

Nightmare (Fantasy in Black), F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

May I say in the beginning that I don't believe this ever happened: it is all too grotesque and I have been unable to find the exact locality where it took place or to identify the people by their real names. But here is the story as I heard it.

In a pleasant section of New Hampshire, on a hill that is white in the winter and green in summer, four or five houses stand near each other. On a spring afternoon all the doors and windows of the largest and most elaborate house are thrown open toward the tennis courts; often the sound of a violin and piano drifts out upon the summer air. There is movement in the reception room downstairs as if a house-party were taking place.

Walking the length of the terrace you might see through the French windows people playing in the billiard room, or other people listening to the spirited strains of Suppe's Light Cavalry, or further on a group with embroidery in hand—all of them on a certain June day arc intent on some pastime, save for a tall girl in white who stands in the doorway looking out toward the New Hampshire mountains with an expression of rapturous discontent.

There was conversation in the salons—some of it in a merry mood. A tall, sheep-like gentleman, standing in a group of three, remarked in a guarded voice:

"Now there's Mrs. Miller playing bridge. If I could just slip up behind her with a good pair of scissors and snip off half a dozen of those mousy curls they'd be fine souvenirs and she'd be much improved."

The other two men were not amused at his fancy. One of them made a contemptuous remark in bad Spanish and regarded the speaker sullenly—the third paid no attention but wheeled sharply as the group was joined by a fourth.

"Well, well, Mr. Woods—and Mr. Woods—and Mr. Woods," said the new arrival jovially, "What gorgeous weather."

The three Mr. Woods—they were brothers, aged perhaps thirty-five, forty and forty-five—agreed with him. He was a dark stout man with flashing brown eyes and black hair and a hawk-like face that somehow blended with his forceful, soft-flowing voice. He was a dandy and rather more sure of himself than anyone in the room. His name was Vincintelli and his birthplace Milan.

"Did you enjoy the music that Mrs. Sachs and Mr. Hepburn have been giving us?" Vincintelli asked.

"I was just saying—" began the eldest Woods brother, but broke off.

"You were just saying what?" asked Vincintelli, quietly yet sharply.

"Nothing" said Mr. Wallace Woods.

Vincintelli looked around and his eyes lingered for a moment on the young woman in the doorway. Instinctively he felt dissatisfied with the physical attitude she had assumed—somehow standing in the doorway like that betrayed the fact that her mood was centrifugal rather than

centripetal—she was drawn toward the June afternoon, the down-rolling, out-rolling land, adventurous as an ocean without horizons. Something stabbed at his heart for his own mood was opposite—for him she made this place the stable center of the world.

He made a parallelogram of the rooms, rather more rapidly and nervously than was his wont, speaking a greeting here, dropping a joke or a joviality there, congratulating the amateur musicians, and then, passing close to Kay Shafer who did not turn to look at him, he arrived again in the vicinity of the Woods brothers who still stood together in a group.

"You should mix around more," he chided them, "You shouldn't be such an exclusive triumvirate."

"Yo no quiero," said the second Woods brother, rapidly and contemptuously.

"As you know I do not speak Spanish well," said Vincintelli calmly, "we could communicate so much better in English."

"Yo non hablo Inglese," asserted Mr. Woods.

"On the contrary you speak excellent English, Mr. Woods. You are an American born and bred, like your brothers. We know that, don't we?" He laughed, confidently, firmly, and took out his watch. "It's two-thirty. We must all go to our schedules." As he turned briskly it seemed to be a sort of signal, for the people in the room, singly or in pairs, bestirred themselves and slowly drifted from the room.

"Train leaving," chanted the youngest Mr. Woods, "New York, New Haven and Hartford—for Pelham, Greenwich, South Norwalk, Norwalk!" His voice suddenly grew louder until it resounded through the room, "Westpoint! Larchmont! NEW HAVEN! AND POINTS BEYOND!"

A nurse skipped quickly to his side.

"Now Mr. Woods." Her trained voice indicated disapproval without exasperation, "we mustn't make quite so much noise. We're going to the carpentry shop where—"

"Train leaving at Gate 12—" His voice had sunk to a plaintive but still sonorous cadence as he walked obediently with her to the door. The other brothers followed, each with a nurse. So also, with a sigh and a last glance outdoors, did Miss Shafer. She stopped, however, as a small short-legged man with a shield-shaped body and beaver whiskers hurried into the room.

"Hello, father," she said.

"Hello, my dear," he turned to Vincintelli, "Come to my office immediately."

"Yes, Professor Shafer."

"When are you leaving, father?" asked Kay.

"At four." He hardly seemed to see her and she made no effort to say goodbye; only her young brow wrinkled a little as she glanced at her watch and went on out.

Professor Shafer and Dr. Vincintelli went to the Professor's office in the same building.

