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# ***MORE SPOOK STORIES***

***by E. F. BENSON***

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## THE STEP

John Cresswell was returning home one night from the Britannia Club at Alexandria, where, as was his custom three or four times in the week, he had dined very solidly and fluidly, and played bridge afterwards as long as a table could be formed. It had been rather an expensive evening, for all his skill at cards had been unable to cope with such a continuous series of ill-favoured hands as had been his. But he had consoled himself with reasonable doses of whisky, and now he stepped homewards in very cheerful spirits, for his business affairs were going most prosperously and a loss of twenty-five or thirty pounds to-night would be amply compensated for in the morning. Besides, his bridge-account for the year showed a credit which proved that cards were a very profitable pleasure.

It was a hot night of October, and, being a big plethoric man, he strolled at a very leisurely pace across the square and up the long street at the far end of which was his house. There were no taxis on the rank, or he would have taken one and saved himself this walk of nearly a mile; but he had no quarrel with that, for the night air with a breeze from the sea was refreshing after so long a session in a smoke-laden atmosphere. Above, a moon near to its full cast a very clear white light on his road. There was a narrow strip of sharp-cut shadow beneath the houses on his right, but the rest of the street and the pavement on the left of it, where he walked, were in bright illumination.

At first his way lay between rows of shops, European for the most part, with here and there a café where a few customers still lingered. Pleasant thoughts beguiled his progress; the Egyptian sugar-crop, in which he was much interested, had turned out very well and he saw a big profit on his options. Not less satisfactory were other businesses in which he did not figure so openly. He lent money, for instance, on a large scale, to the native population, and these operations extended far up the Nile. Only last week he had been at Luxor, where he had concluded a transaction of a very remunerative sort. He had made a loan some months ago to a small merchant there and now the appropriate interest on this was in default: in consequence the harvest of a very fruitful acreage of sugar-cane was his. A similar and even richer windfall had just come his way in Alexandria, for he had advanced money a year ago to a Levantine tobacco merchant on the security of his freehold store. This had brought him in very handsome interest, but a day or two ago the unfortunate fellow had failed, and Cresswell owned a most desirable freehold. The whole affair had been very creditable to his enterprise and sagacity, for he had privately heard that the municipality was intending to lay out the neighbourhood, a slum at present, where this store was situated, in houses of flats, and make it a residential quarter, and his newly acquired freehold would thus become a valuable property.

At present the tobacco merchant lived with his family in holes and corners of the store, and they must be evicted tomorrow morning. John Cresswell had already arranged for this, and had told the man that he would have to quit: he would go round there in the forenoon and see that they and their sticks of furniture were duly bundled out into the street. He would see personally that this was done, and looked forward to doing so. The old couple were beastly creatures, the woman a perfect witch who eyed him and muttered, but there was a daughter who was not ill-looking, and someone of the beggared family would be obliged to earn bread. He did not dwell on this, but the thought just flitted through his brain.... Then doors would be locked and windows barred in the store that was now his, and he would lunch at the club afterwards. He was popular there; he had a jovial geniality about him, and a habit of offering drinks before they could be offered to him. That, too, was good for business.

Ten minutes' strolling brought him to the end of the shops and cafés that formed the street, and now the road ran between residential houses, each detached and with a space of garden surrounding it, where dry-leaved palms rattled in this wind from the sea. He was approaching the flamboyant Roman Catholic church, to which was attached a monastic establishment, a big white barrack-looking house where the Brothers of Poverty or some such order lived. Something to do with St. Mark, he vaguely remembered, who by tradition had brought Christianity to Egypt nearly nineteen hundred years ago. Often he met one of these odd sandal-footed creatures with his brown habit, his rosary and his cowed head going in or out of their gate, or toiling in their garden. He did not like them: lousy fellows he would have called them. Sometimes in their mendicant errands they came to his door asking alms for the indigent Copts. Not long ago he had found one actually ringing the bell of his front door, instead of going humbly round to the back, as befitted his quality, and Cresswell told him that he would loose his bulldog on the next of their breed who ventured within his garden gate. How the fellow had skipped off when he heard talk of the dog! He dropped one of his sandals in his haste to be gone, and not sparing the time to adjust it again, had hopped and hobbled over the sharp gravel to gain the street. Cresswell had laughed aloud to see his precipitancy, and the best of the joke was that he had not got any sort of dog on his premises at all. At the remembrance of that humorous incident he grinned to himself as he passed the porch of the church.

He paused a moment to mop his forehead and to light a cigarette, looking about him in great good humour. Before him and behind the road was quite empty: lights gleamed behind venetian shutters from a few upper windows of the houses, but all the world was in bed or on its way there. There were still three or four hundred yards to go before he came to his house, and as he turned his face homewards again and walked a little more briskly, he heard a step behind him, sharp and distinct, not far in his rear. He paid no heed: someone, late like himself, was going home, walking in the same direction, for the step followed him.

His cigarette was ill-lit; a little core of burning stuff fell from it on to the pavement and he stopped to rekindle it. Possibly some subconscious region of his mind was occupied with the step which had sprung up so oddly behind him in the empty street, for while he was getting his cigarette to burn again he noticed that the step had ceased. It was hardly worth while to turn round (so little the matter interested him), but a casual glance showed him that the wayfarer must have turned into one of the houses he had just passed, for the whole street, brightly moonlit, was as empty as when he surveyed it a few minutes before. Soon he came to his own gate and clanged it behind him.

The eviction of the Levantine merchant took place in the morning, and Cresswell watched his porters carrying out the tawdry furniture—a few tables, a few chairs, a sofa covered in tattered crimson plush, a couple of iron bedsteads, a bundle of dirty sheets and blankets. He was not certain in his own mind whether these paltry articles did not by rights belong to him, but they were fit for nothing except the dust-heap, and he had no use for them. There they stood in the clean bright sunshine, rubbish and no more, blocking the pavement, and a policeman told their owner that he had best clear them away at once unless he wanted trouble. There was the usual scene to which he was quite accustomed: the man's wife snivelling and slovenly, witch-like and early old, knelt and kissed his hand, and wheezingly besought his compassion. She called him "Excellency," she promised him her prayers, which he desired as little as her pots and pans. She invoked blessings on his head, for she knew that out of his pity he would give them a little more time. They had nowhere to go nor any roof to shelter them: her husband had money owing to him, and he would collect these debts and pay his default as sure as there was a God in heaven. This was a changed note from her mutterings of yesterday, but of course Cresswell had a deaf ear for this oily rigmorole, and presently he went into the store to see that everything had been removed.

It was in a filthy, dirty state; floors were rotten and the paint peeling, but the whole place would soon be broken up and he was not going to spend a piastre on it, so long as the ground on which it stood was his. Then he saw to the barring of the windows and the doors, and he gave the policeman quite a handsome tip to keep an eye on the place and take care that these folk did not get ingress again. When he came out, he found that the old man had procured a handcart, and he and his son were loading it up, so of course they had somewhere to go: it was all a pack of lies about their being homeless. The old hag was squatting against the house wall, but now there were no more prayers and blessings for him, and she had taken to her mutterings again. As for the daughter, seen in the broad daylight, she had a handsome face, but she was sullen and dirty and forbidding, and he gave no further thought to her. He hailed a taxi and went off to the club for lunch.

Though Cresswell, in common parlance, "did himself well," taking his fill of food and drink and tobacco, he was also careful of that great strong body of his, and the occasions were few when he omitted, at the end of the day's work, to walk out in the direction of Ramleh for a brisk hour or two, or, during the hotter months, to have a good swim in the sea and a bask in the sun. On the day following this eviction he took a tramp along the firm sands of the coast, and then, turning inland, struck the road that would bring him back to his own house. This stood quite at the end of the rows of detached houses past which he had walked two evenings before: beyond, the road ran between tumbled sand-dunes and scrub-covered flats. Here and there in sheltered hollows a few Arab goatherds and such had made themselves nomadic tentlike habitations of a primitive sort: half a dozen posts set in the sand supported a roof of rugs and blankets stitched together. If they encroached too near the outskirts of the town the authorities periodically made a clearance of them, for they were apt to be light-fingered, pilfering folk, whose close vicinity was not desirable.

To-day as he returned from his walk, Cresswell saw that a tent of this kind had newly been set up within twenty yards of his own garden wall. That would not do at all, that must be seen to, and he determined as soon as he had had his bath and his change of clothes to ring up his very good friend the chief inspector of police and request its removal. As he got nearer to it he saw that it was not quite of the usual type. The roof was clearly an outworn European carpet, and standing outside it on the sand were chairs and a sofa. Somehow these seemed familiar to him, though he could not localize the association. Then out of the tent came that old Levantine hag who had kissed his hand and knelt to him yesterday, invoking on him all sorts of blessings and prosperities, if only he would have compassion. She saw him, for now not more than a few dozen yards separated them, and then, suddenly pointing at him, she broke out into a gabble and yell of

curses. That made him smile.

