of hell that sang to the baton of Abaddon the Trisagion of Pandemonium—unholy! unholy! unholy! Sometimes a lull made an island in the roar, but when it burst again, only more terribly did its billows roar, and more brutal the bellow with which it shook the blue.

At such times Carl clutched the ground with trilling tympanums and bastinadoed brain, conscious dully of the grey clay an inch beyond the goggles of his gas mask. Silly things kept coming into his head. He wondered what they would be having at home for breakfast. He tried to think of his wife, but found that he could think of nothing except the breakfast. This was perhaps because he was hungry. Then a terrific burst of sound swept over him, and suddenly he recalled what he had heard a girl say to her lover at the station the day he entrained. She had said, "Remember to be careful!" It seemed so unutterably silly! Careful! That was woman all over. She should be here, the silly!

Then he remembered his wife and how he had told her that he would bring her back the cross. His mind went

back to the time when he was not fat, when he had wooed her in the long twilights after work; of their walks along roads deepening in the dusk, and the marriage in the village church—just a little hurried, perhaps, for they were human, these two—and of their first child. He put up his hand to wipe some mist from his goggles, but the mist was not on the outer glass. . . . Over Carl too those wings had hovered.

He turned at a slap on the leg and saw the sergeant passing along the trench. The man on his right put his nozzle, grotesquely like the muzzle of a dog, close to his ear and yelled through to him: "We go over at eight, Fatty. It's five to, now. When you see the signal, over you go. We've got to get Hill 50."

"Where's Hill 50?" Carl called back at him.

The man waved his arm. "Straight ahead," he said. "But it's all the same; you'll never get there. It might as well be Hell 50."

Inside his stuffy mask Carl darkled. The man's words waked in him a strange rage. What was he here for? What were they all fighting about, these fools, with their Hill 50, which might be Hell 50, and which was to be got to, but could not be got to by the fruit of woman? If they would only stop that infernal racket! The cross? What had the cross to do with this place of fifty hells, of tabulated infernos? Wrath swept through him—and his poor flesh, empty now for many an hour, trembled in its hollow. He raised his hands and beat the clay before his face. "Curse the cross!" he shrieked into the unheeding womb of din. "Curse the cross!—curse the cross!"

So said Carl in his ditch that dim morning, while the Beast that man had made raged round him and wound him ever further and firmer in its toils. And you were right, Carl, as man is in the main right and men in the mass are in the main wrong; but you should have stopped at that

last, Carl, for that was a hard thing to say, now; and out there Death reaps with a free sweep and singing scythe; and not with curses in his heart is it fit that a man should meet his Maker.

* * * *

The signal had been given, and Carl, scrambling upward on hands and knees, had sprawled across the wet clay of the parapet, risen grasping his rifle, and now was off at a shambling run over ground sodden with rain and dotted with shellpools. He ran awkwardly, as the middle-aged man runs on whose thews the fat has set old encroachment; and the mud squelched and slithered under the blunder of his big boots. Enveloping him, a shroud of mist and smoke drove and whirled and drifted; and in front a curtain hung, behind which the concussions of the barrage gambolled redly, throating always its oratorio.

Little as had been his idea of the plan of attack and the part set apart for his battalion, it was now no better; only he knew that he was one of a crowd that straggled out across the open, death-dedicated, their feces set towards a bourne unknown. Dreadful to him seemed their ineffectual pace and grotesque the spludge with which they trudged the mud. Could sacrifice be so shorn of outward grandeur, could things ultimate enough to fling millions at each other's throats be served by figures so ineffectual and ridiculous? Not so, surely, did Gaul and Ossian lean forward into battle, nor Hector leap the Grecian ditch. True, Carl, true—but in the end the last chapter of the body's story is the same; one sure touch deep-biting on head or breast or belly, and the red honey that the soul stored pours, and she, the bee, is gone. Look, now.

On the edge of a crater he saw a man in front kneel down as though to pray, there, at which Carl, this being his first charge, and indeed his first taste of war at all, hurried to him, and was just about to touch him when the man went

forward on his face limply in the clay, and at the same instant another figure some three yards on his right said "Ah!" and, gasping, sprawled.

At this Carl stood a space dazed, not knowing what to do, his throat choking and his heart aflutter; then going to the first man, he put down his hand and touched him, saying in a sort of whisper, "What is it?" and, without waiting to know, was off a few steps to the other, and over him, too, he leaned, and peered, and said again, "What is it?" in a sort of whisper. But scarcely had he spoken when he was answered; for the man rolled over in his death agony, and as he gasped, the death rattle blew from his torn throat in a splutter of red over Carl's bent be-goggled muzzle.

At that Carl started back, and had just time to see a leg severed at the hip lying bloody-stumped apart from that other huddle on the crater's edge, when he heard dimly a shout behind, and looking, saw the sergeant with revolver pointed at him coming up through the haze. He could hear nothing of the words flung at him but understood the menacing murder of that glance and that glinting barrel, and terror urged him forward.

He turned and plunged into the mist ahead, plugging the mud heavily, his rifle trailing and a weakness in his knees, for death is not pretty, and he had not seen it near before. In front he saw the backs of his fellows jogging slowly forward, all moving one way, in twos and threes; here and there a single figure, and at intervals larger patches, where many shadows blurred to one mass.

Suddenly he found himself in a crowd. He saw two officers close to him. One seemed to be urging the men forward, the other hung upon the rear, moving this way and that, as a collie cuddles the rear of his flock. In his hand was an automatic. At that Carl spurted anew and drew up into the middle of the crowd.

As yet he had seen no man, other than those first two,

fall. He wondered if, after all, it might be that by taking care one might win a trick from death. Assuredly that was it. Those two back there had not been careful. Perhaps even Hill 50 might be hell only for its defenders. He brought his rifle from the ground,—and a tall man beside him turned, threw up his arms and clutched him with a squeal, his mask a red mash.

They went down together, the tall man atop, drumming frantically with his toes, his head pressed tight against the breast of Carl's tunic. Carl struggled free and rose. The officer in front was gesticulating. With one hand he pointed at the mist ahead, and with the other he seemed to gather the air behind him and fling it forward. There was a rush around him, a chug-chug of many feet. He ran with the others.

The smoke opened and ahead he saw a mound against a further murk, the remains of what once had been a hill, now a monstrous tumble of rubbish, like the midden of a Cyclops or a birth begotten of earthquake. From a dozen points smoke poured from it and he caught a glint just under the ragged rim of its ridge. Then Hill 50 spoke and justified the jest upon its name.

Three horizontal bands, one above the other, crashed into flame upon the crouched hunch of the mound, and as the air knew that jar it shuddered and its riven chambers crashed heart-shatteringly. Cataract after cataract of sound poured; Niagaras of thunder gambolled amid a din of tumbling Gibaltars; and over their jostling battlements the trumps of judgment braved their blast of desolation. The sun was a brass that banged and the earth answered with her voice in travail.

The air, too, was become the playground where in a carnival of passion immense presences danced with feet nimbler than the doe, and wings swifter than swallow wing. Their leap was whirlwind and the brush of their passing

pinions vertigo unnamable. Here and there they whooped and stooped and flew, bruising the poor earth, burrowing to burst there deep their fiery hearts and throw fields skyward in steel-shot fountains. Overhead, while the eye pondered its flutter, their sirocco grew to full, and ere the lid drooped they whooped their whaup and went.

Before that onslaught Carl's band went down like penned cattle above which the red sledge is busy. Three level sheets of flame fraying out from the hill's three bands of fire, converging, took them on a single edge of steel, solid almost as an axe blade. The first ranks, cut in two by that dreadful stream of death, wilted and were no more, and the blade, passing on, bit ever deeper into the huddle of the ranks behind. A blanket of burning air swept down on Carl, filling his lungs through the mask he wore. A jumble of screams beat in to him from in front and above the heads before him he saw a toss of arms and a shattered rifle spin.

Then the man upon whose heels he trod burst like a puff-ball. He seemed to blow out and go, burst into a whirl of shattered bone and flying blubber, and where he had been his cut-off shriek hung. Carl's mask was torn from his face, the left ear strap taking with it half the ear, and now Carl too, conscious of that cruel pang, screamed. Something hit his bare face, something warm, that squelched and fell at his feet, leaving his eyelids heavy. Dazed, as one does such things, he stooped, saw it red and twitching under his hand and screamed again. Then he turned, and with the goad of that horror deep in his soul, leapt into the mist whence he had come.

But now no more does he know where to go nor how to guide his heavy feet. The air is an inferno of flying fragments, dust and flame; everywhere those murderous devils leap, and where they strike chaos thuds to being, and being in her turn to chaos. And, through all, the screaming soars,

a high-pitched continuous ululation like the lamentation of damned souls.

He takes a step, and before him hell opens a new mouth; his next leap is sideways, and a gaunt corpse, from which the uniform streams in crimson tatters, whirls spread-eagled at him, swooping like a great strange bird from a cloud of smoke. He avoids its flight and is off like a harried rabbit at an angle, when his foot twirls in a hole and he is down. As he rises, a man, or what has been a man, comes down on top of him and crushes him in the mud. A weight presses his chest and through his tunic a warm moisture soaks his skin. . . .

Again he struggles up, pushing that nameless thing from him, his mouth atwist; and, when once more he stands, his tunic from collar to waist is no longer grey but red. Down his neck his torn ear, too, pours its quota, his helmet hangs backward, the tatters of his gas mask are twisted about his throat. Around him, as far as he can see on either side beneath the pall of vapour, to front and rear, the plain is like a pot of mud that has been stirred, and in which great bubbles, bursting, have left their pits. And over all that tumbled plain lies the harvest that the guns have gathered, the crops of flesh that are man's toll to the Beast that he has made.

Here, like a sheaf, three bodies stand leaned together, planted to the knees in mud, one headless, one with a jagged fragment of steel projecting from its back, the other unmarked save for a trickle at the lips. Near these a carcass, without legs or arms and caked with clay, lies like a grey valise. Further is a leg naked and blackened; a boot protrudes; a rifle with a hand and forearm hanging from it sticks butt upward. There is a huddle of bodies in one place piled one upon the other, and away from that heap something drags itself upon its hands, something like a maimed dog that lifts a blackened head and howls. . . .

Hill 50 has spat her spit for this time, but her chosen children, the snipers, cuddle their rifle-butts in her ditches yonder and peer steady-eyed into the mist. And at the moving thing they see they aim, and where they aim they hit. As Carl stands, a bullet rips the flesh of his shoulder. He is hurt, but not to death; a numbness runs down his arm, and again that warm flow that he knows spreads under his clothes.

But the touch of the foe's bullet wakes him from the daze of that first battle-terror that all warriors know. Fear passes from him. He sinks, crawls behind the body lying there and rests his rifle across it. There is a glint on the hill and Carl's first bullet wings. His is a kill.

A dozen empty cartridge cases lie in the shelter of his bulwark, when he is conscious of a confused noise behind. It grows and disintegrates into the chug-chug of many feet that plough the mud. It is the attack, reformed and reinforced, coming back upon its dreadful tracks to batter at Hill 50's gates.

Far to the right and left behind him he sees the forefront of the attackers breaking through the mist, and beyond that fringe the mass of the wave looms hugely through the fume. Abruptly the dribble of shots from Hill 50 stops, and it, too, looms, glowering and still, like a crouched monster at bay that shakes the slaver from its chin and braces itself to meet the onslaught of the hounds. Between, time tenses and the air holds its breath.

The first man shuffles past Carl some twenty yards to his right, then three together pass close to him. As Carl rises, one of them brings his rifle halfway to the shoulder, but at Carl's shout drops it, waves his hand forward and is off. Carl now brings his rifle to the carry and, after the man, he too goes, plugging the mud.

He feels no pain now, nor again can panic take him, but he goes deliberate and wrathful. It is as though there are in

him two Carls, one above, calm, resolute, unshaken, and an under-Carl which is a creature of passion and hot anger and red frenzy, like an elemental born from the torture of a slaughterhouse. And the upper-Carl, which is master, stoic and Spartan, callous as pure reason and pitiless as arithmetic and Euclid, observes, directs and prompts the Carl its creature, whispering, "Carl, do this," or "Carl, go there," or "Quick, Carl," and that under-Carl obeys.

For thus does battle divide man within himself:—against himself, since the body, as the state in which such rule is, though it endure a little, passes; yet again for himself in the end and long run of the æons, since from the unconscious oneness first must come division before the conscious wedding that is peace.

And man is then as it were god and devil—god in the austere far-seeing plan, and devil in that blind and brutal hacking that the mandate launches; yet false god and false devil, since not these either may endure in the end and long run of the æons, any more than the God of pure man-righteousness and the Devil of pure man-sin that man's heart has set in his mind's temple; but must ultimately meet, they too, and mate and have their bridal sweets.

And man, although as yet but half awake and still slumber-eyed, dimly even now perceives this; and in that temple a whisper stirs that the priests cannot wholly keep from the ears of their sheep. . . . "For God without the Devil cannot be human, now, nor our Father surely; and your Devil, too, he must be God, not to be divorced from Him—yea, Him vehemently by pitiless Euclid and urgently by arithmetic, since the Whole must contain the part, and He is all that is. . . ."

And now that atom that is Carl runs there at Hill 50, doing his bit in the long wooing; and the Hill glowers at him over the gloom, biding its time for the bit that is its to do. . . .

He has fallen back somewhat, for he limps, his ankle swollen so that he has had to cut open his right boot, and he is in the midmost of the wave of those grey figures that move forward like beaters shooing unseen game.

No man falls as yet, no yelp or growl sounds from hounds or quarry. The foremost men come to the remnants of smashed and tangled wire and posts splintered and askew, on which a few dark bundles of rags hang sagging woefully, like scarecrows propped amid the crops of murder. They pick their way through the mass, and now at that tangled barrier's nearer edge little crowds begin to gather, waiting to pass, for parts are impassable and the fords narrow. In a moment the crowd grows, and those behind still come on, men with teeth set and lips atwilt. An officer yells and flings up his hand in front there. A man beside Carl turns to him. "The fools!" he shouts. "The fools!—They should have seen if it was clear. Look at them. It's murder!" He flings himself into a shell pit, Carl beside him. A confused noise comes from ahead. He can see a man in front, facing round, beat the air downwards with his palms as a conductor stills an orchestra. Hill 50 opens.

For the second time Carl feels that tornado batter at his brain and his sanity swims—the giggle and tee-hee of madness not far from his lips then—but the upper-Carl, with a wrench, masters, and as those thunders leap about him and discharge their wrath heart-shatteringly, he croons bemused above his racking flesh, murmuring, "This one"—and, as it passes, "No, the next"—and again, "This one"—and as that too goes whooping its whaup, he looks upward to its uproar and grins, wagging his hand in a gleeful ta-ta. Then he raises his head above the shelter of the shell-hole's rim and looks, and the next moment is out and running to the wire.

The attack this time has wilted but not broken, for it is deep, and where one wave halts and tumbles its grey froth,

another, roaring in, tumbles its grey froth in turn farther, throwing out, as it frays, streams that reach out like feelers ever nearer to the Hill. The solid foam of bodies leaves a ridge where the wire stretched its tangle, and behind that slight shelter the billows of the charge gather, then, mounting, pass ceaselessly to break and seethe and cease. Ranks are cut as by scythe blades, invisible flails leap laughing here and there, monstrous devils of iron, soaring slowly, swoop through the smoke and, bursting, smash islands in the tight-packed crowd, throwing up eruptions of earth and shattered flesh. But ever the grey waves mount and spread and the grey froth rolls nearer, nearer, yearning shorewards to the Hill.

From all that mass of shattered man a myriad screams and moans that the ear weaves weakly to one fabric rise like a steam of pain. Something else rises too, intangible and supersensual, but hypnotic, soul-compelling, too rare for eye's dark glass or ear's dull drum to gather, airy as a babe's dream, yet stark as a crown of thorns biting at the brow—as it were the brush of wings innumerable, woven to a presence tender and terrible at once, that rises sheathed in splendours and crowned with sacrifice above the agonies of earth. The herd in their bloody quagmire feel it move among them as a wave, and for a space in that choked communing-place of life and death, where the carnate and the discarnate mingle, the iron bands of the body and its terrors drop and the carnate act as the discarnate, are lifted, masters, above themselves, become gods and devils, know themselves immortal and divine. . . . Pain sends up to them no message, weariness drops like a husk, death—there is no Death. . . .

The packed mass slides forward roaring, mounts in front there, thrusting forward its breasts thirstily upon that edge of reaping steel, indomitable, not to be denied its Hill. It is horrible, it is dreadful, but it is sacramental. . . . Look

down, O God!—here in the shambles man vindicates again his claim and the faith by which he lives; here, as in a figure of things spiritual, Adam turns again to the guardian of the Garden, his breast against that flaming blade, and in his mouth the shout: "Make way! . . . Thou canst slay, but not destroy!"

The attackers now reach to fifty metres from the first trench upon the Hill. A minute passes and the gap is twenty metres. A new spout of flame roars from the Hill's volcano and the gap widens to thirty, then closes with a rush to ten.

Carl is now mounting the ridge where the wire was, packed tight among a hustle of figures that bear him onward in their rush. He is treading on bodies on which his feet slip and blunder. It is like walking on bolsters full of stones. Bones pop underfoot. He looks down and sees a face give under his boot, then slides and comes down. A gnashing mouth closes on his leg; he frees himself and is up again. A lance crashes through the crowd, missing him narrowly, and a welter of fragments whirls round him. A man in front goes down on his knees and, shrieking, grabs blindly at a stringy mass that pours downward from the lower part of his body, trying madly to mend that cruel hurt that is past all mending. Carl leaps over the man and goes on. He is nearing that dreadful edge where the crowd frays into a fringe of death. Hill 50, slaving at him with flaming breath, looms above.

The first of those three trenches is now not more than ten metres in front. He finds suddenly only one man in front covering him and they run together with a spurt. Two metres they cover thus—three. The trench is five metres off, when the man goes down, and Carl, springing over his body, drives on, his bayonet forward, all the lump of him lumbering ponderously, his knees now at last feeling

again their weariness, but the upper-Carl still master, the lower still obeying.

A face in a helmet appears at the level of the ground, a hand grenade whizzes past his head. Here are Hill 50's children. He lunges forward at the head and the bayonet, entering at an eye, bites with a rasp upon bone and sticks fast. At the same instant he receives the thrust of a bayonet in turn. Aimed at his belly, it is a fraction too high; the steel grates on the sternum and rips upwards its pitiless gash till, deflected by his left hand that now leaves his own rifle to seize that other, it sticks under his right clavicle, but owing to its direction from below upward, does not enter far, although it lacerates the top of the lung. Also a bullet goes through the flesh of his left calf, touching the bone, but not breaking it.

But Carl, though pain stabs dully, shifts the grip on his rifle, gets the trigger and pulls, at which the impaled head drops away from the bayonet. He now has the other's rifle firmly held in his left, and though the man pulls, Carl is no weakling, and his weight is firmly anchored.

Suddenly the other man lets go the rifle, and as he grabs a hand grenade Carl's bullet brings him night. Carl stumbles into the battered trench, and as he crumples on its floor sees all along the wave of the attack sweeping in and a tumble of leaping figures and clubs that rise and fall. There is no surrender. Hill 50, too, has her vision and her faith, and her firm-lipped children that fight like devils, die like gods.

But Carl is in a bad way now. Things are slipping from him. He feels the trench swing like a ship beneath him and as in a dream hears a voice murmur at his ear. With the palsy of swoon creeping on him, he puts his hand to the wound in his breast and, sipping deliciously the poppy-boon of sleep, his tired mind sinks into the plush of dreams. . . .

Far back, on the other side of Hill 50, an officer in a dim dugout, with a telephone clipped to his head, reaches out his hand to a button and presses it. The set of mines had been well laid as a counter for the possible loss of that first line, a backward gnash of the hill as she withdraws a little and hunches herself farther in her ambush . . . and that gnash now crunches.

Five mine chambers set deep at intervals of a hundred yards, each well gorged with deadly food, with cunningly knuckled tunnelling to absorb the backblast and heavy tampons of cement and sandbags, burst upwards as with one shock beneath the battered trench, their voices blending in one terrible roulade at which the Hill rocks; and five separate mushrooms of soil sprout monstrously and spread and burst, throwing far and wide fountains of débris, battered guns, riven cement blocks, beams and wire, rifles, smashed ammunition boxes and remains of men.

* * * *

Late that day, in a far-off town, in the garret that she had crept to with her children, Ann, the wife of Carl, sat at the tiny window through which the gloaming darkled, a bod- ing in her heart not to be banished, for she had had no word from him since he went, though he had promised; and she remembered that at that promise she had winced in her woman's wisdom, knowing, as all women know, that for every man's promise a bow is strung whose shaft will some day wound a woman's heart. And when the postman came his round she raised her head eagerly, yet feared to go to the door; and when she heard his footfall fade and die, suddenly she bowed her brows there on her arms upon the table and her shoulders shook; for all her woman's home was reft of its man that night, and the hearth of her heart cheerless, like the cabin where the fisher's wife waits lonely with her light and sadly watches, knowing only that

her Jo is on the ocean, but where, in all its desolation and tramp of billows, she knows not. . . . And in the gathering shadows, presently, she slept.

But Carl lay that night on Aceldama; and a gentle rain fell upon his upturned face and upon all who lay there with him, God as it were sweating in His heaven with pity, while below man groaned in the Gethsemane of his flesh; and his sweat was blood.

But Carl was not dead; for him wait deeper depths than these, aye, and greater heights. His grave is not yet dug and in three days he must dig it with his hands.

II. Golgotha

ONE hundred miles from Hill 50, as the kite flies up a tainted wind, a group of buildings stands upon a moor. Between it and the hill stretches a rolling country, dotted here and there with villages, mottled with a dark rash of forests and wealed lividly with rivers that gurgle slowly to the sea.

It is a dark land and desolate, for over the larger part of it war's juggernaut has crashed, and though many months have passed since that time of terror, man has been too busy feeding its wheels yonder where it has stuck in its ruts, to trouble overmuch to mend the scars and tramplings of its track. In the villages grass grows its green beard around the cobbles, save in those through whose shuddering streets food is dragged daily to the Beast. Forests have been felled in acres to make room for road and railway; groups of ruins stand gaping gloomily amid lopped and riven trees. People are scarce save in the arteries that yield that ceaseless tribute whose drain the land now begins to feel sorely.

Through the forests, wild winds, for it is winter, throat their low note of moaning. Sometimes church bells toll,

but weakly and appealingly, a wail which the people hear indeed but heed no more than the elfin bells that sleepy shepherds hear along the evening hills, though sometimes they go in and move their lips dully in that House that might be Rimmon's house to them. For the priests have mostly been smitten dumb by the blast of Baal's passing and the voices of those that still speak are a sound in which small comfort is. But the soul knows, as indeed she knows all, that by that road, though on it night gathers, dawn comes; and wearily still the mind plods to her urge, though no star beams now. And the flame burns always; though deep, and the earth, knowing, makes her attack to smother; but though not yet is the fire's victory, the day comes when the clay shall be riven and the sky kindled with the fire's begotten. . . .

Southward on the moor the land rolls flatly and bare, save for low bushes for many a mile; northward, some two miles from the group of buildings, a river sweeps in a curve, and on the other side is a small town, north of which again the land goes more pleasantly, fruitful with the crops whereby man's body lives. Eastward, far away, a low range of hills tumble the horizon lazily.

Over these hills at dawn the sun views the moor always sullenly, for every night a night-sweat falls there, no sweet dew, but the clammy moisture of marshes, such as in great part the moor is; and like an evil thing that has settled to a work unholy this, at the first hint of day, rises in a thick vapour through which the sun, when he comes, glares redly.

The buildings stand far out on the moor. There are three main structures, a central large one, oblong, about fifty yards long by twenty wide, and on either side of this narrower sheds of almost equal length, evidently accessory to the main buildings, like covered platforms for loading and discharging. A cluster of outhouses completes the

group, all hideously constructed of galvanised sheeting and raw girders, liberally daubed with whitewash.

Round all a light railway runs, with sidings to the two platforms, a gimcrack, uneven way with small pretence at ballasting, even on that bad soil, as if its maker too felt guilty, and the sun, peering over the hill some morning, might find him gone with all his traps. The buildings are completely circled by a double fence of barbed wire, eight feet high, curved inwards at the top. Inside this an inner fence, a few wires high, edges the railway line.

Along the edge of the wood to the westward runs a road, cut at a level crossing by the railroad, which disappears into the wood there.

At six every morning there is a bustle among the hutches out yonder. Men come and go between the shed and the platforms. The railway creaks and rattles under the rumble of closed trucks; an engine puffs. From a chimney in the main shed smoke pours and in the air an acrid odour spreads.

At five in the afternoon the noises and the smoke cease. Gradually the figures that now move again around the hutches grow fewer, a light gleams for a little hour or two like an eye watching, and then another night shuts down and the mist settles.

Only one or two men pass and return through the single gate in the fence, where constantly a sentry watches in a box. Through this gate, which is a heavy iron frame, backed by wire netting and surmounted by barbed wire, the single track of the railway passes, the gate being just wide enough to admit a truck. It is secured by a massive, old-fashioned lock, the key of which hangs in the sentry's box.

The men who pass in and out are three; always the same three, each taking a salute from the sentry as he goes, and going silently with grim looks. No others of the workers

ever go out, but live in the hutches yonder. The only others who have passage to and from the world outside the high barbed fence are the guard and driver of the train that puffs fussily through the gate in the daytime; and they are always the same men.

Over all this place a silence broods, heavy as the stillness of sodden grass through which the wind's feet no longer stir, with something malignant and guilty mixed into its stillness, as if the grass concealed a corpse. A nameless suspicion filters to the soul through the eye that looks upon it, and a fear such as the traveller feels when on the heath at night he passes a pool, fringed with long grass, from which the moon's floating pupil watches.

A mesmeric influence seems to draw the gaze that surveys the moor to those buildings that show white against its dark face, like a tumble of bleached bones over which a savour of decay still hangs. The soul says that this is an evil place, though the mind may scoff; and the soul, as always when she speaks, is right.

These buildings are the Utilization Factory of the Tenth Army Section and to them the bodies of the slain in battle are dragged over that ramshackle railroad, sometimes almost before the blood's warmth is quite chilled, and while some grosser streamers from the departing guest still linger in the brain's grey maze, hearing dully the summons from without.

The bodies arrive in covered trucks drawn by a fussy engine, with pantings and shrieks that seem deliberately devilish. The bodies come packed in bundles of four, naked, save for a rag of underclothing tied around their middles, and secured together by three ties of thick wire, tightly drawn, one in the middle and one at each end. At each end of the bale protrude two heads and two pairs of feet, the heads ghastly in their expressions of agony in all its moods,

though now and then a face where peace has rested looks out and gives its blessing undismayed.

The feet are pitiful; they that have come so far and now must go this farther, even when all their walks are taken.

To every train that draws up at the right-hand siding, looking towards the hills, there is added an open truck with a dark-coloured tarpaulin drawn tight down over its top, an iron tank like a big kitchen sink on wheels. In this have been loaded the fragments that it was not possible to bundle, for bags are scarce and their cost would make an inroad on the Factory's dividends; and the Factory, though under military organization, is run at a profit, must so run, or the shareholders will be angry.

For even to this last has Mammon come, and the intellect that weighs suns in its balance and wants but a fulcrum to lever worlds, divorced from love, ministers in the sty and, chuckling, counts the hire.

From that truck, last always of the train, a thick dark liquid oozes through invisible joints in its iron frame and leaves dribblings all along the track. Sometimes the tarpaulin bulges on the top.

When the train draws up—and there is at least one train a day—the wagon doors are unsealed by a stout, fussy official wearing a skip cap like a station master's, who clatters along the platforms and bangs down the hasps of the wagon doors one after another, collecting as he passes the little green cards from the frames let into the lower corner of the wagon's sides.

With these cards he fusses off to a small outhouse, where, in an office reeky with disinfectant, divided down the centre by a partition in which is cut an opening like a booking-office window, he bangs them down before a weak-chinned youth who sits at a desk on a high stool, and is off again. The same youth receives a sheaf of papers from the guard

of the train and, adding them to a pile under his hand, resumes his work, entering from the lists to a heavy book before him. Behind him stands a shelf on which a row of similar books lengthens day by day.

Meantime, out upon the platform comes a string of men dressed in overalls and wearing hood-shaped helmets that completely cover their faces and show only two large round eyeholes paned with glass, and a circular nozzle like a telephone receiver stopped by a grating, through which is visible a wad of cotton wool. They carry poles about six feet in length, with an open hook of blunt iron at one end. The overalls are stained with dark patches and drops here and there.

They shuffle at the wagons without words, as if moved by some unholy common instinct rather than by mental impulse, and throw open the doors and commence to rake out the bundles, reaching upward with their long hooks and tugging, then stepping back as the bale thuds its sick impact on the platform.

As they discharge, other figures, dressed in the same ghoulish travesty of monk's vesture, come and go through the sliding doors, now thrown wide. These put out their rakes, hook a bundle by the wire tie and, turning, drag it into the shed, leaning forward as they go, as one drags a sled. The bundles slip easily along the cement paving for it is worn and soon becomes covered with a viscous coating over which the bales slither. A horrible stench fills the air. The men cough dully inside the masks.

Inside the main shed a man steps forward and with a pair of pincers unhooks the wires, letting the bodies sprawl apart on the floor. The place is peopled by a hundred nightmares of decay and dissolution, of inconceivable phantasies of manglement and physical disruption. The stench wells, the steam of its abomination ascends, ascends; no mask

can keep it out. No, nor can an iron roof hide it; and One, by whom no violet by the wayside blooms forgotten, whose face is maskless as the day—be assured, O Soul, that He is near.

In this part of the shed is a long corridor, partitioned off from the rest. And at the height of about ten feet from the ground passes an endless chain, propelled by machinery, that clanks ceaselessly onward. Suspended from this chain, at intervals of some three yards, are short lengths of chain terminated by sharp steel hooks that curve their cruel points upward.

A man pushes the bodies forward with a pole under the chain, and another, taking the hook with his right hand and holding the short chain taut with his left, fixes the body by inserting the hook under the breastbone. The chain clanks and the body goes off, its heels dragging along the floor, the upper portion of the trunk sagging backward, the head rolling, the arms swaying horribly—a sickening travesty of a death agony.

The chain clanks and another hook hangs, then sags forward with its load. Another hook—another body. The work goes on. The men, poor wights caught in the web of bloodless reason, make an attempt at reverence, which at best can appear but a mockery.

The bodies are dragged up the corridor, and, after passing a corner far up near the end of the shed ascend into the steaming chamber, where they are detached. After undergoing a treatment there under the care of another batch of hooded familiars, they travel up a belt which, turning at the top, allows them to drop into a huge iron vat, that—heated by a furnace underneath from which comes up a dull roar—simmers like a pot of porridge. In the vat a great macerating wheel with massive iron cogs revolves slowly, grinding, grinding, half under and half above the surface of that

awful stew, its pitiless rim passing six inches from the iron sides of the vat—O Thou, who knowest the end, sustain—and there the bodies, as bodies, cease.

Far underneath in the vat's iron side is a door of iron, tight clamped, and from this, when periodically the vat is emptied, the crushed bones that have sunk to the bottom are drawn out to play their part in the infernal alchemy of Mammon.

The exports of the Factory are pig food, fats, glycerine and manure, brewed and distilled and strained from the mush that once was bodies of men, temples of the—Father, let this cup pass, for I faint. . . .

And to the Tenth Army Section belongs the 85th Regiment; and number 1251 in that regiment is Carl; and along that shuddering *via crucis* of the railway there, even now, Carl comes.

* * * *

He awoke again to bodily being in a dark and stuffy truck, in which an intolerable odour reigned. He was bound with wires that cut him where they touched, to three other fragments whose souls had passed out in that same agony of battle that had left Carl unconscious, and, by some quirk of that strange house where marvels pass unnoticed, sunk in a marble-still mimicry of death. He was paralysed from crown to toe, rigid in the posture in which he had fallen from the throw of the mine. Nor was speech left to him. Sounds reached him, but he could not answer, nor even groan. Only a little light filters through his eyelids' slits, open so little that they might be closed. And how shall any see the horror in that tiny gleam amid the ghastly tumult of the sheds?

Even as he woke the snorting engine braked at the right-hand platform. The trucks banged in succession upon the hind buffers of the one in front, and he had no more time than to realise his state and take the odour of the charnel

to his waking brain, when the truck door went open with a rasp and a hook was dragging at his chest.

They dumped him on the greasy platform in his bale. The agony of the fall stunned him back to blackness on the threshold of a deeper hell than he had yet known.

* * * *

When he woke again he did not know at first that black had passed, for he lay uppermost in the bale, his face turned to the sky that spread dark and heavy above him.

Five minutes after he had fallen, the knock-off bell had gone. The men that night had been sulky at the order to unload within the last five minutes of a heavy day, and as their slipshod overseer—already in his Sabbath best—passed through the gate in the engine cab, gloating over the prospect of his weekly night out in the town six miles away, they had piled their hooks against the shed wall and gone off to the hutches to take off their overalls and eat and afterwards go too, each to his separate shadow for a time.

The sky is dark. A storm has been gathering all the afternoon and presently closes in, and about eight o'clock rain begins to fall and the wind comes in gusts that grow stronger. The raindrops patter on the iron roofs of the sheds, faintly at first, then gradually increasing to a steady murmur. For the second time since Carl got his wounds his face is wet from heaven.

And now slowly his numb flesh wakes to feel and move. Silently, mysteriously, the body undoes her magic and lifts the spell laid, perhaps in mercy, on the tattered flesh. He opens his lips and from his lips come moans and whimpers that the rain's murmur drowns. Presently he slips an arm out of the tie that binds him across the chest, for the bundle has been loosened by that fall from the truck. The ties slacken more as the arm comes out. Then with long moments of stillness during which agony again swamps him,

and struggles stretching across ages of horror, he drags his living body out from its hollow in that bundle of flesh in which decay is already rampant and rises to his feet on the littered platform.

It is a terrible Carl that stands there. He is naked except for a blood-stained rag from his own underclothes, which some relic of decency has ordered should be tied about the corpses' hips. His breast gapes from belly to neck from that bayonet rip; his left leg hangs crooked, not broken, but shrinking from the ground, every touch of which is a long-drawn woe. His form is blackened by earth and powder fumes, splashed in a dozen places with dark brown blood. He has not eaten for three days. And he is mad.

The rain drives him to shelter and there in the shed's wall he sees a narrow door. He drags himself along by the wall, and moaning gets to the door—moaning turns the handle. What need of guards and locks here inside that grim fence? He is inside the shed.

A lantern hangs from a hook, just inside, lighted; so, in fact, hangs every night, by the whim of some brain sicker or saner than the rest of the shed's servants; and by its yellow glare Carl sees that further horror on the floor. It is ten o'clock.

At twelve he is in a long room, a storehouse of the Factory's ghastly products, lower down the shed, with a door that gives upon the same platform upon which the wagon dumped him. In his hand is the lantern and his lips gabble unceasingly the words: "All, all, let me see all"; for in Carl's insanity horror reigns—a last vestige of reason—horror at that grisly place in which man's flesh is made to pig's food in a pot; horror at the dangling hooks and those pale rows upon the gratings in the steam chamber; and fear raised to super-terror, shock by shock, as his reeling brain leaps to knowledge of each new horror.

"Let me see all," he babbles, and from his breast the slow

gouts well one by one, for every word a gout, and at every fresh abomination again the words. He has crept up the Corridor of Hooks, followed by his capering shadow, his bare feet slipping in the glush on the floor; he has crouched with outstretched lantern above the Pot; and down in the cellar, where the iron door opens, has seen the vast heap of splintered bones that feeds the manure grinders.

And one last horror has been his, one last drop of white-hot torture has seared his brain. He came upon it in a cask still unclosed . . . he had been empty for three days . . . and only afterwards he understood. . . .

Now, as he stands there he begins to faint again—he has fainted three times since he took the lantern from its peg—and he staggers, leaning against a heap of a dozen casks piled on the floor against the farther wall, some ten yards from the door. His foot knocks away a block, and the casks, piled in three tiers, come down with a rumble, chasing him before them. To him they seem live things, monstrous births of horror, ghouls set there by man to watch and trap him. . . .

A choking moan comes from his throat and his figure is off down the shed, the lantern dropping from him as he goes. The lantern overturns, the glass shatters, and the spilt oil behind him sputters and runs, blue will-o'-the-wisps flickering upon its pool. Then, as the flame spreads to a litter of stained straw and sawdust that strews one part of the shed floor, a yellow flame springs that with licking fangs reaches and leaps.

But Carl, though he sees the flame's reflection throw his shadow ahead in a giant phantom that capers and sprawls over floor and wall, heeds not, for he hears after him the barrels rumbling, the floor here sloping downward. And madly he scampers to reach that door before those trundling horrors, bulging forward, all lay their touch upon his heels.

He reaches the door and fumbles at the latch, while out of its corner his frantic eye measures the space between him and the foremost cask and the pace of its roll. He finds the catch, raises it and pulls, and for an instant his heart darts a red pang and his panting brain swims as the door remains fast. Then it gives, and he is out on the platform where those pale figures lie, and the door behind him slams, to shake an instant later with the dull thud of the casks upon its farther side.

Instantly his flesh shrinks as the rain impinges on his already shuddering skin and its liquid shell spreads encasing his body. His torn ear wakes its smart at the bite of the wind; his left leg is a moan that fears the ground and hangs crooked from the knee, twitching, as he rests his weight on the other; his breast, as his blood responds to that urgency of hurry which still shakes him, opens a fresh gape, and from the gash's lower end again a rivulet of red trickles thickly down.

By now the storm has spread its dark forces over all the sky, and the moor lies dark beneath great masses of cloud that roll their squadrons over the heavens and deploy and march and countermarch, like armies that muster and take positions for attack, and charge and withdraw, flirting with lightnings. The rain comes in sudden whirls and gusts, no steady downpour, but like batteries that open suddenly and discharge their wrath and wheel and are gone; and after a lull another in turn, choosing its time, bursts its flurry of peltings and shuts and goes dribbling.

There are signs, however, that the night may yet clear, for amid the clouds' jostling battalions now and then a rift shows, and there the black deep of the night sleeps sphered in the moon's light; and here and there a star swims.

As Carl comes out of the door a shower spouts to its height with a roar, shuddering the shed with an echoing downpour on the resounding roof of iron sheeting. A gust

of wind whoops around the corner and like a troop of phantom vultures flings itself upon him, whirling around his pale tattered flesh that stands trembling and bewrayed there in that new trial of its discomfort.

But the will is greater than the terrors that assault it, and Carl now shudderingly puts that crane's foot to the ground and is off over the platform to the rails, then down upon the track with a smothered yelp for his leg, and then on to the inner fence that lies beyond, limping like a wounded bird, his hand stanching the river at his breast. But where his nest is in all that wild night of storm and agony he does not know—God only knows that. And, oh! it is enough to make a heart crack to see that fragment stagger there, with its backward glance and its totter, flying from man's hard handiwork and flinty heart, hunted like a fox to the moor, and with that pitiful hop of a broken bird. Yet the foxes have their holes, and the birds of the air their nests, but for Carl's head there seems no place of rest. . . .

Now he is at the first fence, and pantingly he drags himself up and puts a leg over, for it is only a few wires high, his whole being a shriek that is smothered in his gaping throat. But when half over, a mad fancy whiffs through his sick brain, and at the sight of those pale figures lying forlorn on the platform yonder, he is back; and over each one he stoops, and patting the poor head, a twisted smile writhing his lips, he says softly, "Sleep, sleepy head, sleep," and at the last one, after he has said this, he pauses, and like a wrestler in his memory he gropes, and then more softly he adds, "Mother will come to you soon"—his voice crooning—and he is off again with his limp and the load of his torture to the fence.

