



Mr. Acarius, William Faulkner

Mr. Acarius

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MR. ACARIUS WAITED until toward the end of the afternoon, though he and his doctor had been classmates and fraternity brothers and still saw each other several times a week in the homes of the same friends and in the bars and lounges and grills of the same clubs, and he knew that he would have been sent straight in, no matter when he called. He was, almost immediately, to stand in his excellent sober Madison Avenue suit above the desk behind which his friend sat buried to the elbows in the paper end of the day, a reflector cocked rakishly above one ear and the other implements of his calling serpented about the white regalia of his priesthood.

"I want to get drunk," Mr. Acarius said.

"All right," the doctor said, scribbling busily now at the foot of what was obviously a patient's chart. "Give me ten minutes. Or why don't you go on to the club and I'll join you there."

But Mr. Acarius didn't move. He said, "Ab. Look at me," in such a tone that the doctor thrust his whole body up and away from the desk in order to look up at Mr. Acarius standing over him.

"Say that again," the doctor said. Mr. Acarius did so. "I mean in English," the doctor said.

"I was fifty years old yesterday," Mr. Acarius said. "I have just exactly what money I shall need to supply my wants and pleasures until the bomb falls. Except that when that occurs — I mean the bomb, of course — nothing will have happened to me in all my life. If there is any rubble left, it will be only the carcass of my Capehart and the frames of my Picassos.

Because there will never have been anything of me to have left any smudge or stain. Until now, that has contented me. Or rather, I have been resigned to accept it. But not any more. Before I have quitted this

scene, vanished from the recollection of a few headwaiters and the membership lists of a few clubs—”

“Along with the headwaiters and the clubs,” the doctor said.

“Predicating the bomb, of course.”

“Be quiet and listen,” Mr. Acarius said. “Before that shall have happened, I want to experience man, the human race.”

“Find yourself a mistress,” the doctor said.

“I tried that. Maybe what I want is debasement too.”

“Then in God’s name get married,” the doctor said. “What better way than that to run the whole gamut from garret to cellar and back again, not just once, but over again every day — or so they tell me.”

“Yes,” Mr. Acarius said. “So they tell you. I notice how the bachelor always says Try marriage, as he might advise you to try hashish. It’s the husband who always says Get married; videlicet: We need you.”

“Then get drunk,” the doctor said. “And may your shadow never grow less. And now I hope we have come at last to the nut. Just what do you want of me?”

“I want—” Mr. Acarius said. “I don’t just want—”

“You don’t just want to get tight, like back in school: Wake up tomorrow with nothing but a hangover, take two aspirins and a glass of tomato juice and drink all the black coffee you can hold, then at five P.M. a hair of the dog and now the whole business is over and forgotten until next time. You want to lie in a gutter in skid row without having to go down to skid row to do it.

You no more intend going down to skid row than you intend having skid row coming up the elevator to the twenty-second floor of the Barkman Tower. You would join skid row in its debasement, only you prefer to do yours on good Scotch whiskey. So there’s not just an esprit de sty; there’s a snobbery de sty too.”

“All right,” said Mr. Acarius.

“All right?”

“Yes then,” Mr. Acarius said.

“Then this is where we came in,” the doctor said. “Just what do you want of me?”

“I’m trying to tell you,” Mr. Acarius said. “I’m not just no better than the people on skid row. I’m not even as good, for the reason that I’m richer. Because I’m richer, I not only don’t have anything to escape from, driving me to try to escape from it, but as another cypher in the abacus of mankind, I am not even high enough in value to alter any equation by being subtracted from it. But at least I can go along for the ride, like the flyspeck on the handle of the computer, even if it can’t change the addition. At least I can experience, participate in, the physical degradation of escaping—”

“A sty in a penthouse,” the doctor said.

“ — the surrender, the relinquishment to and into the opium of escaping, knowing in advance the inevitable tomorrow’s inevitable physical agony; to have lost nothing of anguish but instead only to have gained it; to have merely compounded yesterday’s spirit’s and soul’s laceration with tomorrow’s hangover—”

“ — with a butler to pour your drink when you reach that stage and to pour you into the bed when you reach that stage, and to bring you the aspirin and the bromide after the three days or the four or whenever it will be that you will allow yourself to hold them absolved who set you in the world,” the doctor said.