"So you've changed your tune again, have you?" he thought, "for that doesn't sound much like good wishes. Curse away, old woman, if it relieves your mind, for it doesn't hurt me. But you'll have to be shifting once more, for I'm not going to have you and your like squatting there."

Cresswell rang up his friend the chief inspector of police, and was most politely told that matter should be seen to in the morning. Sure enough when he set out to go to his office next day, he saw that it was being attended to, for the European carpet which had served for a roof was already down, and the handcart was being laden with the stuff. He noticed, quite casually, that the two women and the boy were employed in lading it; the Levantine was lying on the sand and taking no part in the work. Two days later he had occasion to pass the pauper cemetery of Alexandria, where the poorest kind of funeral was going on. The coffin was being pushed to the side of the shallow grave on a handcart: a boy and two women followed it. He could see who they were.

He dined that night at the club in rare good-humour with the affairs of life. Already the municipality had offered him for his newly acquired freehold a sum that was double the debt for which it had been security, and though possibly he might get more if he stuck out for a higher price he had accepted it, and the money had been paid into his bank that day. To get a hundred per cent in a week was very satisfactory business, and who knew but that some new scheme of improvement might cause them to change their plans, leaving him with a ramshackle building on his hands for which he had no manner of use? He enjoyed his dinner and his wine, and particularly did he enjoy the rubber of bridge that followed. All went well with his finesses; he doubled his adversaries two or three times with the happiest results, they doubled him and were sorry for having spoken, and there would be a very pleasant item to enter in his card-account that evening.

It was later than usual when he quitted the club. Just outside there was a beggar-woman squatting at the edge of the pavement, who held her palm towards him and whined out blessings. Good-naturedly he fumbled in his pocket for a couple of piastres, and the blessings poured out in greater shrillness and copiousness as she pushed back the black veil that half shrouded her face to thank him for his beneficence to the needy widow. Next moment she threw his alms on the pavement, she spat at him, and like a moth she flitted away into the shadows.

Cresswell recognized her even as she had recognized him and picked up his piastres. It was amusing to think that the old hag so hated him that even his alms were abhorrent to her. "I'll drop them into that collecting-box outside the church," he thought to himself.

To-night, late though it was, there were many folk about in the square, natives for the most part, padding softly along, and there were still a few taxis on the rank. But he preferred to walk home, for he had been so busy all day that he had given his firm fat body no sort of exercise. So crossing the square he went up the street which led to his house. Here the cafés were already closed, and soon the pavements grew empty. The waning moon had risen, and though the lights of the street grew more sparse as he emerged into the residential quarter, his way lay bright before him. In his hand he still held the two piastres which had been flung back at him ready for the collection-box. He walked briskly, for the night was cool, and it was no exercise to saunter. Not a breath of wind stirred the air, and the clatter of the dry palm-leaves was dumb.

He was now approaching the Roman Catholic church, when a step suddenly sounded out crisp and distinct behind him. He remembered then for the first time what had happened some nights ago and halted and listened: not a sound broke the stillness. He whisked round, but the street seemed empty. On he went again, now more slowly, and there was the following step again, neither gaining on him nor falling behind; to judge by the loudness of it, it could not be more than a dozen paces in his rear. Then a very obvious explanation occurred to him: no doubt this was some echo of his own footsteps. He went more quickly, and the steps behind him quickened; he stopped and they stopped. The whole thing was clear enough, and not a shadow of uneasiness, or anything approaching it, was in his mind. He slipped his ironical alms into the collecting-box outside the church, and was amused to hear that they evoked no tinkle from within. "Quite a little windfall for those brown-gowned fellows; they'll buy another rosary," he said to himself, and soon, with the echo of his own steps following, he turned in at his gate. Once inside, he slipped behind a myrtle bush that stood at the edge of the gravel walk, to see if by chance anyone passed on the road outside. But nothing happened, and his theory of the echo, though it was odd that he should never have noticed it till so lately, seemed quite confirmed.

From that night onwards he made it a practice, if he dined at the club, to walk home. Sometimes the step followed him, but not always, and this was an objection to that sensible echo theory. But the matter was no sort of worry to him except sometimes when he woke in the night, and found that his brain, still drowsy and not in complete control, was brooding

over it with an ever-increasing preoccupation. Often that misgiving faded away and he dropped off to dreamless sleep again; sometimes it was sufficiently disquieting to bring him broad awake, and then with all his senses about him, it vanished. But there was this condition, half-way between waking and sleeping, when in the twilight chamber of his brain something listened, something feared. When fully awake he no more thought of it than he thought of that frowsy Levantine tobacco merchant whom he had evicted and whose funeral he chanced to have seen.

Early in December his cousin and partner in the sugar-business came down from Cairo to spend a week with him. Bill Cresswell may be succinctly described as "a hot lot," and often after dinner at the club he left his cousin to his cronies and the sedate pleasures of bridge, and went out with a duplicate latchkey in his pocket on livelier private affairs. One night, the last of Bill's sojourn here, there was "nothing doing" and the two set forth together homewards from the club.

"Nice night, let's walk," said John. "Nothing like a walk when there's liquid on board. Clears the brain for you and I must have a final powwow to-night, if you're off to-morrow. There are some bits of things still to go through."

Bill acquiesced. The cafés were all closed, there was nothing very promising.

"Night life here ain't a patch on Cairo," he observed. "Everyone seems to go to bed here just about when we begin to get going. Not but what I haven't enjoyed my stay with you. Capital good fellows at your club and brandy to match."

He stopped and ruefully scanned the quiet and emptiness of the street.

"Not a soul anywhere," he said. "Shutters up, all gone to bed. Nothing for it but a powwow, I guess."

They walked on in silence for a while. Then behind them, firm and distinct to John's ears, there sprang up the sound of the footsteps, for which now he knew that he waited and listened. He wheeled round.

"What's up?" asked Bill.

"Curious thing," said John. "Night after night now, though not every night, when I walk home, I hear a step following me. I heard it then."

Bill gave a vinous giggle.

"No such luck for me," he said. "I like to hear a step following me about one of a morning. Something agreeable may come of it. Wish I could hear it."

They walked on, and again, clearer than before, John heard what was inaudible to the other. He told himself, as he often did now, that it was an echo. But it was odd that the echo only repeated the footfalls of one of them. As he recognized this, he felt for the first time, when he was fully awake, some sudden chill of fear. It was as if a cold hand closed for a moment on his heart, just pressing it softly, almost tenderly. But they were now close to his own gate, and presently it clanged behind them.

Bill returned next day to the gladder life of Cairo. John Cresswell saw him off at the station and was passing out into the street again through the crowd of loungers and porters and passengers when there defined itself to his ear the sound of that footstep which he now knew so well. How he recognized it and isolated it from the tread of so many other feet he had no idea: simply his brain told him that it was following him again. He took a taxi to his office, and as he mounted the white stone stairs once more it was on his track. Once more the gentle pressure of cold fingers seemed to assure him of the presence that, though invisible, was very close to him, and now it was as if those fingers were pressed on some bell-push in his brain, and there sounded out a shrill tingle of fear. So hard-headed and sensible a man, of course, had nothing but scorn for all the clap-trap bogey tales of spirits and ghosts and hauntings, and he would have welcomed any sort of apparition in which the step manifested itself, in order to have the pleasure of laughing in its face. He would have liked to see a skeleton or some shrouded figure stand close to him; he would have slashed at it with his stick and convinced himself that there was nothing there. Whatever his own eyes appeared to see could not be so unnerving as these tokens of the invisible.

A stiff drink pulled him together again, and for the rest of the day there occurred no repetition of that tapping step which had begun to sprout with terror for him. In any case he was determined to fight it, for he realized that it was chiefly his own fear that troubled him. No doubt he was suffering from some small nervous derangement; he had been working very hard, and after Christmas, if the thing continued to worry him, probably he would see a doctor, who would prescribe him

some tonic or some sedative which would send the step into the limbo from which it had come. But it was more probable that his cure was in his own hands: his own resistance was all the medicine he needed.

It was in pursuance of this very sane policy that he set out that night after an evening at the club to walk home: he faced it just because he knew that some black well was digging itself into his soul. To yield, to take a taxi, was to retreat, and if he did that, if he gave way an inch, he guessed that he might be soon flying in panic before an invading and imaginary host of phantoms. He had no use for phantoms; the solid satisfactions of life were enough occupation. Once more, as he drew near the church, the step sprang up, and now he sought no longer to tell himself it was an echo. Instead he fixed his mind on it, saying to himself, "There it is and it can't hurt me. Let it walk all day and night behind me if it chooses. It's got a fancy for me." Then his garden gate shut behind him, and with a sigh of relief he knew that he had passed out of its beat, for when once he was within, it never came farther.