"I will be gone three or four days," said Professor Shafer, "Here are some last points for you to note: Miss Katzenbaugh [says] she wants to leave and since she's not committed we can't stop her—until her sister arrives from New York detain her on one pretext or another. It is clear paranoid schizophrenia, but when they refuse to commit what can we do?" He shrugged his shoulders and glanced at his paper. "The patient Ahrens is suicidal; watch him closely and remove all small objects from his room. You cannot be too careful—remember the golf balls we found in Mr. Capes at the autopsy—also, I think we can regard Mrs. O'Brien as well and discharge her. Talk to her and write to her family."

"Very well, Professor," said Vincintelli writing busily.

"Move Carstairs to 'the Cedars.' When there is a full moon he meows at night and keeps people awake. Finally, here are some prescriptions and routine notes that will explain themselves. There—" he sat back in his chair, "I think that is all. Is there anything you would like to ask me?"

Vincintelli nodded thoughtfully.

"About the Woods brothers," he said.

"You are always worried about the Woods brothers," said Dr. Shafer impatiently. "It is not a case that permits of much interesting prognosis. Their progress has been steadily down-hill."

Vincintelli nodded in agreement. "Today," he said, "I tried bringing them over to lunch. It was a failure—the brother who imagines himself a train announcer was shouting when he left."

Professor Shafer looked at his watch. "I must leave in ten minutes," he said.

"Let me recapitulate," said Vincintelli, "their history. The Woods brothers are rich and prosperous stockbrokers; the eldest, Wallace, breaks down on the day after the market crash in twenty-nine and is sent here with his pockets full of ticker-tape. He develops a mania for cutting off people's hair, and we have trouble every time he gets hold of a pair of shears. There was the unfortunate incident of Mrs. Reynard's wig—not to mention the time he tried to get at your facial hair with a nail scissors."

The professor passed his hand uncomfortably through his beard.

"The second brother, Walter, was in charge of the Foreign Bond Department. He broke down after the revolutions in South America and came here with the delusion that he could speak nothing but Spanish. The third brother, John, who specialized in railroad securities, was all right until the fall of 1931 when he fainted one day and woke up under the impression that he was the train announcer in the Grand Central Station. There is also a fourth brother, Peter, who is quite sane, carrying on the business."

Professor Shafer looked at his watch again. "That is all quite correct, Dr. Vincintelli, but really I must leave you. If there is any special change of treatment you would recommend for them, we can take it up on my return."

He began tucking papers into his briefcase, while Vincintelli regarded him rather glumly.

"But Professor—"

"It seems to me that we should conserve our interest for cases more promising than those of the Woods brothers," and with that Professor Shafer hurried out.

While Vincintelli still sat there, a moody dissatisfaction in his eyes, a small red light glowed on his desk and Miss Shafer came into the room. The doctor stood up.

"Is father gone?" Kay asked.

"You can still catch him, I think."

"It doesn't matter. I just want to report that the press is broken in the book-bindery."

He stared at her with open admiration.

"To look at you," he said, "it is hard to believe that you are a full-fledged doctor."

"Do you mean that to be a compliment?" she asked indifferently.

"Yes, a compliment to your youth. To be a doctor—there could be no higher calling. But to be a psychiatrist—" A light of exaltation came into his eyes, "that is to be among the peers, the samurai of the profession. And when some day you will see arise the splendid towers of our Institute for Psychiatric Research, which will parallel the Rockefeller Institute—"

"I think," said Kay Shafer slowly, "and have thought for some time, that you yourself are in the early stages of manic-depressive psychosis." As he stared at her she continued, "And I think that I will soon develop symptoms myself if I don't get out of here. I should think father would see I haven't any gift for it."

Kay was twenty-three, with a tall graceful form apparent even under her rather severe white dress. She had brown eyes with active light in them and a serious face shot through with sudden moods of amusement. She was serious today, though, as she continued.

"What may be a fine place for a neurotic young doctor with exalted ambitions may not be a fine place for a girl with an interesting nose."

A month ago Vincintelli had asked her to marry him and she had refused him with confirmatory laughter. Instinct warned him that it was not yet time to try again, but he kept anxiously remembering her pose of flight by the window.

"That's because you haven't yet been able to view your work professionally," he suggested in a don't-worry-little-girl tone. "If you see someone badly afflicted it depresses you—a natural feeling in a layman but not suitable to a nerve specialist. They are merely cases—even their sufferings have a different quality than ours. They suffer perhaps more but not as normal human beings suffer. It's like reading into a plodding horse the sensibilities of an educated person."

"It seems much the same to me," Kay admitted. "I know that father can't agonize over every case he treats, but it has made him hard. I simply say with all humility that I'm not fitted for the work."

He came over and stood beside her, even put his hand tentatively on her bare forearm, but immediately withdrew it as if he sensed some hardening of the pores.

"Let me help you, Kay. If your life was joined to—"

He was interrupted by a click from Professor Shafer's desk as the red light came on. Impatiently he moved away from Kay and called "Come in." It was the Professor's secretary.

"Mr. Peter Woods is here from New York, doctor."

"Mr. Peter Woods—oh, yes," Vincintelli straightened up; his features relaxed their intensity and an expression of genial urbanity had settled on his face as Mr. Peter Woods came into the room.