This time he gets over, not, however, without a fall, at which a boo-hoo of pain conquers and sprawls from his wry mouth. But Carl need not have been afraid then that

men would hear him and come, as he thought, to take him back to that catasta of the sheds behind; for the storm sheltered him, and man's ears are hard too, like his heart. So only God heard him.

Presently he found the outer fence bar his way, and at that fence his poor heart sank entirely into shadow, for no man unaided might scale it; and he leaned against one of the posts of it, bitter, bitter, thinking that now surely was he undone and all his labour at nought.

But in a little he groped in the darkness and reached another post, and then to another he tottered; and after a long nightmare, in which those posts were commas, he saw the gate and the kennel where the sentry sat.

That night the sentry had drunk well of beer, having gained a wager with a comrade in which the stake was a day's share, and having taken a turn outside the gate just lately, had come in when the first drops of the shower plashed, and now, huddled in his box, he snored; while the gate, with its lock turned indeed by his fuddled fingers, but clear of its hasp, swung to the wind's breath, showing an inch of space between its iron edge and the post.

So the gate was open; and the guard slept; and Carl passed out.

III. Sepulture

THE moor took him to its desolation and the winds and waters wrapped him.

Picking his way among the gorse bushes that dotted the moor's face, he went his weary way, his face set towards the forest yonder three miles away; although he knew not whither he went, only that he left the sheds ever farther at his back.

No longer now fearful of a sound, he lets his sick brain say freely her whims and fancies at his mouth, and between his whimpers words come, nonsense for the most part, and echoes from those shelves where the mind stores her records and from which now at random she picks and ponders and drones now a passage and now peevishly is off on a new quest, scattering the dust. . . . And sometimes his head yaws in the wind like a sick ship, and from his slack lips comes a diddle of delirium and a teetering sound of idiocy that gathers its shadows in the house where his soul still lingers.

But soon with his gabble begin to mingle phrases, disjointed at first, but slowly fitting together; with sometimes here and there a ray that breaks and goes or a gleam of peace in which a star swims like a fisher's boat with its light that rides the storm.

Sometimes, too, a sphery thought sails wonderfully athwart that turmoil of raving, a thought too big for the Carl that passed through the anguish of the mount and the horrors of the charnel house, a glistening orb that sheds calm light upon his suffering soul, like words which they who watch by madmen's beds sometimes hear and wonder at, not understanding, but knowing that here no madness speaks.

For a sane man's mind is bounded; and in the penthouse of the brain the soul sets her asylum of sanity and the sanctuary of her self-contemplation that like all else must grow from a little room to big; but a madman's head is a ruined house with walls agape and riven roof through which looms the abyss wherein the planets swing. Not empty are those halls then, nor entirely desolate that Balclutha of the soul; for the soul in her roaming looks in often, visiting the ruined home she loved; and drops sometimes there a flower gathered on the far shores she knows or whispers there sweet secrets of other whens and wheres; so that

those who linger by the door may hear at times, amid the fall of crumbling roof beams and the flap of swaying shutters, some echo of eternal verities or feel above the odour of rank weeds and rotten grass the subtle perfume of those unknown blooms.

So Carl diddles and droons his way over the moor with that super-sanity of the insane insistently asserting its note, and thus as he goes he murmurs . . . "diddle, diddle, diddle. . . . Oh, that was a cruel rip to give one . . . and struck in anger. But anger is better than hate, for God can be angry, but He would not hate . . . no, not even me . . . diddle, diddle, diddle. And man, sure, has a long way to travel, like me over this moor; and there are storms and blacknesses enough to meet him. But the thing to say is: deeper yet, deeper yet, and still in the end a deeper deep; and in that deep there is a stair starts whose end . . . diddle, diddle, diddle . . . what end is that? . . . Diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow . . . yes, the end, oh, that's good now, and Jacob knew it after that long night of his . . . so maybe for me too there is a stair at the end of this, maybe even for me too. . . ."

And when later on he stumbled and had a fall, he saw some wild thing run from his scramble, and called to it "pussy, pussy," his mind busy with some memory of fire-sides; but it did not come, and his tears drizzled from his chin, and he stood, saying, "Even the beasts fly from me; and who will take me in then and comfort me?" But his home, had he known it, was not far then nor was his comforter unmindful.

Then, seeing the moon through a rift of the storm—which by now was beginning to break up and clear—cruising like a swan in her pool of gloom, he said, "There you go, there you go, you child bereft and far from home; well may you muse upon this cruising human-home, for she is heavy laden . . . and a tear might well fall some night

from you; for her freight of care and heartache is past all cargomark, Father, Thou knowest" . . . and again a spasm shook him at that "Father," and he diddled.

And farther on he stumbled over a spade with a broken handle that some workman had left lying there at the time those sheds were built; and listlessly, after gazing on it some time, he took it up and carried it with him, murmuring, "Here is a spade, Carl; and here is Carl, spade; but whether Carl has found the spade, or the spade Carl, neither of them knows; for this spade has a broken handle and is thrown out on the moor; and I too am broken-handled, and thrown out too, so that I am thought useless by all men, save it be to dig my own grave . . . diddle, diddle. . . . So we may as well go together, spade, for none will have us, not even God; for if I be without a handle, how may He take me up?" . . . And suddenly his foot caught in a stone and he fell upon his face.

As he lay, he lost his spade and groped, and for a moment had a pang of loneliness at the loss of it; but presently found it a little way from him as he lay, and felt immediately better of that pang and followed his musing vacantly, his lips moving as of their own will.

"But it seems I was wrong now, for here is nothing but a broken spade; but when I lost it I was forlorn, and finding it was happy again; so that even a broken spade is some use it seems, if one love it. And even when it is utterly broken up and mouldered I suppose it is not utterly destroyed, for that I am sure of, but its substance must pass into other spades, or into other and finer tools. But look now; some one planned the spade before it was made, and took iron and wood and put his plan in them, and clothed his plan in spade; but the plan was in the mind, and a man's thoughts now do not rot. A thought is not a thing and man can't get at it to rot it or to break it. So you see, Carl, the spade is good and need not be afraid" . . . And

at that he rose again, and as he went hopping on amid the gorse, his brows wrinkled and his eye puzzled, as with a great thought that would not be tamed to speech.

Once as he went he saw suddenly a dark form stretch out before him on the ground like a great evil thing that lay in wait to betray his feet, and he started, all his fear swift-turned on him and his heart sinking, for that menace was sudden, and awful seemed that form. Yet saying, "What cannot harm spade surely cannot harm me," he made a step and found that it was his shadow, cast by a glare that had waked behind him on the moor.

That thought with which he wrestled was very near then and his soul was a Bethesda pool which it seemed an angel's wings almost stirred, but at the light he turned, thinking day came then; and again the pool waited.

Day was not yet, and it was an evil light that he saw far away whence he had come. The lantern he had dropped in his flight down the shed had set its flame's contagion firm in that sinful house, before any of its minions had waked to its menace in that wild and roaring night, and now the conflagration was well under way, lighting up the moor with the glare of its destruction.

Great billows of smoke, heavy and greasy as with the evil that had dwelt there, rolled far away towards the river before the wind that had now died to a breeze, and tongues of deep orange flame shot up, from which sparks whirled upwards. Now and then great flots of fire, detached, soared a moment, and flickered and went out.

The rain had ceased, the sky was clearing and the murmur of the flame came out to Carl dimly, he being now about two miles away from the sheds and about a mile from the road yonder.

He stood in an irregular circle of gorse bushes and watched that far out roar of red fury growing and the sparks and flame-flots fly their brief flight and go. . . . "As

the sparks fly . . .” he murmured. Then suddenly he was aware that even here the glare reached, showing him dimly, and, still faithless in man’s hard heart and the hand that seemed always against him, he sank, thinking he would surely be discovered; “and goodness knows,” he thought, “what new thing they will do to me if that happens.”

After a little he looked out and saw the fire grow and black figures run about the foot of the furnace; and presently, darkling, with a grim resolve in his eye, he took the spade and began to dig. And as he dug in the face of the moor, he spoke to himself:

“If I stay here I am caught by those devils yonder, and go farther I cannot, God knows; for here I am foundered at the last and my life must be saved or spent in this spot, for I am not a bird though I hop like one” . . . And a twisted smile broke on his lips to a sob, he being then truly near his end and his flesh but a living wince in which the soul lingered. And now as he dug he sobbed:

“God, God—if you do see and it is not an untruth—look, I have borne my part, surely; nevertheless, what more of my share may be to come I’ll bear—I’ll bear . . . But a man is not a camel, now . . . not a camel . . . and it is time to make an end. Here, then, I will dig my grave, and I will be buried in the earth; for in her is sweetness and good rest and comfort . . .” And he went on digging with his broken spade.

Presently, after half an hour’s labour, crouching there, during which his breast gaped again, and drops of blood fell on the spadefuls he turned, he had carved a shallow ditch the length of a man, two feet across and about a foot and a half deep, but then could do no more, feeling death near; and he said:

“I will lay me down in this grave that I have made and here will I compose myself to sleep, for my limbs are weary, weary, and my heart heavy laden; and to no far-

ther bourne came all the tribes of earth, no, and to no better rest; for truly man is dust and darkness the portion of his days."

But before he lay down in the grave he had another memory and he knelt there in his pain and nakedness to pray. And when he had knelt to pray he would have said the Lord's Prayer, for that seemed to him a good prayer; but he found he had forgotten it, and he could only sob . . . and after a little he said "Mother . . . mother" . . . and that comforted him, for God had made him as a little child again.

He took the spade and lay in the grave, and closing his eyes he said softly, "This surely is the end of my pain and I can die and be at rest for ever" . . . and after a little . . . "But if there is a God He will raise me." And he slept.

IV. Resurrection

IN A SWIFT, easy-rolling car two men sped along a road that night, leaving ever farther behind them the snake-line where the Beast raged and in which Hill 50 was a boil of torment.

Before and behind the car went two others, each keeping its distance from the middle car and each with four soldiers on board.

Of the two men in the car, one was a burly figure dressed in a Marshal's uniform under a grey cloak. His face was massive and heavy-jowled, a grim face with an eye to be feared, for pity was not in it.

The other was a slighter man, whose face was almost totally hidden by the turned-up collar of his coat, above which, in the shadow of his helmet, his eyes gleamed with an insolent stare. His loose cloak, thrown open, showed a

glitter here and there on the uniform beneath, for they had been to a review of raw troops, these two, where for once in a while such gewgaws had their use to gild the bitter pill of death.

Silence hung in the car between those two and with gloomy looks their eyes roved through the windows as they sped through the countryside, deserted and still in the slowly waking grey of a storm-washed dawn, it being now about four in the morning.

The rain of the night had ceased to fall and the skies were clearing, the clouds rolling away horizonwards in a jostling tumult of murky billows; and a fresh wind blew, with a promise in it of a glorious day to be. The wheels of the car splashed now and then through pools of rain water.

The figures in the car sat motionless, each communing with his mind's images and getting little comfort there, it might be seen. The man with the shadowed face broke the silence. "So they fight," he said.

The other man turned on him a dour look, something between respect and contempt. "So," he said, "they fight. But what can they do? A handful!" He flicked his coat sleeve. He was still for a space, then spoke again, his dour smile twitching his face. "War broods," he said, "and all her eggs are not hatched yet."

The slight man looked at him sideways. "Nor laid," he said between closed teeth and laughed loudly at his own wit.

The car at that moment swerved round a bend of the road, which followed here the line of a forest's edge. In front and on one side of the car they saw a wide expanse of moor bounded by a distant ridge of hills.

A mist lay over the face of the low land, a mist that rose like an evil thing born of quags and marshes, that hurried to be gone before the dawn. And far out on the moor a

great red eye glared, a dark crimson pupil in an iris of orange light, that hung spectral-like above the world and pulsed and ogled like an unholy eye.

The smaller man leaned forward and looked intently at that far-away conflagration swimming in the mist. For a full ten seconds he regarded it and, as he looked there into that red pupil, his eyes in the shadow of his helmet threw back a glint of red, for even at that distance a faint tinge of its fury dyed the air like the glare from a furnace door, flushing the wall of trees on the farther side of the car. One would have thought that the fire fascinated him, for as he looked his head went slowly forward as a bird goes to a snake. His lips went down at the corners and he laughed harshly.

"Look!" he said, nudging the other, "some one is warming himself this morning. What place can that be?"

The other pondered a moment; then reading easily from the map of his well-stored, well-ordered supermind, he answered: "This is where the Utilization Factory of the Tenth Army Section is situated, and those should be the buildings that are ablaze yonder. The flame spreads from below upwards," he added, with a laugh. "The main building is a big one and there should be a crash soon; it should be worth watching. I suppose it came from above," and he glanced upward; "but I thought they were safe here. Curse those planes!" Thus with idiot lips he too gabbled the high truths given him.

The other was about to lie back on the cushions, his mind ready to rove from that new toy of the fire, when a whim seized him, given as he was to fantastic tricks. He leaned forward and rapped on the front window, and the car drew up. The cars ahead and behind also stopped and by the time he was on the road a group of officers stood around him at a respectful distance.

"Come, Marshal," he said, "we will walk a little way in

this fresh air and see that nearer. The crash would not be complete without us," and he chuckled.

The other in the car got up lumberingly, and with a "You command, Highness," which scarcely disguised his grumpiness, stepped out beside him on the moor. Four of the others fell in behind, some ten yards off, walking stiffly, their eyes straight ahead and unmindful of the moor's beauties, for even in its evil it was a thing of loveliness there in the presage of the dawn.

The sky was now almost completely clear and the mist was paling rapidly, waning the anger of that red eye that glowed before them. Behind them the dark fringe of the forest was faintly tinged with rose against the night that rolled back yonder in the west. Far off, the hills lay on the horizon and in the sky above the hills the morning Star hung clear as a spark of crystal light.

The flame that drew them burned ahead and they trudged forward, their feet making a sound of chugging in the quaggy patches that interspersed the firmer ground.

They had come the better part of a mile from the road when the smaller of those two figures ahead started and gripped the other by the arm. "Look!" he said. They stopped. The four figures behind halted.

They had come to the edge of an irregular circle of gorse bushes, enclosing a patch of firmer ground. In the centre of the little arena thus formed was visible a heap of newly turned earth. By the side of the mound was a shallow grave, and in the grave lay a naked man with a great wound in his breast and a broken spade by his side. Upon the air came a sound of moaning.

The bulky figure of the Marshal moved a pace in front of the other, then, stayed by something more than the strange terror of that figure lying there, he stopped, and his voice came in a gruff whisper. "Some madman," he said. "He must be one of the men from the sheds. Come back,

Highness. I will have him covered and dispatched somewhere."

On the verge of his answer the other gripped the Marshal's arm again and pointed. . . .

The body of Carl had been lying in the grave with his head towards the two who had come thus upon him, and as the smaller man raised his hand, pointing at him, he rose till he was sitting in the hollow, his back still towards them, so that he did not see them with his eyes.

He rose sitting, and before him, as those eyes now opened, he saw the hills, and above them that Star hanging like a spark of crystal in the sky.

He looked and slowly his moans died away. Wonder stirred behind the tiredness in those eyes then and slowly broke, flowering like the blossom of a babe's calm glance when first its eyelids open beneath its mother's kiss. The twitchings smoothed away from that racked flesh, as if a touch had healed the scars of all his woe. Then slowly, with a motion of infinite yearning, he raised his arms, stretching them wide towards the hills and the beacon that hung above them.

His voice came, and his voice was calm and deep, and "Oh, there's a music there," he said, with a movement of his head, first from side to side, then bowing. . . . "Oh there's a music there . . . that beats the bleat of all man's music; . . . and a light . . . a light . . . that's not a candle."

And in Carl's heart then truly there was music—and a psalm unheard of man; for he had come through that valley whose shadow is Death and lifted up his eyes unto the hills; and a presence stood with him in his house and used his lips for ends beyond his ken.

The watchers there stood motionless, watching him, hearing those words dimly, yet clear in the morning still.

And he went on: "Again, again my cup is prepared, and

behold I take it gladly. Father, let it not pass from me; for though the labour is heavy, the labourer is strong." He stood up. "I come, and the morning comes with me," said his voice, rising with a note of anthems. "Behold the earth, O Son, the vineyard where the ripe grape hangs her clusters of full-blooded fruit, ripe for yet another vintage, another of the luscious harvest-homes of God. And though my feet be heavy on both grape and the stalk, though the lees must be cast out until another pressing, Thy wine bin shall be love in the end to overflowing, and not one drop remain ungathered."

He turned and looked on those two, his eyes placid, yet with a gaze in them under which they stirred uneasily.

He smiled slowly, not a fear there, nor a doubt. . . . "What seek ye?" he said. "For if ye seek this Carl whom ye numbered with a tag, stamped upon one side with a crown and the number eighty and five, and upon the other with the number one thousand two hundred and fifty and one, he is with me, but ye cannot touch him; for I hold him now, and presently Another. And if ye seek me who am with him in his house, me indeed ye may touch if ye will, but the will is not in ye. Yet love a moment as this one came at last to love, and ye shall sup with me at my table."

The Marshal strode forward, his burly figure looming grossly by that worn flesh there in the grave. "Who are you and what are you doing here, fellow?" he said, with a surprised and angry eye, his large well-ordered mind fretful at this jarring figure, this thing not in that mind's reckoning, thrust thus suddenly into its ken.

He paused, and from Carl no answer came, but he looked at those two with a clear eye, not surprised, but calm as summer sky. The Marshal took a pace. "Salute your Emperor," he said.

The voice of Carl spoke softly and he turned upon that burly form his cool pupil. "My Emperor truly I do salute,"

he said; "and bow myself wholly down before him; but not this emperor, but another whom you know not now with the mind; but the soul there in her secret chambers knows Him and makes her obeisance to Him in that hall where from of old He has set His holy throne." He paused.

The Marshal's dull eye grew dark, and again he spoke, saying gruffly, "Do you not know who we are?"

And Carl's voice answered, "Yes, I know you truly, you and the other there, but not as ye know yourselves, but in another glass than the eye scans. You are begotten of the Oneness, that yet is not the One, of its separation into its elements in order that meeting they may apprehend and mate in conscious union. And yours is the grosser part, and a hard man you are, with adamant in your heart now; but He who fused the adamant, He will fuse you too, never fear; and soon in His chosen vessels, with the fire out of the mouth of a babe you will be blasted; and if the torture of the fire has been long, yours will be as the slag and lava till you learn, and do, His will. . . . Long has the earth waited, but now the hour is at hand. Even now my feet are wonder on the hills; my voice gathers in the blast; the brush of my wings shakes the bastions of the darkness. . . . I come, the Chosen of God, the Cosmic, planet-chapleted and unashamed, anointed with the chrism of blood that is the Jordan water preferred before the rivers of Pharpar and Abana. . . . Woe unto ye, the hard; he through whose lips I speak is sifted, but ye are still to sift. Yet a little while and I will kiss him, but ye I will spew out of my mouth . . . before my breath ye shall be as the thistle's beard in the whirlwind, as snowdrifts at the thaw. . . . Not that ye shall be cast away for ever, but that first I will eat the ripe, but the green not yet."

His voice was a trumpet—in his eye the lightning like an eagle homed. For a moment a ray from the waning fire

lit a streamer of mist that seemed to flame from his right hand outwards like a sword . . . then passed, and he smiled again.

He stood up, drawing himself taut from the toes, reaching . . . his arms outstretched . . . a tatter of rag still swathed about his hips . . . on his breast the red gash agape. They saw him a pale figure against the murk . . . strangely reminiscent . . . he was lifted up . . . light beat from his face . . . Morning Star was at his brow . . . the grave under his feet.

For a moment the two before him tensed. In the stillness their breathing was heard with a hissing intake.

Then the body's arms came slowly down and the voice from the lips of Carl broke like a chant upon the morning air; now crooning as a mother's voice above the downy babe's head nested in her breast; now with the note with which in the valley of the shadow a man yearns back through the years for those breasts of peace again; or whispering like a lover's insistent whisper at his beloved's ear; or, again, rolling deep-chested as the anthem of a priest inspired:

"Sing unto the Lord, O Earth; and all ye stars give answer. Praise Him, ye heavens that He has made, with all your chanting choirs. For from His love He made you and cannot leave you; all you in Him, no speck in you not held within His hand.

"And though He let you stray like babes, yet a road He gives you and a gate; and though you wander far from His father-hand, in the end He leads you right; and will bring you back into His heart's harbour and holy home of Love.

"In His House He has decked a bridal chamber, and there He waits you as a bride the bridegroom, with the spousal kiss ripe upon his lips, sweet, sweet; and the lamps lighted about the couch and the curtains drawn.

"Sing unto the Lord, O Earth; and all ye stars give answer. Praise Him, ye heavens that He has made, with all your charming choirs."

He ceased; then bowed his head. Then again he looked at them with that eye of summer calm. "What seek ye?" he said.

The gruff voice of the Marshal seemed to falter a moment on his lips, but with a wrench he spoke. "Who are you?" he asked again.

"I am the King of the World," the lips of Carl answered, and his voice was like a challenge. Then with a softer tone he went on, "If I am come here and declare it unto you, it is not for you alone, nor for him only that is present in this house with me, but that the purposes of Him that sent me may be fulfilled. For out of the Father comes the Son, which is the Father also, and must be first in Him. So also is that earthly birth that now must be. But the father here begets not the son in spirit; but through him only in this case may the Spirit of the Son pass. For this one was tried in the fire and refined, and was a worthy vessel in the end; in his heart holiness and loving-kindness and a childlike faith in the most high ways of God. And if the vessel were tainted a strong spirit would yet take away a cloud with it; and it is needful that this be as crystal or the labour would be in vain."

He groaned, and on his brow, though no ruffle showed, the sweat stood. "I speak riddles to you, but before we leave this spot, all this and more shall be accomplished. And now—I go." He ceased and made a step . . . looking at the two as though expectant.

The two cloaked figures in front of him did not stir from their places, but the bulkier made a movement of his hand as if he would have summoned the four that stood together some yards behind.

The other man put out his hand and stayed the gesture.

"Let him be," he said; "the men from the sheds will find him, and in any case we cannot be troubled with him. He hasn't got long, poor fellow."

The Marshal shrugged. "You command," he said. "Shall we go?" He half turned.

The pale figure stopped a moment and they could hear a murmur from it as though a voice spoke with itself there. Then the voice of Carl was raised.

"Look!" he said. "I go to preach to the people, to stir them so that soon they will come and take your crown away and break it, and make a better crown for an Emperor mightier than you. The Beast you serve draws near his end. Think you that it was written in vain: 'Out of the eater shall come forth meat and out of the strong sweetness?' You have made yourselves his priests, but there is a murmur that grows, even now a *fama clamosa* is set against you that you must answer." He made another step.

"The Slayer of the Beast is afoot," his voice pealed. "I have eaten of his food yonder, in the sty that burns, and am his master even in the flesh. I have taken the measure of your works and weighed them and found them wanting—and the Carl ye numbered with a tag has set alight your sinful house." He pointed to the smouldering sheds. "Your empire and its abomination"—he fixed upon the smaller man a look of judgment—"is even now in spirit at an end." Again the mist streamed like a ray of light from his right hand. "And I go to stir the people." He made another step.

The slighter figure in front of him turned and spoke to the other. "Have him sent to a madhouse," he said.

But the other brooded with a heavy brow, looking at Carl. He swept his hand across his brow, puzzling, as one tries to brush the cobwebs from some far memory.

"I have heard that tone before," he said, "but where I forget; which for me is strange. But to let him go, Highness, were madness as great as his. This voice makes con-

verts and even now there is a murmur among the people which grows. . . . He has seen too much, I think, and by his own words he fired the Factory yonder. In any case, he is a rag already. Since he has made his bed, let him lie in it and save a firing party."

The slight man turned away with a "Well, well, do what you think best, Marshal, but quickly; I wash my hands of it," and stood, back to those two, his cloak aflap in the gentle wind that now stirred, his figure grey there in the whispering dawn. The other fumbled a moment beneath his cloak, then as that white figure went stepping, all its limp forgot, he made a swift stride—was beside it. His hand went up with a glint of blue steel and a sharp crack barked in the stillness, sending a startled bird skyward from a nearby bush. Carl staggered a few steps backward, and as his backward step went over the edge of the grave, he fell and lay there upon his back, his length along the length of the shallow pit.

While a breath might come and go they remained there, these three, together in the flesh after so many years. . . .

The mists of the dawn were rising all about them on the moor, and at that moment the cold grey of the breaking light seemed shadowed, dimming the angry smoulder from the far-off sheds, where the fire by now had died, and the motionless figures of the other four that stood grouped some yards apart. Then over the hills came the dawn, a tiny rim of red at first, that grew as the eye watched it—and suddenly all the mist was glorious with tints of mother-of-pearl and opal and rose.

The Marshal slipped the thing he held in his hand under his cloak and turned, but the other, with a lift of the eyebrows and a sidelong glance, showed him a twitch that quivered and passed and quivered in the flesh that lay in the ditch, and he turned again and took a pace and looked down.

Then he stepped down with a heavy tread upon the body that lay there in the grave, and setting his foot upon the neck, pressed with a jerk of his full weight until the tautened sinews dragged the chin down to dent the upper of his boot toe. There was a dull snap.

And never again moved Carl; for there beneath that heel his story closed, and before the snap of his atlas passed, his soul was where no heel could harm him. And though no soul bell sped or priest shrove him, though to the outward eye his house was utterly destroyed, him also the mansion of the Father gathered.

And at that hour, in her garret in a far town, Ann, the wife of Carl, suddenly laid down her sewing and put her hand to her side, feeling a pang there; then to the bed she tottered with a moan and lay where never more Carl's weight would press, her soul all a troublement of new darkness and new light. For between two that God makes three there is a bond God knows, that man knows not.

And, going back, those two sat silent in their car; and between them an echo of words hung heavy, and long shadows of thoughts swept now and then through those chambers where each man dwells with the images he has made and which one by one he must break before he finds himself and knows the Maker from the Made. Yet what those shadows brought them, whether their hearts were touched with pity or whether they brushed them aside as idle fancies, they only know, each of them—they and God who knows all things.

But this only is here written, that after a long spell of that grim silence between them in the car, he of the shadowed face said to the other, "By the way, Marshal, do you remember that regiment and number?" And the other with the big, well-stored, well-ordered mind said, "Yes, I have made a note of them." Then at the end of a further silence the first one said, "Oh, well, if he had a wife, see

that she gets the cross—he did his bit, anyway.” So Carl’s bit is done, and a note is duly made; and the car rolls on.

A week later a flat package, stamped with many seals, was put into Ann’s hands, and when she had tremblingly undone the tapes and shattered the crimson wax that fell in flakes, bedabbling dreadfully the floor, she found a box, and inside the box a cross.

In this way the cross of Carl came home to his wife, Ann; and the cross of Carl that so terribly he earned is now Ann’s; and she bears it.

But for his slayers also is a cross prepared; and that cross is more terrible than Carl’s. For as the deep is, so also is the steep.

When the flow of these waters was over, a voice said: The work of the spirit is done; what remains is a labour of the mind.

The vessel gives it not as it was given, but as in a figure of things spiritual, and through a dark glass.

But Another comes to tell it clear and sweet; and a blind man shall see Him, and at His voice the ears of the deaf rejoice.

Peace be with you.

July 1917

HATHOR'S PETS

by Margaret St. Clair

"I WON'T have my baby born here among a lot of lizards!" Vela said passionately. "I just won't! Henry, you've got to help us get out of here!"

Henry Pettit sighed. Would it do any good to try to tell his sister again that Hathor and her fifteen-foot congeners were not lizards? No, it would not. Vela was never very logical and the fact that she had violated the cult of feminine delicacy sufficiently to mention her coming child to him showed how excited she was. Arguing with her in this mood would be wasted breath.

"Why don't you ask your husband to help you?" he said pointedly.

Vela drew herself up. Her small hard face softened momentarily. "Denis doesn't know how to get things out of the Scalies the way you do," she said. "He isn't—Denis has principles. Denis has ideals."

("Denis is too all-fired good and noble to butter up to the lizards in the disgusting way that *you* do," Henry translated silently.)

Aloud, he said, "He's your husband, though. It's his responsibility."

Vela stared at him reproachfully for a moment. Then she burst into tears. Ever since her child had been on the

way she had been indulging in orgies of tears. Anything was apt to send her off into a crying jag.

Henry, who was some five years older than his sister, could remember, very dimly, back to the end of the era of feminine freedom, the time when women had been encouraged, nay, expected, to be intelligent.

The girls had been in the saddle then—they had ridden high, wide and handsome. But the rise of the government-sponsored cult of feminine modesty, chastity and brainlessness in the late 1970's had put an end to all that. Nowadays a woman was a cross between a dripping sponge and a vegetable.

Mrs. Pettit came waddling up. She had been lingering within earshot behind a tree in the park. "What have you been saying to Vela, son?" she demanded. "The poor girl! I won't have you upsetting her."

"I'm not upsetting her," Henry replied morosely. "She's upsetting herself. Excuse me. I'm going over to the laboratory."

He got up and started rapidly across the grass.

"Henry, *wait!*" his mother shrilled after him. Fortunately he was walking so fast that it was possible for him to pretend that he had not heard.

After lunch his brother-in-law, Denis Hardy, began on him. Denis went over the history of the last few months relentlessly, from the time the strato-liner *Pelican's* life boat had been trapped in the vortex and whirled into Hathor's universe until the present. He even made a digression to consider whether the vortex had been deliberately created or not.

"Don't you see," he finished, "Vela can't have her baby here. Why, she might—might even have to feed it herself."

"Well, what of it?" Henry replied abstractedly. "Women used to do it all the time." He had had a most interesting morning. He wanted to get back to the laboratory.

Denis turned an angry red. "You're disgusting!" he said sharply. "Can't you keep a civil tongue—" He bit off the words and made an obvious effort at conciliation.

"Why don't you want to go home, Pettit? There's nothing here for a man."

"I like it," Henry answered simply. "Grass, flowers, air—it's a beautiful place."

"That's not the reason," Denis replied nastily. His little ramrod of a back grew straighter. "I know what you're up to in the laboratory. *Forbidden research.*"

"Everything was forbidden at home," Henry answered reasonably. "But we're not home now. It's not forbidden here."

"Right's right and wrong's wrong, no matter where—" Once more Denis controlled himself. The gold braid on his shoulders quivered with effort. "Stay here yourself if you want, then," he snapped. "But the rest of us don't share your peculiar tastes. We want to get back to decency, normality. Is there any reason why you shouldn't use your influence with your scaly friends to have them send us back to Earth?"

There was—but how could he explain it to Denis? Denis had a mind which, even for the second officer of a stratosphere liner, was limited. How could Henry make him understand how horrible mental contact with Hathor was?

It was not that Hathor was malignant or even unkind. Henry had a faint but positive impression of benignity in his dealings with her. But the words with which the human mind bridges gulfs—*when, who, where*—became, when one was in contact with Hathor, the gulfs themselves.

To ask her when something had happened was to reel dizzily into the vastest of all enigmas for humanity—the nature of time itself. The question, "What is it?" forced the questioner to contemplate the cloudy, chilling riddle of his own personal identity. And even, "Where?" brought

up a panorama of planes of being stretching out to infinity.

In between times it was not so bad. When Henry had not seen Hathor for several days he was almost able to convince himself that he was not afraid of her. Then he would need something in the laboratory, go to see her to ask for it and come back from the interview sick and shaking, swearing that nothing—*nothing*—would induce him to plunge once more into the vast icy reaches of her inhuman intelligence.

He hunted for a reason Denis would understand. "It's no use asking her," he said finally. "Vela is going to have a child now and so Hathor would never let you go."

"But that's just why we want to go home."

"I know." Henry swallowed. "But Hathor and the others look on us as—you might say—pets. Whether or not they brought us here deliberately—myself, I think it was an accident—that's how they feel about us. And nobody ever turned a pet loose when it was going to have young."

There was no use in telling Denis that Hathor was responsible for Vela's child in the same way that a dog breeder is responsible for the birth of pups. It would only offend Hardy's dignity.

"Pets!" Denis answered, staring. "What are you talking about? They're nothing but lizards. They haven't got stereo, stratoliners, a-bombs, anything. We're their superiors in every way."

"They're *not* lizards," Henry replied. "They're very highly evolved mammals. That crest down the back of their heads is just an accident.

"The reason they don't have those material things is that they don't need them. Haven't you ever seen Hathor materialize things for my laboratory? She does it by moving her hands. She could turn a rubber ball inside out without making a hole in it.

"As far as that goes, if you think they're nothing but lizards, why are you trying to get them to send you back to

your own time and space? No lizard I ever heard of could do that sort of thing."

Hathor appeared. One moment the air was empty—the next it thickened and condensed, and there she was. As always when he first saw her Henry was divided between a wild desire to run for cover and an almost equally strong impulse to prostrate himself in awe at her feet.

He glanced about to see how the others were taking it. Denis, for all his bravado, was turning slowly white. And Vela, trying hard to be supercilious, was arranging the folds of her mantilla with shaking hands.

Not that there was anything especially horrible about Hathor to casual viewing. Though she was over fifteen feet tall and so strong that she could have picked up any of the humans in the park with one hand, her body was slight and well-proportioned.

She looked a good deal smaller than she actually was. The integument which covered her streamlined contours, was pearly, pinkish, lustrous. And her tall vermilion crest could hardly be considered a deformity. It was something else that caused the reaction, something in the look of her eyes.

Her impersonal gaze moved slowly over the little group. It slowed and came to rest on Henry. The skies of her mind fixed on him.

"You're Henry," said the glassy, disembodied voice within his brain. "Henry. The one"—(not quite *one*—what Hathor was thinking was more like *semipermeable membrane* or *assemblage of points*)—"the one with the laboratory. Yes.

"I'm going to train you to"—(a dissolving kaleidoscope of images as thick as snowflakes. From the glittering throng of whirling, evanescent pictures Henry caught up two which lasted longer than the rest—one of a hawk leav-

ing the falconer's wrist, the other of a slender key turning in a lock)—“Come along.” Hathor motioned with her two-thumbed hand.

It was the first time she had ever come after him. Henry felt a premonitory shudder run through his limbs. None the less he got obediently to his feet.

It was nearly suppertime when he got back. The smoke of Mrs. Pettit's cooking fire drifted out into the still air and mingled pleasantly with the smell of frying meat.

Henry sank down limply on the grass beside the blaze, shielding his eyes with his hand from the light. It was not until supper had been eaten and the necessary refuse from the meal had been burned that he could bring himself to speak.

“Vela—Denis,” he said, trying to keep his voice from quivering. “Do you still want to get away from here? If you do I'll do all I can to help you. I want to get away myself.”

There was a cautious silence. Vela opened her lips and then closed them again. At last Denis spoke.

“Why, yes, we still do. We thought you— Yes, we still want to get away.” For a moment the ruddy flicker of the fire lit up the tight lips of his handsome small-featured face.

Whatever had made him decide to be tactful about Henry's abrupt *volte-face*, whether his silence was caused by policy or contempt, Henry was thankful for it. He could not possibly have put into words how hateful Hathor's recent compulsory extension of his senses had made the world where he now was to him.

He had learned too much ever to consider that world beautiful again. And trying to express it verbally would have been almost as bad as the original experience.

“What was Hathor doing with you today?” Vela asked curiously.

“Training me,” Henry answered briefly.

"Training you? How?"

"It's something she does with her hands," Henry replied unwillingly. "They disappear. And then I hear what's going on inside the stones."

"Oh." Vela looked rather sick. "Well, are you just going to ask her to send us back to our earth, or what?"

"Asking her wouldn't be any use. She let me see that today. Anyhow, she knows we want to go home. But I've been thinking." Henry Pettit's voice was getting back its customary tones. "Why do people get rid of their pets? They get rid of them—"

"I don't like 'get rid of,'" Denis cut in sharply. "God knows we aren't here of our own choice and we want to get back to our own time and place. But we're alive here and that's something. We don't want to get killed trying to get back."

"We won't be killed. When people get rid of their pets they don't murder them. They send them to a friend in the country who has more room or turn them over to an animal shelter or something. They don't kill them."

"But as I was saying, why do they get rid of them? Basically for one of two reasons. You get rid of a pet when it's not a good pet—when it sulks, is sullen, uncooperative, disagreeable—or you get rid of it because it makes a nuisance of itself. Like chewing up rugs or howling at the moon. Now if we could only make nuisances of ourselves—"

"How?" Denis asked, frowning. "Hathor isn't around here much, so being noisy won't do any good."

"What about doing something with whatever you're working on in the laboratory, son?" Mrs. Pettit suggested. "Perhaps we could be nuisances with that."

"We can't have anything to do with the laboratory," Denis announced sternly. "Forbidden research is wrong, here or on Earth."

"Oh, be quiet, Denis," Vela said peevishly. Her husband

looked as if he could hardly believe his ears. "This is lots too serious for us to be honorable," she went on as if in explanation. "Henry, if you can do anything with your research, do it."

"Well—I might try a matter canker. That's just about the most forbidden research there is. I'd have to be careful not to get a radioactive form of canker, of course"

"Would that annoy Hathor?"

"A matter canker? Yes. A matter canker would annoy anybody quite a lot."

"And if she gets mad enough at us, she'll send us back to our own time and space," Vela said. She yawned. "Let's go to bed early and get lots of sleep. And tomorrow we'll help Henry all we can."

His lab assistants were willing if not very bright. Clad in lead-impregnated coveralls they weighed, stirred, measured, filtered and proved to be so incompetent that on the second day Henry got rid of all of them except Vela.

Her measurements were more accurate than those of the others, and she didn't talk so much. Once or twice before he had suspected that she could be intelligent when it suited her to be.

"Listen, Henry, aren't you afraid Hathor will find out what we're doing before it's ready?" she asked late on the second afternoon. "Then she'd make us stop before we got annoying."

"I doubt it," Henry replied absently. They were engaged with a difficult bit of titration. "There, that's enough—She used to visit the lab a good deal at first but not any more. I don't think she'll be around until it's time for me—for me to have another lesson. I hope we'll be gone before then."

"Well, but what about the canker itself? Won't it be dangerous? I should think it would give out a lot of heat."

"No," Henry replied, "there isn't any heat with a canker. Nobody knows why. And they can't find out because it's been ruled forbidden research. About the only direct danger to us would be if the canker got out of control. Nobody knows why but they do that sometimes."

He poured the solution into a crucible. "You see that switch down there by the betatron? All right, when I move my hand, depress it. Thanks."

A matter canker takes time to establish. There were failures in the early stages of Henry's. It was more than a week after his conversation with Vela that he got the canker into its ultimate form.

He carried it out of the laboratory, Vela following, and showed it to the others, who were sitting listlessly on the grass.

"It doesn't look like much," Denis said after a pause. He was turning the big flask critically in his hands. "Except for the color, that is. How could this annoy anyone?"

"It hasn't been activated yet," Henry explained. He took the flask back from Denis and set it on the ground. "I want you both to get into your coveralls. The canker isn't very radio-active but there's bound to be some radiation. So keep well back from it."

He adjusted the timing device on the neck of the flask. While Mrs. Pettit and Denis were getting into their long white coveralls he dropped in the gray-sheathed thorium pellets which were the activating charge. Once more he adjusted the timing device.

"Get back," he said. The first—second—third pellets dropped.

The flask dissolved. The gluey viscous stuff it held ran out sluggishly over the grass. Writhing, twisting, boiling, the grass was eaten away from it. The liquid disappeared. The canker was eating in.

"It's getting started nicely," Henry said.

A column of steam shot up. It enlarged, grew hollow. Now there was a hole, a growing one, in the ground. Its edges curled and bubbled and smoked. The hole widened, grew deeper.