He stood for a moment on his threshold, after he had opened his door, pleased with himself for having faced it. The bright light shone full on to the straight gravel walk he had just traversed. It was quite empty, and nothing was looking in through his gate. Then he heard from close at hand the crunch of the gravel underneath the heel of some invisible wayfarer. Now was the time to assert himself again, to look his fear in the eyes and mock at it.

"Come along, whoever you are," he called, "and have a drink before you get back to hell. Something cooling. Drop of cold water, isn't it?"

Thick sweat had broken out on his forehead, and his hand on the door-knob shook as with ague as he stood there looking out on to the bright empty path. But he did not flinch from the lesson he was teaching himself. The seconds ticked away: he could count them from the pulse that hammered in his throat. "I'll give it a hundred beats," he said to himself, "and then I'll say good night to Mr. Nothing-at-all."

He counted his hundred, he gave ten beats more for good luck. "Good night, you old fraud," he said, and went in and secured the door.

It seemed indeed for the week that followed that he had rightly gauged the nature of the hallucination which had threatened to establish its awful dominion over him. Never once, whether by day or night, did there come to his ears that footfall which he feared and listened for, nor, if in the dead hours of the darkness he lay for a while between sleep and waking, did he quake with a sense that something unseen and aware was watching him. A little courage, a flat denial of his fears had been sufficient not only to scotch them, but to snuff out the manifestation which had caused them. He kept his thoughts well in hand, he would not even conjecture what had been the cause of that visitation. Occasionally, while it still vexed him, he had cast about for the origin of it, he had wondered whether that shrill Levantine hag calling curses on him could somehow have found root in his mind. But now it was past and done with: he would have a few days' remission from work, if it was overwork that had been at the bottom of it, at Christmas, and perhaps it would be prudent not to be quite so free with the club brandy.

On Christmas Eve he and his friends sat at their bridge till close on midnight, then lingered over a drink, wished each other seasonable greetings and dispersed. Cresswell hesitated as to whether he should not take a taxi home, for the object with which he had trudged back there so often seemed to be gained, and he no longer feared the recurrence of the step. But he thought he would just set the seal on his victory and went on foot.

He had come to the point in his walk where he had first heard the step. To-night, as usual, there was none, and he stopped a moment looking round him securely and serenely. It was a bright night, luminous with a moon a little after the full, and it amazed him to think that he had ever fashioned a terror to himself in this quiet, orderly street. From not far ahead there came the sound of the bells of the church saluting Christmas morning. They would have been holding their midnight Mass there. He breathed the night air with content, and throwing the butt of his spent cigar into the roadway, he walked on again.

With a sudden sinking of his heart, he heard behind him the step which he thought he had silenced for ever. It was faint at first, but to-night, instead of keeping at a uniform distance behind him, it was approaching. Louder and more crisp it sounded, until it was close to him. On and on it came, still gaining on him, and now there brushed by him, though not quite touching him, the figure of a man in European dress, with his head wrapped in a shawl.

"Hullo, you there," called Cresswell. "You're the skunk who's been following me, are you, and slipping out of sight again? No more of your damned conjuring tricks. Let's have a look at you."



The figure, now some two or three yards ahead of him, stopped at the sound of his voice and turned round. The shawl covered its face, but for a narrow chink between the edges.

"So you understand English," said Cresswell. "Now I'll thank you to take that shawl off your face, and let me see who it is that's been dogging me."

The man raised his hands and threw back the shawl. The moonlight shone on his face, and that face was just a slab of smooth yellowish flesh extending from ear to ear, empty as the oval of an egg without eyes or nose or mouth. From the upper edge of the shawl where it crossed the forehead there depended a few wisps of grey hair.

Cresswell looked, and a wave of panic fear submerged his very soul. He gave a little thin squeal and started to run, listening the while in an agony of terror to hear if the steps of that nameless, faceless, creature were following. He must run, he must run, to get away from that thing out of hell which had manifested itself.

Then close at hand he saw the lights of the church, and there perhaps he could find sanctuary from it. The door was open, and he sprang up the steps. Close by there were lights burning on the altar of a side chapel, and he flung himself on his knees. Not for years had he attempted to pray, and now in the agony of his soul he could but say in a gabbling whisper, "O my God: O my God." Over and over he said it.

By degrees some sort of self-control came back to him. There were holy images, there was a sacred picture above the altar, a smell of hallowing incense was in the air. Surely there was protection here, a power that would intervene between him and the terror of that face. A sort of tranquillity overscored his panic, and he began to look round.

The church was darker than it had been when he entered, and he saw that some of those cowed brown-habited men of the order were moving quietly about, quenching the lights. Those at the altar in front of which he knelt were still bright, and now he saw one of these cowed figures move up close to him, as if waiting for him to finish his devotions. He was calm now, his panic had quite passed, and he rose from his knees.

"I've had a terrible fright, Father," he said to the monk. "I saw something just now out in the street which must have come out of hell."

The figure turned a little towards him: the cowl concealed its face altogether, and the voice came muffled.

"Indeed, my son," he said. "Tell me what it is that frightened you."

Cresswell felt some backwash of his panic returning.

"A man passed me as I was going back to my house," he said, "and I told him to stop and let me have a look at him. He wore a shawl over his head and he threw it back. Oh, my God, that face!"

The monk quietly raised his hands and grasped the edges of his cowl. Then with a quick movement he threw it back.

"That sort of face?" he said.

---

# THE BED BY THE WINDOW

## *PROLOGUE*

My friend Lionel Bailey understands the works of Mr. Einstein, and he reads them with the rapt, thrilled attention that more ordinary people give to detective stories. He says they are so exciting that he cannot put them down: they make him late for dinner. It may be owing to this unusual mental conformation of his that he talks about time and space in a manner that is occasionally puzzling, for he thinks of them as something quite different from our accepted notions of them, and to-night, as we sat over my fire hearing a spring-gale of March bugling outside, and dashing solid sheets of rain against my window, I had found him very difficult to follow. But though he thinks in terms which the average man finds unintelligible, he is always ready (though with an effort) to quit the austere heights on which he naturally roams, and explain. And his explanations are often so lucid that the average man (I allude to myself) can generally get some idea of what he means. Just now he had made some extremely cryptic remark about the real dimensions of time, and of the palpable incorrectness of our conception of it; but rightly interpreting the moaning sound with which I received this, he very kindly came to my aid.

"You see, time, as we think of it," he said, "is a most meaningless convention. We talk of the future and the past as if they were opposite poles, whereas they are really the same. What we thought of as the future a minute ago or a century ago, we now see to be the past; the future is always in process of becoming the past. The two are the same, as I said just now, looked at from different points."

"But they aren't the same," said I, rather incautiously. "The future may become the past, but the past never becomes the future."

Lionel sighed.

"A most unfortunate remark," he said. "Why, the whole of the future is made up of the past; it entirely depends on it; the future consists of nothing else but the past."

I did see what he meant. There was no denying it, so I tried something else.

"A slippery slidey affair altogether," I said. "The future becomes the past, and the past the future. But luckily there's one firm spot in this welter, and that's the present. That's solid; there's nothing wrong with the present, is there?"

Lionel moved slightly in his chair—an indulgent, patient movement.

"Oh dear, oh dear," he said. "You've chosen as your firm, solid point the most shifting and unstable of all. What is the present? By the time you've said 'This is the present,' it has slid away into the past. The past has got some sort of real existence and we know that the future will blossom out of it. But the present hardly can be said to exist at all, for the moment you say that it is here, it has changed. It is far the most elusive part of the phantom which we call Time. It is the door, that is the most that can be said for it, through which the future passes into the past. And somehow, though it scarcely exists, we can see from it into the past and into the future."

I felt I could venture to contradict that.

"Thank heaven we can't," I said. "It would be the ultimate terror to be able to see into the future. It's bad enough sometimes to be able to remember the past."

He shook his head.

"But we can see into the future," he said. "The future is entirely evolved out of the past, and if we knew everything about the past, we should equally know everything about the future. Everything that happens is merely a fresh link in the chain of unalterable consequences. The little we know about the solar system, for instance, makes it a certainty that the sun will rise to-morrow."

"Oh, that kind of thing," said I. "Just material, mathematical deductions."

"No, all kinds of things. For instance, I'm sure you know the certainty that we all have now and then that somebody

present is about to say some particular definite sentence. A few seconds pass, and then out it comes precisely as we had known it would. That's not so material and mathematical. It's a little instance of a very big thing called clairvoyance."