He was a tall young man of about thirty, with pleasant mien and manner, and the rather harassed face of one who bore heavy responsibilities.

"Dr. Vincintelli?" he said, "I understand that Professor Shafer is away."

"Come in, Mr. Woods—I'm very happy to meet you. I'm sorry the Professor's gone, but since I've occupied myself particularly with your brothers I hope I'll be a satisfactory substitute. In fact—"

Peter Woods collapsed suddenly into the armchair beside the desk.

"I haven't come about my brothers, Dr. Vincintelli, I've come about myself."

Dr. Vincintelli gave a start, and turned quickly to Kay.

"That will be all, Miss Shafer," he said. "I will talk to Mr. Woods."

Only then did Peter Woods notice that there was another person in the room, and seeing that a pretty girl had heard his avowal he winced. Meanwhile Kay was studying him—certainly he was the most attractive looking man she had met since leaving medical school, but she was examining more carefully the flexing of his hands, the muscles of his face, the set of his mouth, searching for the "tension" which in its medical sense is one of the danger signs of mental troubles.

"I will see Mr. Woods alone," repeated Dr. Vincintelli.

"Very well."

When she had left the room, Vincintelli, his features sympathetically composed, sank back into Professor Shafer's arm chair and folded his hands.

"Now, Mr. Woods, let me hear about it."

The young man drew a long breath, then he too sat back in his chair concentrating.

"As you may know, I'm the youngest member of the firm," he began. "Perhaps because of that I am less inclined to worry than my brothers, but frankly the stock-market crash didn't bother me much. We were so rich in 1929—I didn't think anybody ought to be as rich as we were. As things got worse I felt like hell about it but still I didn't feel like my brothers did—and when they collapsed, one by one, I couldn't understand it. It didn't seem justified by the circumstances."

"Go on, go on," said Dr. Vincintelli, "I understand."

"What bothered me personally was not the hard times—it was my brothers. Ever since Walter broke down a year ago I've lived with the idea that there was hereditary mental trouble in the family and it might hit me. That was all until last week."

He drew a long breath.

"I came home from work last Friday to the penthouse where I live alone at 85th Street. I had been working very hard—I'd been up all night the night before, smoking a lot. As I opened the door on all that big silence I felt suddenly that the time had come—I was going insane."

"Tell me all about it," Dr. Vincintelli leaned forward in his chair. "Tell me exactly what happened."

"Well—I saw—I saw—"

"Yes," said Dr. Vincintelli eagerly.

"I saw rings and circles before my eyes, revolving and revolving like suns and moons of all colors."

Dr. Vincintelli sank back in his chair.

"Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough?" asked Peter Woods. "I'd never seen anything like that before."

"No voices?" demanded Dr. Vincintelli, "No buzzing in your head?"

"Well, yes," admitted Peter, "some buzzing, like a hangover."

"No headaches? No feeling that maybe you weren't who you thought you were? No feeling that you wanted to kill yourself? No terrible fears?"

"Well, I can't say I had any of those—except the last—I had a terrible fear that I was going to go crazy."

"I see," said Dr. Vincintelli, pressing his fingers together. There was a moment's silence—then he spoke up in a crisp decided voice. "Mr. Woods, the wisest thing you ever did in your life was to come voluntarily and put yourself under our care. You are a pretty sick man."

"My God," groaned Peter Woods, "Do you mean I may be like my brothers?"

"No," said Dr. Vincintelli emphatically, "because in your case we're going to catch it in time."

Peter Woods buried his face in his hands.

It was the custom for such patients as were not under restraint to dine rather formally with the staff at a long table in the pleasant dining room—when they sat down Kay Shafer found herself sitting opposite Mr. Peter Woods.

Over the whole assemblage brooded a certain melancholy. The doctors kept up a sort of chatter, but most of the patients, as if exhausted by their day's endeavor or depressed by their surroundings, said little but concentrated on their food or stared down into their plates. It was the business of Kay as of the other doctors to dissipate as much of this atmosphere as possible.

As she sat down she smiled and spoke to Peter Woods and he looked at her with a rather startled expression. After a minute he addressed a casual remark about the weather to Mr. Hughes, the patient sitting on his left, but receiving no answer he lowered his eyes and made no further attempt at conversation. After a minute Mr. Hughes spoke up suddenly.

"The last one to finish his soup," he said, "is a rotten egg."

No one laughed or seemed to have heard. The cadaverous woman on Peter Woods' right addressed him.

"Did you just arrive?"

"Yes."

"Do you play polo?" she asked.

"Why, a little."

"We must play soon—perhaps tomorrow."

"Why, thank you very much," he said, looking surprised.

The woman leaned toward him suddenly.

"My heavens, this fish!"

Peter Woods looked down at his plate; there seemed nothing the matter with the fish.

"Why, it seems very nice."

"Nice?" She shook her gaunt head. "Well, if you think it's nice all I can say is you must be crazy."

Kay saw him wince, look again at the fish, poke it reticently with his fork, even inhale it unobtrusively as if he thought his own judgment had become fallible.

Mr. Hughes spoke up again.