A wind blew over the surface of the grass. It freshened. In a moment the leaves of the trees were in motion. The boughs began to rock. The column of steam broke off, reappeared soaringly, broke off again. The wind was growing to a gale.

"What is this, son?" Mrs. Pettit demanded. She had to put her mouth against Henry's head to make herself heard. "Where's the wind coming from?"

"Canker's creating a vacuum," Henry yelled back. "Air rushes in to fill it faster as the canker grows. Get back! *Get back!*"

The party hurried across the slick green surface of the grass toward safety, breaking at the last into a run. The giant wind kept trying to push them back.

"Further! *Further!*" Henry yelled. "*Get back!*"

Abruptly the canker was lapping at the laboratory walls. The stones boiled evilly for a moment and no longer existed. The upper part of the structure fell in, disappeared.

Henry's face was greenish white. "It's getting out of control. *Run! Run!*" he said.

They ran. Shrieking, stumbling, trying to breathe, they ran. The canker was faster than they. With the flowing ease of a creature in a dream it gained on them. It was no more than a yard from them when they reached the site of the cooking fire. Two seconds more and it was lapping at their heels.

Vela collapsed and fell. Denis put his hands under her armpits and wildly tried to drag her along. Mrs. Pettit, her face a mask of terror inside the glazed hood of her coveralls, was screaming inaudibly. The wind was horrible.

Hathor appeared. She was standing in the air eight or ten feet above their heads. Though her eyes still had their uncanny look of remoteness and impassivity, something about her suggested exasperation consciously controlled. Standing securely on nothingness she began to make quick, plucking motions with her hands. Slipping, sliding, twisting, they moved in space and out of it.

There was a terrific lightning flash. The world dissolved in curtains of white light. Henry, staggering back from the impact of the prodigy, was amazed that his retinae had not been burned out. It did not seem possible that the eyes could be flooded with such light and still see.

There was another even vaster flash. Slowly, reluctantly, it died away. Henry looked up at Hathor with his scalded eyeballs. Her hands still moved in their twisting pattern, sliding in and out of visibility, but more deliberately than they had. Tiny veins stood out on her temples. Her lips were compressed. Plainly she was imposing some great exertion on herself. The howling wind had died away.

The earth, the horizon, the air, twanged like a plucked bowstring. In the most horrible moment of the afternoon, Henry perceived that everywhere about him were slowly opening doors. Convulsively he shut his eyes.

When he opened them again Hathor had put down her hands. The air was calm and untroubled. All around the party the grass lay as fresh, as green, as unbroken as it had been before the matter canker was set up. The only sign of its existence that the canker had left was an exceptionally heavy coating of dew. But the laboratory was gone.

Hathor fixed her impassive eyes on Henry. Her face had resumed its ordinary inexpressiveness, but he felt the fright that always came over him at mental contact with her. A huge voice began to print itself awesomely in his brain—"DON'T EVER DO THAT AGAIN."

It hadn't worked. Hathor had neither punished them nor got rid of them. And now what were they to do? The laboratory was gone. They had no way of annoying Hathor with another matter canker even if they had been minded to try it. All that was left them was to try to be unsatisfactory pets.

They discussed it night after night as they sat around the coals of their fire. They could decide on nothing. It was not until Hathor, coming to get Henry for the third installment of his training, took Denis along too, that a definite program emerged.

Denis was shaken by his experience. It amused Henry, who was becoming accustomed to the horror that Hathor's training involved, to see how shaken he was. Denis' tight little mouth was as firm as ever when he remembered to keep it firm. But in moments of inattention his jaw hung slackly and his lips had a tendency to shake.

"This can't go on," he said, pacing up and down on the grass. "Vela's not well—haven't you noticed? She needs medical attention but I wouldn't trust Hathor to prescribe for her. It's not myself I'm thinking of, it's her. We've got to get home."

"It would be nice if we could," Henry replied warily. "But—"

"But what?"

"Nothing. Do you have a plan?"

"Yes. We'll run away."

"Run away? Hathor can bring us back in ten seconds as soon as she notices we're gone."

"Yes, of course she can," Denis replied. "But if we keep on running away and she has to keep on bringing us back—you see what I mean. She only comes to visit us every four or five days, but if every time she comes we've run away, she'll soon get tired of it. Bringing us back will be so annoying she'll send us home to get rid of us."

Henry was silent.

"What's the matter?" Denis asked challengingly. "Don't you think it would work? We could save up our supplies and take food with us. Besides, there's a lot of wild fruit."

"Oh, I think it would work. That's what's bothering me."

Denis' back stiffened. For a moment he was again the martinet. "Explain yourself," he rapped out.

"I'm afraid." Henry swallowed. "Afraid to annoy her. Afraid of what she'd do."

Denis looked relieved. "Nonsense," he said heartily. "If she didn't do anything to us for setting up the matter canker she won't do anything to us no matter what we do. That's obvious. Besides, what could be worse than what she does when she's training us? That—that almost makes me sick."

Henry let his hands dangle down between his knees. His eyes had taken on an odd bright look. "That's pretty bad, isn't it?" he said. He managed a smile. "Pretty bad. But maybe something could be worse."

"Rot! I'm going to talk to Vela and her mother about it. If they agree will you come along with us? After all, you're in this too."

There was a pause. "All right," Henry replied at last. "As you say, I'm in this with you. If you go I'll go with you."

Hathor had made one of her visits only the day before. She made them at irregular intervals but it was probable that three or four days would elapse before she would visit Henry and the others again. On the third day, carrying what supplies they had been able to accumulate, the party escaped.

The escape was unspectacular. They walked for a mile or two through the rolling parkland where Hathor had established them, turned to the right and were on a road

that was no more than a grassy track. Once in the distance they saw a pair of Hathor's people walking slowly along. Sometimes the big mammals walked, instead of simply materializing where they wished to be.

Denis made the party hide beside the road until the big people were safely out of sight. Later the party passed a lonely building whose walls were shimmering gray webs. Henry identified it to himself as a place where a dimension-spanning vortex, like the one which had brought them thither, was being made. By noon the party was in a rather open wood. They decided to stay there for the night.

Hathor came for them on the second day. She did not seem angry, only more than usually remote. She set them down on the sward beside the open stoa in the park where they slept, and gazed at them. Then she disappeared.

Denis was jubilant. "It's working!" he said, very pleased with himself. "The next time we run away or maybe the time after that she'll send us home to get rid of us. You'll see, old chap."

"Will she?" Henry answered with a sigh. "Well, I hope you're right."

The second attempt at escape was not very successful. Hathor came for them when they had been gone no more than a couple of hours. The third time . . .

Denis was in the lead when they reached the boundary of the park. He was talking cheerily to Vela, his head turned, as they walked along. When he faced about once more, Hathor was standing there. Her crimson-tipped crest waved gently in the breeze as she bent over and picked up Denis.

The action itself was ordinary enough but Henry felt a sickening pang of apprehension. He plucked at Vela's arm. "Run," he said hoarsely. "You and mother run and hide."

"But—what's the matter? What's she doing with her hands?" Vela's eyes were round. "Why is she holding him so tight?" Her voice went up. "Is she—he said she wouldn't hurt us. Oh! Oh!"

Hathor's hands were slipping smoothly in and out of the web of invisibility. Now she put one of them up to Denis' head. Eerily, unbelievably, her fingers slid inside the skull.

Denis began to scream. It was a horrible high squeal like a frightened rabbit's. At the sound Vela pressed her fists to her ears and started to run. Mrs. Pettit hesitated, looking after her. Then, moaning and slobbering, she bobbed after the girl. Henry stayed behind, watching, until he was sure what was going on. Then he too turned and ran.

There was little cover in the rolling park. The women were cowering behind a big granite boulder and there Henry joined them. Denis gave scream after shattering scream.

The screams stopped. Henry looked over the top of the rock.

Tears were still flowing down Denis' cheeks but the convulsed terror had gone out of his face. It had been replaced with a vegetable imbecile calm.

Hathor put him down very gently on the grass. He walked eight or ten paces uncertainly and then sat down on the sward. He pulled up a handful of grass and examined its roots.

Vela tugged desperately at the hem of Henry's sleeve. "What's she done to him?" she demanded in an agonized whisper. "Oh, what is it? Henry, Henry, Henry—what's she done?"

Henry turned to face her. "We geld domestic animals to make them better pets, don't we?" he answered. His mouth twisted shockingly to one side. "Hathor's done something to his brain to make a better pet out of him. So he'll stay

here always without wanting to get away, so he won't be a nuisance any more. That's what she's doing. She's making us better pets. *Better pets! Better pets!*"

He was still shrieking the words when Hathor picked him up.

A TERRIBLY STRANGE BED

by Wilkie Collins

SHORTLY after my education at college was finished, I happened to be staying at Paris with an English friend. We were both young, and lived rather a wild life.

One night I said to my friend, "Let us go somewhere where we can see a little genuine gambling, with no false glitter thrown over it. Let us get away from fashionable Frascati's to a house where they don't mind letting in a man with a ragged coat."

"Very well," said he, "we needn't go out of the Palais Royal to find the sort of company you want. Here's the place just before us; as blackguard a place as you could possibly want to see."

Entering the house, we went upstairs, left our hats and sticks with the doorkeeper and were admitted into the chief gambling room. We had come to see blackguards, but the people assembled there were something worse, and the quiet of the room was horrible. The thin, haggard, long-haired young man, whose sunken eyes fiercely watched the turning up of the cards, never spoke; the flabby, fat-faced pimply player, who pricked his piece of pasteboard perseveringly, to register how often black won, and how often red—never spoke; the dirty, wrinkled, old man, with the vulture eyes and the darned greatcoat, who had lost his last sou, and still looked on desperately, after he could play no longer—never spoke. Even the voice of the croupier sounded

as if it were dulled and thickened by the atmosphere of the room. I had entered the place to laugh, but I soon found it necessary to take refuge in excitement from the depression of spirits which began to steal on me.

I sought the nearest excitement by going to the table, and beginning to play. Unfortunately, as the event will show, I won—won prodigiously; won incredibly; won at such a rate that the regular players at the table crowded round me; and staring at my stakes with hungry, superstitious eyes, whispered to one another that the English stranger was going to break the bank.

The game was Rouge et Noir. I had played it in every city in Europe, but a gambler, in the strict sense of the word, I had never been. My gaming was a mere idle amusement. I never practised it so incessantly as to lose more than I could afford, or to gain more than I could pocket without being thrown off my balance by my good luck.

On this occasion it was very different—now, for the first time in my life I felt what the passion of play really was. My success first bewildered, and then intoxicated me. Incredible as it may appear, I only lost when I attempted to estimate chances, and played according to previous calculation. If I left everything to luck, and staked without any care or consideration, I was sure to win—to win in the face of every recognized probability in favour of the bank.

Time after time, I staked higher, and still won. The excitement in the room rose to fever pitch. The silence was interrupted by muttered oaths every time the gold was shovelled across to my side of the table—until the imperturbable croupier dashed his rake on the floor in a fury of astonishment at my success. Only one man present preserved his self-possession; and that man was my friend. He came to my side, and whispering in English, begged me to leave the place satisfied with what I had already gained. He repeated his warnings and entreaties several times; and only

left me and went away after I had rejected his advice (for I was to all intents and purposes gambling drunk) in terms which rendered it impossible for him to address me again that night.

Shortly after he had gone, a hoarse voice behind me cried: "Permit me, my dear sir! permit me to restore to their proper place two Napoleons which you have dropped. Wonderful luck, sir! I pledge you my word of honour as an old soldier, in the course of my long experience in this sort of thing, I never saw such luck as yours—never! Go on, sir. *Sacré mille bombes!* Go on boldly, and break the bank!"

Turning round I saw, nodding and smiling at me with inveterate civility, a tall man, dressed in a frogged and braided surtout. If I had been in my senses, I should have considered him as being rather a suspicious specimen of an old soldier. He had goggling blood-shot eyes, mangy mustachios, a broken nose, and the dirtiest pair of hands I ever saw—even in France. However, in the reckless triumph of that moment, I was ready to fraternize with anybody who encouraged me in my game. I accepted the old soldier's offered pinch of snuff; clapped him on the back, and swore he was the most glorious relic of the Grand Army that I had met.

"Go on," cried my military friend, snapping his fingers in ecstasy—"Go on, and win! Break the bank. *Mille tonnerres!* My gallant English comrade, break the bank!"

And I did go on—went on at such a rate, that in another quarter of an hour the croupier called out: "Gentlemen! The bank has discontinued for tonight." All the notes, and all the gold in that "bank" now lay in a heap under my hands.

"Tie up the money in your pocket-handkerchief, my worthy sir," said the old soldier, as I plunged my hands into my heap of gold. "Tie it up, as we used to tie up a bit of dinner in the Grand Army: your winnings are too heavy

for any breeches pocket that ever was sewed. There, that's it!—shovel them in, notes and all! Crédie! what luck! Now then, sir—two tight double knots each way with your honourable permission, and the money's safe. Feel it! feel it, fortunate sir! hard and round as a cannon ball. Ah! bah! if they had only fired such cannon balls at us at Austerlitz. *Nom d'une pipe . . .* if they only had! And now as an ancient grenadier, what remains for me to do? Simply this: to entreat my valued English friend to drink a bottle of champagne with me, before we part."

"Excellent! Champagne by all means!"

"Bravo! the Englishman; another glass. Ah! Bah!—the bottle is empty! Never mind! *Vive le vin!* I, the old soldier, order another bottle, and half a pound of bon-bons with it."

"No, no, *ex-brave*; *your* bottle last time; my bottle this. Toast away! The French Army!—the great Napoleon!—the present company!"

By the time the second bottle of champagne was emptied, I felt as if I had been drinking liquid fire—my brain seemed all a-flame. "*Ex-brave of the French Army!*" cried I, in a mad state of exhilaration, "I am on fire! Let us have a third bottle of champagne to put the flame out!"

The old soldier placed his dirty forefinger by the side of his broken nose; and solemnly ejaculated, "Coffee!"

"Listen, my dear sir, to an old soldier's advice. Coffee will help to rid you of your exaltation of spirits before going home. With all that money it is a sacred duty to yourself to have your wits about you. You are known to be a winner to an enormous extent by several gentlemen present tonight, who are in many ways worthy and excellent fellows; but they are mortal men, my dear sir, and they have their amiable weaknesses!"

As the *ex-brave* ended, the coffee came in, ready poured out in two cups. My attentive friend handed me one of the cups with a bow. I was parched with thirst, and drank it at

a draught. Almost instantly afterwards, I was seized with a fit of giddiness, and felt more completely intoxicated than ever. I rose from my chair, holding on by the table to keep my balance; and stammered out that I felt unwell—so unwell that I did not know how I was to get home.

“My dear friend,” answered the old soldier, “it would be madness to go home in your present state; you would be sure to lose your money; you might be robbed and murdered with the greatest ease. *I* am going to sleep here; do *you* sleep here, too—they make up capital beds in this house—take one; sleep off the effects of the wine, and go home safely with your winnings tomorrow—tomorrow in broad daylight.”

I had but two ideas left—one, that I must never let go of my handkerchief full of money; the other, that I must lie down somewhere immediately, and fall into a comfortable sleep. So I agreed to the proposal about the bed, and preceded by the croupier, we passed along some passages and up a flight of stairs into the bedroom which I was to occupy. The ex-brave shook me warmly by the hand; proposed that we should breakfast together, and then, followed by the croupier, left me for the night.

I ran to the washstand; drank some of the water in my jug; poured the rest out, plunged my face into it, then sat down in a chair and tried to compose myself. I soon felt better. The change for my lungs, from the fetid atmosphere of the gambling room to the cool air of the apartment I now occupied; the almost equally refreshing change for my eyes, from the glaring gas-lights of the “Salon” to the dim, quiet flicker of one bedroom candle, aided wonderfully the restorative effects of cold water. The giddiness left me, and I began to feel more like a reasonable being. My first thought was the risk of sleeping all night in a gambling house; my second, of the still greater risk of trying to get out after the house was closed, and of going home alone at

night, through the streets of Paris, with a large sum of money about me. I had slept in worse places than this on my travels, so I determined to lock my door, and take my chance till the next morning.

Accordingly I looked under the bed and into the cupboard; tried the fastening of the window; and then, satisfied that I had taken every proper precaution, pulled off my upper clothing, put my light, which was a dim one, on the hearth among a feathery litter of wood ashes, and got into bed with the handkerchief full of money under my pillow.

I soon felt not only that I could not go to sleep, but that I could not even close my eyes. I was wide awake and every one of my senses seemed to be preternaturally sharpened. I raised myself on my elbow, and looked about the room—which was brightened by a lovely moonlight pouring through the window—to see if it contained any pictures or ornaments that I could at all clearly distinguish. While my eyes wandered from wall to wall, a remembrance of Le Maistre's delightful little book "*Voyage autour de ma Chambre,*" occurred to me. I resolved to imitate the French author, and find occupation and amusement enough to beguile the tedium of my wakefulness, by making a mental inventory of every article of furniture I could see, and by following to their sources the multitude of associations which even a chair, a table, or a washstand may be able to call forth.

In the nervous, unsettled state of my mind at that moment, I found it much easier to make my inventory than to make my reflections and thereupon soon gave up all hope of thinking in Le Maistre's fanciful track—or, indeed, of thinking at all. I looked about the room at the different articles of furniture, and did nothing more.

There was, first, the bed I was lying in: a four-post bed, with the regular top lined with chintz—the regular fringed

valance all round—the regular stifling unwholesome curtains, which I remembered having mechanically drawn back against the posts when I first got into the room. There was the marble-topped washstand, from which the water I had spilt, in my hurry to pour it out, was still dripping, slowly and more slowly, on to the brick floor. Then two small chairs, with my coat, waistcoat, and trousers flung on them. Then a large elbow chair, covered with dirty-white dimity, with my cravat and shirt collar thrown over the back. Then a chest of drawers with two of the brass handles off, and a tawdry, broken china inkstand placed on it by way of ornament. Then the dressing table, with a small looking-glass, and a large pincushion. Then the window—an unusually large window. Then a dark old picture, which the feeble candle dimly showed me. It was the picture of a fellow in a high Spanish hat, crowned with a plume of towering feathers. A swarthy, sinister ruffian, looking upward—it might be at some tall gallows on which he was going to be hanged. At any rate, he had the appearance of thoroughly deserving it.

This picture put a kind of constraint upon me to look upward too—at the top of the bed. It was a gloomy and not an interesting object, and I looked back at the picture. I counted the feathers in the man's hat—they stood out in relief—three white, two green. I observed the crown of his hat, which was of a conical shape, according to the fashion supposed to have been favoured by Guy Fawkes. I wondered what he could be looking up at. It must be the high gallows, and he was going to be hanged presently. Would the executioner come into possession of his conical crowned hat and plume of feathers? I counted the feathers again—three white and two green.

While I still lingered over this very improving and intellectual employment, my thoughts insensibly began to wander. I became absorbed in past scenes; but suddenly,

in an instant, the thread on which my memories hung snapped. My attention came back to present things more vividly than ever, and I found myself looking hard at the picture.

Looking at what?

Good God, the man had pulled his hat down on his brows! No!—the hat itself was gone! Where was the conical crown? Where the feathers—three white, two green? Not there! In the place of the hat and feathers, what dusky object was it that now hid his forehead, his eyes, his shading hand?

Was the bed moving?

I turned on my back and looked up. Was I mad? drunk? dreaming? giddy again? or was the top of the bed really moving down—sinking slowly, regularly, silently, horribly, right down throughout the whole of its length and breadth—right down upon me, as I lay underneath?

A deadly, paralyzing coldness stole over me. I turned my head on the pillow, determined to test whether the bed-top was really moving or not, by keeping my eye on the man in the picture.

The next look in that direction was enough. The dull, black, frowsy outline of the valance above me was within an inch of being parallel with his waist. I still looked breathlessly. Steadily and slowly—very slowly—I saw the figure, and the line of frame below the figure, vanish, as the valance moved down before it.

I am, constitutionally, anything but timid. I have been on more than one occasion in peril of my life, and have not lost my self-possession for an instant; but when the conviction first settled on my mind that the bed-top was actually moving, was steadily and continuously sinking down upon me, I looked up shuddering, helpless, panic-stricken, beneath the hideous machinery for murder, which was advancing closer and closer, to suffocate me where I lay.

Motionless, speechless, breathless, I lay. The candle, fully spent, went out; but the moonlight still brightened the room. Down and down, without pausing and without a sound, came the bed-top, and still my panic terror seemed to bind me faster and faster to the mattress on which I lay—down and down it sank, till the dusty odour from the lining of the canopy came stealing into my nostrils.

At that final moment the instinct of self-preservation startled me out of my trance, and I moved. There was just room for me to roll myself sideways off the bed. As I dropped noiselessly to the floor, the edge of the murderous canopy touched me on the shoulder.

Without stopping to draw my breath, without wiping the cold sweat from my face, I rose instantly on my knees to watch the bed-top. I was literally spell-bound by it.

It descended—the whole canopy with the fringe round it, came down—down—close down; so close that there was not room now to squeeze my finger between the bed-top and the bed. I felt at the sides and discovered that what had appeared to me from beneath to be the ordinary light canopy of a four-post bed, was in reality a thick broad mattress, the substance of which was concealed by the valance and its fringe. I looked up and saw the four posts rising hideously bare. In the middle of the bed-top was a huge wooden screw that had evidently worked it down through a hole in the ceiling, in the way ordinary presses are worked down on to the substance selected for compression. The apparatus moved without making the faintest noise. There had been no creaking as it came down. Still, as I looked on it, I could not move, I could hardly breathe, but I began to recover the power of thinking, and in a moment had discovered in all its horror the murderous conspiracy framed against me.

My cup of coffee had been drugged, but—drugged too strongly. I had been saved from being smothered by having taken an overdose of some narcotic. How I had chafed

and fretted at the fever-fit which had preserved my life by keeping me awake! How recklessly I had confided myself to the two wretches who had led me into this room, determined, for the sake of my winnings, to kill me in my sleep by the surest and most horrible contrivance for secretly accomplishing my destruction! How many men, winners like me, had slept, as I had proposed to sleep, in that bed, and had never been seen or heard of more?

Ere long, all thought was suspended by the sight of the murderous canopy moving once more. After it had remained on the bed—as nearly as I could guess—about ten minutes, it began to move up again. The villains who worked it from above evidently believed that their purpose was accomplished. Slowly and silently, as it had descended, that horrible bed-top rose towards its former place. When it reached the upper extremities of the four posts, it reached the ceiling too. Neither hole nor screw could be seen; the bed became in appearance an ordinary bed again—the canopy an ordinary canopy.

Now, for the first time I was able to move, to rise from my knees, to dress myself, and to consider how I should escape. If I betrayed by the smallest noise that the attempt to suffocate me had failed, I was certain to be murdered. Had I made any noise already? I listened intently, looking towards the door.

No! No footsteps in the passage outside—no sound of a tread light or heavy. In the room above—absolute silence. Besides locking and bolting my door, I had moved an old wooden chest against it. To remove this chest—my blood ran cold as imagination suggested what might be its contents—without making some disturbance was impossible; and moreover, to think of escaping through the house, now barred up for the night, would be sheer insanity. One chance was left me—the window. I stole to it on tiptoe.

My bedroom was on the first floor, above an entresol, and

poked into the back street. I raised my hand to open the window, knowing that on that action hung, by the merest hair's breadth, my chance of safety—for they keep vigilant watch in a House of Murder. If any part of the frame cracked, if the hinge creaked, I was a lost man! It must have occupied me at least five minutes, reckoning by time—five hours, reckoning by suspense—to open that window. I succeeded in doing it silently—in doing it with the dexterity of a house-breaker—and then looked down into the street. To leap the distance beneath me would be almost certain destruction. Next, I looked at the sides of the house. Down the left ran a thick water-pipe—it passed close to the outer edge of the window.

To some the means of escape which I had discovered might have seemed difficult—to me the prospect of slipping down the pipe into the street did not suggest even a thought of peril.

I had already got one leg over the sill, when I remembered the handkerchief, filled with money, under my pillow. I could well have afforded to leave it behind me, but I was determined that the miscreants of the gambling-house should miss their plunder as well as their victim. I went back to the bed therefore and tied the heavy handkerchief at my back by my cravat.

Just as I had made it tight and fixed in a comfortable place, I thought I heard a sound of breathing outside the door. The chill feeling of horror ran through me again as I listened. No! Dead silence still in the passage—I had only heard the night air blowing softly into the room. The next moment I was on the window-sill—and the next I had a firm grip on the water-pipe.

I slid down into the street easily and quietly, as I thought I should, and immediately set off at the top of my speed to a branch Prefecture of Police, which I knew was in the immediate neighbourhood. A Sub-prefect and several of his

subordinates were up. But, when I began my story, in a breathless hurry and very bad French, I could see that the Sub-prefect suspected me of being a drunken Englishman who had been robbed. He soon altered his opinion, and before I had concluded, he shoved the papers before him into a drawer, put on his hat, supplied me with another (for I was bareheaded) and ordered a file of soldiers, desired his expert followers to get ready all sorts of tools for breaking open doors and ripping up brick flooring, and took my arm, in the most friendly and familiar manner possible, to lead me with him out of the house.

Sentinels were placed at the back and front of the house the moment we got to it; a tremendous battery of knocks was directed against the door; a light appeared at a window; I was told to conceal myself behind the police—then came more knocks, and a cry of "Open in the name of the law!" At that terrible summons bolts and locks gave way before an invisible hand, and the moment after, the Sub-prefect was in the passage, confronting a waiter half-dressed and ghastly pale.

"We want to see the Englishman who is sleeping in this house."

"He went away hours ago."

"He did no such thing. His friend went away; he remained. Show us to his bedroom."

"I swear to you, Monsieur Le Sous-préfet, he is not here! He—"

"I swear to you, Monsier le Garçon, he is. He slept here—he didn't find your bed comfortable—he came to us to complain of it—he is here among my men—and here am I ready to look for a flea or two in his bedstead. Renaudin," calling to one of his subordinates, and pointing to the waiter—"collar that man, and tie his hands behind him. Now, then, gentlemen, let us walk upstairs!" Every man and woman in the house was secured—the "Old Soldier" first. I identi-

fied the bed in which I had slept and we then went on to the room above.

No object that was at all extraordinary appeared in any part of it. The Sub-prefect looked round the place, commanded everybody be silent, stamped twice on the floor, called for a candle, looked attentively at the spot he had stamped on, and ordered the flooring there to be carefully taken up. This was done in no time. Lights were produced, and we saw a deep raftered cavity between the floor of this room and the ceiling of the room beneath. Through this cavity there ran perpendicularly a sort of case of iron thickly greased; and inside the case appeared the screw, which communicated with the bed-top below. Extra lengths of screw, freshly oiled; levers covered with felt; the complete upper works of a heavy press—constructed with infernal ingenuity to join the fixtures below, and when taken to pieces again to go into the smallest possible compass—were next discovered and pulled out on the floor. After some little difficulty the Sub-prefect succeeded in putting the machinery together, and leaving his men to work it, descended with me to the bedroom. The smothering canopy was then lowered, but not so noiselessly as I had seen it lowered. When I mentioned this to the Sub-prefect, his answer, simple as it was, was significant. "My men," said he, "are working down the bed-top for the first time—the men whose money you won were in better practice."

We left the house in the possession of two police agents—the inmates having been removed to prison. The Sub-prefect, after taking down my *procès-verbal* in his office, returned with me to my hotel to get my passport. "Do you think," I asked, as I gave it to him, "that any men have really been smothered in that bed, as they tried to smother me?"

"I have seen dozens of drowned men laid out at the Morgue," answered the Sub-prefect, "in whose pocket-

books were found letters, stating that they had committed suicide in the Seine, because they had lost everything at the gaming-table. Do I know how many of those men entered the same gaming-house that you entered? won as you won? took that bed as you took it? slept in it? were smothered in it? and were thrown into the river, with a letter of explanation written by the murderers and placed in their pocket-books? No man can say how many or how few have escaped the fate from which you have escaped."

The rest of my story is soon told. I was examined; the gambling-house was searched from top to bottom; the prisoners were separately interrogated; and two of the less guilty made a confession. I discovered that the Old Soldier was the master of the gambling-house; justice discovered that he had been drummed out of the army as a vagabond years ago; that he had been guilty of all sorts of villainies since; that he was in possession of stolen property, which the owner identified; and that he, the croupier, another accomplice, and the woman who had made my coffee, were all in the secret of the bedstead. There appeared to be some doubt as to whether the servants attached to the house knew anything of the suffocating machinery; and they received the benefit of that doubt, by being treated simply as thieves and vagabonds. As for the Old Soldier and his two head myrmidons, they went to the galleys; the woman who had drugged my coffee was imprisoned for I forget how many years; the regular visitors to the gambling-house were considered "suspicious," and placed under "surveillance"; and I became for a week the "lion" of Parisian society.

My adventure cured me of ever again trying Rouge et Noir as an amusement. The sight of a green cloth, with packs of cards and heaps of money on it, will henceforth be forever associated in my mind with the sight of a bed-canopy descending to suffocate me in the silence and darkness of the night.

THE WELL

by W. W. Jacobs

Two men stood in the billiard-room of an old country house, talking. Play, which had been of a half-hearted nature, was over, and they sat at the open window, looking out over the park stretching away beneath them, conversing idly.

"Your time's nearly up, Jem," said one at length, "this time six weeks you'll be yawning out the honeymoon and cursing the man—woman I mean—who invented them."

Jem Benson stretched his long limbs in the chair and grunted in dissent.

"I've never understood it," continued Wilfred Carr, yawning. "It's not in my line at all; I never had enough money for my own wants, let alone for two. Perhaps if I were as rich as you or Cræsus I might regard it differently."

There was just sufficient meaning in the latter part of the remark for his cousin to forbear to reply to it. He continued to gaze out of the window and to smoke slowly.

"Not being as rich as Cræsus—or you," resumed Carr, regarding him from beneath lowered lids, "I paddle my own canoe down the stream of Time, and, tying it to my friends' door-posts, go in to eat their dinners."

"Quite Venetian," said Jem Benson, still looking out of the window. "It's not a bad thing for you, Wilfred, that you have the door-posts and dinners—and friends."

Carr grunted in his turn. "Seriously though, Jem," he said, slowly, "you're a lucky fellow, a very lucky fellow. If there is a better girl above ground than Olive, I should like to see her."

"Yes," said the other, quietly.

"She's such an exceptional girl," continued Carr, staring out of the window. "She's so good and gentle. She thinks you are a bundle of all the virtues."

He laughed frankly and joyously, but the other man did not join him.

"Strong sense of right and wrong, though," continued Carr, musingly. "Do you know, I believe that if she found out that you were not——"

"Not what?" demanded Benson, turning upon him fiercely, "Not what?"

"Everything that you are," returned his cousin, with a grin that belied his words, "I believe she'd drop you."

"Talk about something else," said Benson, slowly; "your pleasantries are not always in the best taste."

Wilfred Carr rose and taking a cue from the rack, bent over the board and practiced one or two favourite shots. "The only other subject I can talk about just at present is my own financial affairs," he said slowly, as he walked round the table.

"Talk about something else," said Benson again, bluntly.

"And the two things are connected," said Carr, and dropping his cue he half sat on the table and eyed his cousin.

There was a long silence. Benson pitched the end of his cigar out of the window, and leaning back closed his eyes.

"Do you follow me?" inquired Carr at length.

Benson opened his eyes and nodded at the window.

"Do you want to follow my cigar?" he demanded.

"I should prefer to depart by the usual way for your sake," returned the other, unabashed. "If I left by the win-

dow all sorts of questions would be asked, and you know what a talkative chap I am."

"So long as you don't talk about my affairs," returned the other, restraining himself by an obvious effort, "you can talk yourself hoarse."

"I'm in a mess," said Carr, slowly, "a devil of a mess. If I don't raise fifteen hundred by this day fortnight, I may be getting my board and lodging free."

"Would that be any change?" questioned Benson.

"The quality would," retorted the other. "The address also would not be good. Seriously, Jem, will you let me have the fifteen hundred?"

"No," said the other, simply.

Carr went white. "It's to save me from ruin," he said, thickly.

"I've helped you till I'm tired," said Benson, turning and regarding him, "and it is all to no good. If you've got into a mess, get out of it. You should not be so fond of giving autographs away."

"It's foolish, I admit," said Carr, deliberately. "I won't do so any more. By the way, I've got some to sell. You needn't sneer. They're not my own."

"Whose are they?" inquired the other.

"Yours."

Benson got up from his chair and crossed over to him. "What is this?" he asked, quietly. "Blackmail?"

"Call it what you like," said Carr. "I've got some letters for sale, price fifteen hundred. And I know a man who would buy them at that price for the mere chance of getting Olive from you. I'll give you first offer."

"If you have got any letters bearing my signature, you will be good enough to give them to me," said Benson, very slowly.

"They're mine," said Carr, lightly; "given to me by the

lady you wrote them to. I must say that they are not all in the best possible taste."

His cousin reached forward suddenly, and catching him by the collar of his coat pinned him down on the table.

"Give me those letters," he breathed, sticking his face close to Carr's.

"They're not here," said Carr, struggling. "I'm not a fool. Let me go, or I'll raise the price."

The other man raised him from the table in his powerful hands, apparently with the intention of dashing his head against it. Then suddenly his hold relaxed as an astonished-looking maid-servant entered the room with letters. Carr sat up hastily.

"That's how it was done," said Benson, for the girl's benefit as he took the letters.

"I don't wonder at the other man making him pay for it, then," said Carr, blandly.

"You will give me those letters?" said Benson, suggestively, as the girl left the room.

"At the price I mentioned, yes," said Carr; "but so sure as I am a living man, if you lay your clumsy hands on me again, I'll double it. Now, I'll leave you for a time while you think it over."

He took a cigar from the box and lighting it carefully quitted the room. His cousin waited until the door had closed behind him, and then turning to the window sat there in a fit of fury as silent as it was terrible.

The air was fresh and sweet from the park, heavy with the scent of new-mown grass. The fragrance of a cigar was now added to it, and glancing out he saw his cousin pacing slowly by. He rose and went to the door, and then, apparently altering his mind, he returned to the window and watched the figure of his cousin as it moved slowly away into the moonlight. Then he rose again, and, for a long time, the room was empty.

It was empty when Mrs. Benson came in some time later to say good-night to her son on her way to bed. She walked slowly round the table, and pausing at the window gazed from it in idle thought, until she saw the figure of her son advancing with rapid strides toward the house. He looked up at the window.

"Good-night," said she.

"Good-night," said Benson, in a deep voice.

"Where is Wilfred?"

"Oh, he has gone," said Benson.

"Gone?"

"We had a few words; he was wanting money again, and I gave him a piece of my mind. I don't think we shall see him again."

"Poor Wilfred!" sighed Mrs. Benson. "He is always in trouble of some sort. I hope that you were not too hard upon him."

"No more than he deserved," said her son, sternly. "Good night."

II.

The well, which had long ago fallen into disuse, was almost hidden by the thick tangle of undergrowth which ran riot at that corner of the old park. It was partly covered by the shrunken half of a lid, above which a rusty windlass creaked in company with the music of the pines when the wind blew strongly. The full light of the sun never reached it, and the ground surrounding it was moist and green when other parts of the park were gaping with the heat.

Two people walking slowly round the park in the fragrant stillness of a summer evening strayed in the direction of the well.

"No use going through this wilderness, Olive," said Ben-

son, pausing on the outskirts of the pines and eyeing with some disfavour the gloom beyond.

"Best part of the park," said the girl briskly; "you know it's my favourite spot."

"I know you're very fond of sitting on the coping," said the man slowly, "and I wish you wouldn't. One day you will lean back too far and fall in."

"And make the acquaintance of Truth," said Olive lightly. "Come along."

She ran from him and was lost in the shadow of the pines, the bracken crackling beneath her feet as she ran. Her companion followed slowly, and emerging from the gloom saw her poised daintily on the edge of the well with her feet hidden in the rank grass and nettles which surrounded it. She motioned her companion to take a seat by her side, and smiled softly as she felt a strong arm passed about her waist.

"I like this place," said she, breaking a long silence, "it is so dismal—so uncanny. Do you know I wouldn't dare to sit here alone, Jem. I should imagine that all sorts of dreadful things were hidden behind the bushes and trees, waiting to spring out on me. Ugh!"

"You'd better let me take you in," said her companion tenderly; "the well isn't always wholesome, especially in the hot weather. Let's make a move."

The girl gave an obstinate little shake, and settled herself more securely on her seat.

"Smoke your cigar in peace," she said quietly. "I am settled here for a quiet talk. Has anything been heard of Wilfred yet?"

"Nothing."

"Quite a dramatic disappearance, isn't it?" she continued. "Another scrape, I suppose, and another letter for you in the same old strain; 'Dear Jem, help me out.'"

Jem Benson blew a cloud of fragrant smoke into the air,

and holding his cigar between his teeth brushed away the ash from his coat sleeves.

"I wonder what he would have done without you," said the girl, pressing his arm affectionately. "Gone under long ago, I suppose. When we are married, Jem, I shall presume upon the relationship to lecture him. He is very wild, but he has his good points, poor fellow."

"I never saw them," said Benson, with startling bitterness. "God knows I never saw them."

"He is nobody's enemy but his own," said the girl, startled by this outburst.

"You don't know much about him," said the other, sharply. "He was not above blackmail; not above ruining the life of a friend to do himself a benefit. A loafer, a cur, and a liar!"

The girl looked up at him soberly but timidly and took his arm without a word, and they both sat silent while evening deepened into night and the beams of the moon, filtering through the branches, surrounded them with a silver network. Her head sank upon his shoulder, till suddenly with a sharp cry she sprang to her feet.

"What was that?" she cried breathlessly.

"What was what?" demanded Benson, springing up and clutching her fast by the arm.

She caught her breath and tried to laugh. "You're hurting me, Jem."

His hold relaxed.

"What is the matter?" he asked gently. "What was it startled you?"

"I was startled," she said, slowly, putting her hands on his shoulder. "I suppose the words I used just now are ringing in my ears, but I fancied that somebody behind us whispered '*Jem, help me out.*'"

"Fancy," repeated Benson, and his voice shook; "but these fancies are not good for you. You—are frightened—at the

dark and the gloom of these trees. Let me take you back to the house."

"No, I'm not frightened," said the girl, reseating herself. "I should never be really frightened of anything when you were with me, Jem. I'm surprised at myself for being so silly."

The man made no reply but stood, a strong, dark figure, a yard or two from the well, as though waiting for her to join him.

"Come and sit down, sir," cried Olive, patting the brickwork with her small, white hand, "one would think that you did not like your company."

He obeyed slowly and took a seat by her side, drawing so hard at his cigar that the light of it shone upon his face at every breath. He passed his arm, firm and rigid as steel, behind her, with his hand resting on the brickwork beyond.

"Are you warm enough?" he asked tenderly, as she made a little movement.

"Pretty fair," she shivered; "one oughtn't to be cold at this time of the year, but there's a cold, damp air comes up from the well."

As she spoke a faint splash sounded from the depths below, and for the second time that evening, she sprang from the well with a little cry of dismay.

"What is it now?" he asked in a fearful voice. He stood by her side and gazed at the well, as though half expecting to see the cause of her alarm emerge from it.

"Oh, my bracelet," she cried in distress, "my poor mother's bracelet. I've dropped it down the well."

"Your bracelet!" repeated Benson, dully. "Your bracelet? The diamond one?"

"The one that was my mother's," said Olive. "Oh, we can get it back surely. We must have the water drained off."

"Your bracelet!" repeated Benson, stupidly.

"Jem," said the girl in terrified tones, "dear Jem, what is the matter?"