"I know what you mean," I said. "But it may be some trick of the brain. It isn't a normal experience."

"Everything is normal," said Lionel. "Everything depends on some rule. We only call things abnormal when we don't know what the rule is. Then there are mediums: mediums constantly see into the future, and to some extent everyone is a medium: we've all had glimpses."

He paused a moment.

"And there is such a simple explanation," he said. "You see, we're all existing in eternity, though just for the span of our lifetime we're also existing in Time. But there's eternity outside Time: Time is a sort of mist lying round us. Now and then the mist clears, and then—how shall I express anything so simple?—then we look down on Time, like a little speck of an island below us, quite clear, future and past and present, and lawfully small. We get just a glimpse, no more, and then the mist closes round us again. But on these occasions we can see into the future just as clearly as we can look into the past, and we can see not only those who have passed outside the mist of material phenomena, whom we call ghosts, but the future or the past of those who are still inside it. They all appear to us then as they are in eternity, where there is neither past nor future."

I suddenly found that my grip on what he was saying was beginning to give way.

"That's enough for one night," said I flippantly. "The future is the past, and the past is the future, and there isn't any present, and ghosts may come from what has happened or what will happen. I should like to see a ghost out of the future.... And as you've had a whisky and soda in the immediate past, I feel sure you will have one in the immediate future, as it's the same thing. Say when."

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I was off into the country next day in order to make amends for a couple of months of wilful idleness in London by hermitizing myself in a small village on the coast of Norfolk, where I knew nobody, and where, I was credibly informed, there was nothing to do; I should thus have to work in order to get through the hours of the day. There was a house there, kept by a man and his wife who took in lodgers, and there I proposed to plant myself till I had got through these criminal arrears. Mr. Hopkins had been a butler, and his wife a cook, and—so I was told by a friend who had made trial of their ministrations—they made their inmates extremely comfortable. There were a couple of other folk, Mr. Hopkins had written to me, now staying in the house, and he regretted he could not give me a sitting-room to myself. But he could provide me with a big double bedroom, where there was ample room for a writing-table and my books. That was good enough.

Hopkins had ordered a car to convey me from the nearest railway-station, six miles distant, to Faringham, and a little before sunset, on a bright windy day of March, I came to the village. Though I had certainly never been here before, I had some odd sense of remote familiarity with it, and I supposed I must have seen and forgotten some hamlet which was like it. There was just one street lined with fishermen's houses, built of rounded flints, with nets hung up to dry on the walls of small plots in front, and a few miscellaneous shops. We passed through the length of this, and came at the end to a much bigger, three-storied house, at the gate of which we stopped. A spacious square of garden separated it from the road, with espaliered pear-trees bordering the path that led to the front door; beyond flat open country stretched away to the horizon, intersected with big dykes and ditches, across which I could see, a mile distant, a line of white shingle where lay the sea. My arrival was hooted on the motor-horn, and Hopkins, a prim dark spare man, came out to see to my luggage. His wife was waiting inside, and she took me up to my room.

Certainly it would do very well: there were two windows commanding a view of the marsh eastwards, in one of which was set a big writing-table. A fire sparkled on the hearth, two beds stood in opposite angles of the room, one near the second window, the other by the fireplace, in front of which was a large arm-chair. This arm-chair had a footstool, under the table was a waste-paper basket, and on it one of those old-fashioned but convenient contrivances which show the day of the month and the day of the week, with pegs to adjust them. Everything had been thought out for comfort, everything looked spotlessly clean and cared-for, and at once I felt myself at home here.

"But what a charming room, Mrs. Hopkins," I said. "It's just what I want."

She moved away from the door as I spoke, to let her husband enter with my bags. She gave him one swift ugly look, and I found myself thinking, "How she dislikes him!" But the impression was momentary, and having elected to sleep in the bed by the fireplace, I went downstairs with her for a cup of tea, while her husband unpacked for me.

When I came up again the unpacking was over, and all my effects disposed, clothes laid in drawers and cupboards, and my books and papers neatly stacked on the table. There was no settling down to be done; I had stepped into possession of this pleasant room as if I had long lived and worked in it. Then my eye fell on the little adjustable contrivance on the table for displaying the current date, and I saw that this one detail had escaped the vigilance of my hosts, for it marked Tuesday, May 8th, instead of the true date, Thursday, March 22nd. I was rather pleased to observe that the Hopkinses were not too perfect, and after twisting the record back to the correct date I instantly settled down to work, for there was nothing to get used to before I felt at home.

A plain and excellent dinner was served some three hours later, and I found that one of my fellow-guests was an elderly sepulchral lady with a genteel voice who spoke but rarely and then about the weather. She had by her on the table a case of Patience cards and a bottle of medicine. She took a dose of the latter before and after her meal, and at once retired to the common sitting-room, where that night and every night she played long sad games of Patience. The other was a ruddy young man who confided to me that he was making a study of the minute fresh-water fleas that infest fresh-water snails, for which daily he dragged the dykes. He had been so fortunate as to find a new species which would undoubtedly be called *Pulex Dodsoniana* in his honour. Hopkins waited on us with soft velvet-footed attention, and his wife brought in the admirable fruits of her kitchen. Once there was some slight collision of crockery in her tray, and happening to look up I saw the glance he gave her. It was not mere dislike that inspired it, but some quiet, deadly hatred. Dinner over, I went in for a few minutes to the sitting-room, where the sepulchral lady was sitting down to her Patience and Mr. Dodson to his microscope, and very soon betook myself upstairs to resume my work.

The room was pleasantly warm, my things laid out for the night, and for a couple of hours I busied and buried myself. Then the door of the room, without any enquiry of knocking, silently opened, and Mrs. Hopkins stood there. She gave a little gasp of dismay as she saw me.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir," she said. "I quite forgot; so stupid of me. But this is the room my husband and I usually occupy, if it is not being used. So forgetful of me."

I awoke next morning after long traffic with troubled, nonsensical dreams to find the sun pouring in at the windows as Hopkins drew up the blinds. I thought that Mr. Dodson had come in to show me a collection of the diamond-shaped fleas that battened on Patience cards, or, rather, that would be hatched on Tuesday, May 8th, for, as he pointed out, there were none there now since the present had no existence. And then Hopkins, who had been bending over the bed by the window, apologized for being in my room, and explained that he could hate his wife more intensely here: he hoped that I had not been disturbed by him. Then there was the crack of some explosion, which resolved itself into the rattle of the up-going blind, and there indeed he was.... I was soon out of bed and dressing, but somehow that farrago of dream-stuff concocted out of actual experience, hung about me. I could not help feeling that there was significance in it, if I could only find the clue. It did not, as is usual with dreams, fade and evaporate with my waking; it seemed to retreat into hidden caves and recesses of my brain and wait in ambush there till it was called out.

Then my eye fell on the date-recorder on my table, and I saw with surprise that it still registered Tuesday, May 8th, though I would have been willing to swear that last night I had adjusted it to the correct date. And with that surprise was mingled a faint and rather uncomfortable misgiving, and involuntarily I asked myself *what* Tuesday, *what* May 8th was indicated there. Was it some day in past years, or in years yet to come? I knew that such a question was an outrage on common sense; probably I imagined that I had screwed the cylinders back to the present, but had not actually done so. But now I felt that this date referred to some event that had happened or was to happen. It recorded the past, or ... was it like a railway-signal suddenly hoisted at night at some wayside station? The line lay empty, but presently out of the darkness would come a yell and a roar from the approaching train.... This time, anyhow, there should be no mistake, and I knew that I moved the date back again.

The days passed slowly at first, as is their wont in new surroundings, and then began to move with ever-accelerating speed as I settled into an industrious routine. I worked all morning, turned myself unwillingly out of doors for a couple of hours in the afternoon, and worked again after tea and once more till round about midnight. My task prospered, I was

well, and the house most comfortable, but all the time there was some instinct bidding me leave the place, or, since I successfully resisted that, to get through with my work as soon as might be and be gone. That strong tonic air of the coast often made me drowsy when I came in, and I would slip from my desk into the big arm-chair and sleep for a while. But always after these short recuperative naps, I would wake with a start, feeling that Hopkins had come silently into the room as I slept, and in some inexplicable panic of mind I would wheel round, dreading to see him. Yet it was not, if I may so express it, his bodily presence which I feared, but some psychical phantom of him, which had sinister business on hand in this room. His thoughts were here—was that it?—something in him that hated and schemed. That business was not concerned with me; I seemed to be but a spectator waiting for the curtain to rise on some grim drama. Then, as this confused and fearful moment of waking passed, the horror slipped away, not dispersing exactly, but concealing itself and ready to emerge again.