“I didn’t think you understood,” Mr. Acarius said, “even if you were right about the good Scotch where his on skid row is canned heat. The butler and the penthouse will only do to start with, to do the getting drunk in. But after that, no more. Even if Scotch is the only debasement of which my soul is capable, the anguish of my recovery from it will be at least a Scotch approximation of his who had nothing but canned heat with which to face the intolerable burden of his soul.”

“What in the world are you talking about?” the doctor said. “Do you mean that you intend to drink yourself into Bellevue?”

“Not Bellevue,” Mr. Acarius said. “Didn’t we both agree that I am incapable of skid row? No, no: One of those private places, such as the man from skid row will never and can never see, whose at best is a grating or a vacant doorway, and at worst a police van and the — what do they call it? — bullpen. A Scotch bullpen of course, since that’s all I am capable of. But it will have mankind in it, and I shall have entered mankind.”

“Say that again,” the doctor said. “Try that in English too.”

“That’s all,” Mr. Acarius said. “Mankind. People. Man. I shall be one with man, victim of his own base appetites and now struggling to extricate himself from that debasement. Maybe it’s even my fault that I’m incapable of anything but Scotch, and so our bullpen will be a Scotch one where for a little expense we can have peace, quiet for the lacerated and screaming nerves, sympathy, understanding—”

“What?” the doctor said.

“ — and maybe what my fellow inmates are trying to escape from — the too many mistresses or wives or the too much money or responsibility or whatever else it is that drives into escape the sort of people who can afford to pay fifty dollars a day for the privilege of escaping — will not bear mention in the same breath with that which drives one who can afford no better, even to canned heat.

But at least we will be together in having failed to escape and in knowing that in the last analysis there is no escape, that you can never escape and, whether you will or not, you must reenter the world and bear yourself in it and its lacerations and all its anguish of breathing, to support and comfort one another in that knowledge and that attempt.”

“What?” the doctor said. “What’s that?”

“I beg pardon?” said Mr. Acarius.

“Do you really believe that that’s what you are going to find in this place?”

“Why not?”

“Then I beg yours,” the doctor said. “Go on.”

“That’s all,” Mr. Acarius said. “That’s what I want of you. You must know any number of these places. The best—”

“The best,” the doctor said. “Of course.” He reached for the telephone.

“Yes, I know it.”

“Shouldn’t I see it first?”

“What for? They’re all alike. You’ll have seen plenty of this one before you’re out again.”

“I thought you said that this one would be the best,” Mr. Acarius said.

“Right,” the doctor said, removing his hand from the telephone. It did not take them long: an address in an expensive section facing the Park, itself outwardly resembling just another expensive apartment house not too different from that one in (or on) which Mr. Acarius himself lived, the difference only beginning inside and even there not too great: A switchboard in a small foyer enclosed by the glass-panel walls of what were obviously offices.

Apparently the doctor read Mr. Acarius’s expression. “Oh, the drunks,” the doctor said. “They’re all upstairs. Unless they can walk, they bring them in the back way. And even when they can walk in, they don’t see this very long nor but twice. Well?” Then the doctor read that one too. “All right. We’ll see Hill too. After all, if you’re going to surrender your amateur’s virginity in debauchery, you are certainly entitled to examine at least the physiognomy of the supervisor of the rite.”

Doctor Hill was no older than Mr. Acarius’s own doctor; apparently there was between them the aura or memory of more than one Atlantic City and Palm Beach and Beverly Hills convention. “Look here, Ab,” Doctor Hill said. “Haven’t you boys come to the wrong place?”

“Does Doctor Hill think I shouldn’t take up room better used or at least needed by someone else?” Mr. Acarius said.

“No, no,” Doctor Hill said. “There’s always room for one more in dipsomania.”

“Like in adultery,” Mr. Acarius’s doctor said.

“We don’t cure that here,” Doctor Hill said.

“Do they anywhere?” Mr. Acarius’s doctor said.

“Can’t say,” Doctor Hill said. “When do you want to start?”

“What about now?” said Mr. Acarius.

“You just get sober here, not drunk too,” Doctor Hill said. “You’ll have to do that much of it outside, otherwise the antitrust or the free-trade laws might get us.”

“Give us four days,” Mr. Acarius’s doctor said. “We can certainly come in under the wire in that time.”

So four days were set; Mr. Acarius let himself go into alcohol completely again for the first time since his college days. That is, he tried to, because at first it seemed to him that he was making no progress at all and in the end would let down not only his own doctor but Doctor Hill too.