For the man she loved was standing regarding her with horror. The moon which touched it was not responsible for all the whiteness of the distorted face, and she shrank back in fear to the edge of the well. He saw her fear and by a mighty effort regained his composure and took her hand.

"Poor little girl," he murmured, "you frightened me. I was not looking when you cried, and I thought that you were slipping from my arms, down—down——"

His voice broke, and the girl throwing herself into his arms clung to him convulsively.

"There, there," said Benson, fondly, "don't cry, don't cry."

"To-morrow," said Olive, half-laughing, half-crying, "we will all come round the well with hook and line and fish for it. It will be quite a new sport."

"No, we must try some other way," said Benson. "You shall have it back."

"How?" asked the girl.

"You shall see," said Benson. "To-morrow morning at latest you shall have it back. Till then promise me that you will not mention your loss to anyone. Promise."

"I promise," said Olive, wonderingly. "But why not?"

"It is of great value, for one thing, and— But there—there are many reasons. For one thing it is my duty to get it for you."

"Wouldn't you like to jump down for it?" she asked mischievously. "Listen."

She stooped for a stone and dropped it down.

"Fancy being where that is now," she said, peering into the blackness; "fancy going round and round like a mouse

in a pail, clutching at the slimy sides, with the water filling your mouth, and looking up to the little patch of sky above."

"You had better come in," said Benson, very quietly. "You are developing a taste for the morbid and horrible."

The girl turned, and taking his arm walked slowly in the direction of the house; Mrs. Benson, who was sitting in the porch, rose to receive them.

"You shouldn't have kept her out so long," she said chidingly. "Where have you been?"

"Sitting on the well," said Olive, smiling, "discussing our future."

"I don't believe that place is healthy," said Mrs. Benson, emphatically. "I really think it might be filled in, Jem."

"All right," said her son, slowly. "Pity it wasn't filled in long ago."

He took the chair vacated by his mother as she entered the house with Olive, and with his hands hanging limply over the sides sat in deep thought. After a time he rose, and going upstairs to a room which was set apart for sporting requisites selected a sea fishing line and some hooks and stole softly downstairs again. He walked swiftly across the park in the direction of the well, turning before he entered the shadow of the trees to look back at the lighted windows of the house. Then having arranged his line he sat on the edge of the well and cautiously lowered it.

He sat with his lips compressed, occasionally looking about him in a startled fashion, as though he half expected to see something peering at him from the belt of trees. Time after time he lowered his line until at length in pulling it up he heard a little metallic tinkle against the side of the well.

He held his breath then, and forgetting his fears drew the line in inch by inch, so as not to lose its precious burden. His pulse beat rapidly, and his eyes were bright. As

the line came slowly in he saw the catch hanging to the hook, and with a steady hand drew the last few feet in. Then he saw that instead of the bracelet he had hooked a bunch of keys.

With a faint cry he shook them from the hook into the water below, and stood breathing heavily. Not a sound broke the stillness of the night. He walked up and down a bit and stretched his great muscles; then he came back to the well and resumed his task.

For an hour or more the line was lowered without result. In his eagerness he forgot his fears, and with eyes bent down the well fished slowly and carefully. Twice the hook became entangled in something, and was with difficulty released. It caught a third time, and all his efforts failed to free it. Then he dropped the line down the well, and with head bent walked toward the house.

He went first to the stables at the rear, and then retiring to his room for some time paced restlessly up and down. Then without removing his clothes he flung himself upon the bed and fell into a troubled sleep.

III.

Long before anybody else was astir he arose and stole softly downstairs. The sunlight was stealing in at every crevice, and flashing in long streaks across the darkened rooms. The dining-room into which he looked struck chill and cheerless in the dark yellow light which came through the lowered blinds. He remembered that it had the same appearance when his father lay dead in the house; now, as then, everything seemed ghastly and unreal; the very chairs standing as their occupants had left them the night before seemed to be indulging in some dark communication of ideas.

Slowly and noiselessly he opened the hall door and passed into the fragrant air beyond. The sun was shining on the drenched grass and trees, and a slowly vanishing white mist rolled like smoke about the grounds. For a moment he stood, breathing deeply the sweet air of the morning, and then walked slowly in the direction of the stables.

The rusty creaking of a pump-handle and a spatter of water upon the red-tiled courtyard showed that somebody else was astir, and a few steps farther he beheld a brawny, sandy-haired man gasping wildly under severe self-infliction at the pump.

"Everything ready, George?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, sir," said the man, straightening up suddenly and touching his forehead. "Bob's just finishing the arrangements inside. It's a lovely morning for a dip. The water in that well must be just icy."

"Be as quick as you can," said Benson, impatiently.

"Very good, sir," said George, burnishing his face harshly with a very small towel which had been hanging over the top of the pump. "Hurry up, Bob."

In answer to his summons a man appeared at the door of the stable with a coil of stout rope over his arm and a large metal candlestick in his hand.

"Just to try the air, sir," said George, following his master's glance, "a well gets rather foul sometimes, but if a candle can live down it, a man can."

His master nodded, and the man, hastily pulling up the neck of his shirt and thrusting his arms into his coat, followed him as he led the way slowly to the well.

"Beg pardon, sir," said George, drawing up to his side, "but you are not looking over and above well this morning. If you'll let me go down I'd enjoy the bath."

"No, no," said Benson, peremptorily.

"You ain't fit to go down, sir," persisted his follower. "I've never seen you look so before. Now if——"

"Mind your business," said his master curtly.

George became silent and the three walked with swinging strides through the long wet grass to the well. Bob flung the rope on the ground and at a sign from his master handed him the candlestick.

"Here's the line for it, sir," said Bob, fumbling in his pockets.

Benson took it from him and slowly tied it to the candlestick. Then he placed it on the edge of the well, and striking a match, lit the candle and began slowly to lower it.

"Hold hard, sir," said George, quickly, laying his hand on his arm, "you must tilt it or the string'll burn through."

Even as he spoke the string parted and the candlestick fell into the water below.

Benson swore quietly.

"I'll soon get another," said George, starting up.

"Never mind, the well's all right," said Benson.

"It won't take a moment, sir," said the other over his shoulder.

"Are you master here, or am I?" said Benson hoarsely.

George came back slowly, a glance at his master's face stopping the protest upon his tongue, and he stood by watching him sulkily as he sat on the well and removed his outer garments. Both men watched him curiously, as having completed his preparations he stood grim and silent with his hands by his sides.

"I wish you'd let me go, sir," said George, plucking up courage to address him. "You ain't fit to go, you've got a chill or something. I shouldn't wonder it's the typhoid. They've got it in the village bad."

For a moment Benson looked at him angrily, then his gaze softened. "Not this time, George," he said, quietly. He took the looped end of the rope and placed it under his arms, and sitting down threw one leg over the side of the well.

"How are you going about it, sir?" queried George, laying hold of the rope and signing to Bob to do the same.

"I'll call out when I reach the water," said Benson; "then pay out three yards more quickly so that I can get to the bottom."

"Very good, sir," answered both.

Their master threw the other leg over the coping and sat motionless. His back was turned toward the men as he sat with head bent, looking down the shaft. He sat for so long that George became uneasy.

"All right, sir?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Benson, slowly. "If I tug at the rope, George, pull up at once. Lower away."

The rope passed steadily through their hands until a hollow cry from the darkness below and a faint splashing warned them that he had reached the water. They gave him three yards more and stood with relaxed grasp and strained ears, waiting.

"He's gone under," said Bob in a low voice.

The other nodded, and moistening his huge palms took a firmer grip of the rope.

Fully a minute passed, and the men began to exchange uneasy glances. Then a sudden tremendous jerk followed by a series of feebler ones nearly tore the rope from their grasp.

"Pull!" shouted George, placing one foot on the side and hauling desperately. "Pull! pull! He's stuck fast; he's not coming; P—U—LL!"

In response to their terrific exertions the rope came slowly in, inch by inch, until at length a violent splashing was heard, and at the same moment a scream of unutterable horror came echoing up the shaft.

"What a weight he is!" panted Bob. "He's stuck fast or something. Keep still, sir; for heaven's sake, keep still."

For the taut rope was being jerked violently by the strug-

gles of the weight at the end of it. Both men with grunts and sighs hauled it in foot by foot.

"All right, sir," cried George, cheerfully.

He had one foot against the well, and was pulling manfully; the burden was nearing the top. A long pull and a strong pull, and the face of a dead man with mud in the eyes and nostrils came peering over the edge. Behind it was the ghastly face of his master; but this he saw too late, for with a great cry he let go his hold of the rope and stepped back. The suddenness overthrew his assistant, and the rope tore through his hands. There was a frightful splash.

"You fool!" stammered Bob, and ran to the well helplessly.

"Run!" cried George. "Run for another line."

He bent over the coping and called eagerly down as his assistant sped back to the stables shouting wildly. His voice re-echoed down the shaft, but all else was silence.

REVENGE

by Samuel Blas

TWILIGHT is settling in the valley. Far below us pale lights are beginning to flicker and the spreading pattern of the city slowly comes alive. As the winding road narrows to the mountaintop the motor sound grows louder in the thin air, within the enclosing silence through which we move.

In the pale blue haze on my left the deepening dusk mingles with the vast silence that seems to suspend the day. A square yellow sign ahead blazes in our headlights: DANGER! SHARP CURVE AHEAD. The mountain wall leans close to the road. On Elsa's side the low branches of a solitary tree rush by, scraping the top of the car.

Elsa, too, is part of the surrounding silence. Beside me she stares straight ahead at the highway. For a long time now she has not spoken; she neither smiles nor is sorrowful. Her expression is grave, almost serene, as if there were no such things as tears or laughter.

But this morning she smiled. A half day's journey away, in the cool morning of a quiet glade she stepped from our trailer door and smiled softly as she waved me off to town. She blushed when I turned back a step to kiss her again. And when I finally drove off, the sweet touch of her hand still tingled in my palm.

Life was wonderful. I drove happily to the small town near by to buy provisions. We had decided to stay a few

days more in this pleasant spot we had found. There could be no better place to finish out our honeymoon. As I neared town I thought it would be fun to add a gift for Elsa to the stuff that I would carry back to the camp.

It was nearing lunchtime when I started back. I had piled groceries enough in the car to last us a week. While I waited for a traffic light to change, a newsboy came by. I bought a paper. It carried a headline reporting the capture of an escaped convict near by. The subcaption said that his companion was still at large. "Presumed Hiding in the Woods Near Campbelltown."

I ran quickly through the rest of the item. When the light turned I moved out fast and put on speed. Campbelltown was a place that lay beyond our camp, but too near to suit me, in the circumstances. I felt uneasy, with Elsa alone in the trailer. It was possible, of course, that the fugitive convict might be in our vicinity; but what disturbed me more was the thought that Elsa might have picked up the news on our radio. If she had, she would be frightened. I stepped on the accelerator.

The road twisted and turned around thinly wooded ridges and hills, and as I swung each curve I chided myself for leaving Elsa alone. I reminded myself that she had insisted I shop without her. "I have a surprise for dinner," she had said with the only artfulness she knew—a shy, secret smile. My attention returned to the road.

The winding turns ended and the last stretch was a long, straight drive sheltered by a canopy of tall trees that somehow eased my anxiety. Not much further now. I imagined the way she would welcome me. She would stanchly deny that she had been afraid but she would hold my arm tightly. And then all of a sudden she would forget the whole thing. She would smile happily and tell me to close my eyes. How I loved that smile!

In the short while that I had known her and in the single

month of our marriage I had grown to cherish that smile and the soft, rich laughter that sometimes accompanied it. So strange, that warm directness with which she shared my life, for in the presence of other men there was only shyness. I think that she was afraid of men. Something in her slender glowing warmth made their blood stir. She knew that, faintly, innocently. When the bold ones stared at her she would ask me to hold her close and never tell me why.

The sun was near high noon when the road broke out of the trees into the clearing. I rolled onto the grass and parked, feeling relieved because I had come so quickly. I pulled up the hand brake and looked to the trailer, expecting to see Elsa's welcoming figure there. My complacency ended. There in the clear fall sunlight I saw wisps of smoke about our home, thin plumes slipping through the unlatched door.

Wild red leaves fluttered across the grass. And a wavering silence to which I listened stupidly. Then I ran to the door and swung it open violently.

An acrid fog swirled about me, making me choke and cough. A curling heavy mist clung to the ceiling. I swung the door wider and flailed my arms to clear the air. And as the fog lifted and shifted I saw with some relief that there was no fire. Our dinner was smoking and burning upon the stove. Three chops—I can see them yet—shriveled and black in a blackened frying pan; string beans in a burning pot, brown where the water had been; and in the oven, where I later found it, a crumbling burnt blob that must once have been Elsa's first cake—the surprise she had promised me.

Panic got hold of me.

"Elsa!" I called.

There was no reply.

"Elsa!" I repeated. "Elsa!"

But only the crackle of the burning pot answered me, and outside a thin echo wandered in the woods. I shut off the burners. The crackling persisted as if in defiance, then it ceased. I turned uneasily toward the door that led to our dining alcove in the rear, stopping short at sight of the waiting table with its knives and forks and plates in neat array. But no Elsa. But of course. She wouldn't, she couldn't have been there or the dinner would not have burned.

Trying to understand what had happened I rejected a dozen answers at once. She would never have left the dinner to burn for any sort of errand. Nor were there neighbors about with whom to fall into forgetful conversation. We were alone. Then as I stood there in the silence I suddenly heard that faint sound, a rising and falling as of someone weakly breathing. Behind the curtain that secluded our bed—Elsa!

I faced about and tore aside the curtain—

There she lay. Pale, still. I kneeled beside her. She was barely breathing.

"Elsa," I whispered.

She seemed neither to move nor to make any sound, yet I knew she was breathing, for I had heard her. I rubbed her wrists and temples. I shook her gently, then fearfully. She stirred a little.

I wanted to get a doctor, yet I was afraid to leave. Then I remembered the brandy. I fumbled in the cupboard and my hand trembled as I poured a glassful and spooned a little between her lips.

At last it took effect. Her lips moved. Her expression altered, she sputtered, she coughed, and her eyes opened weakly.

At first they were blank. A long second passed while I held her hands tightly. Then, as if awareness had just touched her, horror filled her eyes and she moaned.

Then as I gathered her into my arms and let the sheet

that covered her fall away, I saw that she was naked—completely.

There were bruises on her body, as if someone had beaten her: cruel bruises on her shoulders where callous fingers had pressed; angry marks where heavy fists had struck her.

Those numb moments beside my wife are not easily recalled, filled as they are with shame and a fierce anger. When at last she stirred again in my arms I held her tight and looked beyond her so that she would not see the anguish in my eyes. For long minutes she shivered; then she sobbed pitifully. Finally the tears and trembling stopped.

In a flat voice that frightened me she said, "*He killed me . . . he killed me.*"

How I gathered the tangled threads of those dreadful hours I cannot entirely remember. For a long time I cradled and comforted her, as though she were a child. After a while she seemed to respond. But then, when she shuddered again, my indignation mounted; I lost control and stormed at her with furious questions: "Who?" I demanded. "Who?" and "When?" and "How?" Until haltingly the brutal story came out. How a salesman knocked—

"A salesman?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure? Did he carry a suitcase, a display?"

"Yes."

A salesman. Then it was not the convict. Nothing reasonable. It was an ordinary man, ordinary.

How he knocked, interrupting her cooking; how he smiled patly and edged inside, eying her boldly while he chattered about kitchenware. How he touched her arm and seized her and now when she resisted he beat her and—and how she finally fainted away.

As she talked she seemed to fall under a spell of horror that produced in her a curious calm. She repeated, "He

killed me, he killed me . . ." until I had to shake her to make her stop. Her eyes, I saw, stared straight ahead as she said over those dreadful words and it seemed as though she saw that man, that menacing figure, in the hopeless distance.

I never thought once of the police. Only one impulse was in me, a dreadful, agonizing craving for revenge. "I'll find him!" I swore. "I'll kill him . . ."

Her hand clutched mine as if to restrain me, but when she felt the anger in my grip her mood abruptly changed and she said quietly, "Yes . . . yes." And when I hesitantly asked whether she would come with me, help me find him, she nodded, almost eagerly I thought.

We drove to the outskirts of the town, where she listened carefully to my instructions, nodding with a sort of unearthly calm.

"We'll drive slowly," I told her. And this we did for perhaps a half hour, examining every passer-by as we moved back and forth through the unhurried streets. The sun still hung heavy above us as we turned a third time down the town's main artery.

In the wide street were a few parked cars, and a thin afternoon crowd was lazily inspecting the shop windows. A man lounging near the hotel disinterestedly picked his teeth. It seemed to me he observed our slow progress curiously. I directed my wife's attention to him but she gravely shook her head. Then suddenly she gripped my arm. Her lips fell open and her face paled. She pointed at a shabby car parked near the hotel. A man was locking the car door.

"*That's him!*" she whispered.

My blood quickened.

"Are you sure?" I asked finally. Her eyes followed him as he put the keys in his pocket and turned toward the hotel.

"*That's him,*" she insisted, "*that's him . . .*"

I pulled to the curb in front of his car and stepped out quickly. "Wait here," I said. "Don't move—" I looked about me with assumed carelessness. The lounge, I saw, was facing the other way. No one else seemed to notice me. I sauntered into the lobby, a few steps behind my man. I decided to wait for him near the elevator, and sure enough he was soon standing beside me absently fingering his room key.

Luck was with me, for as the car went up I glimpsed his room number on the key in his hand. I had planned to get out with him and openly follow him to his room. Instead I rode to the floor above his, made my way to the stairway, down one level, through the hallways to his room and knocked softly, an unexpected and unknown visitor.

I was calm then as he answered my knock. I spoke to him through the door and represented myself as the buyer for a local store. He opened the door wide.

"Why, come in," he said; he wore a welcoming grin that infuriated me.

I went in; took the hammer from the waistband of my trousers and, as he turned to walk ahead of me, I smashed him mightily on the back of his head.

A great cry escaped him; then a dismal sight that collapsed with him to the floor. He lay still.

I stared at the crumpled figure and my fury subsided, spent by that single avenging blow. A clock ticked into my consciousness. My eyes wandered absently to the simple dresser, the bed, the silent telephone. In my hand the hammer was edged with blood. I tucked it back in my trousers and dropped the skirt of my coat over it. With my handkerchief I turned the knob of the door. Curiosity prompted me to glance again at the still figure on the floor, but I no longer cared. It might be hours before anything happened. I might be suspected or I might not. None of these conjectures bothered me. I was reasonably safe from suspicion; that I knew; except perhaps from this—this ordinary in-

dividual. I turned and went out quickly, closing the door behind me. And with that closed door behind me, in that quiet carpeted hallway, I at last felt clean, free of obsessing shame.

I went back upstairs, rang for the elevator and rode down quietly. The very sleepiness of this town made my ambling exit from the hotel unnoticeable.

Elsa was still in the car, patient, gazing straight ahead, just as I had left her.

"It's done," I said.

Her head barely turned in my direction and she nodded slowly. She said one word: "Good."

Poor Elsa. So altered with shame and shock that she had grown a shell which I could not pierce. She sat silently in the car while, back at our camp, I hooked up the trailer and made ready for a journey. Even the lunch I fixed for her she barely touched, nibbling once or twice, then staring into space. Perhaps when we were away from this terrible place . . .

It was evening when we stopped again. I drove furiously past a dozen small villages, hurrying toward the city that lies, now, below and behind us at the foot of the mountain. I hoped to find in its busy streets some distraction from our lonely secret, to lose some of this horror there, perhaps in some lively bar or in a theater; perhaps in a good night's rest. Then the strain of the dreadful day took charge. A good night's sleep was all I craved. But not in the trailer; not yet.

Elsa agreed indifferently. We rolled ahead and merged with the traffic in the city. We would park the trailer and stop at the best hotel. We would have a hot bath, then dinner in our room and perhaps a bottle of wine. And a good sleep, a good sleep . . . "Would you like that?" I asked her.

I thought her expression softened; certainly a tear glistened in her eye. I wanted right then to hold her in my

arms, to caress her and comfort her. I pointed to a hotel we were approaching.

"Would you like that one?" I asked.

Her glance followed my pointing finger. She paled. She gripped my arm tightly and her lips parted. She stared straight ahead. Oh, God! She stared straight ahead and pointed at a man in the street—

"That's him," she whispered. *"That's him . . ."*

THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

by Edgar Allan Poe

Impia tortorum longas hic turba furores
Sanguinis innocui, non satiata, aluit.
Sospite nunc patria, fracto nunc funeris antro,
Mors ubi dira fuit vita salusque patent.

*Quatrain composed for the gates of
a market to be erected upon the site
of the Jacobin Club House at Paris.*

I WAS sick—sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me. The sentence—the dread sentence of death—was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears. After that the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate hum. It conveyed to my soul the idea of *revolution*—perhaps from its association in fancy with the burr of a mill-wheel. This only for a brief period, for presently I heard no more. Yet, for a while, I saw—but with how terrible an exaggeration! I saw the lips of the black-robed judges. They appeared to me white—whiter than the sheet upon which I trace these words—and thin even to grotesqueness; thin with the intensity of their expression of firmness—of immovable resolution—of stern contempt of human torture. I saw that the decrees of what to me was Fate were still issuing from those lips. I saw them writhe

with a deadly locution. I saw them fashion the syllables of my name; and I shuddered because no sound succeeded. I saw, too, for a few moments of delirious horror, the soft and nearly imperceptible waving of the sable draperies which enwrapped the walls of the apartment. And then my vision fell upon the seven tall candles upon the table. At first they wore the aspect of charity, and seemed white slender angels who would save me; but then, all at once, there came a most deadly nausea over my spirit, and I felt every fibre in my frame thrill as if I had touched the wire of a galvanic battery, while the angel forms became meaningless spectres, with heads of flame, and I saw that from them there would be no help. And then there stole into my fancy, like a rich musical note, the thought of what sweet rest there must be in the grave. The thought came gently and stealthily, and it seemed long before it attained full appreciation; but just as my spirit came at length properly to feel and entertain it, the figures of the judges vanished, as if magically, from before me; the tall candles sank into nothingness; their flames went out utterly; the blackness of darkness supervened; all sensations appeared swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades. Then silence, and stillness, and night were the universe.

I had swooned; but still will not say that all of consciousness was lost. What of it remained I will not attempt to define, or even to describe; yet all was not lost. In the deepest slumber—no! In delirium—no! In a swoon—no! In death—no! even in the grave all *is not* lost. Else there is no immortality for man. Arousing from the most profound of slumbers, we break the gossamer web of *some* dream. Yet in a second afterward (so frail may that web have been) we remember not that we have dreamed. In the return to life from the swoon there are two stages: first, that of the sense of mental or spiritual; secondly, that of the sense of physical, existence. It seems probable that if, upon

reaching the second stage, we could recall the impressions of the first, we should find these impressions eloquent in memories of the gulf beyond. And that gulf is—what? How at least shall we distinguish its shadows from those of the tomb? But if the impressions of what I have termed the first stage, are not at will, recalled, yet, after long interval, do they not come unbidden, while we marvel whence they come? He who has never swooned, is not he who finds strange palaces and wildly familiar faces in coals that glow; is not he who beholds floating in mid-air the sad visions that the many may not view; is not he who ponders over the perfume of some novel flower; is not he whose brain grows bewildered with the meaning of some musical cadence which has never before arrested his attention.

Amid frequent and thoughtful endeavours to remember, amid earnest struggles to regather some token of the state of seeming nothingness into which my soul had lapsed, there have been moments when I have dreamed of success; there have been brief, very brief periods when I conjured up remembrances which the lucid reason of a later epoch assures me could have had reference only to that condition of seeming unconsciousness. These shadows of memory tell, indistinctly, of tall figures that lifted and bore me in silence down—down—still down—till a hideous dizziness oppressed me at the mere idea of the interminableness of the descent. They tell also of a vague horror at my heart, on account of that heart's unnatural stillness. Then comes a sense of sudden motionlessness throughout all things; as if those who bore me (a ghastly train!) had outrun, in their descent, the limits of the limitless, and paused from the wearisomeness of their toil. After this I call to mind flatness and dampness; and then all is *madness*—the madness of a memory which busies itself among forbidden things.

Very suddenly there came back to my soul motion and

sound—the tumultuous motion of my heart, and, in my ears, the sound of its beating. Then a pause in which all is blank. Then again sound, and motion, and touch—a tingling sensation pervading my frame. Then the mere consciousness of existence, without thought—a condition which lasted long. Then very suddenly, *thought*, and shuddering terror, and earnest endeavour to comprehend my true state. Then a strong desire to lapse into insensibility. Then a rushing revival of soul and a successful effort to move. And now a full memory of the trial, of the judges, of the sable draperies, of the sentence, of the sickness, of the swoon. Then entire forgetfulness of all that followed; of all that a later day and much earnestness of endeavour have enabled me vaguely to recall.

So far, I had not opened my eyes. I felt that I lay upon my back, unbound. I reached out my hand, and it fell heavily upon something damp and hard. There I suffered it to remain for many minutes, while I strove to imagine where and *what* I could be. I longed, yet dared not, to employ my vision. I dreaded the first glance at objects around me. It was not that I feared to look upon things horrible, but that I grew aghast lest there should be *nothing* to see. At length, with a wild desperation at heart, I quickly unclosed my eyes. My worst thoughts, then, were confirmed. The blackness of eternal night encompassed me. I struggled for breath. The intensity of the darkness seemed to oppress and stifle me. The atmosphere was intolerably close. I still lay quietly, and made effort to exercise my reason. I brought to mind the inquisitorial proceedings, and attempted from that point to deduce my real condition. The sentence had passed; and it appeared to me that a very long interval of time had since elapsed. Yet not for a moment did I suppose myself actually dead. Such a supposition, notwithstanding what we read in fiction, is altogether inconsistent with real existence;—but where and in what state was I? The con-

demned to death, I knew, perished usually at the *auto-da-fès*, and one of these had been held on the very night of the day of my trial. Had I been remanded to my dungeon, to await the next sacrifice, which would not take place for many months? This I at once saw could not be. Victims had been in immediate demand. Moreover, my dungeon, as well as all the condemned cells at Toledo, had stone floors, and light was not altogether excluded.

A fearful idea now suddenly drove the blood in torrents upon my heart, and for a brief period I once more relapsed into insensibility. Upon recovering, I at once started to my feet, trembling convulsively in every fibre. I thrust my arms wildly above and around me in all directions. I felt nothing; yet dreaded to move a step, lest I should be impeded by the walls of a *tomb*. Perspiration burst from every pore, and stood in cold big beads upon my forehead. The agony of suspense grew at length intolerable, and I cautiously moved forward, with my arms extended, and my eyes straining from their sockets in the hope of catching some faint ray of light. I proceeded for many paces; but still all was blackness and vacancy. I breathed more freely. It seemed evident that mine was not, at least, the most hideous of fates.

And now, as I still continued to step cautiously onward, there came thronging upon my recollection a thousand vague rumours of the horrors of Toledo. Of the dungeons there had been strange things narrated—fables I had always deemed them—but yet strange, and too ghastly to repeat, save in a whisper. Was I left to perish of starvation in this subterranean world of darkness; or what fate, perhaps even more fearful, awaited me? That the result would be death, and a death of more than customary bitterness, I knew too well the character of my judges to doubt. The mode and the hour were all that occupied or distracted me.

My outstretched hands at length encountered some solid obstruction. It was a wall, seemingly of stone masonry—

very smooth, slimy, and cold. I followed it up; stepping with all the careful distrust with which certain antique narratives had inspired me. This process, however, afforded me no means of ascertaining the dimensions of my dungeon, as I might make its circuit and return to the point whence I set out without being aware of the fact, so perfectly uniform seemed the wall. I therefore sought the knife which had been in my pocket when led into the inquisitorial chamber; but it was gone; my clothes had been exchanged for a wrapper of coarse serge. I had thought of forcing the blade in some minute crevice of the masonry, so as to identify my point of departure. The difficulty, nevertheless, was but trivial; although, in the disorder of my fancy, it seemed at first insuperable. I tore a part of the hem from the robe and placed the fragment at full length, and at right angles to the wall. In groping my way around the prison, I could not fail to encounter this rag upon completing the circuit. So, at least, I thought; but I had not counted upon the extent of the dungeon, or upon my own weakness. The ground was moist and slippery. I staggered onward for some time, when I stumbled and fell. My excessive fatigue induced me to remain prostrate; and sleep soon overtook me as I lay.

Upon awaking, and stretching forth an arm, I found beside me a loaf and a pitcher with water. I was too much exhausted to reflect upon this circumstance, but ate and drank with avidity. Shortly afterward, I resumed my tour around the prison, and with much toil, came at last upon the fragment of the serge. Up to the period when I fell, I had counted fifty-two paces, and, upon resuming my walk, I had counted forty-eight more—when I arrived at the rag. There were in all, then, a hundred paces; and, admitting two paces to the yard, I presumed the dungeon to be fifty yards in circuit. I had met, however, with many angles in

the wall, and thus I could form no guess at the shape of the vault, for vault I could not help supposing it to be.

I had little object—certainly no hope—in these researches; but a vague curiosity prompted me to continue them. Quitting the wall, I resolved to cross the area of the enclosure. At first, I proceeded with extreme caution, for the floor, although seemingly of solid material, was treacherous with slime. At length, however, I took courage, and did not hesitate to step firmly—endeavouring to cross in as direct a line as possible. I had advanced some ten or twelve paces in this manner, when the remnant of the torn hem of my robe became entangled between my legs. I stepped on it, and fell violently on my face.

In the confusion attending my fall, I did not immediately apprehend a somewhat startling circumstance, which yet, in a few seconds afterward, and while I still lay prostrate, arrested my attention. It was this: my chin rested upon the floor of the prison, but my lips, and the upper portion of my head, although seemingly at a less elevation than the chin, touched nothing. At the same time, my forehead seemed bathed in a clammy vapour, and the peculiar smell of decayed fungus arose to my nostrils. I put forward my arm, and shuddered to find that I had fallen at the very brink of a circular pit, whose extent, of course, I had no means of ascertaining at the moment. Groping about the masonry just below the margin, I succeeded in dislodging a small fragment, and let it fall into the abyss. For many seconds I harkened to its reverberations as it dashed against the sides of the chasm in its descent; at length, there was a sullen plunge into water, succeeded by loud echoes. At the same moment, there came a sound resembling the quick opening and as rapid closing of a door overhead, while a faint gleam of light flashed suddenly through the gloom, and as suddenly faded away.

I saw clearly the doom which had been prepared for me, and congratulated myself upon the timely accident by which I had escaped. Another step before my fall, and the world had seen me no more. And the death just avoided was of that very character which I had regarded as fabulous and frivolous in the tales respecting the Inquisition. To the victims of its tyranny, there was the choice of death with its direst physical agonies, or death with its most hideous moral horrors. I had been reserved for the latter. By long suffering my nerves had been unstrung, until I trembled at the sound of my own voice, and had become in every respect a fitting subject for the species of torture which awaited me.

Shaking in every limb, I groped my way back to the wall—resolving there to perish rather than risk the terrors of the wells, of which my imagination now pictured many in various positions about the dungeon. In other conditions of mind, I might have had courage to end my misery at once, by a plunge into one of these abysses; but now I was the veriest of cowards. Neither could I forget what I had read of these pits—that the *sudden* extinction of life formed no part of their most horrible plan.

Agitation of spirit kept me awake for many long hours, but at length I again slumbered. Upon arousing, I found by my side, as before, a loaf and a pitcher of water. A burning thirst consumed me, and I emptied the vessel at a draught. It must have been drugged—for scarcely had I drunk, before I became irresistibly drowsy. A deep sleep fell upon me—a sleep like that of death. How long it lasted, of course I know not; but when, once again, I unclosed my eyes, the objects around me were visible. By a wild, sulphurous lustre, the origin of which I could not at first determine, I was enabled to see the extent and aspect of the prison.

In its size I had been greatly mistaken. The whole circuit

of its walls did not exceed twenty-five yards. For some minutes this fact occasioned me a world of vain trouble; vain indeed—for what could be of less importance, under the terrible circumstances which environed me, than the mere dimensions of my dungeon? But my soul took a wild interest in trifles, and I busied myself in endeavours to account for the error I had committed in my measurement. The truth at length flashed upon me. In my first attempt at exploration I had counted fifty-two paces, up to the period when I fell: I must then have been within a pace or two of the fragment of serge; in fact, I had nearly performed the circuit of the vault. I then slept—and upon awaking, I must have turned upon my steps—thus supposing the circuit nearly double what it actually was. My confusion of mind prevented me from observing that I began my tour with the wall to the left, and ended with the wall to the right.

I had been deceived, too, in respect to the shape of the enclosure. In feeling my way I had found many angles, and thus deduced an idea of great irregularity; so potent is the effect of total darkness upon one arousing from lethargy or sleep! The angles were simply those of a few slight depressions, or niches at odd intervals. The general shape of the prison was square. What I had taken for masonry seemed now to be iron, or some other metal, in huge plates, whose sutures or joints occasioned the depression. The entire surface of this metallic enclosure was rudely daubed in all the hideous and repulsive devices to which the charnel superstition of the monks has given rise. The figures of fiends in aspects of menace, with skeleton forms, and other more really fearful images, overspread and disfigured the walls. I observed that the outlines of these monstrosities were sufficiently distinct, but that the colours seemed faded and blurred, as if from the effects of a damp atmosphere. I now noticed the floor, too, which was of stone. In the centre

yawned the circular pit from whose jaws I had escaped; but it was the only one in the dungeon.

All this I saw indistinctly and by much effort—for my personal condition had been greatly changed during slumber. I now lay upon my back, and at full length, on a species of low framework of wood. To this I was securely bound by a long strap resembling a surcingle. It passed in many convolutions about my limbs and body, leaving at liberty only my head, and my left arm to such extent, that I could, by dint of much exertion, supply myself with food from an earthen dish which lay by my side on the floor. I saw, to my horror, that the pitcher had been removed: I say to my horror—for I was consumed with intolerable thirst. This thirst it appeared to be the design of my persecutors to stimulate—for the food in the dish was meat pungently seasoned.

Looking upward, I surveyed the ceiling of my prison. It was some thirty or forty feet overhead, and constructed much as the side walls. In one of its panels a very singular figure riveted my whole attention. It was the painted figure of Time as he is commonly represented, save that, in lieu of a scythe, he held what, at a casual glance, I supposed to be the pictured image of a huge pendulum, such as we see on antique clocks. There was something, however, in the appearance of this machine which caused me to regard it more attentively. While I gazed directly upward at it (for its position was immediately over my own) I fancied that I saw it in motion. In an instant afterward the fancy was confirmed. Its sweep was brief, and of course slow. I watched it for some minutes somewhat in fear, but more in wonder. Wearied at length with observing its dull movement, I turned my eyes upon the other objects in the cell.

A slight noise attracted my notice, and, looking to the floor, I saw several enormous rats traversing it. They had issued from the well which lay just within view to my

right. Even then, while I gazed, they came up in troops, hurriedly, with ravenous eyes, allured by the scent of the meat. From this it required much effort and attention to scare them away.

It might have been half an hour, perhaps even an hour (for I could take but imperfect note of time), before I again cast my eyes upward. What I then saw confounded and amazed me. The sweep of the pendulum had increased in extent by nearly a yard. As a natural consequence its velocity was also much greater. But what mainly disturbed me was the idea that it had perceptibly *descended*. I now observed—with what horror it is needless to say—that its nether extremity was formed of a crescent of glittering steel, about a foot in length from horn to horn; the horns upward, and the under edge evidently as keen as that of a razor. Like a razor also, it seemed massive and heavy, tapering from the edge into a solid and broad structure above. It was appended to a weighty rod of brass, and the whole *hissed* as it swung through the air.

I could no longer doubt the doom prepared for my by monkish ingenuity in torture. My cognisance of the pit had become known to the inquisitorial agents—*the pit*, whose horrors had been destined for so bold a recusant as myself—*the pit*, typical of hell and regarded by rumour as the Ultima Thule of all their punishments. The plunge into this pit I had avoided by the merest of accidents, and I knew that surprise, or entrapment into torment, formed an important portion of all the grotesquerie of these dungeon deaths. Having failed to fall, it was no part of the demon plan to hurl me into the abyss; and thus (there being no alternative) a different and a milder destruction awaited me. Milder! I half smiled in my agony as I thought of such application of such a term.

What boots it to tell of the long, long hours of horror more than mortal, during which I counted the rushing os-

cillations of the steel! Inch by inch—line by line—with a descent only appreciable at intervals that seemed ages—down and still down it came! Days passed—it might have been that many days passed—ere it swept so closely over me as to fan me with its acrid breath. The odour of the sharp steel forced itself into my nostrils. I prayed—I wearied heaven with my prayer for its more speedy descent. I grew frantically mad, and struggled to force myself upward against the sweep of the fearful scimitar. And then I fell suddenly calm, and lay smiling at the glittering death, as a child at some rare bauble.

There was another interval of utter insensibility; it was brief; for upon again lapsing into life, there had been no perceptible descent in the pendulum. But it might have been long—for I knew there were demons who took note of my swoon, and who could have arrested the vibration at pleasure. Upon my recovery, too, I felt very—oh! indescribably—sick and weak, as if through long inanition. Even amid the agonies of that period the human nature craved food. With painful effort I outstretched my left arm as far as my bonds permitted, and took possession of the small remnant which had been spared me by the rats. As I put a portion of it within my lips, there rushed to my mind a half-formed thought of joy—of hope. Yet what business had *I* with hope? It was, as I say, a half-formed thought—man has many such, which are never completed. I felt that it was of joy—of hope; but I felt also that it had perished in its formation. In vain I struggled to perfect—to regain it. Long suffering had nearly annihilated all my ordinary powers of mind. I was an imbecile—an idiot.

The vibration of the pendulum was at right angles to my length. I saw that the crescent was designed to cross the region of the heart. It would fray the serge of my robe—it would return and repeat its operations—again—and again. Notwithstanding its terrifically wide sweep (some thirty

feet or more), and the hissing vigour of its descent, sufficient to sunder these very walls of iron, still the fraying of my robe would be all that, for several minutes, it would accomplish. And at this thought I paused. I dared not go further than this reflection. I dwelt upon it with a pertinacity of attention—as if, in so dwelling, I could arrest *here* the descent of the steel. I forced myself to ponder upon the sound of the crescent as it should pass across the garment—upon the peculiar thrilling sensation which the friction of cloth produces on the nerves. I pondered over all this frivolity until my teeth were on edge.

Down—steadily down it crept. I took a frenzied pleasure in contrasting its downward with its lateral velocity. To the right—to the left—far and wide—with the shriek of a damned spirit! to my heart, with the stealthy pace of the tiger! I alternately laughed and howled, as the one or the other idea grew predominant.

Down—certainly, relentlessly down! It vibrated within three inches of my bosom! I struggled violently—furiously—to free my left arm. This was free only from the elbow to the hand. I could reach the latter, from the platter beside me, to my mouth, with great effort, but no farther. Could I have broken the fastenings above the elbow, I would have seized and attempted to arrest the pendulum. I might as well have attempted to arrest an avalanche!

Down—still unceasingly—still inevitably down! I gasped and struggled at each vibration. I shrank convulsively at its every sweep. My eyes followed its outward or upward whirls with the eagerness of the most unmeaning despair; they closed themselves spasmodically at the descent, although death would have been a relief, oh, how unspeakable! Still I quivered in every nerve to think how slight a sinking of the machinery would precipitate that keen, glistening axe upon my bosom. It was *hope* that prompted the nerve to quiver—the frame to shrink. It was *hope*—the

hope that triumphs on the rack—that whispers to the death-condemned even in the dungeons of the Inquisition.