"The last one who finishes—" but Kay felt that this had gone far enough. She leaned forward and said to Peter Woods in a clear crisp voice that cut across Mr. Hughes' remark:

"Do you know New Hampshire, Mr. Woods?"

"I've never been here before," he answered.

"There are some fine walks and climbs around here with beautiful views," Kay said.

"Dullest scenery in North America," muttered the horsewoman, sotto voce.

Kay continued her conversation until Mr. Hughes interrupted.

"As a matter of fact I am a doctor," he said irrelevantly, "one of the best doctors in the country." He cast a look of jealousy at Dr. Vincintelli at the head of the table. "I wish they'd let me take charge of this place for about a week. I had a clinic of my own that makes this one look like a poor-house."

He stared at his plate sadly.

"What was the matter?" Peter Woods asked with an effort. "Did it fail?"

"It failed," said the doctor despondently, "Everything failed. I had to come here."

"That was too bad."

"Yes," agreed the doctor absently, and then, "And I know why it failed."

"Why?"

"Plot—I had powerful enemies. What do you suppose they used?"

"What?" asked Peter Woods.

"Mice. Filled the whole place with mice. Mice everywhere. Why, I used to see mice—"

Again Kay interrupted him.

"Now, Doctor Hughes, mustn't tell Mr. Woods about that right now."

The man sunk his voice to a whisper but Kay heard.

"She hates me," he said. "Can't stand it if I talk about mice."

"Like horses?" the woman patient asked Peter Woods.

"Yes, I do."

"Rode all my life but was thrown from a horse three years ago." She hesitated. "But still keep my own stable. Only six now—three hunters that you'll like. Show them to you tomorrow."

The conversation was interrupted by the sound of moving chairs. Dr. Vincintelli rose and the table rose with him. Kay drew a long breath of relief. She had, to a certain extent, adjusted herself to the irrationalities and delusions of the patients, but tonight had been difficult and she had seemed to see it all through the eyes of the newest arrival. She liked him—she hoped that his brothers' fate was not going to overtake him. It was all very depressing and it strengthened her desire to get away.



About nine-thirty when the patients had retired and she was starting across the grounds to her home, Dr. Vincintelli called after her and caught up with her.

"What did you make of Woods?" he asked. "I purposely placed him opposite you."

Kay considered.

"Why, I can't say I noticed anything. He seemed rather tired and rather embarrassed. Mr. Hughes and Miss Holliday were particularly annoying and absurd and after dinner that alcoholic Chetwind kept asking him how he'd like a highball."

"I suppose they were showing off for a newcomer."

"Well, it was a nuisance," Kay said.

The doctor was silent for a minute.

"It's a much more serious case than it appears," he said suddenly.

"Do you think so?" she asked, rather anxiously.

"I talked to him a long while this afternoon. Already he has certain delusions. He will follow the same course toward paranoid dementia that his brothers followed. He's already receding from reality." His tone changed, became almost elated. "But it's wasteful to talk shop on a night like this."

She was so absorbed in the tragedy of Peter Woods that she hardly knew when he took her arm—realized it only when he said her name in a tender voice. Then she broke sharply away from him.

"Kay, I want to tell—"

"Be quiet!" she cried. "Even if I cared for you, which I don't, I'd scarcely be in a receptive humor just after hearing a thing like this."

"But can't you make your work and your personal life into two separate—"

"I can't become a monster overnight. Excuse me, I want to be alone."

She ran on suddenly and left him standing there. Her eyes were full of tears for the unpreventable sadness in the world.

II

My schedule, thought Kay next morning, reads like a debutante's date list—"see the dancing teacher—see the portrait painter—see the milliner"—except that the dancing teacher, the portrait painter and the milliner are no longer practicing their professions.

For a moment, standing by the summer window, she forgot them all and the same vague nostalgia for something she had never known had rushed over her. She wanted to be in a boat going to the South Seas, in a town car going to a ball—in an aeroplane going to the North Pole. She wanted to stand in a shop full of utterly useless and highly ornamental jim-cracks—ivory elephants—Algerian bracelets, ear rings, yes and nose rings—and say, "I'll take this, I'll take this, I'll take this." She wanted to buy

out the cosmetics department of a drug store, and talk about trivialities to men who would think of her as decorative rather than competent.

Instead she had to see Mr. Kirkjohn the dancing teacher. Mr. Kirkjohn was a pleasant man in many respects—his only fault was his ambition. Mr. Kirkjohn wanted to go to Paris and walk down from the Arc de Triomphe to the Cafe de la Paix. A harmless enough aim in itself, but during his stroll Mr. Kirkjohn wanted to be entirely unclothed. Failing Paris, Mr. Kirkjohn wanted to be entirely unclothed wherever he was—unless he was alone, when he did not care. Kay's visits to him were short and unfrequent, for no sooner did her see her than he reached for his tie.

There were other calls, none of them cheerful pastimes save one to a young girl who was cured and was going home. Kay envied her—already she was talking about the clothes she was going to buy and the trip abroad she was going to make this fall.