But by the end of the third day, reason told him he had better not try to leave his penthouse; and by the afternoon of the fourth one, when his doctor called for him, his legs themselves assured him that he could not without assistance, so that his doctor looked at him with a sort of admiration almost. “By gravy, you’re even up to an ambulance. What do you say? Go in toes-up like you had come in a patrol wagon right out from under Brooklyn Bridge?”

“No,” Mr. Acarius said. “Just hurry.”

“What?” the doctor said. “It can’t be that your mind is changing.”

“No,” Mr. Acarius said. “This is what I wanted.”

“The brotherhood of suffering,” the doctor said. “All of you together there, to support and comfort one another in the knowledge of the

world's anguish, and that you must be a man and not run from it? How did it go? Peace and quiet for the lacerated and screaming nerves, sympathy, understanding—”

“All right,” Mr. Acarius said. “Just hurry. I’m going to be sick.”

So they did: between his own houseman and an elevator man who remembered him well and tenderly from many Christmases, down the elevator and across the foyer and into the doctor’s car; then into the other small foyer again, where Mr. Acarius knew that at any moment now he was going to be sick, looking out of a sort of tilting chasm of foul bile-tasting misery at what was holding them up: some commotion or excitement at the elevator which a flashy, slightly brassy woman in an expensive fur coat, like a fading show girl, was being forcibly restrained from entering. If somebody doesn’t do something pretty quick, Mr. Acarius thought, it won’t matter anymore. Which apparently someone did, his own doctor perhaps, though Mr. Acarius was too miserable to tell, only that he was in the elevator at last, the door sliding to across the heavily rouged shape of the woman’s scream. “Peace and quiet,” his doctor said.

“All right,” Mr. Acarius said again. “Just hurry.”

But they made it: in the privacy of his room at last and the nurse (he did not remark when or where she came from either) even got the basin in position in time. Then he lay exhausted on his bed while the deft hands which he had anticipated divested him of his clothing and slipped his pajamas over his legs and arms, not his doctor’s hands, nor — opening his eyes — even the nurse’s.

It was a man, with a worn almost handsome actor’s face, in pajamas and dressing gown, whom Mr. Acarius knew at once, with a sort of peaceful vindication, to be another patient. He had been right, it was not even as he had merely hoped but as he had expected, lying there, empty and exhausted and even at peace at last while he watched the stranger take up his coat and trousers and move rapidly into the bathroom with them and reappear empty-handed, stooping now over



Mr. Acarius's suitcase when the nurse entered with a small glass of something and a tumbler of water on a tray.

"What is it?" Mr. Acarius said.

"For your nerves," the nurse said.

"I don't want it now," Mr. Acarius said. "I want to suffer a little more yet."

"You want to what?" the nurse said.

"The man's suffering," the stranger said. "Go on, Goldie. Bring him a drink. You've got to have something to put down on his chart."

"Says you," the nurse said.

"You've got to watch Goldie," the stranger said to Mr. Acarius. "She's from Alabama."

"What time everybody's not watching you," the nurse said to the stranger. She glanced rapidly, apparently at Mr. Acarius's discarded clothing, because she said sharply, "Where's his suit?"

"I've already put it in," the stranger said, tossing Mr. Acarius's shoes and underwear and shirt into the suitcase and closing it rapidly. Then he crossed to a narrow locker in the corner and stowed the suitcase in it and closed the door, which now revealed itself to be armed with a small padlock. "You want to lock it yourself, or will you trust me?" the stranger said to the nurse.

"Hold it," the nurse said grimly. She set the tray on the table and entered the bathroom and then reappeared. "All right," she said. "Lock it." The stranger did so. The nurse approached and tested the lock and then took up the tray again. "When you want this, ring," she told Mr. Acarius. At the door she paused again, speaking this time to the stranger. "Get out of here now," she said. "Let him rest."

"Right," the stranger said. The nurse went out. The stranger watched the door for perhaps half a minute. Then he came back to the bed. "It's behind the tub," he said.

"What?" Mr. Acarius said.

“That’s right,” the stranger said. “You’ve got to watch even the good ones like Goldie. Just wait till you see the one that’s coming at midnight. Boy. But we’ll be all right now.” He looked down at Mr. Acarius, speaking rapidly now. “My name’s Miller. You’re a patient of Doctor Cochrane’s, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” Mr. Acarius said.