I saw that some ten or twelve vibrations would bring the steel in actual contact with my robe—and with this observation there suddenly came over my spirit all the keen, collected calmness of despair. For the first time during many hours—or perhaps days—I *thought*. It now occurred to me, that the bandage, or surcingle, which enveloped me, was *unique*. I was tied by no separate cord. The first stroke of the razor-like crescent athwart any portion of the band would so detach it that it might be unwound from my person by means of my left hand. But how fearful, in that case, the proximity of the steel! The result of the slightest struggle, how deadly! Was it likely, moreover, that the minions of the torturer had not foreseen and provided for this possibility? Was it probable that the bandage crossed my bosom in the track of the pendulum? Dreading to find my faint and, as it seemed, my last hope frustrated, I so far elevated my head as to obtain a distinct view of my breast. The surcingle enveloped my limbs and body close in all directions—*save in the path of the destroying crescent*.

Scarcely had I dropped my head back into its original position, when there flashed upon my mind what I cannot better describe than as the unformed half of that idea of deliverance to which I have previously alluded, and of which a moiety only floated indeterminately through my brain when I raised food to my burning lips. The whole thought was now present—feeble, scarcely sane, scarcely definite—but still entire. I proceeded at once, with the nervous energy of despair, to attempt its execution.

For many hours the immediate vicinity of the low framework upon which I lay had been literally swarming with rats. They were wild, bold, ravenous—their red eyes glaring upon me as if they waited but for motionlessness on my

part to make me their prey. "To what food," I thought, "have they been accustomed in the well?"

They had devoured, in spite of all my efforts to prevent them, all but a small remnant of the contents of the dish. I had fallen into an habitual see-saw or wave of the hand about the platter; and, at length, the unconscious uniformity of the movement deprived it of effect. In their voracity, the vermin frequently fastened their sharp fangs in my fingers. With the particles of the oily and spicy viand which now remained, I thoroughly rubbed the bandage wherever I could reach it; then, raising my hand from the floor, I lay breathlessly still.

At first, the ravenous animals were startled and terrified at the change—at the cessation of movement. They shrank alarmedly back; many sought the well. But this was only for a moment. I had not counted in vain upon their voracity. Observing that I remained without motion, one or two of the boldest leaped upon the framework, and smelt at the surcingle. This seemed the signal for a general rush. Forth from the well they hurried in fresh troops. They clung to the wood—they overran it, and leaped in hundreds upon my person. The measured movement of the pendulum disturbed them not at all. Avoiding its strokes, they busied themselves with the anointed bandage. They pressed—they swarmed upon me in ever accumulating heaps. They writhed upon my throat; their cold lips sought my own; I was half stifled by their thronging pressure; disgust, for which the world has no name, swelled my bosom, and chilled, with a heavy clamminess, my heart. Yet one minute, and I felt that the struggle would be over. Plainly I perceived the loosening of the bandage. I knew that in more than one place it must be already severed. With a more than human resolution I lay *still*.

Nor had I erred in my calculations—nor had I endured

in vain. I at length felt that I was *free*. The surcingle hung in ribands from my body. But the stroke of the pendulum already pressed upon my bosom. It had divided the serge of the robe. It had cut through the linen beneath. Twice again it swung, and a sharp sense of pain shot through every nerve. But the moment of escape had arrived. At a wave of my hand my deliverers hurried tumultuously away. With a steady movement—cautious, sidelong, shrinking, and slow—I slid from the embrace of the bandage and beyond the reach of the scimitar. For the moment, at least, *I was free*.

Free!—and in the grasp of the Inquisition! I had scarcely stepped from my wooden bed of horror upon the stone floor of the prison, when the motion of the hellish machine ceased, and I beheld it drawn up, by some invisible force, through the ceiling. This was a lesson which I took desperately to heart. My every motion was undoubtedly watched. Free!—I had but escaped death in one form of agony, to be delivered unto worse than death in some other. With that thought I rolled my eyes nervously around on the barriers of iron that hemmed me in. Something unusual—some change, which, at first, I could not appreciate distinctly—it was obvious, had taken place in the apartment. For many minutes of a dreamy and trembling abstraction, I busied myself in vain, unconnected conjecture. During this period, I became aware, for the first time, of the origin of the sulphurous light which illumined the cell. It proceeded from a fissure, about half an inch in width, extending entirely around the prison at the base of the walls, which thus appeared, and were completely separated from the floor. I endeavoured, but of course in vain, to look through the aperture.

As I arose from the attempt, the mystery of the alteration in the chamber broke at once upon my understanding. I have observed that, although the outlines of the figures

upon the walls were sufficiently distinct, yet the colours seemed blurred and indefinite. These colours had now assumed, and were momentarily assuming, a startling and most intense brilliancy, that gave to the spectral and fiendish portraitures an aspect that might have thrilled even firmer nerves than my own. Demon eyes, of a wild and ghastly vivacity, glared upon me in a thousand directions, where none had been visible before, and gleamed with the lurid lustre of a fire that I could not force my imagination to regard as unreal.

Unreal!—Even while I breathed there came to my nostrils the breath of the vapour of heated iron! A suffocating odour pervaded the prison! A deeper glow settled each moment in the eyes that glared at my agonies! A richer tint of crimson diffused itself over the pictured horrors of blood. I panted! I gasped for breath! There could be no doubt of the design of my tormentors—oh! most unrelenting! oh! most demoniac of men! I shrank from the glowing metal to the centre of the cell. Amid the thought of the fiery destruction that impended, the idea of the coolness of the well came over my soul like balm. I rushed to its deadly brink. I threw my straining vision below. The glare from the enkindled roof illumined its inmost recesses. Yet, for a wild moment, did my spirit refuse to comprehend the meaning of what I saw. At length it forced—it wrestled its way into my soul—it burned itself in upon my shuddering reason. Oh! for a voice to speak!—oh! horror!—oh! any horror but this! With a shriek, I rushed from the margin, and buried my face in my hands—weeping bitterly.

The heat rapidly increased, and once again I looked up, shuddering as with a fit of the ague. There had been a second change in the cell—and now the change was obviously in the *form*. As before, it was in vain that I at first endeavoured to appreciate or understand what was taking place. But not long was I left in doubt. The Inquisitorial ven-

geance had been hurried by my two-fold escape, and there was to be no more dallying with the King of Terrors. The room had been square. I saw that two of its iron angles were now acute—two, consequently, obtuse. The fearful difference quickly increased with a low rumbling or moaning sound. In an instant the apartment had shifted its form into that of a lozenge. But the alteration stopped not here—I neither hoped nor desired it to stop. I could have clasped the red walls to my bosom as a garment of eternal peace. “Death,” I said, “any death but that of the pit!” Fool! might I not have known that *into the pit* it was the object of the burning iron to urge me? Could I resist its glow? or if even that, could I withstand its pressure? And now, flatter and flatter grew the lozenge, with a rapidity that left me no time for contemplation. Its centre, and of course its greatest width, came just over the yawning gulf. I shrank back—but the closing walls pressed me resistlessly onward. At length for my seared and writhing body there was no longer an inch of foothold on the firm floor of the prison. I struggled no more, but the agony of my soul found vent in one loud, long, and final scream of despair. I felt that I tottered upon the brink—I averted my eyes—

There was a discordant hum of human voices! There was a loud blast as of many trumpets! There was a harsh grating as of a thousand thunders! The fiery walls rushed back! An outstretched arm caught my own as I fell, fainting, into the abyss. It was that of General Lasalle. The French army had entered Toledo. The Inquisition was in the hands of its enemies.

MACKLIN'S LITTLE FRIEND

by Howard Wandrei

THE old, substantial residences on Lincoln Avenue stood in blocks of secret, dark masses against the swiftly failing green pallor of the western sky. A fleet new coupé slowed, slipping forward close to the curb. After crossing the intersection of Mills Lane it stopped at the corner residence as silent as destiny. The powerful white beams of the headlights went off. Out of the car staggered the muscular, personable, but now nearly furtive figure of Willard Macklin.

Light from the corner lamp reached his face. His gray eyes were ablaze. Somewhat lean, and intense with years of determined study, his dark features were extraordinarily accented by his glistening paleness. He wore no hat. But the huge and perplexing turban of bandages surmounting his head seemed to be as great a burden as he could support.

Shakily mounting the steps like a drunken man, he paced laboriously up a red brick wall dividing panels of level green velvet lawn.

Above the doorbell in the brick wall, partially hidden by vines which swarmed over the house, a browned brass plate carried in modest relief the name of Theodore Kley, M.D. One year following Macklin's imminent marriage to lovely Barbara Kley, allowing that time for the honeymoon and their getting settled, old Kley meant to retire and Macklin

would assume his moderate but rich practice. Macklin inclined the sickening weight of his head for a moment, then stumped the bell with his thumb.

After a moment old Theodore himself drew the door wide. A stocky, heavy-boned Dutchman, grizzled, he still had his penetrating and infallible blue eyes and big but neat hands that were marvels of surgical skill. Macklin had those same muscular, unerring hands. Sight of the huge bandage drew a grunt of surprise from old Kley. He hooked the slim, fragrantly reeking cigar out of his mouth, wet his broad lips and swallowed. Then he said gutturally and angrily, "Don't stand there. Come inside!"

Macklin blundered in, smiling shakily. "Where's Barbara?"

"Upstairs finishing her bath; she'll be down directly."

Macklin indicated his head, and said jerkily, "This—this thing has been driving me crazy. Wait till you see it! You've got to do something about it, sir, before Barbara finds out about it."

Scowling at the mysterious turban, Kley closed the door and said softly, "We will go into the study."

They heard Barbara's bare feet hurrying down the hall upstairs to her room. Her door didn't close, so Kley closed the door to his office. This was half-study, half-laboratory, and occupied the entire ground floor of a wing which had been added to the east side of the house. Heavy walnut shelves built against two walls to the height of Kley's reach were jammed to the heads with a valuable medical library.

At the rear wall stood a large, windowed cabinet with a murderous and glittering array of surgical instruments on glass shelves. There was a patent chair fixed to the floor, used for minor operations. Alongside it, a metal standard equipped with a variety of electrical instruments—sterilizing apparatus.

Near the front windows stood Kley's big desk laden

with typewriter, the open volume which he had been reading, notes on his own third work, and accumulations of papers and correspondence.

He gestured Macklin into an easy chair beside the desk, and lowered his own bulk unhurriedly into a swivel chair back of the typewriter.

Macklin's lips parted, but he couldn't say anything. He was plainly in the ripest kind of funk.

Kley put his cigar out in an ash tray and reflected gruffly, "We've been wondering what you were doing these last two weeks. We knew you were working hard to get the house ready before the marriage, but——" Indicating the bandage with a nod he asked, "What's that?"

"I don't know." Macklin shivered, and his gray eyes were bright with fear. Abruptly, as though he were committing a reckless act, he began to unwind the gauze from his head. Kley watched. In the end, the bandages protected no slightest wound nor head injury. But there was something contained in the bandages which rendered Kley's ordinarily placid face stiff with stupefaction. He let out an explosive breath. Rising slowly from his chair he stared with as much disbelief as though his dead wife Anna had abandoned the rotten mahogany of her coffin and walked into the room. Medical impossibilities!

"For Heaven's sake, what is it?" Macklin asked in a shattered voice.

Kley swallowed with incredulity; his heavy lips worked soundlessly as he bent far over the desk for closer scrutiny. He was plainly aghast. "Keep hold of yourself, boy," he rumbled gently. "It isn't anything. It's nothing at all."

Macklin laughed, a tortured, one-syllable sound. "I'm not a child," he gasped. "Do something about it!"

Bound twice around his sweating head under the many turns of gauze, and now depending from his right temple

into a nest of coils on the floor, was a fifty-six-inch length of limp tentacle—a slim, easily tapering rope of flesh.

Kley had never before seen nor heard of anything even remotely resembling it. Formed in general like a serpent, but without any recognizable head, this dangling obscenity was studded from root to tip with close, even rows of hard, rugose nodes or nipples graduated in size from about that of small peas down to pinheads.

At its base, the frightful appendage was horny. More phenomenal still was its partial translucency, within which seemed suspended a complex and fine network of ruby veins stemming from one main dark artery like a backbone. The artery did not seem to continue into Macklin's head.

Kley took hold of the dreadful tentacle, tugged gently. There was no pulse. And the thing was like flexible horn, tough, sinewy, like the tentacle of an octopus save in its tapering roundness.

"Be quiet now for just a little," Kley cautioned in a strangled voice. He circled to the operating chair, selected a tubular chromium instrument from the standard alongside, and returned drawing fine electric cord from a reel under spring tension. The chromium tube was closely jointed, for flexibility, and terminated in a glass capsule which produced a tiny intense beam of white light. This needle of light Kley directed at the juncture of the tentacle with Macklin's head. He played the beam rapidly, pushing at the horny root experimentally with his thumb. The light snicked off.

Kley made a clucking sound and muttered, "Damnedest thing." Aloud, to Macklin, "Where the devil did you get this little friend of yours?"

Macklin shook his head. "It sprouted from that cut I got two weeks ago. At first it was just a bud, but it's been growing like—like this. I've been holing up because I didn't want to scare Barbara out of her wits."

Kley made a sound of comment. "The only reason she isn't down here with her arms around your neck is to show you that she can make you wait, too." Soberly, "Tell me about that cut again."

"Why, Barbara and I went picnicking. There's a spring-fed lake on the Joel Spinney farm, north of town. We were going swimming, and I dived in first. The lake has rocky banks, and I grazed my head on a jagged rock under the water, I guess. We drove right back here."

Kley had dressed the wound. "There were three deep slashes, like the work of a knife or fangs," he remembered. His accent had become strong. "Something bit you."

"What, sir?"

"You want this to come off, don't you?"

"Good Heavens, yes! But——"

"There is a perfect line of cleavage at the temple. If the blood vessel is articulated there the way it looks, there won't be any trouble. Relax, boy. We'll dock this fellow in a jiffy." Kley returned the chromium light to the fixture, headed for the cabinet and selected a lean and hungry-looking scalpel and a strong and ugly pair of forceps with ridged jaws.

"No local. Nothing!" Macklin burst out. In a groan, "Lord! I've had this thing in bed with me for two weeks!"

"Is there any feeling in it?"

"No, but the whole side of my head is numb. I don't think I'll feel the knife."

Kley nodded. For a moment the tentacle held his perplexed regard, and then his hands went to work as though there were brain fiber in his finger ends. Macklin paled as the scalpel flickered in a ribbon of light and the ropy growth fairly peeled from his temple.

He remained motionless, but his pallor turned faintly greenish. With a grimace, Kley dropped the limp amputation on the desk in a heap of convolutions and proceeded

to sterilize and bandage the raw circle on Macklin's head. Following the line of cleavage with absolute precision, he had not drawn a drop of blood. The membrane protecting the source of the growth remained intact.

In conclusion, he produced a bottle of hoary old brandy and brimmed a slender, soap-bubble glass of it which he urged on Macklin. Kley had one for himself. After it was down he remarked somberly, "I didn't tell you that I've been investigating the small lake on Spinney's farm. You know it's the only one of its kind."

Macklin's hand strayed to the neat bandage on his temple. "How do you mean, sir?"

Kley listened for sounds of Barbara's coming, then said, "About the way it was formed, I mean." His voice was idly musing, putting Macklin at ease. "Ten or twelve years ago a meteorite fell on Spinney's farm. You might say Heaven did Spinney a good turn. The meteorite smashed through a shell of granite south of the farmhouse, the only worthless ground on his land. It opened a reservoir, and the water climbed to form this remarkable lake."

"Oh, I remember something about that." The brandy was bringing a flush into Macklin's lean face. He kept his eyes away from the thing on the desk near Kley's elbow. "There were some men from the university went down there to take soundings and raise the meteorite if they could. But they thought it must have blown up under water. What did you mean, sir, when you said that wound of mine was a bite?"

Kley shrugged heavily. With slight reluctance he asked, "You don't really think you cut your head on the rocks, do you?"

"But there's nothing in the pool, sir," Macklin argued. "There never has been."

"I'm not so sure of that," Kley stated ambiguously.

Slowly, "I've been talking with Joe Spinney. He had lost a fine dog, cattle, and many of his chickens. This has been going on to some extent for years."

"I don't understand."

"His animals disappear. He has found packs of feathers caught in the rocks at the water level in his lake. What's more, there isn't any small game, no squirrels or mice or anything on four legs, in the woods and pasture near the lake. There used to be plenty."

Macklin laughed uncomfortably. "That doesn't mean anything."

"Spinney and I think it does. The crows raise Ned over the woods several times a week. Spinney has come running, but never got anything but a splash in the pool. You can find the bones of game in the woods. Spinney thinks a big snake is killing his hens."

"A snake? There aren't any snakes around here big enough to carry off a dog. His dog must have run away."

"He told me about hearing a heifer bawling in the pasture one evening. When he got there the ground was plowed up with hoofs, and no heifer. There was also a groove, like the track made by an oversize bicycle tire, hitting through bushes and weeds straight to the pool. And he said he thought the water in the pool looked reddish, but it might have been the reflection of the sunset."

Macklin held himself from shivering, though the night was sultry and without breeze. He remembered his deep dive into the crystal water, and the solid, wholly unexpected blow his head had received. If some problematical water snake were lurking there, it might have been startled from a nest in the rocks and struck him a glancing blow before retreating to the bottoms. But no such reptile was indigenous to this middle-Western State, if indeed it existed at all. Nor was there any ready accounting for the phenomenon of the abominable parasite growth which had been

developing with mushroom speed and sapping his strength for these many days.

Papers rustled surreptitiously on old Theodore's desk.

Macklin's gaze went rigid and Kley turned his square, massive head with a jerk. The tentacle lay serpentine and still. The air was dead, and Kley thought the thing's convolutions must have disturbed the loose papers in settling. But the suggestion in the sound was gruesome.

"It moved." Macklin couldn't keep the hysteria out of his whisper. His lips were like a scar.

"Nonsense," Kley snorted in his heavy bass. "It has only just settled a little. I'll get rid of it."

The butt of the growth, the root of which had been covered with a fine pink membrane after the amputation, was now whitely, gleamingly denuded. Interested, Kley picked up the scalpel and tried the exposed surface with it. The microscopic steel point slipped off. Kley took hold of the firm flesh of the butt and again tried to score the rounded enamel with the steel. But it was of such tight, resistant texture that even the scalpel's wicked sheerness couldn't find a flaw.

Faint markings in the bright enamel were discernible. The lines zigzagged closely as though two parts had knit, or like small, wonderfully perfect, needle-toothed jaws rigidly locked. The suggestion of close rows of teeth girt with a fold of leathery lips was increasingly obvious.

Kley muttered something under his breath and poised the scalpel to make an incision in the specimen just behind the blind head. Before the steel touched it the thing moved fluidly, the coils turning as smoothly as flowing oil. It stilled, and Kley was still with a vast surprise. Abruptly and violently he brought his powerful left hand down and seized one of the coils. With the contact the blood drained from his face. He ripped his hand away and sprang to his

feet with a hoarse, convulsive oath. Starting, his eyes were blind with agony.

Macklin shouted, "It's alive!"

That hideous, tapering tentacle with its rows of tough studs streaked over the edge of the desk with a heavy, burring sound. As luck would have it, the horror shot down into the wastebasket beside the desk. All sinew and electric nerve, it moved with lightning velocity and piled up in the wastebasket with the force of a falling club. Simultaneously Macklin erupted from his chair, overturned the steel basket on the rug and knelt on it. He looked up, breathless.

Kley's breath hissed. The palm of his left hand was flayed in a neat strip denuding knuckle bone, muscle and tendon. His palm was a cup of bright blood which brimmed over and pattered on the rug like ghostly little footfalls.

Kley glared at his hand as though he didn't comprehend what had happened, then broke for a washstand at the end of the room. His hand hurt as though seared, but his face was merely grim. He washed the wound and kept swabbing it with brownish stuff from a bottle he snatched from the cabinet. The spring of blood lessened, and at last he was able to bandage the numb hand. His bull voice came over his shoulder, "That devil! Don't let it get away!"

"For Heaven's sake, what is it?" Macklin asked frantically. A commotion in the wastebasket shook him, magnifying his horror.

"There still are forms of life that we have never dreamed of," Kley said with a kind of cold passion. Then, his eyes quirked with realization, he added, "You know, that hellish thing was mature. That's why there was such a plain line of cleavage. In a few hours it would have detached itself from you naturally if I hadn't cut it off. Ah, if I only had had the brains to cut it in two!"

"But, Dr. Kley——"

Scowling, Kley turned and snapped with a kind of sin-

ister intelligence, "Something in Spinney's Lake bit you, and impregnated the wound. Nature tries all methods of reproduction."

Which meant that another nightmare like the one imprisoned under the basket dwelt in the bottoms of Spinney's Lake. The fact that the monster was of an unknown species did not make it less appalling. In a race of thought Macklin played with the possibilities of the monster's origin. It could not have been indigenous to the subterranean reservoir on Spinney's farm. But the seed of it might have been carried in by the meteorite out of the vastness of space. Cultures of unknown bacteria and fungus life capable of withstanding extremes of heat and cold had been obtained from meteoritic bodies before this.

It happened before Kley got back to the desk.

Macklin's hundred and eighty-odd pounds shivered and bucked above the upended wastebasket as though he were trying to hold down a series of explosions. He cried out, "I can't hold it down!"

Abruptly, he sprawled headlong into Kley and knocked him off his feet. A litter of waste paper and cigar butts and ashes went flying. They scrambled to their feet at once and in the following frenzied, futile moments they ransacked the entire floor area of the room, on the rug and the tiles and under furniture, but Macklin's little friend had gone into good hiding.

"Well?" Kley exploded gutturally, baffled. "Where did that devil go?"

"It—it just disappeared," Macklin stuttered. He felt like a complete fool. Still dazed, he wiped the perspiration from his throat and face. His temple throbbed. The prodigy having vanished, it seemed now to have been only some gruesome figment of the imagination. He piously wished it were.

But there was Kley prowling tensely about the room with the breathless industry of a big mastiff. Macklin fought down the hysteria that was beginning to shake him and kept searching, too—futilely. His breathing had accelerated raggedly.

The door of the study swung open, framing Barbara Kley's loveliness. She was blond, with hair like molded honey. She had a challenging, fresh, oval face, velvet lips, her father's blue eyes, a boyish and statuesque figure in expensive green silk. She looked from Macklin to her father, at the overturned wastebasket on the sumptuous rug, and alarm jumped into her eyes.

"What have you been doing down here?" she asked sharply. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing!" Kley boomed. "Quick! Close the door!"

Barbara stepped into the office; the door closed heavily behind her. She saw her father's bandaged hand and Macklin's temple and said worriedly, "You're hiding something. Tell me what's wrong. Why were you making such a racket?"

Kley softened his voice. "Wait for us in the den, Barbara." His gaze shifted restlessly, searching the floor. "We have a little work to do; it won't take long."

She appealed to Macklin. "Have you stopped loving me? What's the trouble? How did you hurt yourselves?"

"It's a—a specimen I brought," Macklin said rapidly. "We were examining it, and had an accident. It got away. That's all."

"Oh, that's all!" Barbara mocked. "What kind of specimen was it, then?"

"A leech," Kley blurted irritably. "A giant amphibious leech."

Macklin thought of the spontaneity with which the thing's bloodsucking apparatus had flayed Kley's hand, and

looked as sick as he felt. He pleaded, "Wait outside for us, Barbara."

"I'm going to stay right here," she said determinedly.

"Stay close to the door, then," Kley warned. To himself, "Lord! We can't let that hellish thing get loose!"

A stealthy, rubbing sound originating from the bookshelves drew the attention of all three.

"Listen!" Kley ordered in a whisper.

The silence was enormous, and then the leathery studs of that thick, whiplike nightmare were again rubbing against one of the walnut shelves behind the books.

Kley ghosted soundlessly to his desk and quietly drew open the shallow middle drawer. In the course of his profession he had had to deal with maniacs and criminals, and therefore kept at hand the seemingly clumsy but wonderfully efficient automatic which he had used in the War. With this deadliest of small arms he was an infallible shot.

Macklin advanced with him to the bookcase. The slight sound of their approach made the leech still. But it flinched, behind the books, in response to the click of the safety button on the automatic rooted in Kley's fist.

They located the leech. It had retreated behind the books on the third shelf from the bottom, having entered through the space between the tops of the books and the shelf above. When it sprang free from the wastebasket it must have shot through the aperture like an arrow. At a nod from Theodore, Macklin cautiously took hold of half a dozen books on the shelf, suddenly whipped them out and leaped aside.

Barbara saw the head of the thing and screamed with the report of the ugly gun. It was a miss. The leech disappeared backward in motion too quick for the eye to follow. But there was a bullet hole in the backboard where the head had been.

"Quick, eh?" Kley ejaculated. "Don't let it get near you. Those rows of buttons on it are suckers; you saw what fast work they did on my hand." Blood was seeping through the bandage now.

In that brief glimpse they had seen the amphibious worm's frightful jaws. The jaws were supplied with long, curving, murderous fangs anchored well back in the head by sloping roots. Such blind ferocity in any living thing was enough to shake anyone's nerve, but Macklin stole vengefully, crouched over and listening, along the wall of books.

At the end of the shelf a length of the blind tentacle issued like a snake striking. It stabbed half a dozen times, in a blur of motion, at the books on the shelf above. It shot through the aperture above the books on the fourth shelf before Macklin could get out of Kley's line of fire. He cursed and looked back at Kley with his lips twitching.

"Never mind," Kley grunted. "Just so it doesn't get out of the room."

Still at bay, the monster no longer advertised its exact position by prowling behind the books. One way of locating it would be to jam one book after another against the backboard, on the chance of pinning the creature momentarily.

Kley had the idea, too. "But it's too dangerous," he advised. "Think of how powerful it is and how fast it can move."

"You're not going to do anything as crazy as that, Willard," Barbara chimed in, terrified. "Where did that horrible thing come from?"

"From Spinney's Lake," Macklin said shortly. He mopped the perspiration from his face and said to Kley, "Do you suppose that damned thing can hear? It acts as though it can."

"We can find out."

Macklin whistled piercingly, and was rewarded with a spasmodic slurring sound near the end of the shelf closest to the door.

"So," Kley rumbled, gluing his eyes to the spot. "Tactile hearing. Tough as they are, those suckers must be sensitive enough to pick up sound vibrations. Lord, what a foul thing! All mouth! In that case we do it this way."

With his lips straight, Kley nosed the gun against the back, low, of a cloth-bound work on forensic medicine. He squeezed the trigger. In the closed room the report of the gun was stunning. Simultaneously a block of books erupted in Kley's face, knocking the pistol from his fist as he staggered backward and recovered his balance.

The monster's tail lashed out, a quivering, tortured whip of living sinew. Barbara was speechless. As Macklin dropped to all fours and scrambled for the gun, the monster raged down the shelf. In a boil of whipping steel it catapulted more of Kley's prized volumes from the shelf. The thing's coils thrashed powerfully in plain view for an instant, and then it appeared to dissipate among the splashing pages of Kley's books.

Kley held his battered jaw and gasped, "My! My, dot's actif!"

"Active!" Macklin snapped, mocking Kley's guttural understatement. "Not any more, though. I think you put a shot in it that time." But doubt and excitement had accelerated the beat of his heart to a continuous murmur of pain. And he was no stronger for his two weeks of sickness. The leech might be injured, but it wasn't dead, and he couldn't find it. He moved the books on the floor aside with his foot, and flirted glances along the disordered shelf of books. They listened. There was not the least stir of movement. With a puzzled grunt, Kley stooped and made the waste-

basket clang with a rap of his knuckles. There was no response from the bookcase to this new sound. Macklin passed the gun back to Kley, hunched his shoulders and without a word began emptying the fourth shelf. Nothing there.

He asked Barbara, "Did you see where it went?"

Her eyes were wide and brilliant, and she couldn't speak; she shook her head.

Macklin unloaded the third shelf, stacking the books on the floor. He was wet with perspiration. So was old Kley, who stayed close beside him with the ready gun.

Then it had to be the fifth shelf. Damn the thing's silence!

"Careful, now!" Kley warned.

Macklin's eyebrows were laden with sweat and he felt dizzy. He mopped his whole face and neck, mentally gearing himself for another encounter with the giant leech's ready fury. He hoped that it was dead, that the effect of Kley's shot was the hideous worm's dying agony. An idea occurred to him. The leech was a blind and deaf thing, but the one sense with which nature endowed it made it as formidable as a tiger. If it could feel sound, conceivably it could feel light. Tactile vision, as in plant life. Its first act upon coming alive was to streak for protective darkness. The apertures in the bookcase were the darkest shadows in the room. They had taught it not to answer to sudden sounds, but sudden light might goad it.

"What's the matter?" Kley asked.

"I've got an idea," Macklin answered. "I think light bothers that thing. You know, the way a shrill note hurts a dog's ears."

"Good!" Kley nodded. According to Spinney's information, the curse of his lake went abroad pillaging chiefly after dark. If it slaughtered stray chickens during the day,

it was a dark day, or else it was driven into the sunlight only by its unappeasable hunger. It was, as Kley expressed it, all mouth.

Macklin got the chromium peep light which Kley had used and bent the flexible end so that light could be directed downward behind the row of books. He wet his lips and asked, "Ready?"

"Ready," Kley grunted. "Try it here at the end, first."

Macklin slipped the slim but powerful torch deep into the shelf and directed the bent end downward. Kley stood woodenly. The automatic was like part of his fist.

From the door came the soft rush of Barbara's breathing. Against her white face her lips looked like a bright scar.

Macklin snapped the button on the torch and a beam of light spurted down behind the books. The sudden impact of the light must have tormented the cornered leech just as much as the bullet. At least, the spontaneous fury of its reaction took both Kley and Macklin by complete surprise.

A section of the big medical books burst from the shelf as though dynamited. A book caught Macklin across the throat, filling his head with fire. He dropped the torch and it snicked back into the fixture beside the operating chair.

As though it had been shot from a gun, the maddened leech struck athwart Kley's body with a sickening, clubbing sound and all his breath left him explosively. The thud of impact was sharpened by the clean crack of bone. The gun sounded with three mighty reports in quick succession.

Drawn up stiffly, as though in insupportable pain, Barbara parted her lips to scream, but the sound was only a long, searing whisper. Her eyes looked mad.

A frantic gobbling sound issued from Macklin's throat. He hurled himself at the doomed Kley and tried to rip off the leech. But he snatched his hands free instantly with

blood running from his finger tips. Kley blundered backward into the bookcase, his massive body warped.

Like a spiral of steel cable the leech bound Kley's body. Its blunt, horny head had gone through his jacket and was half buried in his breast. Studded with ravenous suckers, the leech bound his left arm crushingly against his side and continued around his waist, feeding. Kley's chest was in an inexorably closing vise and his blunt features fast empurpled with the stoppage of circulation and lack of breath. Veins stood out on his face in knotted violet cords. When the thing went around him like a steel hose his left arm had been broken. But what shocked Macklin and Barbara to the point of insanity was the way in which that spiraled length of ferocity was melting into Kley's helpless body—feeding, through fabric, deep into his flesh.

Macklin had snatched up the scalpel and was back with it. Kley brought up the gun in a trembling arc and half unconsciously prodded the leech with the muzzle. His broken arm dangled. He tried to say something to Macklin, but his lungs had collapsed and his lips scarcely quivered.

Holding the scalpel like a dagger, Macklin attacked the leech just behind the head, cramping Kley hard against the gutted bookshelves. Severing that tough sinew was like trying to cut tempered rubber. Kley shook his blackening head in a wordless negative. Macklin got the blade of the scalpel under the leech and jerked with all his strength. The crazy violence of that effort severed the leech's head from its body, but it was too late. The gun roared, jumped in Kley's fist. His arm dropped and the gun fell on the floor. The bullet had passed through his heart; his body relaxed and he pitched forward.

The leech was dying. It worked convulsively, freeing itself in bursts of nervous reflex from the dead surgeon's body. Scarcely knowing what he was doing, Macklin reached down and snatched it entirely free. He whipped

it high over his head and smashed it down on the floor with the bitterest passion. Then, aiming deliberately with the gun, he discharged the five remaining bullets into a twitching length of blind sinew that was still trying to crawl. He continued pulling the trigger after the clip was exhausted, until Barbara ran sobbing to him and stopped him.

Called by neighbors, a squad car had stopped in front of the house; two uniformed cops were hammering on the door.

The police limousine passed the city limits, heading for Spinney's farm. This was early on a brilliant and hazeless afternoon five days following the death of Dr. Theodore Kley. Beside Detective Joseph Waller, who was driving, sat Detective Sergeant George Brehm, with a bomb in his lap. The bomb consisted of numerous sticks of dynamite roped together, with a cap, and a coil of fuse like a whitewashed spring. Hence no one was smoking.

In the rear seat rode Barbara Kley with Will Macklin, who also carried a burden. This was five pounds of beefsteak wrapped in brown paper. The paper was getting wet with meat juices.

The limousine was brought to a stop at the edge of Spinney's woods, a moderate sprint from the roughly elliptical lake. Macklin compelled Barbara to remain in the car and accompanied the two detectives.

In a land of lakes Spinney's Lake could be called only a pool, however deep and crystal-clear. The water was of unquestionable purity, but some vestigial instinct deterred the farm animals from picking their way down through the garter of rocks to drink at the water's edge.

The three men halted on the brink of a granite table overhanging the untrembling mirror of water—a surface of breathless innocence that was, but just as false as a spoken lie. The overhead sun, now inclining more appreci-

ably from the perpendicular, penetrated to an unusual depth. But no moss grew on the rocks, submerged or on the banks. And there were overhangs and labyrinthine caves in the depths where it was always absolute night.

Without delay, Macklin pitched the sodden package of meat toward the middle of the pool. The water geysered; but even while it was quieting they could see the package sinking, staining the water a little. Far off on a brown-black slope beyond Spinney's farmhouse crawled a team of horses with their black coats shining with sweat. Spinney sat hunched on the cultivator they drew, and from beneath him climbed a soft plume of dust.

Out of the pool's depths, while the package was still in sight, foamed a savage projectile of such proportions that the two hard-boiled detectives jerked backward, getting in the way of each other. The leech was a larger edition of the one Macklin had killed. More than a dozen feet in length, it seemed even more horrible with its maculations of dirty-tan and violet and inky-black flecks. A spotted nightmare, jaws parted in living murder. It struck and overshot the mark as its coils whipped around the package of bloody meat. Water burst over the pool in a glittering shower like broken glass.

The bomb had been set down on the granite footing. Macklin lighted a match and touched the petal of flame to the fuse. It ignited with a spurt; he lifted the bundle of dynamite sticks with both hands and heaved it into the pool.

"Run like hell!" he blurted, and was sprinting for the police car before the bomb hit the water.

Waller and Brehm weren't far behind him. At the car the two detectives plugged their ears and turned around to watch, but Macklin piled inside and took Barbara in his embrace.

She buried her head in the hollow of his shoulder and

sobbed. "Don't ever leave me." Her voice was blurred. "Can't we get married to-morrow? Do we have to wait any longer?"

"No, darling, we don't have to wait any longer."

Then the earth vibrated as the bomb went off. The jagged granite walls of the lake acted like the bore of a cannon, and earth and steaming water smoked up into the sky with thunder like a volcano. The echoes rolled back in deafening concussions, and the banks of the lake caved in, completely sealing the reservoir. Where the lake had been was a shallow crater with saffron smoke and dust hanging over it. In the distance Spinney's team broke and stampeded down the long slope.

Detective Waller lighted a cigarette nervously. "Say," he asked, "did you see what snagged onto that hunk of bait?"

Detective Sergeant Brehm cleared his throat. "Yeah."

"What the hell was it?"

"I don't know," Brehm said forcibly. "And so help me, I don't ever want to know."

THE EASTER EGG

by H. H. Munro
(*"Saki"*)

IT WAS distinctly hard lines for Lady Barbara, who came of good fighting stock, and was one of the bravest women of her generation, that her son should be so undisguisedly a coward. Whatever good qualities Lester Slaggy may have possessed, and he was in some respects charming, courage could certainly never be imputed to him. As a child he had suffered from childish timidity, as a boy from unboyish funk, and as a youth he had exchanged unreasoning fears for others which were more formidable from the fact of having a carefully-thought-out basis. He was frankly afraid of animals, nervous with firearms, and never crossed the Channel without mentally comparing the numerical proportion of life belts to passengers. On horseback he seemed to require as many hands as a Hindu god, at least four for clutching the reins, and two more for patting the horse soothingly on the neck. Lady Barbara no longer pretended not to see her son's prevailing weakness; with her usual courage she faced the knowledge of it squarely, and, mother-like, loved him none the less.

Continental travel, anywhere away from the great tourist tracks, was a favoured hobby with Lady Barbara, and Lester joined her as often as possible. Eastertide usually found her at Knobaltheim, an upland township in one of those

small princedoms that make inconspicuous freckles on the map of Central Europe.

A long-standing acquaintanceship with the reigning family made her a personage of due importance in the eyes of her old friend the Burgomaster, and she was anxiously consulted by that worthy on the momentous occasion when the Prince made known his intention of coming in person to open a sanatorium outside the town. All the usual items in a programme of welcome, some of them fatuous and commonplace, others quaint and charming, had been arranged for, but the Burgomaster hoped that the resourceful English lady might have something new and tasteful to suggest in the way of loyal greeting. The Prince was known to the outside world, if at all, as an old-fashioned reactionary, combating modern progress, as it were, with a wooden sword; to his own people he was known as a kindly old gentleman with a certain endearing stateliness which had nothing of standoffishness about it. Knobaltheim was anxious to do its best. Lady Barbara discussed the matter with Lester and one or two acquaintances in her little hotel, but ideas were difficult to come by.

"Might I suggest something to the gnädige Frau?" asked a sallow high-cheek-boned lady to whom the Englishwoman had spoken once or twice, and whom she had set down in her mind as probably a Southern Slav.

"Might I suggest something for the Reception Fest?" she went on, with a certain shy eagerness. "Our little child here, our baby, we will dress him in little white coat, with small wings, as an Easter angel, and he will carry a large white Easter egg, and inside shall be a basket of plover eggs, of which the Prince is so fond, and he shall give it to his Highness as Easter offering. It is so pretty an idea; we have seen it done once in Syria."

Lady Barbara looked dubiously at the proposed Easter angel, a fair, wooden-faced child of about four years old.

She had noticed it the day before in the hotel, and wondered rather how such a tow-headed child could belong to such a dark-visaged couple as the woman and her husband; probably, she thought, an adopted baby, especially as the couple were not young.

"Of course Gnädige Frau will escort the little child up to the Prince," pursued the woman; "but he will be quite good, and do as he is told."

"We haf some pluffers' eggs shall come fresh from Wien," said the husband.

The small child and Lady Barbara seemed equally unenthusiastic about the pretty idea; Lester was openly discouraging, but when the Burgomaster heard of it he was enchanted. The combination of sentiment and plovers' eggs appealed strongly to his Teutonic mind.