Yet all the time the routine of the well-ordered house went smoothly on. Hopkins was busy with his jobs, doing much of the housework, and valeting and waiting at table; his wife continued to ply her admirable skill in the kitchen. Sometimes its door would be open, as I went upstairs after dinner, and I had a glimpse of them as I passed, sitting friendly at their supper. Indeed, I began to wonder whether that gleam of dislike on the one side and of sheer hate on the other which I fancied I had seen was not a fiction of my own mind, for if it was real there would surely be some betrayal of the truth, a voice raised in anger, and a sudden shrill answer. But there was none; quietly and efficiently the two went about their work, and sometimes late at night I could hear them pass to the attic-floor above, where they slept. A few footsteps would sound muffled overhead, and then there was silence, till, early in the morning, I, half-awake, heard the discreet movements begin again, and soft footfalls pass my door on their way downstairs.

This room of mine, where for three weeks now I had been so prosperously at work, was growing a haunted and a terrible place to me. Never once had I seen in it anything outside the ordinary, nor heard any sound that betokened another presence except my own and that of the flapping flames on the hearth, and I told myself that it was I, or, more exactly, my fanciful sense of the unseen and the unheard that was troubling me and causing this ghostly invasion. Yet the room itself had a share in it too, for downstairs, or out in the windy April day, or even just outside the door of the room, I was wholly free of this increasing obsession. Something had happened here which had left its mark not on material things, and which was imperceptible to the organs of sight and hearing, the effect of which was trickling not merely into my brain but filtering through it into the very source of life. Yet the explanation that a phantom was arising out of the past would not wholly fit, for whatever this haunting was, it was getting nearer, and though its lineaments were not yet visible, they were forming with greater distinctness below the veil that hid them. It was establishing touch with me, as if it was some denizen of a remote world that reached across time and space, and was already laying its fingers on me, and it took advantage of small physical happenings in that room to encompass me with its influence. For instance, when one evening I was brushing my hair before dinner, a white featureless face peered over my shoulder, and then, with an arrested shudder, I saw that this was only the reflection of the oval looking-glass on the ceiling. Or, as I lay in bed, before putting out my light, a puff of wind came in through the open sash, making the striped curtain to belly, and before I could realize the physical cause of it, there was a man in striped pyjamas bending over the bed by the window. Or a wheeze of escaping gas came from the coals on the hearth, and to my ears it sounded like a strangled gasp of someone in the room. Something was at work, using the trivial sounds and sights for its own ends, kneading away in my brain to make it ready and receptive for the revelation it was preparing for it. It worked very cleverly, for the morning after the curtain had shaped itself into the pyjamaed figure bending over the other bed, Hopkins, when he called me, apologized for his attire. He had overslept himself, and in order not to delay further, had come down in a coat over his striped pyjamas. Another night the breeze lifted the cretonne covering that lay over the bed by the window, inflating it into the shape of a body there. It stirred and turned before it was deflated again, and it was just then that the coal on the hearth gasped and choked.

But by now my work was completed; I had determined not to yield to the fear of any strange and troubling fancies until that was done, and to-night, very late, I scrawled a dash across the page below the final words, and added the date. I sat back in my chair, yawning and tired and pleased that I was now free to go back to London next day. For nearly a week now I had been the only lodger in the house, and I reflected how natural it was that, diving into myself all day over my work, and seeing nobody, I had been creating phantoms, to keep me company. Idly enough, my glance lighted on the record of the day of the week and the month, and I saw that once more it showed Tuesday, May 8th.... Next moment I perceived that my eyes had played me false; they had visualized something that was inside my brain, for a second glance told me that the day indicated there was indeed Tuesday, but April 24th.

"Certainly it's time I went away," I said to myself.

The fire was out, and the room rather cold. Feeling very sleepy, and also very content that I had finished my task, I undressed quickly, not troubling to open the window by the other bed. But the curtains were undrawn and the blind was up, and the last thing I saw before I went to sleep was a narrow slip of moonlight on the floor.

I awoke, at any rate I thought I awoke. The moonlight had broadened to a thick oblong patch, very bright. The bed beyond it was in shadow, but clearly visible, and I saw that there was someone sleeping there. And there was someone standing at the foot of the bed, a man in striped pyjamas. He took a couple of steps across the patch of moonlight, and then swiftly thrusting his arms forward, he bent over the bed. The figure that lay there moved: the knees shot up, and an arm came out from beneath the coverlet. The bed creaked and shuddered with the struggle that was going on, but the man held tight to what he was grasping. He jumped on to the bed, crushing the knees flat again, and over his shoulder I saw and recognized the face of the woman who lay there. Once she got her neck free from the stranglehold and I heard a long straining gasp for breath. Then the man's fingers found their place again: once more the bed shook as with the quivering of leaves in a wind, and after that all was still.

The man got up; he stood for a moment in the patch of moonlight, wiping the sweat from his face, and I could see him clearly. And then I knew that I was sitting up in bed, looking out into the familiar room. It was bright with the big patch of moonlight that lay on the floor, and empty and quiet. There was the other bed with its cretonne covering, flat and tidy.

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The sequel is probably familiar to most people as the Faringham murder. On the morning of May 8 according to the account given by Hopkins to the police, he came downstairs as usual from the attic where he had slept about half-past seven, and found that the lock of the front door of his house had been forced, and the door was open. His wife was not yet down, and he went upstairs to the room on the first floor where they often slept together, when it was not being used by their guests, and found her lying strangled in her bed. He instantly rang up the police and also the doctor, though he felt sure she was dead, and while waiting for them observed that a drawer of the table, in which she was accustomed to keep the money she had in the house, had been broken open. She had been to the bank the day before and cashed a cheque for fifty pounds, in order to pay the bills of last month, and the notes were missing. He had seen her place them in the drawer when she brought them back. Questioned as to his having slept in the attic, while his wife had slept alone below, he said that this room had been lately occupied, and would be occupied again in a few days; he had not therefore thought it worth while to move down, though his wife had done so.

But there were two weak points in this story. The first was that the woman had been strangled as she lay in bed, full length, with the blankets and sheet over her. But if the supposed burglar had throttled her, because she had been awakened by his entrance, and threatened to raise the alarm, it seemed incredible that she should have remained lying there with the bedclothes up to her chin. Again, though the drawer into which she had put her money had been forced, it had not been locked. The burglar had only got to pull the handle of it, and it would have opened. Hopkins was detained, and the house searched, and the missing roll of notes was found in the lining of an old great-coat of his in the attic. Before he suffered the extreme penalty, he confessed his crime and told the manner of its execution. He had come down from his bedroom, entered his wife's room and strangled her. He had then forced the front door from outside, and, unnecessarily, the drawer where she had put her money.... Reading it, I thought of Lionel Bailey's theory, and my own experience in the room where the murder was committed.

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## JAMES LAMP

Mr. John Storely, bachelor, of middle-age, and very comfortable circumstances, had lately retired from his extensive practice in London, while still in sound health and activity, for, as he justly remarked, what was the good of keeping in harness till you were too old and infirm to enjoy a well-earned leisure. He still spent most of the year in town, for he was of sociable habits, and the country, so he thought, was a very dreary place for a single man, who neither hunted nor shot, from the time when the autumn leaves began to fall until spring had definitely established itself again. There were fogs and darkness, it was true, in London, but there were also gas-lamps and pavements, and a walk along lighted streets to his club, where he would find a rubber of bridge before dinner was infinitely preferable to a tramp in dim and dripping country lanes, and the return again to his house at Trench, a small country-town at the edge of the Romney Marsh, where he would spend a solitary evening. Winter days in the country closed in early, a servant came round and drew the curtain, and then you were shut up in your box till morning, whereas in London there were many friends about, and pleasant dinners at home or abroad, amusements of all sorts ready to hand. As for going to some winter resort like the Riviera, the thought was anathema to him. People went to the Riviera to get sunshine and all they got was blizzards and possibly pneumonia. London, to his mind, was the ideal place in which to spend the winter.

He had therefore arranged his life on these lines. His delightful little house down at Trench was in the hands of a caretaker and his wife from November till April; during the late spring and earlier autumn Storely was often down there for a week or a week-end, and then Mr. and Mrs. Lamp looked after him, she as cook with housemaid's help got in from the town, and her husband as general manservant. When summer arrived he moved his London household down there for four or five solid months, while the caretakers took charge of his house in London. Like a sensible man, he knew that a motor, now that he had no rounds of professional visits to pay, was a mere encumbrance in town, and accordingly he left his car at Trench throughout the winter.