"You'll visit me, Doctor, won't you?" the girl asked. "You've done more for me than anyone here."

"My dear, I wouldn't know what to say to your friends. I've talked science to doctors and baby talk to patients for so long that I've forgotten how to chatter. Write me a letter with all the new slang in it. I don't know anything later than 'Oh, Yeah?'"

There were several other visits—then she took out her roadster and started for the village five miles away. It was a gorgeous morning and she sang as she drove.

Leaves come tumbling down overhead  
Some of them are brown, some are red  
Beautiful to see-ee, but reminding me-ee  
Of a faded summer lu-uve—

Suddenly she stepped hard on the brakes—the well set-up man walking down the road had looked up as she passed and to her astonishment she recognized Mr. Peter Woods.

She stopped the car twenty feet beyond him and in the minute during which he came toward her she thought quickly. He had no suitcase and it was obvious that he had simply walked out of the clinic. He must be taken back and if he should prove obdurate she could do nothing alone. The road was lonely, deserted. Should she drive on to the village and phone back to Dr. Vincintelli or should she try persuasion? Her heart beat fast as he came alongside.

"How do you do," he said, lifting his hat.

"Why, Mr. Woods, how do you happen to be here?"

"I simply walked out," he admitted with a smile, "I couldn't stand it any longer."

"Without seeing Dr. Vincintelli? Really, you should have talked over any such decision with him. It really isn't fair to the clinic, you know, Mr. Woods. Jump in and I'll turn around and we'll drive back and talk to him."

He shook his head.

"I have taken a dislike to Dr. Vincintelli, and, frankly, to the clinic. The atmosphere doesn't seem to me very restful."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Woods, it's not the thing to start off like this on the road."

He gave her what she thought was an odd look.

"But you're starting off like this on the road."

"That's entirely different," said Kay, tartly.

"I don't see why. Up to four o'clock yesterday I was responsible for my actions—I came here voluntarily for treatment, but if I'd stayed a few more hours I wouldn't have been responsible for anything."

She looked at him closely. He seemed to be in a mild and pleasant mood, but remembering what Dr. Vincintelli had told her the night before, she kept the car in gear and her foot on the accelerator.

"Besides," he said, smiling, "you haven't told me what you're doing here."

There it was, the cloven hoof, the irrational remark.

"Our cases are different, Mr. Woods," she said firmly. "I am not sick. Did anyone tell you I was?"

"No one has mentioned you to me." He smiled. "I admit you don't look sick but I believe it is characteristic of mental trouble to assert that one is perfectly well. Now I know I am as yet utterly sane—and yet—"

"Mr. Woods," interrupted Kay, "you are doing something you will regret. Why not stay at least until my—until Professor Shafer returns Monday.

The rest can do you no harm."

"Rest!" He laughed ironically.

"—and will almost surely do you good. You are in no condition to travel."

"I'm going by automobile. My chauffeur is still waiting for orders in the village."

"You are in no condition to travel by automobile."

Again the odd look, the odd remark.

"Then why are you in condition to travel by automobile?"

This time she did not contradict him but it was saddening to note that spot of darkness, a spot that often widened until it obscures the whole mind. Yet she was somehow not afraid of him now.

"You can be cured, Mr. Woods, and you can be cured here. Our treatment, our plant, is modeled upon the most modern usages in Europe." She realized that she was quoting from a circular. "You ascertained that or else you wouldn't have sent your brothers here. If the clinic doesn't prove suitable to you, Professor Shafer will be the first to advise that you go elsewhere."

"It will be too late."

"Never. I'm sure you can be saved."

"Have they saved you?"

She made her voice softer and more persuasive.

"Mr. Woods, just to oblige me, get in the car."

"Ha-ho," he sighed, considering. "If I do, it will be largely for the privilege of sitting beside you. I think your pretty face was the only thing that kept me sane last night at table."

She hated to admit it, but the compliment pleased her.

"Get in. And we'll go back and I'll take you to the carpentry shop."

"Why should I want to go to the carpentry shop?"

"It's called ergo therapy-occupational, you know. We no longer believe in repose, you see."

"Dr. Vincintelli told me to repose-it was like being told to grow three inches."

"That was merely temporary. You'll have some vocational occupation assigned to you-something you like."

"What's yours? Driving a car?"

"Get in, Mr. Woods."

"If I do it will be the first really crazy thing I've ever done."

She was thinking that by now they must have discovered his absence and sent out a posse. They had no legal right to detain him by force unless he was a public menace, but Dr. Vincintelli would try to overtake him for purposes of persuasion.

Peter Woods suddenly made a gesture of indifference and got into the car.

"You're more attractive than Vincintelli," he said, "and rather more sane than anybody I've met."

"Thank you." As she started off a car flashed in and out of sight on a neighboring hill and she recognized it as being from the clinic-Vincintelli at last! On an impulse she couldn't explain to herself, she turned up a side road that circled back to the clinic.

"Are you married?" asked Peter Woods suddenly.

"No."

"Why don't you marry? That would probably solve all your problems."

"Possibly-but marry whom?"