On the eventful day the Easter angel, really quite prettily and quaintly dressed, was a centre of kindly interest to the gala crowd marshalled to receive his Highness. The mother was unobtrusive and less fussy than most parents would have been under the circumstances, merely stipulating that she should place the Easter egg herself in the arms that had been carefully schooled how to hold the precious burden. Then Lady Barbara moved forward, the child marching stolidly and with grim determination at her side. It had been promised cakes and sweets galore if it gave the egg well and truly to the kind old gentleman who was waiting to receive it. Lester had tried to convey to it privately that horrible smackings would attend any failure in its share of the proceedings, but it is doubtful if his German caused more than an immediate distress. Lady Barbara had thoughtfully provided herself with an emergency supply of chocolate sweetmeats; children may sometimes be time-servers, but they do not encourage long accounts. As they approached nearer to the princely dais Lady Barbara stood discreetly aside, and the stolid-faced infant walked for-

ward alone, with staggering but steadfast gait, encouraged by a murmur of elderly approval. Lester, standing in the front row of the onlookers, turned to scan the crowd for the beaming faces of the happy parents. In a side-road which led to the railway station he saw a cab; entering the cab with every appearance of furtive haste were the dark-visaged couple who had been so plausibly eager for the "pretty idea." The sharpened instinct of cowardice lit up the situation to him in one swift flash. The blood roared and surged to his head as though thousands of floodgates had been opened in his veins and arteries, and his brain was the common sluice in which all the torrents met. He saw nothing but a blur around him. Then the blood ebbed away in quick waves, till his very heart seemed drained and empty, and he stood nervelessly, helplessly, dumbly watching the child, bearing its accursed burden with slow, relentless steps nearer and nearer to the group that waited sheep-like to receive him. A fascinated curiosity compelled Lester to turn his head towards the fugitives; the cab had started at hot pace in the direction of the station.

The next moment Lester was running, running faster than any of those present had ever seen a man run, and—he was not running away. For that stray fraction of his life some unwonted impulse beset him, some hint of the stock he came from, and he ran unflinchingly towards danger. He stooped and clutched at the Easter egg as one tries to scoop up the ball in Rugby football. What he meant to do with it he had not considered, the thing was to get it. But the child had been promised cakes and sweetmeats if it safely gave the egg into the hands of the kindly old gentleman; it uttered no scream, but it held to its charge with limpet grip. Lester sank to his knees, tugging savagely at the tightly clasped burden, and angry cries rose from the scandalized onlookers. A questioning, threatening ring formed round him, then shrank back in recoil as he shrieked out one hide-

ous word. Lady Barbara heard the word and saw the crowd race away like scattered sheep, saw the Prince forcibly hustled away by his attendants; also she saw her son lying prone in an agony of overmastering terror, his spasm of daring shattered by the child's unexpected resistance, still clutching frantically, as though for safety, at that white-satin gew-gaw, unable to crawl even from its deadly neighbourhood, able only to scream and scream and scream. In her brain she was dimly conscious of balancing, or striving to balance, the abject shame which had him now in thrall against the one compelling act of courage which had flung him grandly and madly on to the point of danger. It was only for the fraction of a minute that she stood watching the two entangled figures, the infant with its woodenly obstinate face and body tense with dogged resistance, and the boy limp and already nearly dead with a terror that almost stifled his screams; and over them the long gala streamers flapping gaily in the sunshine. She never forgot the scene; but then, it was the last she ever saw.

Lady Barbara carries her scarred face with its sightless eyes as bravely as ever in the world, but at Eastertide her friends are careful to keep from her ears any mention of the children's Easter symbol.

PROBLEM IN MURDER

by H. L. Gold

GILROY spread the office copy of the *Morning Post* over the editor's desk and stared glumly at the black streamer. The editor was picking at his inky cuticles without looking at them; he was watching Gilroy's face.

"Twelfth ax victim found in Bronx," Gilroy grumbled. "Twelve in two weeks—and not a single clue."

The editor drew in his breath with a pained hiss and yanked out a handkerchief to dab at a bleeding finger. Gilroy raised his gaunt head, annoyed.

"Why don't you get a manicure, chief?" he pleaded. "That nail-picking of yours is getting me too used to blood."

The editor wrapped the handkerchief around his finger and said, "I'm taking you off the torso story, Gilroy. What's the difference who goes down to headquarters and gets the police handout? Admit it yourself—outside of the padding, your stories are the same as any of the other papers'. Why should I keep an expensive man on the job when a cub can do as well? There are other stories waiting for you to tackle them."

Gilroy sighed and sat down. He sighed again and stood up, going behind the editor's desk to the window that looked over the dark river to the lights in Jersey. His long, hewn face twisted thoughtfully at them.

"You're right, of course, chief. But, hell!" He turned

around. "Do we *have* to get our handouts from the cops? How about *us* doing some detective work? Chief—will you leave that finger alone?"

The editor looked up hastily, although his thumb continued to caress the bleeding cuticle. "Our own detecting?" he repeated. "How? You—and no other reporter, either—ever got close enough to the victims to give an eyewitness description of what they looked like. The cops won't even let you take a peek. They find an arm or a leg, all wrapped up in brown grocery bags; but did you ever see them? All night long they've got radio cars riding up and down the Bronx, yet nearly every morning they find arms or legs."

"I know, but—"

"What are you going to do when the cops can't stop the murders?"

"Get a look at the chopped-off limbs," Gilroy said doggedly, coming around slowly to the front of the desk, his hands in his pockets, his head down, and his wide mouth pursed. "That's the main thing." He looked up angrily. "Why don't the cops let us take a fast look? There'd be more chance of identification. Not much more, maybe, but more."

The editor shrugged and went back to his cuticles. "You keep saying that. Do you have any concrete ideas?"

"Sure," Gilroy said slowly. "If we use our heads, we *can* see one of those limbs."

"How?" the editor asked, mildly skeptical.

"The bulldog edition's just hitting the stands. The final hasn't been put to bed yet. Suppose we insert a reward for finding one of the arms, legs, or whatever the next one will be, and bringing it here. Tell me *that* wouldn't get results."

"It might," the editor admitted. He rolled a sheet of paper into his typewriter. "How much should I make it for—two hundred and fifty? I can clear it with the board of directors . . . especially if there are any results."

"*Two-fifty?*" Gilroy exclaimed. "Do you know you can get people killed in this town for a hundred? Make it about fifty—seventy-five tops. But they have to bring the thing here and let us take care of the cops."

The editor nodded and typed. "Seventy-five," he said, "and I have a good spot for it. I'm dropping the subhead on the ax yarn and this goes there in a box. How's that?"

"Great." Gilroy grinned and rubbed his bony hands together. "Now if the interns don't send us samples from the hospitals, we can grab off an exclusive. Anyhow, I'm going up to the Bronx and look around myself."

The editor leaped out of his chair and grabbed Gilroy's lapel. "The hell you are! I've kept my men out of there so far, and they're staying out till the terror is over. How would you like to find yourself hacked to pieces, and all the cops can find is an arm or a leg? You're not going, Gilroy. That's final!"

"All right, chief," Gilroy said with a mournful expression. "You don't want me to go, I don't go."

"And I'm not kidding. I'm not yellow—you know that; but that's the one place we stay out of. The cops up there are scared witless. If the maniac doesn't get you, they will, with a couple of wild shots. Don't go. I mean it!"

Gilroy got off the subway at 174th Street, on the Grand Concourse, and walked south along the wide, bright highway. Traffic sped north, south and east, but none of it turned west into the terror district. He met no pedestrians. The police had been taken off their beats along the Concourse to patrol the dark side streets.

Riding up to the eastern boundary of the danger area, Gilroy had decided approximately where he would spend the night. Dismembered limbs had been found as far north as Tremont Avenue, as far south as 170th Street, west to just short of University Avenue, and east almost to the

Concourse. The geographical center of the area, therefore, would be a few blocks west of the elevated station at 176th Street and Jerome Avenue, but Gilroy knew it was too well patrolled for the murderer to be found there.

He entered an apartment house on the Concourse, which at that point is about forty feet above the surrounding streets. He took the self-service elevator down five stories to the street level and walked boldly toward Jerome Avenue. His hands were out of his pockets, ready to snap over his head if a policeman challenged him. But if anyone in civilian clothes were to approach, his long, lean legs were tense to sprint an erratic course, to dodge knives or axes.

Several times he crouched in shallow doorways or behind boulders in vacant lots when he caught sight of policemen traveling in pairs. He realized how helpless they were against the crafty killer, and why, in spite of their tense vigil, murders had been committed at the rate of one a night, excepting Sundays, for the past two weeks. He, a reporter, not particularly adroit in skulking, found no difficulty in getting through the police cordon to Jerome Avenue and 176th Street!

He looked carefully before crossing under the elevated; when he saw that the road was completely deserted, he raced from post to post, across to a used-car lot. While he was still on the run, he chose a car slightly to the front of the first row, flung open the door, and crouched down on the floor. From that position, with his eyes just above the dashboard, he had a relatively clear view of the avenue for blocks each way. He made himself comfortable by resting against the panel. From time to time he cautiously smoked a cigarette, blowing the smoke through the hood ventilator. He was not impatient or in a hurry—the odds were that spending the night in the car would be fruitless; only by an off-chance might the murderer happen to pass. But even so, it was better than merely waiting for the official

police bulletins, and there was always the hope that perhaps the maniac *would* slink by him.

Gilroy relaxed; his eyes did not. They automatically peered back and forth along the empty, shadowy avenue.

He wondered where the murderer got his victims. All through the terror area, only policemen were out at night, and then in pairs. House doors were locked. Stores were closed. People getting off late from work stayed at downtown hotels rather than go home through the dark with horror in lockstep behind them. After the first murders, taxi drivers could be bribed to enter the area; now they refused fantastic tips without regret. The elevator trains carried no passengers getting off here.

Even Gilroy, deadened to violence, could sense the cloyed atmosphere, the oppression of lurking horror in ambush. Through those streets, where terror hid and struck, paired policemen walked too quickly and nervously, afraid of somehow being separated—hundreds of patrolmen, every available man in the city—watchful as only deathly frightened men can be.

Yet in the morning, for all their watchfulness, another victim would be found somewhere within the borders of the danger area—only a limb or part of a limb; the rest of the body would never be found nor identified.

That was another point that puzzled Gilroy. Obviously the slayer had some superperfect method of disposing of the bodies. Then why did he casually leave a limb where it could be easily found after each murder? Bravado? It must have been, for those dismembered limbs could have been disposed of even more easily than the rest of the bodies. If not for that apparent egomaniacal quirk, the crimes could have been committed indefinitely, without detection.

It was long after midnight. Gilroy fished a cigarette out of an open pack in his pocket. For only an instant, he bent

under the dash to hide the match's flare. When he straightened up—

A man was walking north along the avenue! A man in a topcoat too big for him, a hat that shadowed his face, a small package in his left hand.

A small package!

He halted. Gilroy could have sworn that the halt was absentminded. The man raised the package and looked at it as if he had just remembered it. Then he dropped it neatly in a box of rubbish. He walked on at no more than a stroll.

Gilroy clutched the door handle. Cursing, he stopped turning it before it opened; a white-roofed police car was slowly cruising by. Gilroy knew that the passenger cop rode with his gun resting alertly out the open window.

For a moment Gilroy calculated his chance of dashing across the avenue, scooping up the bundle and following the murderer before he escaped. There was no chance. It would be as suicidal as running out of a bank at noon.

The elevated pillars hid his view of the corner toward which the killer had strolled. When he did not cross, Gilroy knew that he had turned up that street.

At that point the police car drew abreast, and Gilroy saw the men inside stare at every doorway, every shadow behind the posts, the dark lot he was hiding in—

And then they rode past without seeing him. When they reached the corner, Gilroy clutched the door handle, waiting for them to whip suddenly off the avenue and up that street. They didn't. The murderer must have vanished somehow.

Gilroy slid out of the car, crouched and scuttled to the nearest pillar, like a soldier running under fire. He stood there until he was certain that no one had seen him. Then he darted from post to post, to the one that stood opposite the rubbish box.

In the next instant, he had snatched up the bundle, on the run, and huddled against a wall, hugging the revoltingly shaped parcel under his arm. He edged swiftly along the building to the corner where the maniac had disappeared.

Nobody was there, of course. But he broke into a limber sprint, stuffing the bundle into his belt under the loose jacket, where it could not be seen. At the corner he slowed to an unsuspecting walk.

He picked a lucky moment to do it. Two policemen in the middle of the northwest block shouted for him to halt, came running with drawn guns—

He stopped and waited, his hands ostentatiously above his head. They reached him, covering him from both sides.

"Who the hell are you?" one demanded with angry panic. "Why are you out?"

"Gilroy, reporter on the *Morning Post*. You'll find my identification papers in my inside breast pocket. I'm unarmed."

Brutally, to cover his fear, the cop at his left tore the wallet out and held the papers to the street light. He blew out his breath without shame and handed the wallet to his partner.

"All right," the second growled, relieved but still shaking. "You can put them down, you lousy jerk. You know how close you came to getting plugged?"

"We got all we can do to keep from shooting each other when we pass another beat," the first patrolman said. "You stinking reporters don't have a heart."

Gilroy grinned. "Now, now, boys, it's only your nerves. All you have to worry about is a maniac. I need a story!"

"You'll get a story," the first cop said, viciously quiet. "We'll boot you onto the El and report your paper to the commissioner. That will give you something to cover."

"With both hands," said the other policeman.

They expected him to cringe before this threat. It would mean being denied the official police bulletins. But as they strode grimly toward the elevated station, Gilroy's forearm pressed reassuringly against the brown paper bundle inside the top of his pants. Official bulletins—*huhl*

At five after nine the next morning, Gilroy and the night editor were roused from their respective beds and ordered to see the police commissioner immediately. They met outside his office.

"What's up?" Gilroy asked cheerily.

"You should ask," the editor grumbled. "Your idea snapped back."

"Come on, you two," a police clerk said. "Get inside."

"Here it comes," the editor said resignedly, opening the door that led to Police Commissioner Major Green.

The major was a retired army officer, a short, wide, stiff man with a belligerent mustache. He sat upright and walked square and his voice was loud enough to make the wings of his mustache flutter—always in indignation. He ran the police department like a military post, and the jails like stockade, and he had an extremely vague idea of civil rights.

Major Green pushed back from his desk and stabbed them with a hostile glare. "You're from the *Morning Post*, eh?" he barked in clipped military tones. "I'm being easy with you. Your paper campaigned for my election. Take that reward offer out and put in a complete retraction. I won't press for suspension of publication."

The editor opened his mouth to speak. But Gilroy cut in sharply: "That sounds like censorship." He fished out a cigarette and lit it.

"Damn right it does," Major Green snapped. "That's just what it is, and the censorship is going to stay clamped on tight just as long as that maniac in the Bronx keeps our cit-

izens terrified. And put out that cigarette before you get thrown out."

"We don't want to fight you, commish," Gilroy said, speaking with deadly deliberation around the cigarette that dangled uncharacteristically from the corner of his mouth. "If we have to, of course, we're in a much better position to fight than you are. Our newspapers'll take on only self-imposed censorship—when they think it's to the public's advantage."

Green's cold eyes bulged out of his stern face. Rage flushed every burly inch. Independently of his tense arms, his fingers clawed the desk.

"Why don't you shut up, Gilroy?" the editor hissed viciously.

"Gilroy, eh? That's the rat who sneaked inside the cordon—"

"Why should I shut up?" Gilroy broke in, ignoring the commissioner. "Ask him what he's done these last two weeks. Don't. I'll tell you.

"He's the only one in the police department who's allowed to make statements to the press. Reporters can't interview cops or captains; they can't even get inside the danger area at night—unless they try. He forces retractions on papers that step out of line.

"Well, what good has it done? He hasn't identified a single victim. He can't find the rest of the bodies. He doesn't know who the murderer is, or where he is, or what he looks like. And the murders're still going on, every night except Sunday!"

"Don't pay any attention to him, sir," the editor begged.

"I expect an arrest in twenty-four hours," Green said hoarsely.

"Sure," Gilroy's clear baritone drowned out his chief's frightened plea. "For the last two weeks you've been ex-

pecting arrests every twenty-four hours. How about giving us one? And I don't mean some poor vag picked up on suspicion.

"I'll give you a better proposition. You've been feeding us that line of goo because you don't have anything else to say. Most of the papers didn't even bother printing it after the first week.

"First of all, let us say anything we want to. We're not going to tip off the maniac. We do our own censoring, and we do it pretty well. Then, let us inside the danger zone with official recognition. We get inside anyhow, one way or another; but there's always the danger of being plugged by your hysterical cops. Finally, let us see the dismembered limbs and photograph them if we want to. Isn't that simple? And you'll get a lot further than you are so far."

Trembling, Major Green stood up, his craggy face shrunken into angles and creases of fury. He pushed his chair away blindly. It toppled and crashed, but he did not hear its clatter.

He caught up the telephone. "I'm—" He strangled and paused to clear his clogged throat. "I'm handling this my own way. I live up in the terror area with my wife and three kids. I'll tell you frankly—every night I'm afraid I'll go home and find one of them missing. I'm scared stiff! Not for myself. For them. You'd be, too, in my place.

"Here's my answer, damn you!" The telephone clicked and they heard a shrill metallic voice. "Get me Albany—the governor!"

Gilroy avoided the editor's worried eyes. He was too concerned with Major Green's reason for calling Albany.

"This is Major Green, sir, police commissioner of New York City. I respectfully urge you to declare martial law in the Bronx danger district. The situation is getting out of hand. With the mayor's permission, I request the national

guard for patrol duty. The confirmatory telegram will be sent immediately. . . . Thank you, sir. I appreciate your sympathy—”

He clapped down the receiver and turned to them grimly. “Now see if you can squeeze past the militia sentries on every corner in the territory. There’ll be a sundown curfew—everyone indoors for the rest of the night.

“Martial law—that’s the only answer to a maniac! I should have had it declared long ago. Now we’ll see how soon the murders’ll stop!

“And,” he stated menacingly, “I still want that retraction, or I’ll get out an injunction. Fall out!”

In utter gloom, the editor went through the outer office.

“Pretty bad, chief,” Gilroy said grudgingly. “We could slip past the police cordon. Napoleon couldn’t patrol every street before, but the militia can put a sentry on every corner. It doesn’t matter, anyhow, so I guess you’d better print a retraction.”

The editor glared. “Really think so?” he asked with curt sarcasm.

Gilroy did not reply. In silence they walked out of the office.

“Well, let’s not take it so hard,” the editor said finally. “He was going to declare martial law anyhow. He was just looking for an excuse. It wasn’t our fault. But, just the same, that nipplehead—”

“Lousy nipplehead is the term, chief,” Gilroy amended.

When they reached the elevator, the switchboard operator called out: “You from the *Morning Post*? They want you down there right away.”

They stepped into the elevator. The editor hunched himself into his topcoat collar. “The louse must have called up the board,” he said hollowly. “Here’s where we get hell from the other side.”

Defeated, he hailed a taxi, though he was not in a hurry. Gilroy gave his Greenwich Village address. The editor looked up in surprise.

"Aren't you coming with me?" he asked anxiously.

"Sure, chief. I want to get something first."

At the apartment house, the editor waited in the taxi. Gilroy went upstairs. He took the brown grocery bag out of the refrigerator and made a telephone call.

"Willis, please." He held the wire until he was connected. "Hello. Gilroy speaking. Anything yet, Willis? . . . No? . . . O. K. I'll call later."

He went down with the package in his pocket. As they rode downtown to the newspaper building, Gilroy said, for the first time with concern on his face:

"If declaring martial law'd help, I wouldn't mind, even though it means giving that stiff-necked ape credit for brains. But this ax murderer'll only be scared off the streets; and when martial law'll be lifted, he'll go right back to work again. Green won't get him that way. He's got to be outfoxed. And he's plenty sly."

The editor remained silent. From his set, dazed expression, Gilroy knew he was thinking of a terse note in his pay envelope. Gilroy did not have to worry about his job; he might have to take less than he was getting at the moment, but he could always manage to get on a paper. The editor, though, would have to start again as a legman, and that would completely demoralize him.

"Aw, don't let it get you down, chief," Gilroy said as they stepped out of the taxi at the *Morning Post* building. "If I have to, I'll take the whole rap. I'll say I forged your initials to the print order. Anyhow, they're only going to warn us. You know—'A newspaper can't afford to antagonize its sources of information. Make an immediate retraction and don't let it happen again.'"

The editor nodded, unconvinced. Under board orders,

Major Green had been the *Morning Post's* pet candidate in the election campaign.

The day shift in the newsroom greeted them much too heartily. Gilroy recognized the ominous symptom. He had often discovered himself being overcordial to reporters about to be fired.

They entered the city editor's office. When he saw them, the city editor shook his head pityingly.

"You boys certainly started something. The board's sore as hell. They're holding a special meeting right now—"

The night editor stuffed his hands into his pockets and turned away.

"Sit down, boys. It might take some time before they cool off enough to be able to speak distinctly."

"Cut out the funeral march, boss," Gilroy said sharply. "You and the chief can soothe them. And even if Green cuts us off the official bulletin, we still can get along. Take a look at this!"

He had taken the parcel out of his pocket and put it on the desk. He ripped off the brown grocery bag.

"It's a foot!" the city editor cried.

"A *woman's* foot!" the night editor added, horrified. "Cut off at the ankle. *Ugh!*"

The city editor yanked the telephone toward him. Gilroy held down the receiver grimly. "I'm not calling the cops," the editor explained. "I'm sending for a photog."

"Not yet," Gilroy stated flatly. "It's not as simple as that. Take a look at the foot first." He picked it up callously and showed them its sole. "See what I see? The skin is perfectly even—unthickened even at the pressure points. Not a corn or callus, toe joints straight—"

"So what?" the city editor demanded. "She could've worn made-to-order shoes. Maybe she was perfectly fitted all her life."

"Shoes aren't made that way," Gilroy retorted. "They've got to prevent the foot from spreading somewhat or else they won't stay on, so there are always points of contact that cause callus. Even if she'd walked barefoot on rugs all her life, there'd still be a tiny thickening."

The city editor pursed his mouth and stared. He had not imagined so much trouble from a simple ax murder. The night editor looked fascinatedly at the foot, picking blindly at his cuticles.

"Suppose she was a cripple or a paralytic," the city editor said.

"The muscles aren't atrophied. But for some reason or other, this foot never walked."

He removed the telephone from the city editor's unconscious grasp and called Willis again. When he had finished speaking, his face was grave. He picked up the foot again and pointed to an incision.

"I cut out a piece of muscle in the heel with a safety razor," he said, "and brought it to the chemist at Memorial Hospital. I made the incision because I knew she wasn't a paralytic. Muscles contain glycogen and glucose, the sugar derived from the glycogen. When you move a muscle, the energy to do it comes from burning the glucose, which turns to lactic acid. Even if she'd been a complete paralytic—hadn't moved in years—there'd still've been a minute quantity of lactic acid."

"What'd he find?" the night editor asked.

"Not a trace of lactic acid! Chief—get Green on the telephone and find out what time the national guard'll be at their posts."

The night editor was accustomed to Gilroy's unexplained hunches. He quickly got an outside wire. "Major Green? . . . *Morning Post*. What time will the militia be in the Bronx? . . . Five o'clock? . . . Quick work. . . . Thanks."

"Wow!" Gilroy shouted. "Stay here, chief. I've got to find him before Green clamps down his martial law, or he'll be shot or arrested!"

In half the number of strides it would take a normal man in a normal state of mind, he was at the elevator, ringing furiously.

The city editor could not keep up with Gilroy's mental pace. "What the hell was he talking about? Who'll be shot or arrested—the maniac?"

"I guess so," the night editor replied, unworried, absolutely confident in Gilroy. "Who else could he mean? I guess he's going up to the Bronx to find him."

But Gilroy did not go to the Bronx. His first stop was at the Forty-second Street Library. Rapidly, yet carefully, he flipped through the index files on every subject that might be a clue. He eliminated hundreds of titles; even so he had to write out dozens of slips.

The man at the pneumatic tube was not astonished by the bundle of slips shoved viciously at him. "Another case, Mr. Gilroy?" he asked.

"Yeah," the tall reporter growled. "A pip."

In the south hall he appropriated an entire table on which he spread his books as quickly as they came up from the stacks. He scanned the contents pages, occasionally going through a chapter for more detailed information; wherever necessary, he looked through the indices of books that seemed to hold the key. A long sheet of foolscap swiftly became crowded with names.

He groaned at the clock. It was almost noon when he requested the city directory and a map of the Bronx. It was not very recent, but he was certain that the man he sought had lived in the same house for some time. With his ponderous equipment, he would have to, Gilroy reasoned.

He went through the enormous Bronx directory, elimi-

nating every one of his references who did not live in the danger area. When he had finished, it was twenty to one, and there was not a single name left for him to investigate. He had eliminated all of them; not one lived in the district where terror reigned.

And he had only four hours and twenty minutes before that area would be under martial law—when it would be too late!

The two editors listened sympathetically, but they had no plan to offer. Gilroy scarcely heard them tell how they had soothed the board of directors. He was too frantically engaged in thinking.

How do you track down one man out of a city of nearly eight million? You don't know his name, what he looks like, where he came from, what he did before, who knew him. You only know that he lives in a mile-square territory, containing perhaps a hundred thousand people.

Gilroy did not have to ignore the city editor's persistent questioning. The night editor had quieted him to a glowering sulk by telling him that Gilroy would explain when there was no danger of being made a fool by a wild intuition.

"If we had block spies, like they have in Europe," Gilroy muttered, "we'd have had him long ago. But then he'd have been executed for doing something he didn't do. Well, three and a half hours to save the poor lug. How do I go about finding him?"

If he could interview every person in that mile-square district, he could easily find the man. Gilroy dismissed the idea. It was fantastic. But suddenly his eyes sparkled and he grinned at the night editor.

"Chief, I've got to make a canvass of the danger area. Will you back me? I've never let you down so far. Where do we get the dough to hire Peck, the ad distributors?"

The night editor writhed in his chair. He picked at his cuticles and his foot tapped nervously. "Special requisition," he said dully.

"Oh, no!" the city editor stated flatly. "I'm not writing it!"

"You don't have to. I'll do it."

Gilroy and the city editor realized the anguish that the night editor had gone through in making his resolution to back Gilroy. The business staff looked cockeyed at every expenditure, even routine ones; and this requisition, based on an unexplained hunch, they could not justify, even to themselves.

"O. K.," Gilroy said in a low, respectful voice. "I'll call Peck and ask for their rates." Reverently, in a manner befitting the night editor's gallant sacrifice—possibly of his job—Gilroy made a ritual of dialing. "Peck? . . . *Morning Post*. Can you interview everyone in the territory between the Grand Concourse and University Avenue, from 170th Street to Tremont Avenue, in an hour and a half? . . . Good. How much will it cost? . . . Cheap enough. I'll be right down with a check and a questionnaire."

He waited until the night editor wrote out the requisition, watching sympathetically the whitened, trembling fingers as they scrawled out the numerals. At each figure Gilroy knew that those fingers were trying to rebel against their violation of conditioning.

Gilroy squirmed impatiently in the squad captain's car. It was too much for him to sit by and merely watch the men going in and out of buildings. All over the danger area Peck investigators were ringing doorbells and calming down the terrified inhabitants enough to open their doors.

"I can't sit here," Gilroy protested. He opened the door. "I'm going to cover a few streets myself."

The squad captain restrained him politely. "Please, Mr.

Gilroy. The whole territory has been mapped out. Each man's beat dovetails with the next one's. You'll only throw them off their stride."

Gilroy subsided, grumbling furiously. He knew that the men were working with maximum efficiency, yet he could not help feeling that his own efforts would speed them up, perhaps inspire them.

Each investigator had a hard-cover notebook in which to write the answers he received. The books were divided into sections—four fifths for "ignorance," one tenth for "no," and the other tenth for "yes."

Gilroy's facile imagination could picture the astonishment his men's questions could cause: "I don't know what you're talkin' about, mister." "Sorry. We don't want any." "Hah?"

For a short while he amused himself with various fancied interviews; then he went back to cursing the men's slowness. In spite of his pessimism, the job was finished in the specified hour and a half, and the crew met at the squad captain's car, parked in the center of the district.

Gilroy eagerly collected the filled notebooks. "Send them home now," he said to the squad captain. "But there's ten bucks in it for you if you drive me around to these addresses."

He had been amazed to find so many affirmative answers. With the captain's help he organized the addresses into a route. As they rode to the first, Gilroy saw evidence of the terror that part of the Bronx lived in. Normally, children played noisily in the street, women sat on folding chairs on the sidewalks, delivery men made their rounds. But all was silent, deserted; frightened faces peered through drawn curtains.

At the first he rang cheerfully. A young man cautiously opened the door, which was held by a newly installed chain.

"An investigator was here a short while ago," Gilroy

said, speaking through the narrow crack. "You answered his question affirmatively."

The youth suddenly brightened. "That's right. I've been interested in the problem ever since I began reading science fiction. I think—"

It was a matter of some minutes before Gilroy could escape and go to the next address. There he had less trouble escaping; but after several stops he lost his temper.

"These damned science-fiction fans!" he snarled at the startled squad captain. "The place swarms with them. They've got to explain everything they know about the subject and ask what you think and why you're going around getting opinions. I've got about a hundred and fifty addresses to investigate, all in less than an hour—and probably a hundred and forty-nine of them are science-fiction readers!"

At the seventeenth name he stopped abruptly. "This isn't getting me anywhere. Lay out the rest of these addresses in a spiral, starting from the middle of this territory."

The squad captain reorganized the route. They sped to the center of the danger area; and once again Gilroy began ringing doorbells, this time with a growing lack of cheerfulness as he eliminated one science-fiction fan after another. They were all scared to death of opening their doors; they made him wait until they did; and then he couldn't get away.

He came to a street of private houses. Immediately his enthusiasm returned. Inventors and experimenters are more likely to live in their own homes than in apartment houses. Landlords are not very hospitable to the idea of explosions, which, in their minds, are invariably connected with laboratory equipment. Then again, apartment houses hold room space at a premium, and scientists need elbow room.

He had only one address to investigate in this entire

street of ultraspectable, faintly smug one-family houses, each identical with the one next door, each nursing its few pitiful square yards of lawn.

But Gilroy felt exceedingly hopeful when he stopped at the proper house and looked up at the dingy curtains, unwashed windows, and the tiny lawn, absolutely untouched in all the years it had been there. Only a scientist, he felt, could be so utterly neglectful. Gilroy was so certain he had come to the end of the trail that, before he left the car, he paid the squad captain and waited until he drove off.

Almost jauntily, then, he rang the bell. When there was no answer, he rapped and waited. He rang a trifle more insistently.

Suddenly children, no longer whitefaced and terrified, came dashing happily out of houses for blocks around. Gilroy wheeled in alarm. They were screaming: "Sojers! A parade—yay!"

In panic, Gilroy glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to five, and from Jerome Avenue detachments of militia marched along the street, pausing at street corners to post armed guards. When they fell into step and approached Gilroy, the street crossing had four bayoneted sentries.

Gilroy stopped his polite ringing and tapping. His left thumb jabbed at the bell and stayed there; his right fist battered away at the door. And the militia marched closer, more swiftly than Gilroy had ever suspected heavily armed men could walk. The officer stared directly at him.

Just then the door opened and a small, wrinkled, old face peered up at him. The watery eyes behind their thick glasses gazed into his with infinite patience and lack of suspicion.

"Professor Leeds?" Gilroy snapped out. The old man nodded, the webs around his weak eyes wrinkling expectantly, utterly trustful. Gilroy did not look back over his

shoulder. He could hear that the guard was nearly abreast now. "May I come in?" he demanded abruptly.

His tall form blocked the soldiers from Professor Leeds' view. The old man said, "Of course," and held the door wide. Gilroy hastily barged into a small dark space between the outer and inner doors. Leeds was saying apologetically: "I'm sorry I was so late answering the door; my servant is ill and I had to come up from my laboratory in the cellar."

"An investigator was here today," Gilroy broke in. "He asked you a question. You answered in the affirmative."

For the first time the old man's eyes clouded, in bewilderment, not suspicion. "That's true. I wanted to discuss the problem with him, but he merely wrote something in a notebook and went away. I thought it was very odd. How do you suppose he knew?"

Without answering or waiting for an invitation, Gilroy strode through the hall to the front room, with the professor pattering behind.

Another old man, considerably more ancient than Leeds, sat at the window in a wheel chair. He turned at their approach. Gilroy suddenly felt uncomfortable under his keen, distrustful scrutiny.

But Leeds still asked, gently persistent: "How do you suppose he knew that I was experimenting with synthetic life?"

"Shut up, professor!" the old man in the wheel chair shrieked. "Don't you go blabbin' everythin' you know to no international spy like him. That's what he is, a-snoopin' and a-pryin' into your affairs!"

"Nonsense, Abner." Leeds faced Gilroy. "Don't pay any attention to him. You're not a spy, are you, Mr. . . . uh—"

"Gilroy. No. I came here—"

"He brought me up from a child. I know he doesn't like

to hear this, but his mind isn't what it used to be. He's a nasty-minded old crank."

Abner drew in his creased lips with a hiss of pain. Then he rasped: "No spy, huh? Why's he bustin' in with them sojers on his heels?"

"That's the point, boys," Gilroy said. He shoved his battered hat off his angular brow and sat on a plush sofa that was red only in isolated spots. Most of the nap had come off on countless pants, dust had turned it to a hideous purple, and a number of its springs coiled uselessly into the air. "Sit down, please, professor."

Leeds sat in the depths of a huge Morris chair and folded his hands.

"You *are* trying to synthesize life, aren't you?"

The professor nodded eagerly. "And I almost have, Mr. Gilroy!"

Gilroy leaned forward with his elbows on his high knees. "Do you read newspapers, professor? . . . I mean, lately?"

"I have so much to do," Leeds stammered, his lined, transparent skin flushing. "Abner neglected his diabetic diet—gangrene set in—and his leg had to be amputated. I have to do all the cleaning, cooking, shopping, buy my material and equipment, take care of him—"

"I know," Gilroy interrupted. "I figured you didn't read the—"

He stopped in amazement. The professor had creaked to his feet and rushed to Abner's side, where he stood patting the old servant on the shoulder. Tears were squeezing out of Abner's eyes.

"Ain't it bad enough I can't do nothin'," the old man wailed, "and I gotta let you take care of me? You're plumb mean, talkin' 'bout it!"

"I'm sorry, Abner. You know I don't mind taking care of you. It's only right that I should. Wouldn't you do it for me?"

Abner wiped his nose on his sleeve and grinned up brokenly. "That's so," he admitted. "Reckon I must be gittin' into my second childhood."

Leeds returned to his seat, confident that Abner was pacified, and looked expectantly at Gilroy. "You were saying—"

"I don't want to scare you, professor. I'm here to help you."

"Fine," Leeds smiled, with absolute trust.

"You watch that there slicker," Abner whispered hoarsely.

"You made several limbs and at least one foot, didn't you?" Gilroy asked. "You weren't satisfied with them, so you threw them away."

"Oh, they were no good at all, complete failures," Leeds confided.

"Let's leave that until later. No doubt you had good reasons for discarding the limbs. But you just threw them away in the street, and people found them. Now the people up here're afraid of being murdered and hacked to pieces. They think those limbs were chopped off corpses!"

"Really?" Leeds smiled tolerantly. "Isn't that silly? A few simple tests would prove that they never lived."

"I made a couple of those tests," Gilroy said. "That's how I found out that they were synthetic limbs. But you won't convince the cops and these people up here that they were. So now there's martial law in this part of the Bronx, with soldiers posted on every corner."

Leeds stood up; he shuffled back and forth, his hands twisting anxiously behind his back. "Oh, dear," he gasped. "My goodness! I had no idea I would cause so much trouble. You understand, don't you, Mr. Gilroy? I was experimenting with limbs, studying them, before I felt I was

ready to construct an entire synthetic human being. The limbs were highly imperfect. I had to dispose of them somehow. So, when I went out for walks at night, I wrapped them up and threw them away. They seemed so imperfect to me. They scarcely looked human, I thought—”

Abner's mouth had dropped open in astonishment. He compressed it grimly and said: “You gotta clear yourself, professor. You're the first Leeds that anybody ever called a murderer! Go out and tell them!”

“Precisely.” Leeds walked purposefully toward his top-coat, draped over a sagging grand piano. “Dear me—I had no idea! I know just how the people feel. They must think I'm just a common Jack the Ripper. Please help me with my coat, Mr. Gilroy. I'll go right down and explain to the authorities that it was all a terrible mistake; and I'll bring a synthetic limb with me as proof. That will clear everything up.”

Abner bounced excitedly in his chair. “Atta boy, professor!”

“Wait a minute,” Gilroy said sharply, before the situation could get out of hand. He snatched the coat and held it tightly under his arm. “You'll be stopped by the sentries. They'll search you. Most of them're green kids out on what they think is a dangerous job—getting a bloodthirsty maniac. If they find a synthetic limb on you, bullets're liable to start flying—plain nervousness, you know, but in the line of duty.”

“Heavens!” Leeds cried. “They wouldn't actually *shoot* me!”

“They might. But suppose they let you through—

“You'd come up against a police commissioner who hates to have anyone prove he's a fool. He's drawn hundreds of cops off their regular beats to patrol this section. Luckily he didn't catch you. So he had to have martial law declared. The papers've been giving him hell, demanding

the maniac's arrest. He's jittery. His reputation's at stake.

"Then you come in telling him that the limbs were synthetic, that there weren't any murders. Why, he'd perjure himself and line up hundreds of witnesses to prove that you were the murderer. He'd take your own confession and twist it to prove that you were cutting people up to study them. Don't you see? . . . He's got to solve these murders, but he's got to solve them the right way: with someone in the electric chair!"

Leeds dropped into a chair. His watery eyes clung to Gilroy's, frankly terrified. "What shall I do?" he begged in scared bewilderment.

The reporter had to escape that pleading, frightened stare. He gazed down at the charred fireplace. "Damned if I know. Anything but explaining to Major Green. *Anything* but that!"

"He's right, perfessor," Abner chattered, fearful for his master's life. "I know them durned coppers. Don't care who they send to the chair, long's they got somebody to send there so's they get the credit."

At that point Leeds broke down. Babbling in horror, he shuffled swiftly out of the room. Gilroy leaped after him, along the hall and down to the cellar.

He heard sobbing in the basement laboratory. He clattered down the steps. He was surrounded by shelves of canned and bottled chemicals that clung to the raw cement walls and had been gathering dust for the good part of a century. A broad bench was constructed in two parts, one on each side of a twin, broad-bellied sink that had originally been meant for laundry. A furnace squatted stolidly in the midst of the apparatus.

Then he saw Leeds, half concealed by the furnace, crouching protectively over a deep zinc tank like a bathtub.

"When will they come to arrest me?" he moaned. "I'd

hope to finish my experiment—I'm so close to the solution!"

Gilroy was touched. "They're not coming to arrest you," he said gently. "So far the cops don't know who did it."

"They don't?" Leeds brightened. "But *you* found out."

"The cops never know anything. Only—" He hesitated, then blurted his single fear: "There's the chance that Major Green might become panicky that his maniac's slipping out of his fingers. He might have the militia search the houses!"

The old man trembled with redoubled fear. "If they did that—"

"This's what they'd find," Gilroy said, looking into the clear bath that filled the high, sharply square tank. In his career he had seen disgusting sights, but the human skeleton at the bottom of the chemical bath, with shreds of muscle, wisps of fatty nerves and an embryonic tracery of veins and arteries adhering to the almost exposed bones, made his hobnailed heart shrink. It took an effort to realize that the tattered remains were not remains but beginnings. The naked skull bore only the revolting fundamentals of what would eventually become features. "They'd think you were dissolving a body in acid!"

Leeds stared at the corpse in fascinated horror. "It *does* look like a dissolving body, doesn't it?" he quavered. "But it won't when it's complete—"

"When'll that be?" Gilroy demanded hopefully.

"In about twenty-four hours." The old man looked up at Gilroy's abstracted face. "Do you think that will be enough time?"

"God knows. I certainly don't."

The situation definitely held a concrete danger. Gilroy knew that high positions often twisted the morality of men who had them. Most men in Major Green's place would unscrupulously sacrifice a single life for the good will of

eight million, and perhaps a national reputation. Major Green, in particular, had been conditioned to think very little of individuals. If the militia searched the house, Leeds was almost in the chair.