“That’ll do it; Cochrane’s got such a good reputation around here that any patient of his gets the benefit of the doubt. Judy’s down stairs — Watkins’s girl friend. She’s already tried once to get up here. But Watkins himself hasn’t a chance; Goldie’s got him sewed up in his room and is watching him like a hawk. But you can do it.”

“Do what?” Mr. Acarius said.

“Call down and say Judy is your guest, and to send her up,” Miller said, handing Mr. Acarius the telephone. “Her name’s Lester.”

“What?” Mr. Acarius said. “What?”

“OK. I’ll do it for you. What’s your name? I didn’t catch it.”

“Acarius,” Mr. Acarius said.

“Acarius,” Miller said. He said into the telephone: “Hello. This is Mr. Acarius in twenty-seven. Send Miss Lester up, will you? Thanks.” He put the receiver back and picked up Mr. Acarius’s dressing gown. “Now put this on and be ready to meet her. We’ll take care of the rest of it. We’ll have to work fast because Goldie’s going to catch on as soon as she hears the elevator.”

It did go fast. Mr. Acarius in his dressing gown was barely on his feet and Miller was scarcely out of the room, when he heard the elevator stop, followed by a hard rapid clatter of female heels in the corridor. Then the next moment his room seemed to be full of people: the brassy, slightly buxom slightly faded girl whom he had left screaming in the foyer, running in and flinging herself upon him shrieking, “Darling! Darling!” with Miller and another man in pajamas and robe on her heels — an older man of at least sixty, with no actor’s face this time because Shriner’s conventions and nightclubs and the first-night lobbies

of musical comedies were full of it — and last of all, the nurse and the elevator attendant, Mr. Acarius watching in horror the brassy girl now hissing viciously: “Hurry, you bastards, hurry!” holding the fur coat open while Miller and the other man tore savagely at the front of her dress until it fell open and revealed a half-pint bottle tucked into each lobe of her brassiere.

Then the room was empty again, as suddenly and violently as it had filled, though not for long; indeed, to Mr. Acarius it seemed almost simultaneous, superposed: The uproar still fading up the corridor, the older patient’s voice still raised in adjuration at the nurse or whoever it was who had finally got the two bottles, when the heels clattered again, the brassy girl entering this time at a dead run, snatching the front of her dress and slip into a wad at her middle and revealing a third bottle, a full pint this time, taped high between her running legs, running to Mr. Acarius and crying down at him: “Grab it! Grab it!” then, while Mr. Acarius, incapable of moving, merely stared, ripping the bottle free herself and thrusting it into the chair behind him and turning already smoothing her skirt over her hips as the nurse entered, saying to the nurse haughtily, in a voice of a princess or a queen: “Have the goodness not to touch me again.”

And he still crouched there, weak and trembling, while the uproar really did die away; he was still there perhaps ten minutes later when Miller, followed by the older man, entered. “Good work,” Miller said. “Where is it?” Mr. Acarius made a weak gesture. Miller reached behind him and extracted a pint of whiskey.

“Did you ever see a dream ... walking,” the older man said.

“Oh yes,” Miller said. “This is Watkins.”

“Did you ever hear a dream ... talking,” Watkins said. “The best place to hide it is here.”

“Right.” Miller said. “The geranium too.”

“Go and get it,” Watkins said. Miller went out. Watkins carried the pint bottle to Mr. Acarius’s bed and thrust it beneath the covers at the foot.

“And the dream that is walking and talking,” Watkins said. “This your first visit here?”

“Yes,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“You’ll get used to it,” Watkins said, “... is you,” he said. Miller returned, carrying a potted geranium under his dressing gown, and a folded newspaper which he spread on the floor and then dumped the plant and its nurturing earth from the pot onto the paper, revealing another pint bottle.

“That puts us in pretty good shape,” Miller said. “We may not have to use your suit, after all.”

“My suit?” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“The fire escape goes down just outside my window,” Miller said, folding the refuse of the geranium into the paper. “Last week Watkins got hold of the key long enough to unlock the window. I’ve still got my shoes and shirt, but we didn’t have any pants. But we’re fixed now. In an emergency, one of us can climb down the fire escape and go down to the corner and get a bottle. But we won’t need to now. We won’t even need to risk changing the charts tonight,” he said to Watkins.

“Maybe not,” Watkins said, brushing the earth from the bottle, “Get a glass from the bathroom.”

“Maybe we ought to put this back into the pot,” Miller said, raising the folded paper.