He had bought this house some three years ago, just before he retired, and I had often been down to stay with him for these week-ends of spring and autumn, and for longer periods during the summer. It stood half-way down one of those steep, cobbled streets for which Trench is famous, and was the most adorable establishment. Three small gables of timber and rough-cast faced the road, and from the front it seemed rather shut in, but once inside, it opened out into a dignified and spacious privacy. There was a little panelled hall with an oak staircase leading up to the first floor, and on each side of it a big ceiling-beamed room with wide open fireplace, and all looked out at the back on to a full acre of unexpected lawn and garden, screened by high red brick walls from the intrusion of neighbouring eyes. He had done the house up with due regard for its picturesque antiquity but with an equal regard for all possible demands of modern comfort: electric light was most conveniently installed, central heating supplemented the log-burning, open hearths, and the three big bedrooms on the first floor had each its own bathroom. Just as perfect were the ministrations of the care-taking couple when Storely went down for the shorter periods of his sojourn, Lamp, deft and silent-footed, and his wife, mostly invisible in her kitchen, manifesting her presence there by the most admirable meals. One saw her occasionally when she came up after breakfast to submit to Storely her proposed caterings for the day, a handsome, high-coloured woman, with a hard smart air about her, and considerably younger than her husband; sometimes one met her in the town with her marketing-basket, and many smiles and ribands.

I was engaged in the spring of this year to spend a week at Easter with my friend. A few days before I met him in the card-room at the club, and we cut into a table of bridge together. After a couple of rubbers we cut out again, and he beckoned me aside to a remote corner, where we could talk privately.

"Upsetting news from Trench yesterday morning," he said. "A couple of days ago Mrs. Lamp, my caretaker's wife; do you remember her?"

"Indeed, I do," said I.

"Well, she disappeared, and has not been seen since. She used often to take long walks in the country by herself when the two were alone there in the winter, and a couple of days ago she appears to have started for one, as was quite usual with her, but when the evening closed in and it had got dark she had not returned. Lamp behaved very sensibly and properly: he went to a house or two in the town where his wife sometimes visited, but no one had seen her, and about eleven o'clock that night, now feeling very uneasy, he went to the police-station, and told the inspector that she was still missing. They telephoned to various villages in the neighbourhood, and to wayside stations on the line, but got no news of her; beyond that there was nothing more that could be done that night. Morning came, but there was still no sign of her,

and Lamp telephoned to me to say what had happened. I went down there after breakfast this morning, and he disclosed to me a state of things of which I had no suspicion at all."

"A man?" I asked.

"Yes; the foreman in some builder's establishment in Hastings. Lamp and his wife had had words about him before, and a fortnight ago, in consequence of what he had seen, he had told the man he mustn't set foot in the house again, but he had been seen in Trench on the day that his wife disappeared. All this Lamp told me, but he had not mentioned it to the police, since naturally he did not want scandal to get about. But now, when his wife disappeared, it seemed to us that it was necessary to let the police know, in case she had gone to him, and I sent for the inspector and told him about it. He made enquiries in Hastings, but nothing could be heard about her. The foreman admitted that he had been in Trench that day, but said he had not seen her. He admitted also, when he was closely questioned, that he and Mrs. Lamp had agreed that she should leave her husband and come to live with him. They intended to marry if Lamp would divorce her."

"And how is Lamp taking it?" I asked.

"My own opinion is that he will be much happier without her. He believes that she has gone to this foreman, though why, if she has, they should try to make a secret about it, it is impossible to say. But that is his firm conviction. The two, so Lamp told me, have had a horrible time of it this winter, and if she was never heard of again I don't think he would be sorry. She certainly has made their life together a wretched business."

"But at present there's no clue as to what has happened to her?" I asked.

"Absolutely none. The police expect loss of memory and sense of identity, as they always do when anyone disappears, and they're keeping an eye on this man in Hastings. It was painful to hear Lamp tell the story of all this, but he did it very frankly, and they're convinced that he has told all he knows. Apparently there is quite sufficient evidence for him to get his divorce, and if she tries to come back to him again, he means to do it."

Storely got up.

"I thought I would just tell you," he said, "for we'll go down there as arranged the day after to-morrow. Lamp says he can get a woman from Trench to come in and cook, and like a sensible fellow he wants to get back to work again. Far the best thing for him to do."

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So we went down together as had been settled: Trench looked more attractive and idyllic than ever in this sudden burst of spring and warm April weather. Its red-brick houses climbing up the hill glowed in the mellow sunshine, its gardens were gay with fresh leaf and blossom. In the reclaimed marsh-land outside, the hawthorn hedges were in bud, innumerable lambs bleated and gambolled over the meadows, and the woods in the country round about were tapestried with primroses and anemone and curled bracken-shoots. It is a land of greenness and streams and slow rivers wending over the levels to the sea: on the east side of the small town the Roop wanders along under the steep hills, on the west side the bigger Inglis sweeps widely past the south of the town and joins the other. Half-way down this western slope of the hill was Storely's house, looking out on to the narrow cobbled street lined with gabled cottages. At the bottom of it, not fifty yards from his door stand granaries and warehouses on the banks of the River Inglis, up which, at high tide, vessels of considerable tonnage can come to anchor and discharge their freights. The road to Hastings passes along this bank, then crosses the river by a bridge, at the side of which are sluice-gates to be opened or shut to let through or limit the tide.

We strolled out after tea on the day of our arrival, Storely and I, across this bridge. The tide was low, and one could see how deeply the flows and ebbs of the water had scooped out, below the sluice, great holes lined with soft shining mud, while others deeper yet were still undiscovered. From there we strolled into a path leading across the daisied meadows of the marsh and bordered by dykes still brimming with the winter rains and fringed with the new growth of the reeds that pricked up through the dead raffle of last year. The sun was low to its setting, and now after this hot day skeins of mist were beginning to form over the level in the chill of the evening, shallow at present but so opaque that at a little distance they appeared like sheets of grey flood-water through which stood up the trunks of the scattered thorn-trees. Then turning we set our faces towards Trench, the topmost houses of which, set on the hill, still glowed in the sunlight



though now on this lower land we walked in the shadow. As we crossed the bridge over the Inglis the mist had formed very thick upon the river, and like a tide had crept across the quay-side, and out in the Channel fog-horns were mooring. We stepped briskly across the vapourous lake to the foot of the steep cobbled street, half-way up which stood Storely's house. The pavement was narrow, not giving room for two to walk abreast, and I fell behind him. Just here there joined this street on our right a narrow footway faced with houses leading round to the south face of the hill, and as we passed this, I saw there was a woman standing there. Her back was towards me, and she was looking up the street in the direction of Storely's house. He was a few paces ahead of me, and as I came directly opposite her she turned, and I felt sure that her face was familiar to me though for the moment I could not recollect who she was. Then close on the heels of that came recognition, and I knew that she was Mrs. Lamp. It was dusk, it was misty and I could not see her face very precisely, but I had no doubt of her identity.

I took a few quick steps forward, and touched Storely on the shoulder.

"Turn round," I said quietly, "and have a look at that woman standing at the corner just below. See if you recognize her!"

He turned, peering into the dusk.

"But I don't see any woman at all," he said. "There's no one there."

I turned also, and even as Storely had said, she was no longer there. I ran back to the corner where the footpath joined the street, and there she was moving up it away from us. I beckoned to him, pointing up this footway.

"But what's all this about?" he asked.

"I want you to see her," said I. "She's walking up that path. Be quick, or she'll have gone."

He laughed.

"But I really can't go in pursuit of women in the dusk about the streets of Trench," he said. "Who is it that you want me to identify?"

"I feel sure it's Mrs. Lamp," I answered.

Instantly he joined me.

"What? Mrs. Lamp?" he said in a changed voice. "Where? That woman ahead there? I'll soon see."

I waited at the corner while he went quickly after her. They both passed out of sight round a bend in the footpath. In a couple of minutes he returned.

"I lost sight of her somehow," he said. "She must have turned into one of those houses there, though I didn't see her do so. Are you sure it was she?"

"No: that's why I wanted you to see her. But if it wasn't she, it was somebody most extraordinarily like her."

He thought a moment.

"I think we had better not say anything either to Lamp or the police at present," he said. "We're not certain enough, for it's dusk, and after all you've only seen her a few times before. But if it is she, you may depend upon it that someone else will see her. We shall soon know."

Lamp was in the sitting-room when we got to the house. It was already chilly, and he had just put a match to the fire of logs and brushwood on the hearth, had turned the lights on, and was now drawing the curtains; I thought he peered oddly and intently up and down the street before he pulled the heavy folds across the windows. Somehow the sight (or so I believed) of the missing woman, had roused an uneasy feeling in my mind, but how utterly illogical and senseless that was. For if it was she, all fear of her having come to some ill end was over, while if it was not she, there could be nothing unsettling in having seen some other woman who strangely reminded me of her. But it was odd, it was also regrettable that Storely had lost sight of her like that. If he had only had one decent look at her, the question would have been settled.