They climbed up to the front room. Abner still sat at the window; he seemed to be fascinated by the militiamen standing at ease on the four street corners within his vision.

"Huh—young whippersnappers!" he hissed at the boys standing guard. "If I had my leg back, I'd get past them fast enough, you betcha!"

Leeds' characteristic optimism had ebbed away, sapped by the knowledge of the chaos his lifework had caused. He sat huddled in a chair as far away from the window as the wall would permit, his terrified mind absolutely useless to Gilroy.

The tall reporter saw only one hope. He felt his analysis of Green had been correct, but—he did not have to convince the commissioner! He had only to convince the public. Green would be washed up as a public figure; on the other hand, Leeds would be saved from being railroaded to the electric chair, and the chief's expense account would be cleared by a scoop! For any single item, he would gladly sacrifice Major Green.

He gripped the professor's thin arm in a hand like a tree root. "I'll get you out of this," he promised.

"Can you really?" Leeds asked breathlessly. "You don't know how I—"

"Don't step out of the house until I come back. In a couple of minutes it'll be curfew. Chances are I won't be back before morning—"

Leeds followed him to the door in a panic. "But please don't leave me, Mr. Gilroy! Please—"

"You'll be all right. Abner's here with you."

"Sure," Abner croaked from the front room. "You got

nothin' to fret about with me here. But ain't it time for my mush and milk, perfessor?"

"I'll get it for you immediately," Leeds quavered; then Gilroy was out in the darkening street, wondering how he was going to get past the alert sentries, who had already turned to watch his long body glooming up uncertainly toward them.

On the other side of the Concourse, out of the martial-law district, Gilroy crowded himself into an inadequate telephone booth and dialed the office. Getting past the sentries had been ridiculously easy; he had only had to show them his guild card and explain that he worked on the night shift, and they had let him pass.

The night editor answered, rather tiredly.

"Gilroy, chief. Listen carefully. I found the guy. That thing I showed you today wasn't real. It was synthetic. The others were, too. I've got to clear him. He's working on a whole one—you know what I mean. If it's found, he's cooked."

"What do you want me to do?"

Gilroy put his mouth against the transmitter and said in a low tone: "I can clear him and grab off a scoop. That'd fix up that special-requisition business for you. He's got an entire one that's about half done. Send me down a photog with plenty of film. We'll take pix of the thing developing, slap it on the front page, and Nappie can go fly a kite!"

"Nothing doing, Gilroy," the editor said decisively. "This'd fix my job more than the special req. The board has big plans for Nappie. They're making eyes at Albany; after that it's only a step to the White House. Nope. This'd knife him. It'd mean my job for sure."

"Wouldn't it be worth it?"

"Look, Gilroy—I'm taking enough of a chance as it is,

backing you. I can't go sticking my chin out at the board any more than that. Just be a good boy and figure out some other way of saving your pal. You can do it. I'll back you all you want. But get a beat if you can."

"O. K., chief," Gilroy said fatalistically. "I'll go home and grab some sleep. Leave me a blank signed req. I'll dope something out."

Long before dawn, Gilroy's mind came awake. He did not open his eyes, for, through his shut lids, he could see that the sun had not yet risen. He lay quietly, thinking. His blanket, which, of course, was too short when spread the usual way, covered him in a diamond shape, one end caught tightly beneath his feet and the other high on his bony neck. His knees were drawn up, soles pressed against the baseboard. Ever since attaining full growth, he had been forced to sleep that way; but his adaptive nature did not rebel against conforming to beds that were too small, telephones in booths that reached his solar plexus unless he shoehorned himself down, or bus seats that scraped his sensitive knees.

In some way, he was thinking, he had to stop the reign of terror in the Bronx; prevent suspicion from being focused on Professor Leeds; and, at the same time, cover the night editor's expense account—which meant getting a beat that would not smash Major Green's reputation.

But, to keep the police commissioner's record clean, he needed a victim. Gilroy knew enough about public pressure to realize that a sacrifice was absolutely vital. Left to himself, Green would find himself one—anybody it could be pinned on. The public would be satisfied, and the strutting martinet would again be a hero.

Gilroy's duty was plain: he would have to find a victim for Green.

At that point Gilroy's eyes almost snapped open. By

sheer will power he kept them shut, and contented himself with grinning into the dark. What a cinch! he exulted. He'd get a victim, and a good one! All at one shot—end the terror, clear the professor, get a scoop and save the chief's job! Incidentally, he would also give Napoleon a lush boost, but that was only because it worked out that way.

Gilroy pulled his knees higher, kicking the blanket smooth without even thinking about it, and turned over to go back to sleep. There were a few trifling details, but they could be settled in the morning.

The city editor had scarcely glanced at the memos left on his desk when Gilroy strode in.

"Morning, boss," the reporter greeted cheerily. "Did the chief leave a requisition?"

"Yeah, a blank one, signed. Fill in the amount. I don't know—he must be going soft, leaving himself wide open like that."

Gilroy waved his hand confidently. "He's got nothing to worry about. Tonight we'll have an exclusive that'll burn up the other rags.

"But, first of all, do you know a good, reliable undertaker, and how much will he charge?"

"Oh, go to hell," the editor growled, puttering about among the papers on his desk. Then his mouth fell open. "An *undertaker*?"

Instead of answering, Gilroy had dialed a number. "Gilroy. . . . How's he coming along? . . . No, not Abner; the other one. . . . Good. . . . Is there any way of speeding it up? . . . Well, even a few hours'll help. I'll be up as soon as I fix everything down here. . . . Oh, you don't have to get panicky. Just stick in the house until I get there."

"Who was that?" the editor demanded. "And why the undertaker?"

"Never mind; I'll take care of it myself. I want your gun. I'll get a hammer and cold chisel off the super. Write a req for the gun—the paper'll take care of it. Let's see, anything else? Oh, yeah—"

Gravely, he took the gun from the astounded city editor. As he sat down at the typewriter and began tapping at the keys, he was completely aware of the city editor's stare. But he went on typing.

Within a few minutes he yanked the paper out of the machine and disappeared into the elevator. In the basement he borrowed the hammer and cold chisel from the apathetic superintendent. For nearly an hour he pounded, hidden away behind the vast heating system. When he put the gun into his back pocket, the serial numbers had been crudely chiseled off.

Then he took a taxi and made a tour of undertaking establishments. Curiously, he seemed less interested in prices, caskets and the luxuriousness of the hearses than he was in the condition of the owner's businesses and the character of the drivers.

He found the midtown funeral parlors too flourishing for his satisfaction. He drove to a Tenth Avenue frame-house establishment.

"Rotten," the owner grumbled in reply to Gilroy's question. "The city's taking over these here tenements. Nobody lives here, so how can they be kicking off? I'll have to get out soon, myself."

Gilroy approved of the driver, who had evidently seen plenty of shady funerals. He offered the owner a flat sum for a full day's rental of the hearse and chauffeur. He was extremely pleased to see the gloating light in the owner's sad eyes. There would be no questions asked and no answers given here, he thought shrewdly.

Finally he called the city editor and told him bluntly to have two photographers waiting for his call, ready to meet him anywhere in the city. He slammed down the receiver before the editor began cursing.

It was merely another experience in a reporter's life to be driving uptown in a hearse. At 125th Street he suddenly remembered something very important. He had the driver stop, walked two blocks toward the Third Avenue cl. When he returned twenty minutes later, he carried a bundle, which he threw into the long wicker basket inside the hearse.

He had not anticipated any difficulty in passing the militiamen. He knew that mailmen, street cleaners, telegraph boys, doctors, and hearses would be able to move around freely within the martial-law area.

They rode, unchallenged, directly to Professor Leeds' door. There he and the driver slid the basket out and carried it into the house. The sentries were scarcely aware of their actions.

"I'm so happy to see you again, Mr. Gilroy!" the professor cried. Then he gaped at the basket. "What is your plan?" he asked anxiously.

From the front room came Abner's querulous voice: "They ain't here for me, are they, professor?"

"No, Abner," Gilroy called out assuringly. "Stay here, driver."

He led the professor down to the basement laboratory. Gilroy nodded in a satisfied way at the body in the tank.

"Another two hours and it will be finished," Leeds said.

The epidermis was almost completely formed. Only in isolated spots could the glaring red muscle be seen where the skin had not quite joined. Its fingers and toes had no nails; and, excepting the lack of hair, eyebrows and lashes, its features were distinctly human and complete.

"I'm just waiting for the hair to grow. That's the final stage. The skin will be whole in a few minutes. Then the nails—"

Gilroy heard wheels rumbling over the ceiling. The cellar door flung open and Abner shouted down, in terror: "Professor! Hey—them durn sojers're goin' through all the houses on this here street!"

Gilroy leaped up the stairs and dashed through the hall to the front windows. At each end of the block he saw eight soldiers; four stood in the gutter, facing opposite sides of the street with leveled guns. The other four paired off and entered houses with fixed bayonets.

"They can't do that 'thout a warrant," Abner protested.

"Can't they?" Gilroy snorted. "They can, and they're doing it. Sit here by the window, Abner, and warn us when they're getting close. They still have half a block to go before they reach us. Come on, prof—"

He removed the bundle from the long wicker basket and raced down to the cellar. While he ripped off the paper, he ordered the professor to take the body out of the chemical bath and dry it.

Leeds cried out: "He isn't complete yet!" But he removed the body, in spite of his complaints, dragged it to the floor and dried it. "It isn't alive!" he suddenly wailed, his hand shaking against its chest. "It should be—it's perfect!"

Gilroy shook out an entire outfit of clothing, a pair of old shoes and a filthy hat that closely resembled his own. "If he isn't alive, all the better," he said. "Anyhow, I always thought it was too much to expect him to live. Take fish, for instance. Put them in the same kind of water they always lived in—temperature just right, plenty of oxygen, plenty of food—and what do they do? They die. You make a body that's identical to a living one, all the necessary or-

gans, all the chemical ingredients for life—and it just doesn't live. Otherwise it's perfect.

"Here, lift up his legs so I can slip these pants on him.

"You're on the wrong track, prof, when it comes to making synthetic human beings. You can give them everything but the life force. But there is one thing you can do. You can grow limbs on people who don't have 'em. Give Abner a leg. His life force can vitalize the synthetic leg."

They pulled a shirt on the body and tucked it inside the trousers. Gilroy spent a mad few minutes trying to knot a tie in reverse, until he knelt and tied it from behind. While he forced its arms into a vest and jacket, Leeds squeezed its flabby, yielding feet into shoes.

Then Abner croaked: "They're only two houses away, perffessor!"

Leeds grew too jittery to tie the laces. Gilroy did it, crammed the battered hat into the body's coat pocket, and roared for the hearse driver to bring down the basket. It was the work of a moment to load the corpse into it and strap on the cover. Almost at a run, he and the driver carried it up the cellar stairs to the front door. They dropped it while Gilroy made a hurried telephone call:

"Boss? Gilroy. Send the two photogs to 138th and Triboro Bridge. Right before the entrance. I'll pick them up in a hearse. Be there with the chief if you can get him to wake up."

He paused a moment to pat Abner on the back encouragingly. He said: "You're all clear, prof. Look in the *Morning Post* tonight. Drain the tank. If they ask about it, say you used to bathe a dog in it. So long!"

They carried the wicker basket to the hearse at a slow, fitting pace, just as the militiamen were leaving the next house. At the same funereal rate of speed they cruised through the martial-law area, which was being thoroughly searched, until they came to the Grand Concourse.

"Open it up!" Gilroy rapped out suddenly.

They streaked through traffic, turned east. At the bridge they had to wait fifteen minutes before the photographers arrived in taxis.

Gilroy dismissed the cabs, paid off his hearse driver, and ordered the photographers to help him with the basket. A scant three minutes later another taxi drew up at the hearse and the city and night editors scrambled out excitedly. They sent their cabs away.

"What the hell is this?" the city editor demanded. "Robbing graves?"

"Just give us a hand and keep quiet," Gilroy said calmly.

They carted the heavy basket to a deserted dumping ground behind two vacant furniture warehouses that had been condemned by the city for the new bridge approach. He removed the basket cover and ordered the photographers to help him take the body out and hold it erect.

"Now watch this," he grinned.

While the editors and photographers watched in horrified amazement, Gilroy backed off ten feet and fired the gun at the corpse's heart. He quietly wiped his fingerprints off the butt, removed the body from the photographers' inert hands, and laid it gently on its back, crooking its right hand around the gun. He placed the cap on the ground beside the naked, hairless head. Then he crumpled a sheet of paper in his hand and just as deliberately smoothed it.

"Snap the body from a few angles. Wind up with a shot of this note."

The two editors snatched at the note in a single wild grab. They read it swiftly.

"Holy smoke!" the night editor shouted. "I am the torso murderer. I realize that I have been insane for some time, and, during my lapse from sanity, I kidnaped and hacked to death a number of people. But the cordon of soldiers hounded me from one place to another, until I am finally

driven to suicide in order to prevent my being captured. My name I shall take to the grave with me, that my former friends be spared the horror of knowing that once they loved this murderous maniac. God save my soul!"

The four men grinned admiringly at Gilroy. But the towering reporter dismissed their admiration with a modest wave of his astoundingly long, incredibly bony arm.

"The only thing I regret is that this's a gorgeous build-up for Major Green—the lousy nipplehead!" he said mournfully. "The autopsy'll show a thousand proofs that this thing never lived, but a fat lot Nappie'll care. And to think that I'll probably be the cause of making him governor!"

He insisted on holding the creased suicide note for the photographers to aim at, claiming that it required a certain artistic touch.

THE MOTH

by H. G. Wells

PROBABLY YOU have heard of Hapley—not W. T. Hapley, the son, but the celebrated Hapley, the Hapley of *Periplaneta Hapliia*, Hapley the entomologist.

If so you know at least of the great feud between Hapley and Professor Pawkins, though certain of its consequences may be new to you. For those who have not, a word or two of explanation is necessary, which the idle reader may go over with a glancing eye if his indolence so incline him.

It is amazing how very widely diffused is the ignorance of such really important matters as this Hapley-Hawkins feud. Those epoch-making controversies, again, that have convulsed the Geological Society are, I verily believe, almost entirely unknown outside the fellowship of that body. I have heard men of fair general education even refer to the great scenes at these meetings as vestry-meeting squabbles. Yet the great hate of the English and Scotch geologists has lasted now half a century, and has "left deep and abundant marks upon the body of the science." And this Hapley-Pawkins business, though perhaps a more personal affair, stirred passions as profound, if not profounder. Your common man has no conception of the zeal that animates a scientific investigator, the fury of contradiction you can arouse in him. It is the *odium theologicum* in a new form. There are men, for instance, who would gladly burn Sir Ray Lankester at Smithfield for his treatment of the Mol-

lusca in the *Encyclopædia*. That fantastic extension of the Cephalopods to cover the Pteropods. . . . But I wander from Hapley and Pawkins.

It began years and years ago with a revision of Microlepidoptera (whatever these may be) by Pawkins, in which he extinguished a new species created by Hapley. Hapley, who was always quarrelsome, replied by a stinging impeachment of the entire classification of Pawkins.* Pawkins in his "Rejoinder" † suggested that Hapley's microscope was as defective as his power of observation, and called him an "irresponsible meddler"—Hapley was not a professor at that time. Hapley in his retort, ‡ spoke of "blundering collectors," and described, as if inadvertently, Pawkins's revision as a "miracle of ineptitude." It was war to the knife. However, it would scarcely interest the reader to detail how these two great men quarrelled, and how the split between them widened until from the Microlepidoptera they were at war upon every open question in entomology. There were memorable occasions. At times the Royal Entomological Society meetings resembled nothing so much as the Chamber of Deputies. On the whole, I fancy Pawkins was nearer the truth than Hapley. But Hapley was skilful with his rhetoric, had a turn for ridicule rare in a scientific man, was endowed with vast energy and had a fine sense of injury in the matter of the extinguished species; while Pawkins was a man of dull presence, prosy of speech, in shape not unlike a water-barrel, over-conscientious with testimonials, and suspected of jobbing museum appointments. So the young men gathered round Hapley and applauded him. It was a long struggle, vicious from the beginning and growing at last to pitiless antagonism. The successive turns of fortune, now an advantage to one side

* "Remarks on a Recent Revision of Microlepidoptera," *Quart. Journ. Entomological Soc.*, 1863.

† "Rejoinder to Certain Remarks," etc. *Ibid.* 1864.

‡ "Further Remarks," etc. *Ibid.*

and now to another—now Hapley tormented by some success of Pawkins, and now Pawkins outshone by Hapley, belong rather to the history of entomology than to this story.

But in 1891 Pawkins, whose health had been bad for some time, published some work upon the “mesoblast” of the Death’s-Head Moth. What the mesoblast of the Death’s-Head Moth may be does not matter a rap in this story. But the work was far below his usual standard, and gave Hapley an opening he had coveted for years. He must have worked night and day to make the most of his advantage.

In an elaborate critique he rent Pawkins to tatters—one can fancy the man’s disordered black hair, and his queer dark eye flashing as he went for his antagonist—and Pawkins made a reply, halting, ineffectual, with painful gaps of silence, and yet malignant. There was no mistaking his will to wound Hapley, nor his incapacity to do it. But few of those who heard him—I was absent from that meeting—realised how ill the man was.

Hapley got his opponent down, and meant to finish him. He followed with a brutal attack upon Pawkins, in the form of a paper upon the development of moths in general, a paper showing evidence of an extraordinary amount of labour, couched in a violently controversial tone. Violent as it was, an editorial note witnesses that it was modified. It must have covered Pawkins with shame and confusion of face. It left no loophole; it was murderous in argument, and utterly contemptuous in tone; an awful thing for the declining years of a man’s career.

The world of entomologists waited breathlessly for the rejoinder from Pawkins. He would try one, for Pawkins had always been game. But when it came it surprised them. For the rejoinder of Pawkins was to catch influenza, proceed to pneumonia, and die.

It was perhaps as effectual a reply as he could make under

the circumstances, and largely turned the current of feeling against Hapley. The very people who had most gleefully cheered on those gladiators became serious at the consequence. There could be no reasonable doubt the fret of the defeat had contributed to the death of Pawkins. There was a limit even to scientific controversy, said serious people. Another crushing attack was already in the press and appeared on the day before the funeral. I don't think Hapley exerted himself to stop it. People remembered how Hapley had hounded down his rival and forgot that rival's defects. Scathing satire reads ill over fresh mould. The thing provoked comment in the daily papers. It was that made me think you had probably heard of Hapley and this controversy. But, as I have already remarked, scientific workers live very much in a world of their own; half the people, I dare say, who go along Piccadilly to the Academy every year could not tell you where the learned societies abide. Many even think that research is a kind of happy-family cage in which all kinds of men lie down together in peace.

In his private thoughts Hapley could not forgive Pawkins for dying. In the first place, it was a mean dodge to escape the absolute pulverisation Hapley had in hand for him, and in the second, it left Hapley's mind with a queer gap in it. For twenty years he had worked hard, sometimes far into the night, and seven days a week, with microscope, scalpel, collecting-net, and pen, and almost entirely with reference to Pawkins. The European reputation he had won had come as an incident in that great antipathy. He had gradually worked up to a climax in this last controversy. It had killed Pawkins, but it had also thrown Hapley out of gear, so to speak, and his doctor advised him to give up work for a time, and rest. So Hapley went down into a quiet village in Kent, and thought day and night of Pawkins and good things it was now impossible to say about him.

At last Hapley began to realise in what direction the preoccupation tended. He determined to make a fight for it, and started by trying to read novels. But he could not get his mind off Pawkins, white in the face and making his last speech—every sentence a beautiful opening for Hapley. He turned to fiction—and found it had no grip on him. He read the “Island Nights’ Entertainments” until his “sense of causation” was shocked beyond endurance by the Bottle Imp. Then he went to Kipling, and found he “proved nothing” besides being irreverent and vulgar. These scientific people have their limitations. Then unhappily he tried Besant’s “Inner House,” and the opening chapter set his mind upon learned societies and Pawkins at once.

So Hapley turned to chess, and found it a little more soothing. He soon mastered the moves and the chief gambits and commoner closing positions, and began to beat the Vicar. But then the cylindrical contours of the opposite king began to resemble Pawkins standing up and gasping ineffectually against checkmate, and Hapley decided to give up chess.

Perhaps the study of some new branch of science would after all be better diversion. The best rest is change of occupation. Hapley determined to plunge at diatoms, and had one of his smaller microscopes and Halibut’s monograph sent down from London. He thought that perhaps if he could get up a vigorous quarrel with Halibut, he might be able to begin life afresh and forget Pawkins. And very soon he was hard at work in his habitual strenuous fashion at these microscopic denizens of the wayside pool.

It was on the third day of the diatoms that Hapley became aware of a novel addition to the local fauna. He was working late at the microscope, and the only light in the room was the brilliant little lamp with the special form of green shade. Like all experienced microscopists, he kept both eyes open. It is the only way to avoid excessive fatigue.

One eye was over the instrument, and bright and distinct before that was the circular field of the microscope, across which a brown diatom was slowly moving. With the other eye Hapley saw, as it were, without seeing. He was only dimly conscious of the brass side of the instrument, the illuminated part of the tablecloth, a sheet of note-paper, the foot of the lamp, and the darkened room beyond.

Suddenly his attention drifted from one eye to the other. The tablecloth was of the material called tapestry by shopmen, and rather brightly coloured. The pattern was in gold, with a small amount of crimson and pale blue upon a greyish ground. At one point the pattern seemed displaced, and there was a vibrating movement of the colours at this point.

Hapley suddenly moved his head back and looked with both eyes. His mouth fell open with astonishment.

It was a large moth or butterfly; its wings spread in butterfly fashion!

It was strange it should be in the room at all, for the windows were closed. Strange that it should not have attracted his attention when fluttering to its present position. Strange that it should match the tablecloth. Stranger far than that to him, Hapley, the great entomologist, it was altogether unknown. There was no delusion. It was crawling slowly towards the foot of the lamp.

"New Genus, by heavens! And in England!" said Hapley, staring.

Then he suddenly thought of Pawkins. Nothing would have maddened Pawkins more. . . . And Pawkins was dead!

Something about the head and body of the insect became singularly suggestive of Pawkins, just as the chess king had been.

"Confound Pawkins!" said Hapley. "But I must catch this." And looking round him for some means of capturing

the moth, he rose slowly out of his chair. Suddenly the insect rose, struck the edge of the lampshade—Hapley heard the “ping”—and vanished into the shadow.

In a moment Hapley had whipped off the shade, so that the whole room was illuminated. The thing had disappeared, but soon his practised eye detected it upon the wallpaper near the door. He went towards it poising the lampshade for capture. Before he was within striking distance, however, it had risen and was fluttering round the room. After the fashion of its kind, it flew with sudden starts and turns, seeming to vanish here and reappear there. Once Hapley struck, and missed; then again.

The third time he hit his microscope. The instrument swayed, struck and overturned the lamp, and fell noisily upon the floor. The lamp turned over on the table, and very luckily, went out. Hapley was left in the dark. With a start he felt the strange moth blunder into his face.

It was maddening. He had no lights. If he opened the door of the room the thing would get away. In the darkness he saw Pawkins quite distinctly laughing at him. Pawkins had ever an oily laugh. He swore furiously and stamped his foot on the floor.

There was a timid rapping at the door.

Then it opened, perhaps a foot, and very slowly. The alarmed face of the landlady appeared behind a pink candle flame; she wore a nightcap over her grey hair and had some purple garment over her shoulders. “What *was* that fearful smash?” she said. “Has anything——” The strange moth appeared fluttering about the chink of the door. “Shut that door!” said Hapley, and suddenly rushed at her.

The door slammed hastily. Hapley was left alone in the dark. Then in the pause he heard his landlady scuttle upstairs, lock her door, and drag something heavy across the room and put against it.

It became evident to Hapley that his conduct and appear-

ance had been strange and alarming. Confound the moth! and Pawkins! However, it was a pity to lose the moth now. He felt his way into the hall and found the matches, after sending his hat down upon the floor with a noise like a drum. With the lighted candle he returned to the sitting-room. No moth was to be seen. Yet once for a moment it seemed that the thing was fluttering round his head. Hapley very suddenly decided to give up the moth and go to bed. But he was excited. All night long his sleep was broken by dreams of the moth, Pawkins, and his landlady. Twice in the night he turned out and soused his head in cold water.

One thing was very clear to him. His landlady could not possibly understand about the strange moth, especially as he had failed to catch it. No one but an entomologist would understand quite how he felt. She was probably frightened at his behaviour, and yet he failed to see how he could explain it. He decided to say nothing further about the events of last night. After breakfast he saw her in her garden, and decided to go out and talk to reassure her. He talked to her about beans and potatoes, bees, caterpillars, and the price of fruit. She replied in her usual manner, but she looked at him a little suspiciously, and kept walking as he walked, so that there was always a bed of flowers, or a row of beans, or something of the sort, between them. After a while he began to feel singularly irritated at this, and, to conceal his vexation, went indoors and presently went out for a walk.

The moth, or butterfly, trailing an odd flavour of Pawkins with it, kept coming into that walk though he did his best to keep his mind off it. Once he saw it quite distinctly, with its wings flattened out, upon the old stone wall that runs along the west edge of the park, but going up to it he found it was only two lumps of grey and yellow lichen. "This," said Hapley, "is the reverse of mimicry. Instead of a butterfly looking like a stone, here is a stone looking like

a butterfly!" Once something hovered and fluttered round his head, but by an effort of will he drove that impression out of his mind again.

In the afternoon Hapley called upon the Vicar, and argued with him upon theological questions. They sat in the little arbour covered with brier, and smoked as they wrangled. "Look at that moth!" said Hapley, suddenly, pointing to the edge of the wooden table.

"Where?" said the Vicar.

"You don't see a moth on the edge of the table there?" said Hapley.

"Certainly not," said the Vicar.

Hapley was thunderstruck. He gasped. The Vicar was staring at him. Clearly the man saw nothing. "The eye of faith is no better than the eye of science," said Hapley awkwardly.

"I don't see your point," said the Vicar, thinking it was part of the argument.

That night Hapley found the moth crawling over his counterpane. He sat on the edge of the bed in his shirt-sleeves and reasoned with himself. Was it pure hallucination? He knew he was slipping, and he battled for his sanity with the same silent energy he had formerly displayed against Pawkins. So persistent is mental habit that he felt as if it were still a struggle with Pawkins. He was well versed in psychology. He knew that such visual illusions do come as a result of mental strain. But the point was, he did not only *see* the moth, he had heard it when it touched the edge of the lamp-shade and afterwards when it hit against the wall, and he had felt it strike his face in the dark.

He looked at it. It was not at all dream-like but perfectly clear and solid-looking in the candle-light. He saw the hairy body and the short feathery antennæ, the jointed legs—even a place where the down was rubbed from the wing.

He suddenly felt angry with himself for being afraid of a little insect.

His landlady had got the servant to sleep with her that night, because she was afraid to be alone. In addition she had locked the door and put the chest of drawers against it. They listened and talked in whispers after they had gone to bed, but nothing occurred to alarm them. About eleven they had ventured to put the candle out and had both dozed off to sleep. They woke with a start, and sat up in bed, listening in the darkness.

Then they heard slippered feet going to and fro in Hapley's room. A chair was overturned and there was a violent dab at the wall. Then a china mantel ornament smashed upon the fender. Suddenly the door of the room opened, and they heard him upon the landing. They clung to one another, listening. He seemed to be dancing upon the staircase. Now he would go down three or four steps quickly, then up again, then hurry down into the hall. They heard the umbrella-stand go over, and the fanlight break. Then the bolt shot and the chain rattled. He was opening the door.

They hurried to the window. It was a dim grey night; an almost unbroken sheet of watery cloud was sweeping across the moon, and the hedge and trees in front of the house were black against the pale roadway. They saw Hapley, looking like a ghost in his shirt and white trousers, running to and fro in the road and beating the air. Now he would stop, now he would dart very rapidly at something invisible, now he would move upon it with stealthy strides. At last he went out of sight up the road towards the down. Then while they argued who should go down and lock the door, he returned. He was walking very fast, and he came straight into the house, closed the door carefully, and went quietly up to his bedroom. Then everything was silent.

"Mrs. Colville," said Hapley, calling down the staircase next morning, "I hope I did not alarm you last night."

"You may well ask that!" said Mrs. Colville.

"The fact is, I am a sleep-walker, and the last two nights, I have been without my sleeping mixture. There is nothing to be alarmed about, really. I am sorry I made such an ass of myself. I will go over the down to Shoreham, and get some stuff to make me sleep soundly. I ought to have done that yesterday."

But half-way over the down, by the chalk pits, the moth came upon Hapley again. He went on, trying to keep his mind upon chess problems, but it was no good. The thing fluttered into his face, and he struck at it with his hat in self-defence. Then rage, the old rage—the rage he had so often felt against Pawkins—came upon him again. He went on, leaping and striking at the eddying insect. Suddenly he trod on nothing, and fell headlong.

There was a gap in his sensations, and Hapley found himself sitting on the heap of flints in front of the opening of the chalk pits, with a leg twisted back under him. The strange moth was still fluttering round his head. He struck at it with his hand, and turning his head saw two men approaching him. One was the village doctor. It occurred to Hapley that this was lucky. Then it came into his mind with extraordinary vividness, that no one would ever be able to see the strange moth except himself, and that it behoved him to keep silent about it.

Late that night, however, after his broken leg was set, he was feverish and forgot his self-restraint. He was lying flat on his bed, and he began to run his eyes round the room to see if the moth was still about. He tried not to do this, but it was no good. He soon caught sight of the thing resting close to his hand, by the night-light, on the green tablecloth. The wings quivered. With a sudden wave of anger

he smote at it with his fist, and the nurse woke up with a shriek. He had missed it.

"That moth!" he said; and then: "It was fancy. Nothing!"

All the time he could see quite clearly the insect going round the cornice and darting across the room, and he could also see that the nurse saw nothing of it and looked at him strangely. He must keep himself in hand. He knew he was a lost man if he did not keep himself in hand. But as the night waned the fever grew upon him, and the very dread he had of seeing the moth made him see it. About five, just as the dawn was grey, he tried to get out of bed and catch it, though his leg was afire with pain. The nurse had to struggle with him.

On account of this, they tied him down to the bed. At this the moth grew bolder, and once he felt it settle in his hair. Then, because he struck out violently with his arms, they tied these also. At this the moth came and crawled over his face, and Hapley wept, swore, screamed, prayed for them to take it off him, unavailingly.

The doctor was a blockhead, a just-qualified general practitioner, and quite ignorant of mental science. He simply said there was no moth. Had he possessed the wit, he might still perhaps have saved Hapley from his fate by entering into his delusion, and covering his face with gauze as he prayed might be done. But, as I say, the doctor was a blockhead; and until the leg was healed Hapley was kept tied to his bed, with the imaginary moth crawling over him. It never left him while he was awake and it grew to a monster in his dreams. While he was awake he longed for sleep, and from sleep he awoke screaming.

So now, Hapley is spending the remainder of his days in a padded room, worried by a moth that no one else can see.

The asylum doctor calls it hallucination; but Hapley, when he is in his easier mood and can talk, says it is the ghost of Pawkins, and consequently a unique specimen and well worth the trouble of catching.

A RESUMED IDENTITY

by Ambrose Bierce

1. The Review as a Form of Welcome

ONE summer night a man stood on a low hill overlooking a wide expanse of forest and field. By the full moon hanging low in the west he knew what he might not have known otherwise: that it was near the hour of dawn. A light mist lay along the earth, partly veiling the lower features of the landscape, but above it the taller trees showed in well-defined masses against a clear sky. Two or three farmhouses were visible through the haze, but in none of them, naturally, was a light. Nowhere, indeed, was any sign or suggestion of life except the barking of a distant dog, which, repeated with mechanical iteration, served rather to accentuate than dispel the loneliness of the scene.

The man looked curiously about him on all sides, as one who among familiar surroundings is unable to determine his exact place and part in the scheme of things. It is so, perhaps, that we shall act when, risen from the dead, we await the call to judgment.

A hundred yards away was a straight road, showing white in the moonlight. Endeavoring to orient himself, as a surveyor or navigator might say, the man moved his eyes slowly along its visible length and at a distance of a quar-

ter-mile to the south of his station saw, dim and gray in the haze, a group of horsemen riding to the north. Behind them were men afoot, marching in column, with dimly gleaming rifles aslant above their shoulders. They moved slowly and in silence. Another group of horsemen, another regiment of infantry, another and another—all in unceasing motion toward the man's point of view, past it, and beyond. A battery of artillery followed, the cannoneers riding with folded arms on limber and caisson. And still the interminable procession came out of the obscurity to south and passed into the obscurity to north, with never a sound of voice, nor hoof, nor wheel.

The man could not rightly understand: he thought himself deaf; said so, and heard his own voice, although it had an unfamiliar quality that almost alarmed him; it disappointed his ear's expectancy in the matter of *timbre* and resonance. But he was not deaf, and that for the moment sufficed.

Then he remembered that there are natural phenomena to which some one has given the name "acoustic shadows." If you stand in an acoustic shadow there is one direction from which you will hear nothing. At the battle of Gaines's Mill, one of the fiercest conflicts of the Civil War, with a hundred guns in play, spectators a mile and a half away on the opposite side of the Chickahominy valley heard nothing of what they clearly saw. The bombardment of Port Royal, heard and felt at St. Augustine, a hundred and fifty miles to the south, was inaudible two miles to the north in a still atmosphere. A few days before the surrender at Appomattox a thunderous engagement between the commands of Sheridan and Pickett was unknown to the latter commander, a mile in the rear of his own line.

These instances were not known to the man of whom we write, but less striking ones of the same character had not escaped his observation. He was profoundly disquieted,

but for another reason than the uncanny silence of that moonlight march.

“Good Lord!” he said to himself—and again it was as if another had spoken his thought—“if those people are what I take them to be we have lost the battle and they are moving on Nashville!”

Then came a thought of self—an apprehension—a strong sense of personal peril, such as in another we call fear. He stepped quickly into the shadow of a tree. And still the silent battalions moved slowly forward in the haze.

The chill of a sudden breeze upon the back of his neck drew his attention to the quarter whence it came, and turning to the east he saw a faint gray light along the horizon—the first sign of returning day. This increased his apprehension.

“I must get away from here,” he thought, “or I shall be discovered and taken.”

He moved out of the shadow, walking rapidly toward the graying east. From the safer seclusion of a clump of cedars he looked back. The entire column had passed out of sight: the straight white road lay bare and desolate in the moonlight!

Puzzled before, he was now inexpressibly astonished. So swift a passing of so slow an army!—he could not comprehend it. Minute after minute passed unnoted; he had lost his sense of time. He sought with a terrible earnestness a solution of the mystery, but sought in vain. When at last he roused himself from his abstraction the sun’s rim was visible above the hills, but in the new conditions he found no other light than that of day; his understanding was involved as darkly in doubt as before.

On every side lay cultivated fields showing no sign of war and war’s ravages. From the chimneys of the farmhouses thin ascensions of blue smoke signaled preparations for a day’s peaceful toil. Having stilled its immemorial al-

locution to the moon, the watch-dog was assisting a negro who, prefixing a team of mules to the plow, was flattening and sharpening contentedly at his task. The hero of this tale stared stupidly at the pastoral picture as if he had never seen such a thing in all his life; then he put his hand to his head, passed it through his hair and, withdrawing it, attentively considered the palm—a singular thing to do. Apparently reassured by the act, he walked confidently toward the road.

II. When You Have Lost Your Life Consult a Physician

Dr. Stilling Malson, of Murfreesboro, having visited a patient six or seven miles away, on the Nashville road, had remained with him all night. At daybreak he set out for home on horseback, as was the custom of doctors of the time and region. He had passed into the neighborhood of Stone's River battlefield when a man approached him from the roadside and saluted in the military fashion, with a movement of the right hand to the hat-brim. But the hat was not a military hat, the man was not in uniform and had not a martial bearing. The doctor nodded civilly, half thinking that the stranger's uncommon greeting was perhaps in deference to the historic surroundings. As the stranger evidently desired speech with him he courteously reined in his horse and waited.

"Sir," said the stranger, "although a civilian, you are perhaps an enemy."

"I am a physician," was the non-committal reply.

"Thank you," said the other. "I am a lieutenant, of the staff of General Hazen." He paused a moment and looked

sharply at the person whom he was addressing, then added, "Of the Federal army."

The physician merely nodded.

"Kindly tell me," continued the other, "what has happened here. Where are the armies? Which has won the battle?"

The physician regarded his questioner curiously with half-shut eyes. After a professional scrutiny, prolonged to the limit of politeness, "Pardon me," he said; "one asking information should be willing to impart it. Are you wounded?" he added, smiling.

"Not seriously—it seems."

The man removed the unmilitary hat, put his hand to his head, passed it through his hair and, withdrawing it, attentively considered the palm.

"I was struck by a bullet and have been unconscious. It must have been a light, glancing blow: I find no blood and feel no pain. I will not trouble you for treatment, but will you kindly direct me to my command—to any part of the Federal army—if you know?"

Again the doctor did not immediately reply: he was recalling much that is recorded in the books of his profession—something about lost identity and the effect of familiar scenes in restoring it. At length he looked the man in the face, smiled, and said:

"Lieutenant, you are not wearing the uniform of your rank and service."

At this the man glanced down at his civilian attire, lifted his eyes, and said with hesitation:

"That is true. I—I don't quite understand."

Still regarding him sharply but not unsympathetically the man of science bluntly inquired:

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three—if that has anything to do with it."

"You don't look it; I should hardly have guessed you to be just that."

The man was growing impatient. "We need not discuss that," he said; "I want to know about the army. Not two hours ago I saw a column of troops moving northward on this road. You must have met them. Be good enough to tell me the color of their clothing, which I was unable to make out, and I'll trouble you no more."

"You are quite sure that you saw them?"

"Sure? My God, sir, I could have counted them!"

"Why, really," said the physician, with an amusing consciousness of his own resemblance to the loquacious barber of the Arabian Nights, "this is very interesting. I met no troops."

The man looked at him coldly, as if he had himself observed the likeness to the barber. "It is plain," he said, "that you do not care to assist me. Sir, you may go to the devil!"

He turned and strode away, very much at random, across the dewy fields, his half-penitent tormentor quietly watching him from his point of vantage in the saddle till he disappeared beyond an array of trees.

III. The Danger of Looking into a Pool of Water

After leaving the road the man slackened his pace, and now went forward, rather deviously, with a distinct feeling of fatigue. He could not account for this, though truly the interminable loquacity of that country doctor offered itself in explanation. Seating himself upon a rock, he laid one hand upon his knee, back upward, and casually looked at it. It was lean and withered. He lifted both hands to his face. It was seamed and furrowed; he could trace the lines with the tips of his fingers. How strange!—a mere bullet-

stroke and a brief unconsciousness should not make one a physical wreck.

"I must have been a long time in hospital," he said aloud. "Why, what a fool I am! The battle was in December, and it is now summer!" He laughed. "No wonder that fellow thought me an escaped lunatic. He was wrong: I am only an escaped patient."

At a little distance a small plot of ground enclosed by a stone wall caught his attention. With no very definite intent he rose and went to it. In the center was a square, solid monument of hewn stone. It was brown with age, weather-worn at the angles, spotted with moss and lichen. Between the massive blocks were strips of grass the leverage of whose roots had pushed them apart. In answer to the challenge of this ambitious structure Time had laid his destroying hand upon it, and it would soon be "one with Nineveh and Tyre." In an inscription on one side his eye caught a familiar name. Shaking with excitement, he craned his body across the wall and read:

HAZEN'S BRIGADE

TO

THE MEMORY OF ITS SOLDIERS

WHO FELL AT

STONE RIVER, DEC. 31, 1862.