“Put it all in the wastebasket,” Watkins said. Miller dumped the paper containing the ruined geranium into Mr. Acarius’s wastebasket and dropped the empty pot on top of it and went into the bathroom and returned with an empty tumbler. Watkins had already opened the bottle. He poured a drink into the tumbler and drank it. “Give him one too,” he said. “He deserves it.”

“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“Better have one,” Miller said. “You don’t look too good.”

“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“You want me to send Goldie back with that bromide she tried to give you?”

“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“Let the man alone,” Watkins said. “This is still America, even in here. He don’t have to drink if he don’t want to. Hide this one good too.”

“Right,” Miller said.

“Did you ever see a dream ... walking,” Watkins said.

And still Mr. Acarius crouched. After a while an orderly brought him a tray of supper; he sat looking at the food quietly, as though it contained poison. The nurse entered, again with the tray. This time it bore, in addition to the water, a small glass of whiskey.

“You’ve got to eat,” she said. “Maybe this will give you an appetite.”

“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“Come on now,” the nurse said. “You must try to cooperate.”

“I can’t,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“OK,” the nurse said. “But you must eat some of it, or I’ll have to tell Doctor Hill on you.”

So he tried, chewing down a little of the food anyway; presently the orderly came and removed the tray; immediately after that Miller entered rapidly and removed one of the bottles, the one Watkins had opened, from Mr. Acarius’s bed. “We appreciate this,” Miller said.

“Sure you won’t have one?”

“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered. Then he could crouch again, hearing the slow accumulation of the cloistral evening. He could see the corridor beyond his door. Occasionally other men in pajamas and dressing gowns passed; they seemed to be congregating toward another lighted door up the corridor; even as he knotted the cord of his robe he could hear the unmistakable voice: “Did you ever see a dream ... walking,” then, creeping nearer, he could see inside the office or dispensary or whatever it was — a cabinet, open, the keys dangling on a ring from the

lock, the nurse measuring whiskey from a brown unlabeled bottle in turn into the small glasses in the hands of the assembled devotees. "Did you ever hear a dream ... talking," Watkins said.

"That's right," Miller said to him in a friendly voice. "Better take it while you can. It's going to be a long dry spell after Goldie goes off at midnight."

But that was not what Mr. Acarius wanted; alone with the nurse at last, he said so. "It's a little early to go to bed yet, isn't it?" the nurse said.

"I've got to sleep," Mr. Acarius said. "I've got to."

"All right," the nurse said. "Go get in bed and I'll bring it to you."

He did so, swallowed the capsule and then lay, the hidden bottle cold against his feet, though it would warm in time or perhaps in time, soon even, he would not care, though he didn't see how, how ever to sleep again; he didn't know how late it was, though that would not matter either: to call his doctor now, have the nurse call him, to come and get him, take him away into safety, sanity, falling suddenly from no peace into something without peace either, into a loud crash from somewhere up the corridor. It was late, he could feel it.

The overhead light was off now, though a single shaded one burned beside the bed, and now there were feet in the corridor, running; Watkins and Miller entered. Watkins wore a woman's jade-colored raincoat, from the front of which protruded or dangled a single broken-stemmed tuberose; his head was bound in a crimson silk scarf like a nun's wimple.

Miller was carrying the same brown unlabeled bottle which Mr. Acarius had seen the nurse lock back inside the cabinet two or three hours or whatever it was ago, which he was trying to thrust into Mr. Acarius's bed when there entered a nurse whom Mr. Acarius knew at once must be the new and dreaded one: an older woman in awry pince-nez, crying: "Give it back to me! Give it back to me!" She cried to Mr. Acarius: "I had the cabinet unlocked and was reaching down the bottle

when one of them knocked my cap off and when I caught at it, one of them reached over my head and grabbed the bottle!"

"Then give me back that bottle of mine you stole out of my flush tank," Miller said.

"I poured it out," the nurse cried in triumph.

"But you had no right to," Miller said. "That was mine. I bought it myself, brought it in here with me. It didn't belong to the hospital at all and you had no right to put your hand on it."

"We'll let Doctor Hill decide that," the nurse said. She snatched up the brown unlabeled bottle and went out.

"You bet we will," Miller said, following.

"Did you ever hear a dream ... talking," Watkins said. "Move your feet," he said, reaching into Mr. Acarius's bed and extracting the unopened bottle. Mr. Acarius did not move, he could not, while Watkins opened the bottle and drank from it. From up the corridor there still came the sound of Miller's moral indignation; presently Miller entered.