"Wait until I'm well and marry me."

She looked at him gravely.

"Do you ask every girl that on first acquaintance?"

"I've never asked anyone that before. And—" he admitted, "I probably wouldn't now if I wasn't in this state of nervous despair. But I looked at you back there on the road and you looked so lovely and clean and straight. I couldn't believe" He broke off. "I suppose it's partly that white dress that makes you look like a nurse—something trustworthy and secure."

Kay was annoyed.

"If there's one thing I'd never marry a man for it would be that he wanted a nurse. I could only consider a proposal from someone stronger than myself."

"Let them get me well," he said grimly. "I'm not weak—it's just impossible to fight unless you know your faculties are all right."

On his face for a moment, as his own words reminded him of a fact from which he had momentarily escaped, was an expression of such anguish as to make her heart swell with pity. He was, save for his sickness, exactly the sort of man she would like to marry. She felt a strong physical attraction in him. But she remembered his brothers and froze back into her professional attitude as they drove in at the clinic gate.

"I don't think Dr. Vincintelli is here," she said, "suppose we walk around and look at the work-shops. They're very pleasant and cheerful."

"All right," he said resignedly. "But don't expect me to jump for joy when I see them."

He admitted the beauty of the place—it might have been a country club with a caddy house and some bungalows around it. "The Beeches" and "The Cedars," houses for hopeless cases, were separated from the other buildings by a fringe of trees. The workshops were three—a carpentry shop buzzing with activity, a book-bindery and a cottage for bead-work, weaving and work in brass. The faces of the patients were sad and they toiled slowly, but the sun was cheerful in the windows, and the bright colors of the stuffs they handled gave an illusion that all was well. Watching them Peter Woods made one of his unmotivated remarks:

"Why aren't they in white like you?"

As they issued forth Dr. Vincintelli's car drove up at the main entrance. He was frowning and in haste; as his quick roaming glance fell upon them he started and stood motionless. Then he came toward them and Kay saw that he was angry.

"Really this is very irregular," he said to her.

"In what way?" she responded coldly.

"I thought I'd made it plain to Mr. Woods," he smiled perfunctorily at Peter, "that he was to remain by himself for the present."

"It was my fault," said Peter Woods. "I got horribly bored. Lure of the great outdoors and all that."

"It really won't do in your condition. You must obey orders, my dear sir, or I won't answer for the consequences."

"All right," said Peter wearily. "I'll try it for another twenty-four hours. Do I go to my cell at once?"

"I'm going with you. I'm changing your arrangements a little."

Peter looked at Kay and smiled.

"Enjoyed seeing the place," he said. "If I stay we can string some beads together or something, what about it?"

"Fine," she answered lightly.

But her heart was heavy for him, as, handsome and in the full prime of life, he walked with Dr. Vincintelli across the sunny yard.

III

Dr. Vincintelli spoke to Kay after lunch. He was still annoyed and only her position there kept him from venting it on her.

"I don't think you quite understand this case of Mr. Woods," he said. "I thought I told you that I had recognized definite paranoid symptoms. For the moment I want to observe him in complete isolation."

"You didn't tell me that," she responded. "I found him on the road. I was simply introducing him to the regime all the patients follow."

"That regime did not succeed with his brothers," he said sharply. "I have other ideas."

She granted him that. He did have ideas—several text books of his on diagnosis and prognosis were standard, and were translated into many languages. Her father had every confidence in him, yet Kay could not like the man, and whenever he was drawn toward her she shrank back with repulsion.

Save for a daily round in which she alternated with two other doctors, Kay was not often in those more melancholy buildings where the human mind had faded down and disappeared, leaving only a helpless shell. But two days later her turn came and she went to The Cedars to see and hear reports on the sad and hopeless cases. Approaching a door where a woman patient had previously lived she took out her key but the infirmarian shook his head.

"That's an isolation case, Dr. Shafer. Orders are that he's not to be disturbed by anyone."

"Who is it?"

"It's Mr. Peter Woods."

"What?" She was unable to understand why he had been brought here. "Let me see him."

"It's against orders."

"Never mind," she said firmly. "Dr. Vincintelli's orders do not apply to doctors."

Reluctantly he opened the door and entered before her as if to protect her from attack. As they went in a man sprang up from the low couch, which was the only article of furniture in the room. His face was so distorted with rage that she scarcely recognized the pleasant young man of two days before.

"So it's you," he shouted. "This is what you got me back here for! What are you, a stool pigeon? Well, they've got me crazy now, damn them, raving crazy—if ever I get my hands on that Vincintelli I'll choke him to death, the—"

"You'd better get out," said the infirmarian.

"Get out!" cried Peter Woods. "Get out! Get out!"

It was horrible—in vain Kay called on her professional training for support but she could not divorce herself from the human element in this case. There was some sympathy between herself and this man that was not obliterated or impersonalized, even after seeing him as he had become.

With a tremendous effort she steadied herself.

"Listen to me, Mr. Woods." She kept her voice from trembling. "I want you to talk to me calmly. I want to know what has happened to put you in this state."