The man fell back from the wall, faint and sick. Almost within an arm's length was a little depression in the earth; it had been filled by a recent rain—a pool of clear water. He crept to it to revive himself, lifted the upper part of his body on his trembling arms, thrust forward his head and saw the reflection of his face, as in a mirror. He uttered a terrible cry. His arms gave way; he fell, face downward, into the pool and yielded up the life that had spanned another life.

BUBBLES

by Wilbur Daniel Steele

CAROL lived in hotels, and her governess was always being mistaken for her mamma. Or it might be her trained nurse or it might be daddy's secretary who was mistaken for her mamma. Most often it was governess. Miss Flower, Miss Runkle, Madame Dunaye, respectively in Nice, on the Isle of Man, and in Deauville, were governesses. But Miss Tolley, in Florida, was daddy's secretary. And Mrs. Kenyon (with long silky legs and an amount of pale-gold hair) was Carol's trained nurse for nearly three months at Capri, though fortunately Carol was not ill a day of the time.

It was a little confusing at first, each time, for in a way they all seemed much alike. One had to remember arbitrarily, that was all, just as one had to remember that whereas two "f's" hitched together make "double-f," two "v's" hitched together make a "double-u." Moreover, Coddie helped her. "Do mind now, child; if anyone's to ask you, Miss Runkle is your governess. *Not* daddy's secretary, this time, but Carol's *governess*." Coddie was severe about this, unnecessarily so it seemed to Carol, upon whom would be lost the glitter of an ironical amusement in the nurse's sea-gray eyes.

Coddie was middle-aged, and broad, and ate with Carol and not with daddy. No matter who was governess, Coddie did the governing; no matter who was trained nurse, Coddie did the nursing; and even if it happened to be a secre-

tary, it was Coddie who got the letters from the concierge, the commissionaire, or the desk clerk, and arranged them on the table in daddy's room. And beyond all, Coddie was permanent.

It had never occurred to Carol to wonder what would have happened to the world had Coddie not been permanent. Perhaps it had to Mr. Bonaparte. Perhaps that was why he was always so polite to her, poor man, walking lightly among his words with her, as a man (and a little ashamed of it) walking on tiptoe past a sleeping dog.

Mr. Bonaparte was of medium height, well set up, with fair hair and mustache waxed at the points, and blue eyes which had a way of widening abruptly sometimes, like the eyes of some people who suffer from the pangs of unadmitted maladies. At forty-one he had habitually a deep line which, springing from between his eyes, divided into dozens of creases all over his forehead, as fine as threads and as tangled as the hunting of the Wandering Jew. This wasn't always, to be sure. Sometimes his brow was as smooth as a boy's. Such were the times when Carol admired him most, and Coddie, knowing by the signs what was in the air, admired him least of all.

Coddie admired him most when she was seeing him most, that is, when there were but the three of them, and Mr. Bonaparte cleaved grimly to the apartment, and grew white of conscience and rumpled of soul and clothing, alternately tender and sharp with Carol, and (for once) defiantly spleenish with Coddie herself, till he was like a lean wolf prowling the windows by day, and by night, in his slippers, the bedroom floor.

Carol admired him most when she was seeing him least. Not for more than scattered minutes in whole days. A "good morning" perhaps, and late in the morning too, after she had been brought back from her walk in Central Park or Kensington Gardens or along the Croisette or the Lido

sands, and he still in bed, like all the princes charming of Coddie's tales rolled in one, with his brow smoothed out and an adventurous kindness in his big, blue, far-off eyes. And after that only in chance glimpses—daddy in the distance in High Street helping a lady into a motor car—daddy in a vista of the Casino gardens at tea with a lady under a striped umbrella—or after the lights were lit and Carol in her bed, a blur of daddy in the hallway in shining black and white and tails.

Oh, how splendid he was! It was queer: Carol was proud and jealous all in one. She wished she were dying, so he couldn't go but must stay and be distracted about her. Yet just as fiercely she wanted him to go—out where the clustered lights were and the admiring throngs. "Do look: who *is* that wonderful *man*?" . . . "But don't you know? You know the girl with the red-brown curls and the green jacket and gaiters—well, *that's her father!*" Between the two wants she wept, and often she would be asleep before she could make up her mind which one she was mostly weeping for. . . . And presently, one day, "I shouldn't be surprised," she would confide to Coddie, "if daddy were looking out for somebody for me—like a governess."

Why did Coddie make it sound so odd when she echoed, "I shouldn't be surprised."

So they weren't surprised when the trunks appeared in the rooms, and when daddy, as if he had been on the point of forgetting to mention it, called back from the door on his way to luncheon, "By the way, might just pack things up, you know; we're leaving for the south to-morrow" (or "for Scotland" or "for America"). Nor were they surprised when, arriving at the station, they found one seat in their compartment occupied by a lady, and the lady was Carol's governess.

Or in America, of course, it would be in the Pullman.

That was where Miss Tolley was, in the bright low cave of the two seats and the berth made up above, and porters and other passengers stepping on one's heels, and daddy with his face pressed to the window as if trying to think what he might have forgotten, while he said in the back of his mouth, "This is Miss Tolley, Carol. Miss Tolley is going to do some secretarial work for daddy down in Florida."

Miss Tolley was small and dark and quick and she had enthusiasms. She adored things. She adored the sea. She spent lots of time at Miami on the beach in an old-rose bathing costume, but she never went into the water. Coddie had funny ways of saying things to herself aloud. Later on she said to herself that daddy had "let the Tolley go" for just that—that she "never went into the water." . . . Miss Tolley liked perfumes.

Mrs. Kenyon did not like perfumes. She liked black coffee, black cigarettes, black Italian shawls, which was interesting, since she was so distinctly un-black herself, but all creamy and pale gold in the hot white Capri sun.

They were all different in little ways. Madame Dunaye disliked anything flavored with pistachio and wore a ribbon across her forehead to make it look wide and low, and she and daddy went to the races.

Miss Flower was an English girl. Sometimes she grew red and at other times she cried. At the Manx Arms, where she was with them, she asked Coddie to let her have one of Carol's lesson books, and sometimes when people looked at her she would come and get Carol, and they would sit in the gardens and read together, much to Coddie's amusement later on. Miss Flower wouldn't go near the water (though it wasn't like Miss Tolley—it was sadder). On the steamer all the way across to New York she would hardly look at the waves, and unless she was tramping the deck with daddy she was always hidden away somewhere inside,

alone. Carol asked her why. Then she told Carol: "My father and my two brothers were fishermen. They were all lost at sea."

One night Miss Flower stole into the stateroom while Coddie was out. She got on her knees by Carol's berth and put her face in the blankets and sobbed. "Is it because you are frightened of being drowned?" Carol asked her.

Miss Flower was a slow, big, hale person, and there was a silk of down on the arms she flung around Carol suddenly, without a word.

"Or why then?" Carol persisted, feeling puzzled and responsible.

"Nothing! Nothing! Except that I—I—I *wish you were mine!*"

That's an odd kind of a governess.

Miss Flower wept too at the High Ridge House in the White Mountains. One night she wept nearly all night long. It must have been over something she and daddy were discussing late, for she was in daddy's room, where Carol could hear her sobbing. She could hear daddy too. Once she heard distinctly what he said. "You've got to be quieter, I *beg* of you, Clare! Good God! this isn't the Continent, remember—this is America." And once he too sobbed.

He took Carol for a long tramp next day. When they got back home to the High Ridge House Miss Flower was gone.

Times like that—just when someone was gone, and before daddy had begun to grow fidgetty—were the times above all that Carol loved. It didn't mean just the one tramp. There were dozens. Up hill and down dale, hand in hand, woods like Persian rugs where autumn was commencing, little clouds in the clear, and blue shadow splashes; boot nails ringing on the rocks, daddy in rough tweeds, a big brown pipe going, instead of so many cigarettes.

There was a hillside facing the sun, a field running down to a pine forest that, in its turn, ran down into a shining river. There was the ruin of a house, and on an outer corner of the old foundation they sat and let their legs hang over. And Carol began to feel queer.

"Old Girl," daddy was saying, "what are you going to remember about your dad? Whatever do you suppose you think you really think of him?"

Think? Oh, she couldn't *think*. Somehow, the way she loved him—the way she was thrilled by his bigness and kindness and handsome strength, so that sometimes she was almost scared to know that he was there with her, undivided, monopolized—somehow or other, it was more than she cared to tackle in words. There are times in the heart of woman when lightness is the only way out.

"I like," she said (though she was feeling queerer all the while) "the way your mustache does at the ends, like the lances knights level at dastard cravens." She squeezed his hand to make him understand this was whimsicality. "And I like the way this suit smells."

Daddy burst out laughing, twisting still tighter the mustache ends. "Ah, woman, woman!"

But then he stopped and his face grew red. After that it turned a greeny white, like the faces one sees in deck chairs. For a while he sat and hugged his knees. So he hadn't understood after all.

He said, "Old Girl, daddy needs something. Daddy needs people. Daddy's not much good in this world without—somebody."

Oh, but couldn't he *see*? Idiot! there were tear drops in his eyes.

But now Carol was feeling queerer than ever.

"Daddy," she said before she knew it, "have we ever been here before?"

"Here?" He stared at her, blinking. "No!" Then he looked down the pasture to the woods and river, and gave a sort of start. "I see what you mean."

If he saw what she meant, certainly Carol didn't.

"Daddy, listen to me. Was I ever—did I ever have a mamma?"

Daddy kept on looking steadily at the river. "By George, I see what you mean," he repeated to himself. He slid from the wall and put his hands up. "Come, jump." But *her* face was the funny color now. "Lord!" he said, "what's wrong? Tummy?"

That was it. Presently she was ill-and-up-with-it in a corner of the wall.

They laughed over it as they tramped back across the world. "What a silly thing to do!" . . . "What a perfectly!" Yet it was a little because they felt they had to. There was a change. That was the last of their walks just then.

Daddy went under again. Anyone could see how vilely he hated to. The looks he gave Carol sometimes! It was as if he were a wolf in a forest, but the forest was enchanted, and even while he prowled and growled his horriest he was all the while trying to tell one with his dumb eyes that he wasn't really a wolf at all but a prince under the spell of an evil sorcerer.

It was growing late in the season and the hotel was nearly empty, and there was nothing but the hotel in miles. Carol and Coddie discussed governesses.

"He'll hardly find one *here*," Carol decided, and Coddie concurred.

Bored! How bored daddy was! Not just yawning bored. It was a more positive thing; more like a disease he had to fight, and tried to fight, sometimes angrily and sometimes in dull despair. His trousers bagged at the knees and the ends of his mustache came undone. The hotel followed his

mood; servants were laid off; the wooden corridors sounded hollower and hollower.

Then one morning Coddie, bringing up the mail, said to Carol, "Here they are." She meant the folders. Cunard, White Star, United Fruit, Royal Mail. Carol looked them over superficially, then turned to the letters, which it was her privilege to sort, Mr. Bonaparte's from Miss Eliza Codd's.

"Here's one for daddy from someone who's a doctor and who's at home. 'Doctor Kamp's Home!' Now isn't that too silly to put on the outside?"

Coddie was surprisingly impressed. Snatching the letter from Carol's hand and hiding it behind her, she hardened her eyes at the girl as though it were a crime she had been caught in. And within two minutes after she had taken the mail into daddy's room, here was daddy out in his pajamas.

"Codd, I want you to get the trunks packed immediately. I've this letter from——" He hesitated, more and more distracted. "Carol, Old Girl, will you run along down and play on the veranda for a while? Dash!"

Carol played on the veranda for a while, but she had nothing to play with and a while is rather indefinite. Returning to the rooms she heard Coddie saying, "Yes, Mr. Bonaparte, we're both right: *I would hardly do.*"

And daddy, at his wit's end, "Well, how to manage? I suppose my best plan would be to wire the agency to send somebody down direct to 'The Pasture.'"

Carol felt things a good deal more than she knew things. She could feel a shadow coming before she could see it. All the way to the station in the hotel car that afternoon—she didn't know why—but it was dreadful. What made her cling so hard to Coddie's hand? And why was Coddie, who hadn't a cold, forever blowing her nose on the sly?

Why was it so queer when they got into the parlor car? There was no new governess there, but that wasn't the half,

nor the hundredth. It happened just before the train started to move. Coddie bent of a sudden, dabbed a kiss on Carol's temple, cried, "Be a good girl, now, always," and in another wink there she was outside on the platform, waving, and the landscape was sliding, and daddy and Carol were awkwardly all alone. . . .

It was late at night and it was a strange house, a strange room and a strange bed. Strangest of all was the getting to bed. The only one there was to preside over it was daddy (there were servants of sorts in the strange downstairs, but of course *they* wouldn't do), and daddy was bungling and distraught, and Carol was inept and distraught, and the whole affair was getting to be a dream which she wished she didn't have to have.

How could she ask where such a thing as her nighty was, when she couldn't ask where Coddie was? In ways it was quite as hard for daddy. With him it took the form of an embarrassment which grew with the child's numbness and dumbness, till it seemed he would have to yell and shake her if she persisted in it ten minutes more. This going on as if nothing had happened!

He did shake her presently, and gave her a fumbling kiss on top of her head, so that she couldn't see his face.

"Don't know what it's all about, do you, Old Girl? You'll be so happy, though, when you know the surprise."

"When is the surprise?" Her voice was as dead as dead.

"To-morrow."

"Is it Coddie?"

Daddy looked worse than exasperated: he looked hurt. Painstakingly, like one counting twenty before he spoke, he turned down the bed. Then he stared at the farther wall and said, "You're getting too old for simply a nurse now, Carol. To-morrow your regular governess will be here."

"Oh-h-h-h!"

Carol got in, pulled the covers to her chin, and lay quiet, studying him as he bent in circles picking up things that didn't need picking up.

"Oh-h-h-h! So-o-o-o! I see-e-e-e!"

Daddy jerked up, his face flaming.

"No, you *don't* see. And it's a *real* surprise—and can't you take daddy's word for it—and not look like that—and—go to sleep like a good girl?"

He rushed around. "Want a drink of water on your table? No?"

He vanished, and presently he was back again in triumph, bearing a kitten captured somewhere, a gray little creature with fluffy cheeks and pert eyes.

"Look! Isn't it cunning? Want to pet?"

"No, thank you."

Unfortunately the kitten had taken matters into its own paws. No sooner had daddy put it beside the pillow than it was gone under the covers, and no sooner was it curled in a lump on Carol's chest than it began to purr.

Carol would do nothing about it. Daddy stood and scratched his head.

"Well, I don't suppose it's at all the right thing. However—just to-night——" He sighed, opened the window, put out the light, and fled.

Carol lay and stared into the dark. "So-o-o-o. I see-e-e-e."

The first sob was hard to get up, the second was easier and then the wild tears came. The ball in her arms wriggled in protest, not liking to be hugged so joltingly. . . . There, that was better.

Not since she could remember had Carol been in one place long enough to be allowed to have a pet. Kittens were amazingly soft and warm. As little by little the sobbing wore itself out, so did the purring. Neither kittens nor kids can stay awake forever.

Carol had a start when she awoke in the morning. It came back with a thump: "*Coddie isn't here.*" Then, hearing someone in the room, she turned her head, and for a wink she thought it was Coddie. The same square figure, a broad back, a head with a topknot. But when the person turned it was a stranger.

Her name, she said, was Mrs. Lephant and, although it wasn't her fault Carol had mistaken her for Coddie, Carol hated her. It didn't help that Coddie would have cried, "*A kitten in bed!*" and flung up her hands in just as holy a horror; no, somehow or other it wouldn't have been the same. Nor would her "Up you get now, Carol: don't be a lazy thing!"

The thing that was hardest to bear, as Carol went about her dressing with averted eyes and heavy hands, was that daddy had told her a deliberate fib. "Too old for simply a nurse now." If that wasn't to say she wasn't to have a new nurse in poor Coddie's place, she didn't know what it was. Of course it never occurred to her that Mrs. Lephant might be the governess he had spoken of. Governesses don't have red wrists and grizzling hair; if Carol knew anything in the world at going-on-seven, she knew *governesses*.

When Carol looked out of her window she had another start. Last night, whirling up in the car, it had all been dark. Now the sunshine of the clear morning discovered to her eyes an oblique and rocky pastureland falling away to a pine wood, and at the foot of the wood the broad Connecticut.

"Come along to your breakfast, child; don't be lagging there."

Carol had felt queer once before. Was she going to have a "tummy" again?

Mrs. Lephant came treading back. There would need to be some discipline.

"Did you hear me, Carol, when I—— Why, what ails the child?"

"Mrs. Lephant, I've been here before."

"Been here before? Gracious! It's your home, isn't it?"

"My—home?"

"I thought your papa told me you were born here. . . . Now whatever the game is, please leave it till after breakfast, my dear, and take my hand and come."

At breakfast, after a long time, Carol asked, "Where is my daddy?"

"He has gone out for a while. He didn't say when he would be back."

"Oh-h-h!" (It was true about the governess's coming then.) "I see-e-e."

That day of waiting was long and it was short. It was long on account of Coddie, who wasn't there, and of Mrs. Lephant, who was. It was short on account of the diverting way in which each new thing about the place was at very first glance familiar, and then, as soon as Carol had time to think about it, strange. And also on account of the kitten, whose name, the cook said, was Bubble.

Bubble was an irresponsible creature. It's the way of the world. Impetuously loved, profoundly depended upon, she seemed to take a perverse delight in maintaining her own poise and doing as she sweetly pleased. Here one moment, rubbing an arched back, cleaving softly, purring like incipient volcanoes and brightening the sun—another moment and Bubble was no more. Run here and call there as Carol might, with panic growing in her, Bubble was gone. Gone like Coddie and, perhaps, like Coddie, never to come again.

It wasn't until after lunch (still no daddy) that Carol discovered the wile of triumph. It might be a twig, but better it was a string with a crumple of paper tied at the end. Bub-

ble was gone, was she? Forever! Well, then, forget Bubble! Go about your business doing as *you* sweetly please. Prowl, explore. Craning at the eaves high overhead, where, in and out of the gingerbread frettings, birds wheeled with tiny whistling sounds, wonder what it can be that makes the heart stop, trying to remember—what? Or all of a sudden, scouting along a path between high barberry walls, *know* that there is a gravelly circle and a bird-bath at the farther end of it, and begin to run—and plop! Tug!—there's Bubble, dropped from heaven, battling at the crumple of paper dragging quite forgotten in the rear, as if Bubble had never been away.

Once it was nearly disastrous. On the side toward the valley the garden was built up, the stone wall of the terrace falling away ten feet at least to the pasture's rocky ground. It was just here that the kitten exploded from a clump of rhododendrons, and Carol, turning her eyes at the tug, saw the gray fluff teetering after the paper along the giddy edge, at a perilous balance and apt at any breath to lose it and go tumbling away to break her neck.

Carol stopped, her heart stopped, her hand froze. Prickles climbed her spine. She was afraid to breathe, but she had to breathe to whisper:

"Mrs. Lephant—where are you?"

"I'm right here, child. Why?"

"Call Bubble a-a-way fr-from there. G-g-get another string and dr-dr-drag it—Oh, she *will* fall off!"

Mrs. Lephant dared disaster by laughing out loud. "Why, my dear child, *cats* don't fall. They never do. And even if they did—See!"

With a swoop almost as quick as a cat's Mrs. Lephant caught Bubble by the scruff and held her at arm's length, squirming in terror of the abyss. Then leaning down and out over it, before Carol could so much as gasp, she had opened her fingers and let the kitten fall.

"There, you see? It doesn't matter how a cat is dropped, it *always* lands right side up. See, though! Why, Carol don't look at me so!"

Carol hazarded one eye over. When she saw that Bubble wasn't dead, but bouncing off along the foot of the wall with a tail as big as indignation, she stopped being faint. She sprang up. She towered, pink with fury.

"Mrs. Lephant, I want you to know right square now I think you're a—a——"

But she was a well-brought-up girl, and it does tell. Appalled, she wheeled and ran as fast as she could run away. Mrs. Lephant called after her but Carol would have cut off her ears before they would have heard. Tears blinded her, she crashed into plantings, scratched her legs on thorns, and hid in a deep hedge of lilacs, cowering down in the leaf-shadow, so that that woman should never find her till the world's end.

Bubble found her though. Together they thought their thoughts of hate.

Someone was walking on the drive outside the hiding place. When Carol had decided it couldn't be the Lephant she dared one peep. It was a lady.

Something turned over with a flop in the middle of the child's insides. "But I—I *know* her!" But then, as with all the other things, "Do I?" How could she, when she couldn't remember ever having seen her till this day.

The lady's eyes were fixed on the house and she walked like a laggard, perhaps because there were others coming behind. She had slightly wavy chestnut hair, laid back as smoothly as it would go from her temples and over her ears. Her face was pale but it was handsome. By that, and by her slender, prettily clad figure and her silk stockings and high-heeled shoes, Carol knew her of a sudden for what she was. She was the new governess.

Slowly, still intent on the house before her, she passed

out of the spy-gap in the leaves. Daddy moved into it, conversing with a gentleman with black whiskers and a gold-rimmed pince-nez. Coming to a halt just there, daddy's voice dropped to almost nothing. "Doctor," he said, "I want—God knows how deeply I want to thank you. And I hope to Heaven it's going to be——"

The other coughed, like people who are embarrassed by being thanked.

"I hope so, too. And, Bonaparte, I believe so. I shouldn't have written you unless, by every test I know, I'd been convinced."

"Well?" Daddy's eyes went after the vanished governess. He now seemed the embarrassed one. "Well, Doctor—you won't stay, eh? Overnight?"

"I don't think it's best. I'll call you up first thing in the morning—or better—I'll drop around. Yes, I'll do that. Good-by, Bonaparte. And good luck!"

There was the sound of a motor near at hand getting up its appetite. Both men blew their noses. Carol slid out the other way, quiet as an Indian, and made for the farthest corner, where was the house that held the garden tools.

Governesses were always bad enough. But *this* one! And daddy blowing his nose with strangers! And Mrs. Lephant! "Bubble!" she wailed, "where, oh where is Coddie gone?"

But before Bubble could even begin to answer, a shadow around the toolhouse corner was followed by the hurrying Lephant in the flesh.

"Where *have* you been, child? Come along directly and see your mamma."

Carol was so flustered that she did go along, suffering tugs at her frock here and dabs at her hair there, and had got almost to the steps of the veranda before her reason came back. Then she balked. Escaping Mrs. Lephant's hand,

she stood off and looked at her from beneath wise brows, precisely as Coddie might have done it, with a nipped-in, faintly alkaline smile.

"But you see, Mrs. Lephant, it *isn't* my mamma. People are *always* making just exactly mistakes like that."

When even daddy assured Carol that it was her mamma, and when the lady herself, waiting near the mantle in the big double-bayed living room, stretched out her arms a little stiffly, as if it hurt her, and was nothing of a sudden but hands and two huge dark eyes, it was more than Carol could deal with on such short notice. She felt like a stick and she acted like a stick.

It was an idea to be gone at slowly. It's doubtful if even Atlas could lift a new world without working up to it. Perhaps the lady didn't realize.

If only Coddie could have been there. Thank Heaven! Bubble was . . .

It would have been easier if they could all have settled down to it quietly; simply have taken three big easy-chairs there in the living room, and sat, and sat, and looked one another over, as much as to say, "Well, now, let's see." But they couldn't. None of them seemed to be able to stay still. First it was outdoors to look at the plantings; then it was upstairs, going through the chambers; then out again to look at the sunset beyond the hills.

Daddy was the worst in a way. When he wasn't breathing very hard, he wasn't breathing at all; when he wasn't going red he was just getting over being red. It was worse than governesses had ever been—he was so anxious that everything should be precisely right for mamma—now a footstool for her feet; now a hand to help her over an inch-high culvert in the garden walk; again a, "Shan't I run bring you out a scarf, Stacia?" or a "Come, dear, sit down for a moment and rest." His blue eyes, always a little helpless,

seemed permanently dilated, as one's eyes will be when there's a gun that may go off any minute or a bubble that may burst. And he talked a lot.

Mamma was quite different. Her quietude (even though she was forever on the move) was extraordinary. It was almost like sleepwalking, it seemed to Carol, and so it startled her, every time mamma took her hand, to find the fingers that closed on hers were as tight as twisted wires and trembling with a slight but very rapid pulse. Carol wished they wouldn't. She wished that the dark brown eyes, whenever they came roving after her, wouldn't turn so abruptly and so inkily black. It made her shy, and the thing she was trying most to do was to get over being shy.

Oh, if only she could act like herself, like the Carol she and daddy and Coddie knew! If only she could charge, arms wide, engulf this mamma in a great hug, and cry passionately as the wonder rushed up from her heart, "I love you, and you're so beautiful, and you're my mamma, and my own, forever and ever—promise me you are!"

But because she was shy she had always to hang back. She had to make believe to be interested in nothing on earth but the kitten that tumbled across the garden at the end of her string. She had to pretend it was secrets, when it was only "She's my own, my really mamma!" that she whispered over and over into Bubble's ear till the creature was nearly frantic with the tickle, and the lovely lady smiled.

It was when they were out for the sunset that mamma smiled. She stopped dead still and flashed a look at the child, knee-deep with Bubble in a thicket of old snapdragon stalks. She started to speak, then closed her lips tight, and wound her fingers into her palms, as people do who are very nervous at hotels in Italy. Then she smiled, and it was a funny, slow, thin smile, and she said in a tone playfully wistful on top and something mysteriously else beneath,

"I wish *I* had a string, little daughter. Would you be my little kittie then, and—and—play with me?"

Carol was allowed to stay down to dinner at table that evening, and if there had been any doubts left, that would have settled it. One doesn't stay down to dine with governesses.

It was wonderful. There were candles on the table, tall ones, whose fat flames wavered softly in miniature in silver and crystal and china such as Carol had never seen in all the hotels in the world. They wavered in daddy's eyes too, and in mamma's: they must have been in Carol's own; the three faces and mamma's neck and daddy's shirt front were bright, and all was gloom behind.

There was a pale wine in glasses. Daddy lifted his and leaned forward.

"Stacia?"

Mamma was like a lady, Carol decided, sitting in a crystal tower. He had to speak again before she heard and lifted her glass to clink on his.

Daddy's trembled a little. "Here's to—God bless all of us, Stacia."

Mamma sipped and said nothing. When one came to think of it, mamma had said nothing all that afternoon, or nearly nothing. It was always daddy.

"Stacia," he went on, musing at his glass, a twisty smile about his lips that was both sad and gay, "I was never built for—going it alone. I'm not the lone wolf. I feel as if I'd been through——" He shook himself, bright tear drops starting. "Never mind! I feel as if I'd come back to life today!"

What mamma felt she didn't say. Dreaming down at the fires in her wine glass, perhaps she was thinking of nothing at all as she twirled the stem of it idly in the fingers of her left hand, somnambulist still.

Carol couldn't help bouncing (it was a mercy she didn't

gasp out loud) when she felt the *other* hand coming through the darkness under the table. She would have liked to get her own two quickly in safe sight above the cloth, but it was so weird somehow, and she was so confused, she didn't know what to do. And then it was too late; the unseen thing that searched had come to her fingers and slid around them, swift as whips and tight as tentacles.

Carol had never been so abashed in her life. It was really more like terror. Of course it wouldn't have been anything at all if the others at table had known about it. But daddy didn't seem to, and no more did mamma, sitting there above the serene white damask (miles and miles away) in her tower of glass. And it wasn't just that it was clandestine, that subterranean grasp; it wasn't even a grasp, but more like a grab, a static violence, gradually tightening.

"I'm going to do lots of things now, Stacia," daddy was musing. "I'm going to buy back into the firm, and I'm going——" From mamma's face his eyes came abruptly to Carol's. "Why, Carol, Old Girl, what's wrong?"

Carol swallowed, and was red. "N-n-nothing. Really and tr-tr-truly."

In a panic she averted her eyes. She peered busily into the shadows in the corners. "Only I—I am a—a little worried about Bub-Bubble. I wonder where Bub-Bub-Bubble is."

There! If only she had thought of that sooner. Under the table the grab had suddenly ungrabbed and flown away, and almost in the same wink of time mamma, come out of her tower, was smoothing with her right hand a wisp of her lovely chestnut hair. She appeared to have rediscovered Carol.

"Bubble is the kitten?" she asked, smiling the same funny, slow, thin smile she had used once before.

Daddy laughed. "Yes, and kittens aren't allowed in dining rooms, Old Girl."

In the living room, after dinner, with Mrs. Lephant wait-

ing rather sniffily in the doorway (for after all, she was a governess, not a nurse), Carol was allowed to bid her parents good night. For the first time in her career and for no known reason, she shook hands gravely with her father. Then she turned with a kind of shiver of stage fright to deal with the other one.

On the flare-backed couch before the new fire in the chimney mamma half reclined, obliquely, one knee over the other, one elbow up and a hand supporting her head, which was tilted a little so, like a bird's in half-preoccupied interrogation. There was a perfume about her that Carol had never known or dreamed of—as if it weren't of earthly flowers—exquisitely faint. Scent and sight worked backward with Carol. A lovely fragrance made her eyes film; to make her nostrils dilate it took an entrancing vision, like the soft flames running and playing in mamma's hair.

The eyes in the face that was more beautiful in its set pallor than all the roses in the world were turning blacker and blacker as the seconds ticked. Carol felt herself being intoxicated. In the "V" of mamma's gown she saw the hollow of the white bosom beginning, and it came to her that what she wanted fiercely was to lay her head there, her cheek and temple, and press tight. On the hidden side of her, lying on the couch in the shadow her crossed knees threw, mamma's other hand was moving. Carol saw it in a corner of her eye, the long fingers coiling and uncoiling restlessly.

"I hope you sleep very well indeed, mamma," she heard herself saying. "Good night, mamma."

But then her feet were glued, not knowing how to go. Bubble saved her. When she saw the kitten cleaving to a table leg and making her eyes green she managed a gasp of joy and skipped.

"Now, child!" Mrs. Lephant called from the doorway.

But Carol had to catch that kitten first. She had to fall on

her knees and hug her, kiss her on the whiskers and blow into her ear a "Don't you think she is beautiful, Bubble; don't you think she's darling; don't we love her almost to *death*?" Otherwise she would have had to burst with a rubbery shriek, like an overblown balloon.

In the hall Mrs. Lephant said, "Now drop your kitty, that's a good girl."

"Mightn't I have her just a little—just a weency-weency while?"

"Upstairs! What an idea! Bedrooms are no place for animals, not at night. Neither are houses. They're much better off outdoors."

"Oh, but Mrs. Lephant—you—wouldn't. You couldn't! She'd *freeze*!"

"Cats? What do you suppose they've fur for? Let her down; that's right. Scat, kitty; I'll tend to you later. Take Mrs. Lephant's hand now, my dear."

Carol couldn't go to sleep. The tighter she closed her eyes the wider she was awake. A procession of "she's" ramped through her mind. With venomous sarcasm: "She seems to know a great deal about cats!" With a surge of the heart: "She *wanted* me to put my head there in her neck; I *know* she did! She loves me. To-morrow—Oh, to-morrow!" With a guilty, almost forgotten hollow feeling: "I wonder if she has gone to be some other girl's nurse, now I've a mamma and she can't be mine." And with a sudden eye on the window, wide open and blue-green-black and chill: "She *hasn't* enough fur; I don't care! If she *doesn't* freeze, she'll catch her death. Oh, dear!"

It was at the same time ironic and tragic. For the first time with so many responsibilities, for the first time there was no one in reach to share them with. The room grew as big as the house, the house grew as empty as the whole black outdoors; the time grew hours.

Then came temptation and the fall.

At first it was creepy, like burglars. No door had been opened, but some one or some thing was in that room. Whether she heard it or simply felt it, she didn't know: she only knew she mustn't stir and mustn't open her eyes.

When she flopped over and popped open her eyes, Bubble said "Prrraouw" from the window sill, where she was busy tidying herself after her trouble with the woodbine by which she had come. Presently, vanishing in lower darkness, she arrived on the bed with a thump.

Carol was firm. "You wicked! You heard what Mrs. Lephant said as well as I did." Bubble rubbed, filling the lecturer's face with fluff. Carol sat bolt up for authority. As she did so Bubble took advantage of the lifted coverlet, dived beneath, whipped into a fat knot, and began to purr.

Carol sat and thought.

"Mrs. Lephant thinks she knows everything, but she doesn't know as much as daddy. She says Bubble shouldn't be here, but last night daddy said——"

She curled back into the warm place under the covers and got hold of the kitten. Thinking of that window (it's much more dangerous to go down vines than up them—and no matter what Mrs. Lephant thought she knew about cats), she got still better hold, her arms double all the way around.

It was the light that awakened her, falling through an open door. She would have said it must be nearly morning, but it wasn't, for daddy and mamma were just coming up to bed. Daddy was in the doorway and mamma was near the bed.

"Is she sleeping?" daddy asked in a low voice.

"I don't know." It was hardly above a whisper, in case. "Carol, dear?"

Carol, peering through sleepy lashes at her there, felt all the things she had felt in the whole of the day in one lump now, and the lump was in her throat. There was something

that ravished her in that silhouette of a mother, the shoulders bent a little and the head held still, like hovering. Carol needn't wait till to-morrow after all to fling up and cry, "Mamma! I love you, and I'm glad."

She would have done it that moment, had something dreadful not occurred. She wasn't the only one awakened. Bubble stretched under the bedclothes and began automatically to purr. It rumbled, nothing less.

There was no time to plan. Carol opened her mouth and snored. She never snored; she didn't even know how to snore; but she snored.

Mamma hadn't moved. Or if she had, it was only her neck and head, by a fraction of an inch, and so swiftly that nobody would have known. Like an Indian in the dark when his brother touches him for "Did you hear?"

Had she heard? Carol snored in despair. Oh, *had* she heard?

Daddy reiterated his question from the door, but with another emphasis, of mirth: "*Is she sleeping?*"

"One would think so, wouldn't one?"

Mamma turned like a shadow, stiffly but without a sound, and moved away toward the bright rectangle where daddy was waiting, one arm crooked out and a smile trembling about his lips and eyes.

The door was closed and it was dark again. Thank Heaven, Bubble Bonaparte! They were both young in crime yet, and it had been a pretty narrow squeak.

It was late when Carol awoke in the morning; it wasn't indeed until Mrs. Lephant came; and it was a clear warm day full of sun. Still blinking, Carol pawed about under the covers. Then she lay suddenly as still as scared mice and studied Mrs. Lephant out of the corners of her eyes.

"Mrs. Lephant," she began in a small voice, when the woman wouldn't stop her bustling and wouldn't end the

suspense by opening her mouth (providing, of course, that she *knew*).

"Yes, child, what is it? Why don't you get up as I told you?"

"Mrs. Le-Lep^hant, you—you didn't—you haven't seen anything of my—of Bubble—this morning?"

"If you're still talking about that cat, no, I haven't. And now if I have to speak again——"

But Carol had to lie one more moment, staring at that open window. "The little monkey!" she thought to herself with what tried to be amusement.

She was wild to get out of doors. Tugging at the monitor's hand on the way down to breakfast she attempted stratagems. "I don't seem to be very hungry this morning, Mrs. Lep^hant. Must I eat breakfast, please?"

She wouldn't take even the Lep^hant's look for answer, but appealed from it to daddy, who was just getting up from his coffee and eggs. Daddy laughed. "You sit down there and cram!"

"Where's mamma?" Carol inquired in a smaller tone.

"Not up yet, the lazy. I'm sending her a tray; imagine that!" He was full of animation. All his motions were big, even the way he filled his pipe. "This is the life! eh, Old Girl! Now gobble. It's no day to be inside."

Carol got a piece of string from the maid and a piece of paper from a basket and set forth. She tried the east side of the grounds. "Kittikittikitti——" She combed the cover as far as the toolhouse there and cast back along the front hedge toward the drive, bareheaded in the sunshine. Daddy stood talking with the doctor of yesterday.

"A bit nervous and quiet last evening—but she slept like an angel, Doctor, and this morning she looks like one. Doctor—I think it's a go."

Failing in the east, Carol trailed her bait into the south, the back-yard region, where the land began to slope and

the outbuildings were. She didn't go to the valley side till the last. She wouldn't, that was all.

She didn't make a sound for a full half minute after her eyes had found Bubble in the long grass. But when she did, it brought daddy around the corner at the double, and the doctor behind.

"What is it, Carol? Oh, I see. Oh, poor kitty! *Isn't* that a *shame!*"

"The old *fool!*"

It rasped Carol's throat. It was rage. Grief hadn't had time as yet.

Daddy stared at her. "Who's a fool?"

"Mrs. Lephant. She is! She t-t-told me a k-k-kitten couldn't hurt itself f-f-falling."

"Where'd Bubble fall from?" Daddy craned up. "That your window there?"

Now the sobs began to rack and the tears to roll.

"It wasn't Bu-Bu-Bubble's fault. She came to bed with me—but—bu-but I let her st-stay. And of course she wanted to g-g-get up early—and the doors were sh-shut—and she sl-sl-slipped on the v-v-vine and—Oh, daddy!"

Daddy caught her up in his arms. His attention, though, was curiously divided, more than half of it still fixed on the gray little body in the grass.

"It's odd," he mused, "but I didn't suppose, myself——" He spoke aloud to the doctor, who had bent to prod with a professional finger. "Neck broken, is it?"

"Broken, yes." The doctor snapped his own neck back of a sudden to look up at Carol's window, but nothing was there. "Broken, yes." His lips moved in a funny way. "I'm afraid a little worse than broken, Bonaparte. *Wrung.*"

Somewhere aloft someone was laughing. It was low but unmuffled and pure, wandering, softly jubilating, soliloquizing, a little sarabande of mirth.

Carol couldn't help it, she shook her hands at the high windows. "Mamma, no! . . . Oh, daddy, but poor mamma, she won't laugh when we—when we t-t-tell her—that."

Daddy, getting his face in another direction, carried Carol away, while the doctor lingered a moment to break a bit of brush down over the place where Bubble lay. . . .

If yesterday had been upsetting, it was as nothing to today. Carol was too prostrate with woe even to try to make it all out. Trunks, bags, boys on bicycles arriving and departing with yellow telegrams, everybody in a hurry, everything in a mess, Mrs. Lephant going about with a flounce and a sniffle, mamma still invisible, still a lazy, Carol guessed.

It wasn't till Carol and Daddy were in the station-taxi that afternoon that a suspicion of the possible truth came into the child's head.

"Daddy, it wasn't so, after all. I mean, it was all a—a kind of a joke—or I mean a kind of fooling. She *was* a governess, after all?"

Daddy sat and stared at the driver's back. Something distressing had happened to his shoulders between the morning and now. To his color too. It couldn't have been worse if he had been suffering one of his conscientious bored-spells for weeks and months; no, it couldn't have been so bad. It made Carol uneasy. She got hold of his hand.

"She *was* a governess, daddy, *wasn't* she?"

Daddy's gray-looking mouth moved with difficulty. "I suppose we might as well call it—why, yes, Carol, yes. And now—it wasn't long—we'll just forget."

On the platform at the little station, where the train was coming at them with a rush and roar, Carol got hold of his fingers again and tugged.

"Where are we going—this time?"

Daddy stared at the engine. He seemed distraught. He got the question mixed up with the answer he must have meant to give.

"Where are we going," he echoed, "this time?"

A wild wish was trying to dare to spring in Carol's heart. She quit tugging and began to stroke the wooden fingers she held.

"Daddy, couldn't we—Daddy, mightn't we, don't you suppose——"

But she didn't need to finish. As the coaches rocked by to a grinding halt her eyes had caught a flicker of a face.

Carol shrieked.

"Daddy! Coddie is on this train!"

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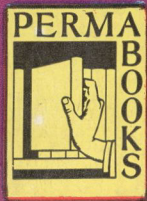
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