"She wouldn't let me use the telephone," he said. "She's sitting on it. We'll have to go upstairs and wake him up."

"She has no sense of humor," Watkins said. "Better kill this before she finds it too." They drank rapidly in turn from the bottle. "We'll have to have more liquor now. We'll have to get the keys away from her."

"How?" Miller said.

"Trip her up. Grab them."

"That's risky."

"Not unless she hits her head on something. Get her out into the corridor first, where there's plenty of room."

"Let's go upstairs and wake up Hill first," Miller said. "I'm damned if I'm going to let them get away with anything as highhanded as this."

"Right," Watkins said, emptying the bottle and dropping it into Mr. Acarius's wastebasket. Then Mr. Acarius was alone again — if he had

ever been else, since there was no time to telephone anyone now, no one to telephone to: who was as isolate from help and aid here as if he had waked on an inaccessible and forgotten plateau of dinosaurs, where only beast might be rallied to protect beast from beast; he remembered in the group armed with the small ritual glasses at the dispensary one who looked like a truck driver or perhaps even a prize fighter; he might do to help, provided he was awake, though it was incredible to Mr. Acarius that anyone on the floor could still be asleep; certainly not now because at this moment there came through the ceiling overhead the sound of Doctor Hill's voice roaring with rage, Mr. Acarius lying in a kind of suffering which was almost peaceful, thinking, Yes, yes, we will save her life and then I will get out of here, I don't care how, I don't care where; still lying so while Doctor Hill's voice reached its final crescendo, followed by a curious faint sound which Mr. Acarius could define only as a suspended one: then one last thundering crash.

He was off the bed now; the nurse and an orderly running, had already shown the way: A door in the corridor which, open now, revealed a flight of concrete stairs, at the foot of which lay Watkins. He looked indeed like a corpse now. In fact, he looked more than just dead: he looked at peace, his eyes closed, one arm flung across his breast so that the lax hand seemed to clasp lightly the broken stem of the tuberose. "That's right!" Mr. Acarius cried, "tremble! You only hope he is!"

Miller had said he put the suit behind the tub; it was there, wadded. Mr. Acarius had no shirt save his pajama jacket nor shoes save his carpet slippers. Nor did he have any idea where Miller's room with its unlocked window on the fire escape was either. But he did not hesitate. I've done what I can, he thought. Let the Lord provide awhile.

Something did, anyway. He had to wait while the orderly and two patients bore Watkins into his room and cleared the corridor. Then he found Miller's room with no more effort than just selecting a door rapidly and opening it. He had had a fear of height all his life, though he was already on the dark fire escape before he even remembered it, thinking with a kind of amazement of a time, a world in which anyone had time to be afraid of anything consisting merely of vertical space.



He knew in theory that fire escapes did not reach the ground and that you had to drop the remaining distance too; it was dark here and he did not know into what but again he did not hesitate, letting go into nothing, onto cinders; there was a fence too and then an alley and now he could see the sweet and empty sweep of the Park: that and nothing more between him and the sanctuary of his home.

Then he was in the Park, running, stumbling, panting, gasping, when a car drew abreast of him. Slowing, and a voice said, "Hey, you!" and still trying to run even after the blue coats and the shields surrounded him: then he was fighting, swinging wildly and violently until they caught and held him while one of them sniffed his breath. "Don't strike a match near him," a voice said. "Call the wagon."

"It's all right, officer," his doctor said and, panting, helpless, even crying now, Mr. Acarius saw for the first time the other car drawn up behind the police one. "I'm his doctor. They telephoned me from the hospital that he had escaped. I'll take charge of him. Just help me get him into my car."

They did so: the firm hard hands. Then the car was moving. "It was that old man," he said crying. "That terrible, terrible old man, who should have been at home telling bedtime stories to his grandchildren."

"Didn't you know there were police in that car?" the doctor said. "No," Mr. Acarius cried. "I just knew that there were people in it."

Then he was at home, kneeling before the cellarette, dragging rapidly out not only what remained of the whiskey but all the rest of it too — the brandy, vermouth, gin, liqueurs — all of it, gathering the bottles in his arms and running into the bathroom where first one then a second and then a third crashed and splintered into the tub, the doctor leaning in the door, watching him.

"So you entered mankind, and found the place already occupied," the doctor said.

“Yes,” Mr. Acarius said, crying, “You can’t beat him. You cannot. You never will. Never.”

The End