He laughed wildly.

"You do, eh? Well, you won't. I'll talk to somebody that's sane. It's like them to send you here—I suppose they think I'll talk to you because you're crazy. You tell that dirty dog, Vincintelli, to come here and I'll break every bone in his body—"

The sight of the guard seemed to madden him further, but the man was forewarned and as Peter Woods moved he stepped backward blocking Kay out of the door which he hastily slammed.

Dr. Vincintelli was standing just outside.

"I hope you are now satisfied, Miss Shafer," he said coldly. "And as long as I am in charge here I must insist that my regulations be obeyed."

Her eyes filled with tears, not at Vincintelli's remark, for she hardly saw him, but because of the plight of the anguished soul behind the heavy door.

"I have a telegram from your father," Vincintelli continued, "He wants you to join him immediately in New York in order to accompany a female patient up here."

"Very well," said Kay in a dead voice.

She felt like a traitor—she saw Peter Woods as he walked quietly along the road toward freedom, she saw him voluntarily entering her car and coming back to this horror. In spite of the fact that she stood in awe of her father, she resolved, on her way to the station, to ask him to look into the wisdom of Dr. Vincintelli's treatment. During the six months

that she had been an interne in the clinic she had never failed to sense the sickness of a person by any one of a hundred small indications—perhaps in this case she was drawing on her subconscious experience, for she had lived since childhood in this atmosphere. That was the trouble with this case, it didn't feel right. Until this afternoon it had seemed to her something that would yield quickly to treatment.

With a certain discouragement at the fact that she was not sufficiently experienced to trust her own judgment, she recapitulated what she had seen.

It was against Peter Woods that his three brothers were insane.

It was in favor of Peter Woods that he had come voluntarily to the clinic.

It was in favor of Peter Woods that he had been logical and tractable even in his discouragement.

It was against Peter Woods that he made curious and unmotivated remarks.

What were those remarks? She reconsidered them. There was his tendency to suppose that sane people were insane, for instance that she was insane. He had made several assertions to this effect; he had never addressed her as "Doctor" but always spoken to her as if she were a patient. This afternoon he had called her a "stool pigeon," implying that she was a patient currying favor with the authorities by inducing him to return to the clinic. Finally, there was his curious remark in the work shop: "Why don't all the patients dress in white like you."

The car came to a stop in front of the station and as if the action of the brakes jarred awake a stray elf of intuition in her mind, she sat suddenly upright.

"I wonder," she said aloud, and then, "Good God!"

It was impossible, impossible, and yet she remembered a moment in Dr. Vincintelli's office just before Peter Woods arrived, and then other moments in the past few months came tumbling into her memory. Her voice was almost hysterical as she cried to the chauffeur:

"I'm not leaving on this train. I've forgotten something. Turn around and drive back as fast as you can."

She wondered if she were making a fool of herself—she even wondered if her action was entirely rational, but she knew that she must go.

Twenty minutes later she went quietly into "The Cedars" and directly to Peter Woods' room. Silently she opened his door with her pass-key. The room was empty.

She located the infirmarian in charge.

"Dr. Vincintelli prescribed a hydro-therapical treatment," the man said, "for the next eight hours."

"Did the patient submit quietly?"

"I can't say he did, Dr. Shafer. He was pretty excited. It took three of us."



Kay knew what he meant. Peter Woods, the banker, was buckled securely in a sort of hammock which in turn was submerged in a warm medical bath. It was a treatment often used to good effect in cases of extreme nervous agitation.

"I see," she said. She started off as if to leave the building, but went instead by another corridor to the baths. Again her pass-key opened a door to her, and she was in a cork-walled chamber with a single tub—in it reclined the well-trussed figure of Peter Woods.

He was smiling, even laughing, hilariously, irrepressibly, and for an awful moment she wondered whether the laughter was maniacal.

"You seem in a more cheerful frame of mind," she ventured.

"I can't help myself. It's too damn absurd—I was thinking if my office force could see me now. It's all so utterly fantastic, like the Spanish Inquisition that there's really nothing to do but laugh." The smile was fading from his face and an expression of wrath was coming into his eyes. "But if you think I'm not going to make that fellow pay for this—"

"Now please," she said hastily, "I want you to give me your calm attention for a minute. Will you?"

"Do you expect me to get up and walk away?"

"Did Dr. Vincintelli at any time tell you how the patients were dressed?"

"Why, yes," he said wonderingly. "He said you all wore white to remind you that your best nurse is yourself."

"And the doctors and nurses?"

"He said they just dressed like ordinary people so that the patients wouldn't have the sense of being in a hospital. What of it?"

Every illogical remark he had made was explained—he had taken the nurses and doctors for patients, the patients for the staff. She saw him shiver inside the wet mummy case.

"Isn't it true?" he demanded. "What is true in this crazy place? Are all the doctors crazy or all the patients sane—or what?"

"I think," said Kay thoughtfully, "that one of the doctors is mad."

"How about me? Am I sane?"

Before she could answer she turned at a sound behind her—Dr. Vincintelli stood in the open door.