We spent a quiet evening, playing a rather serious game of chess after dinner. About ten o'clock, while the game was still

in progress, Lamp brought in a tray of water and spirits, and while he was in the room there came a soft tapping, very light, against the low diamond-paned window behind the curtain, looking out onto the street. At the moment he was pouring some whisky into a glass, and looking up, I saw he had paused as if listening.

"What was that tapping?" asked Storely absently, as he considered his move.

"A butterfly, sir," said Lamp. "I saw one fluttering about the window when I drew the curtains this evening."

"Must have been encouraged to come out after the winter by this hot sun," said Storely. "That's all we shall want, Lamp. You can go to bed: I'll put out the lights."

Lamp left us, Storely made his move, and as I was considering mine the soft tapping came again. He rose and went to the window.

"It sounded just as if someone was tapping at the pane from outside," he said.

He parted the curtain and looked out. There was silence for a moment.

"Just come here," he said to me.

The light from inside the room as he drew the curtain back cast a field of illumination into the street, and outside looking into the window was the figure of a woman. I could see her face clearly, and it was certainly that of her whom I had seen that evening in the flesh as we returned from our walk. She looked at Storely, then at me, and then between us into the room behind as if she was wanting somebody but not one of us.

"Stop there and watch her," said Storely to me, and he went out into the hall, and I heard him unlock the front door. The woman turned at the sound, and moved away from the window into the darkness. I heard Storely's step on the pavement outside, and he beckoned and called to me through the window. "She's gone," he said. "Did you see which way she went?"

"I think down the hill," I said, and I heard his steps following her. I went out after him into the street. It was an exceedingly dark night and misty: I could not see more than a few yards in any direction. The light in the hall shone out of the open door, and I saw also that at the top of the house was a lit window against which was framed a man's head. Lamp had evidently gone up to bed, and, hearing the sound of Storely's voice in the street, was looking out. In a few minutes I heard Storely's returning steps.

"Come in," he said, "I lost her at once, for the fog is fearfully thick at the bottom of the hill."

He closed the door, and we sat down again on either side of our chess-board. Though the game was only half over he began putting the pieces back in the box.

"What am I to do?" he said. "There's no doubt who it was. But why is she here, and why does she come at night and tap at the window and then make off again? Did you see her looking between us as if she wanted somebody else? And if it's Lamp she wants, why doesn't she come and ask for him? Anyhow I must go round to the police station in the morning to tell them they needn't make any further enquiries about her, as she has certainly been seen. They aren't concerned about her connubial affairs, but only about her disappearance, and now that we're sure she's alive there's nothing more for them to investigate. Hullo, I've scrapped our game." He stared into the smouldering embers of the fire for a moment in silence, then wheeled round to me.

"It's all rather odd," he said. "I've no doubt it is she; absolutely none. But why did she come here at all, if it was only to sheer off again in that mysterious way? I wonder if by any chance Lamp has seen her? Surely he would have told me if he had."

Even as he spoke the door opened and Lamp came in.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but I had just gone up to bed when I heard you go out and call from the street. I came down to see if you were wanting anything."

Storely pointed to the window.

"Your wife was standing outside there a few minutes ago," he said. "I went out to see what she was doing here."

I was watching Lamp closely now, for an idea, wild and fantastic no doubt, had entered my head. He was standing by the electric light, and I saw sudden beads of perspiration break out on his forehead, and his lips moved as if for speech, but no words came. But he quickly recovered himself.

"Indeed, sir?" he said. "And may I ask if you got speech with her?"

"No, she disappeared in the fog before I could come up with her. But you can dismiss from your mind now any fear that some accident has happened to her. I shall go round to the police-station in the morning, and tell them they need not continue their search for her."

"Thank you very much, sir," said Lamp. "But I was never really afraid of that. I always thought that she had gone off with that man of hers.... And there's another thing, sir, if you wouldn't mind my mentioning it. I'll get all her clothes and bits of things ready packed for her, if it's that she's hanging about for, but I hope you won't allow her into the house again after what she's done."

"No, that's reasonable," said Storely, "I won't let her bother you if I can help it. You haven't seen her I suppose?"

Again I watched Lamp. I saw him gulp in his throat before he spoke, and moisten his lips.

"No, sir, and I don't want to," he said.

Storely nodded.

"That's all then, Lamp," he said. "I'll go to the police to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir," said Lamp again. "Of course it's a great relief to me to learn that she's come to no bodily harm."

"But you said you weren't afraid of that," said Storely.

"I wasn't, sir," he said. "But it's another thing to be certain of it."

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Now Storely, like most people accounted sensible, both distrusts and despises all theories that admit the existence of occult and unexplained phenomena. So I did not say anything to him about the notion which had entered my head, and which proved, when I had got to bed, to be very uncomfortably established there. In a word, I did not believe that the woman we had both seen was the living and material presentment of Lamp's wife. I believed that it was some bodiless phantom of her, and that Lamp also had seen her, and that he knew it was not her actual bodily presence we had all beheld. He had seen, I felt sure, what we had seen, and was terrified of it. His explanation and suggestion were certainly plausible enough; he would pack up her clothes and have them ready, and it was natural that he did not want her to come inside the house at all. But it was not the thought of that which made the sweat to stand on his forehead, and his throat to gulp, but something very different. The thought haunted me: often I half dropped off to sleep, but as many times I woke again with the sense that there was something creeping up to the house, like the fog that was now thick outside my window, and seeking admittance. And often in these awakenings, I heard from the room above, which was Lamp's, a soft footfall going backwards and forwards. It went to the window, and then I heard the creak of the opening sash: then the window was closed again, and the blind drawn down over it. But towards morning I slept more soundly, and woke to find him already in my room, deftly putting out my clothes.

Storely went off to the police-station directly after breakfast. He had told Lamp to bring the car round from the garage which adjoined the house, for we were to spend the day on the links. The fog had quite cleared under a breath of north wind, the morning was of a crystalline brightness, and while waiting for Storely I strolled down the street and out on to the river-side. In this radiant day of spring I almost thought that my uneasy imaginings were but nightmare notions, and unreal as dreams. Certainly they had left the surface of my conscious mind, and I cared little whether they had dispersed altogether or were lurking in the shadows within, so long as they did not trouble me.... When I got back to the house the car was standing at the door, and casually glancing into it, as I passed, I thought I saw that huddled up on the back seat was sprawling the figure of a woman. The impression was absolutely momentary for at once it restored itself into a

medley of coat and rug with a patch of oval sunlight for a face. A good lesson, thought I, of the tricks the imagination can play, for clearly this was a piece of that nightmare stuff which had been troubling me, and which had no existence in fact.

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It was dusk when we drew up at the door again that evening after a salubrious day in the open. A tranquil, pleasant fatigue possessed me: I looked forward to my bath and my dinner, and cosy fireside hours before bedtime. Storely had passed into the house, leaving the front door open, and I lingered at the threshold a minute, watching Lamp back the car into the garage. As I stood there, I felt something brush by me, and pass invisibly into the house. Simultaneously I heard Storely's voice from the hall inside call out, "Hullo, what's that?" I came in, shutting the door.

"What was it?" I asked.

"I don't know. I was reading my letters at the table, when something brushed by me, and I thought it was you. But there was nothing to be seen. The door into the sitting-room swung open and closed again. Where's Lamp?"

"He's putting the car into the garage," I said.

"But something did go in there," he said. "Turn on the light."

I found the switch and turned it, and the dark room leaped into brightness. But it was quite empty.

"Odd," he said. "It must have been a draught. But it felt more solid than that."

"It brushed by me, too, as I stood in the doorway," I said.

"Of course it was a draught then," he said. "Strong eddies of air often come up this narrow street. I will shut them all out."

We drew our chairs up near the fire, for the evening had turned chilly again. I had looked forward to this drowsy hour, with the evening paper to glance at, and a book to doze over, but instead I found myself eagerly alert. But I could not give my attention to my book because something was going on far more arresting than anything which the world of books could contain. It was no subjective unrest that kept me thus on wires; it was that the whole of my mind was waiting for something quite outside myself to develop, and it, whatever it was, was in the room. It watched, it moved about, it waited, and now the air was growing misty, and I supposed that the fog had formed again outside, and was leaking in. But when I went up to dress I looked out from my bedroom window, and saw that the sky overhead was full of bright-burning stars, and that the street below, though dark, was so clear that I could see the dew which had fallen and lay on the cobbles shimmering in the starlight.