"Miss Shafer." His voice was low and intense. His eyes were fixed on hers. "Miss Shafer, come here to me."

He retreated slowly before her, and she followed. He had a certain power of hypnosis which he used occasionally in treatments, and she saw that he was exerting it on her. Her will seemed to cloud a little and she followed him out step by step until he closed the door upon Peter Woods' wild roar.

He seized her by the elbows.

"Listen to me, you little fool," he breathed. "I am not crazy. I know what I am doing. It is you who are mad—you who are standing in the way of something that will be a monument to your father and a blessing to mankind forever. Listen." He shook her a little. "A month ago the three insane Woods brothers came to your father voluntarily and said they wanted to will him all their money for research work."

"But of course he refused," said Kay indignantly.

"But now all is changed!" he cried triumphantly. "This is the fourth and last and there are no heirs. No one is wronged—we have our Institute, and we will have reared a monument for which humanity will bless our name forever."

"But this man is sane!" Kay exclaimed. "As sane as I am."

"You are wrong. I see signs that you do not see. He will break, like the others, in a week, in three days, perhaps before your father returns—"

"You devil!" she cried. "You're mad—you're driveling—"

There was a sudden interruption—the buzzing of bells, doors banging and the appearance of excited nurses in the corridors.

"What is it?"

"The three Woods brothers—they've disappeared!"

"Impossible!" cried Vincintelli.

"Their windows have been sawed with files from the carpentry shop."

The veins grew large as worms on Vincintelli's forehead.

"Get after them!" he shouted furiously. "They must be on the grounds. Sound the alarm in the main building—"

He had forgotten Kay—still crying orders, he rushed down the corridors and into the night.

When the corridor was empty Kay opened the door of the bath-room, and quickly unbuckled the straps that held Peter Woods.

"Get out and get dressed," she said. "We're leaving—I'll run you away in my car."

"But they've locked up all my clothes somewhere."

"I'll get you a blanket," she said, and then hesitated. "That won't do—the police will be watching the roads tonight and they'll take us both for lunatics."

They waited helplessly. But outside there were voices calling here and there through the shrubbery.

"I've got it," she cried. "Wait!"

Straight to the room of Mr. Kirkjohn across the hall she fled, and opened the door. Scented and immaculate he stood before his mirror, brushing his hair.

"Mr. Kirkjohn," Kay said breathlessly, "take off your clothes!"

"What?" Then, as he comprehended, a quiet glow of satisfaction spread over his face.

"Take off everything, and throw it to me."

"With pleasure, dear lady," he said.

Coat, vest, tie, trousers, shoes, socks—she caught them all and gathered them up in a pile.

"Dear lady, this—" his hand was on the top button of his union suit, "is the happiest day of my life."

With a little shriek Kay shut the door.

Half an hour later, the throttle pressed down to the floor of the car, they were still speeding along the roads of New Hampshire through the summer night. There was a moon and the universe was wide and free about them. Peter Woods drew a deep breath.

"And what made you think that in spite of everything I was sane?" he demanded.

"I don't know." She looked demurely at the stars. "I suppose it was when you asked me to marry you. No girl could believe that a man who proposed to her could be entirely crazy."

"And you won't mind being a little saner than me."

"But I'm not—darling." She hurried over the word she had never used before. "I'm in the grip of the greatest lunacy of all."

"Speaking of being in the grip of anything," he said, "when you get to those next trees why not stop the car?"

#### IV

The three elder Woods brothers were never found. However, an unconfirmed story reached me some months ago that the announcer at a certain terminal in New York has a peculiar intonation that makes Wall Street men start and mutter—"Now where have I heard that voice before?" The second brother, Wallace, has conceivably fled to South America, where he can make himself understood. As for the tale itself, it was told me by the first barber in the Elixer Shop, Scranton, Pennsylvania. Check up on it if you like—the barber I mean is a tall, sheep-like man with an air of being somewhat above his station.

#### Comments

The typescript, being a short story titled "Nightmare," n.p., c. 1932, 54 pages (11 x 8 5/8 in.; 278 x 212 mm), with manuscript corrections and additions in pencil in the author's hand; some minor fraying at edges of a few leaves, some light browning, stain from paper clip of first and last leaves — [With:]: a clean typescript of the story, n.p., c. 1932, 35

pages (11 x 8 5/8 in.; 278 x 212 mm); minimal wear and soiling;  
accompanied by a typed note from Harold Ober, summarizing the plot.

unpublished short story from the early 1930's, originally titled "Fantasy in Black". The original title has been scored through on the first page of the corrected manuscript and the new title written in ink. Harold Ober judged the story "Original and amusing. But slight. Institution for crazy people. Heroine daughter of doctor who owns institution. She acts as nurse, etc. Three rich brothers have been committed. They will their fortune to institution. Fourth brother has a breakdown and comes. Girl saves him from being kept there so Institution can get all the money. Very improbable of course but well told." A note below in pencil lists publications which have rejected the story: College Humor, Cosmopolitan, Redbook, and Saturday Evening Post.