During dinner I noticed that Storely as well as I was observing Lamp. The man was evidently not himself, ordinarily deft-handed and silent-footed, he clattered with his dishes, and when he stood waiting for us to eat our course he kept glancing uneasily round. At the end of the dinner, as he poured out a glass of port for his master, he made some awkward jerk with his hand, and upset it. An impatient exclamation was on the tip of Storely's tongue, but he checked it.

"Anything the matter, Lamp?" he asked, as he mopped up the spilt wine. "Aren't you well?"

"No, sir, I'm right enough," he said. "But it's queer how the house is full of fog. The kitchen: why you can hardly see across it."

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Presently we were back in the sitting-room where the chess-board was already set. The woman who came in to cook did not sleep in the house, and soon I heard the tapping of her steps down the flagged kitchen passage, and the opening and shutting of the back door: then came the sound of Lamp locking and bolting it. During the next hour, while our game was in progress, he must have come into the room half a dozen times: his hands trembled as he swept up the hearth, his face was ashen, and it was evident that he was in a state of acute nervous tension, and made any excuse to himself for coming into the room instead of biding alone in the kitchen. Finally, Storely told him that we wanted nothing more that night, and

that he could get to bed. But we heard him moving about the house overhead, and when an hour later we finished our game, and went upstairs, he was still astir in the room above me.

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I got to bed and instantly fell asleep, and woke again with the faint light of early dawn shining in through the window, knowing that some noise had aroused me. There was the sound of steps coming from the floor above, and they passed my door, and went on downstairs into the hall. I got out of bed, turned on my light and went to the door and opened it. But not a yard could I see in front of me, so dense was the fog that filled the passage. Yet somebody—were there not the steps of two people?—had just passed quickly by as if it was full daylight. Then suddenly from below came the sound of voices and with a thrill of nameless horror I heard that one of them was the voice of a woman.

"So now you've got to come with me, James Lamp," it said, "and take me where you took me before. You'll drive me down in the car, as you drove me before, and you'll come down into the water where you threw me, and I'll be waiting for you there, so close and loving."

Then came the other voice. It was Lamp's voice, and it rose to a scream as it spoke.

"No, no," he cried. "No, not that. I won't come. I tell you. Ah, take your hand off me: it's hot as fire, and I can't bear it."

"Come on then obediently," said the other. "It's cool in the water."

The door of Storely's room, just opposite mine, opened. I heard him click on the switch in the passage, and very faintly above our heads, in the dense air, there shone out white but hardly luminous the electric light from the ceiling.

"Ah, you've heard it, too," he said, seeing me. "What is it? What's happening? There were voices, and a yell.... And then the front door opened and shut again. Come down!"

We groped our way along the passage, but on the stairs it was absolutely pitch dark. There was a switch somewhere there, but he could not find it, and he went back to his room to get a box of matches. With the help of that light he got hold of the switch, but even so we had to proceed with shuffling steps, so dense was the fog. We crossed the hall, and after fumbling at the front door, he threw it open, and there came in the faint clear light of the dawn. Even as we stood on the threshold the motor emerged from the garage close by, and I saw that by the side of Lamp, who drove it, there sat a woman. It turned and went swiftly down the street towards the river.

"But, good God, what's happening?" cried Storely. "That's Lamp. But where is he going? And who was that woman with him. Couldn't you see?"

And in the grey light of morning we read the answering horror in each other's faces.

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The rest of the story, as it came out at the inquest held next day at Trench, is probably known to my readers. Storely's empty car was found by a labourer going out to his work drawn up on the bridge across the river Inglis, and the deep pool below the sluice was dragged. Two bodies were found there, one of a woman, the other of James Lamp. The woman's body had evidently been in the water for several days, his only for a few hours. But her hands were so tightly locked round the throat of the man that it was with difficulty that the two could be separated. In the woman's head was a wound caused by a revolver bullet: it had entered the back of her skull and was embedded in her brain. Medical evidence showed that she was certainly dead before she had been thrown into the water, and round her neck was a heavy iron weight. The body was quite recognizable as being that of Lamp's wife.

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## THE DANCE

Philip Hope had been watching with little neighing giggles of laughter the battle between a spider and a wasp that had been caught in its web. Once or twice the wasp nearly broke free, it hung with one wing only entangled in the tough light threads and he feared it would escape. But its adversary was always too quick and too clever; it swarmed about on its silken ladders, lean and nimble, and, by some process too rapid for Philip to follow, wound a new coil round head or struggling leg.

"Why, it's noosing its neck I believe," chuckled Philip, putting on his glasses, "like a hangman at work at eight o'clock in the morning. And it's got grey tips to its paws, like a hangman's gloves. Adorable!"

Clever spider! Philip's sympathy was entirely with it: he backed brains and agility against the buzzing, clumsy creature which had that curved sting, one stroke of which, if it could find its due target in the fat, round, mottled body of the other, would put an end to the combat. And the spider seemed to know that there was death in that horny scimitar so furiously stabbing, and skirted round it, keeping out of striking distance, while it spun its gossamers round the less dangerous members of its prey. The other wing was neatly tied up now, and then suddenly the spider pounced on the thread-like waist that joined the striped body to the thorax, and appeared to tear or to bite it in half.

The body dropped from the web, and the spider made a parcel of the rest, and took it into the woven tunnel at the centre of its home. Never was anything more neat and cruel; and neatness and cruelty were admirable qualities. Philip left the bed of dahlias, where he had watched this enthralling little spectacle, and stood still a moment thinking of some fresh entertainment. In person he was notably small and slight, narrow-chested, with spindle arms and legs. He leaned on a stick as he walked, for one of his knees was permanently stiff, but he was quick and nimble in spite of his limping gait. His clothes were fantastic; he wore a bright mustard-coloured suit, a green silk tie, a pink, silk shirt, with a low collar, above which rose a rather long neck supporting his very small sharp-chinned face, quite hairless and looking as if no razor had ever plied across it. His eyes were steel grey, and had no lashes on either lid: whether they looked up or down, they gave the impression of a mocking and amused vigilance. They saw much and derived much entertainment. He was hatless, and the thick crop of auburn hair that covered his head could deceive nobody, nor indeed did he intend that it should.

Beyond the lawn where he stood, half-screened by a row of shrubs, was the *en tout cas* court where, half an hour ago, he had left his wife and his secretary, Julian Weston, playing tennis. In point of age he might have been the father of either of them, and their combined years, twenty-two and twenty-three, just equalled his own forty-five. He could not catch any glimpse of their darting white-clad figures through the interstices of the hedge, and he supposed they had finished their game. He had told them that he intended to go for a motor drive, and no doubt they thought that he had gone, but there was no reason why he should not have a peep at them, to see what they were doing; and he walked quietly up to the screening shrubs. There they were, silly fools, only a few yards from him, sitting one on each side of the summer house. Sybil bounced a tennis ball on the tiled floor in the open space between them; Julian caught it and bounced it back. It was worth while to watch them for a little, and see what they would do when they tired of that. Five or six times the ball passed between them and then Julian missed it, and it rolled away, disregarded, under the table in the corner. They sat there, looking at each other. Philip, crouching down, moved a little nearer still invisible to them. He wanted to hear as well as to see. His face, satyr-like with its sharp chin and prominent ears, was alight with some secret merriment, and his small white teeth closed on his lower lip to prevent his laughing outright.

For the last week he had watched those two young creatures falling in love with each other. They had made friends at once when Julian came here a month ago, with the frank attraction of the young for each other: they rode, they played games, they bathed together in light-hearted enjoyment. But very soon Philip had seen that behind this natural comradeship there was stirring something that both troubled and kindled them. Their eyes were alight in each other's presence, their ears listened for each other. Sometimes each feigned an unconsciousness of the other till some swift glance betrayed the silly pretence. They would soon be as helpless in the silken web that enwrapped them as the wasp he had been watching, and indeed he himself was like the clever spider; for he had certainly helped to spread the net for them, encouraging their comradeship for the very purpose that they should get entangled. All this amused Philip, and it would be amusing to begin petting and making love to his wife again; that would touch both of them up. He would be very neat and dainty in device.

Suddenly these agreeable plans faded from his mind, and he became intensely alert. Julian got up, and Sybil also, and

they stood facing each other.

"Does he know? Does he guess, do you think?" he asked.

She gave no audible answer. Then, which of them moved first it was difficult to say, but next moment they were clasped to each other, and then as suddenly stood apart again.

Philip, shaking with laughter, stole quietly away, for he had no notion of disclosing himself; that would spoil it all. Something in the abruptness of what he had seen made him feel certain that they had never passionately kissed like that before; for, if so, they would not have leaped to it thus and then instantly have recoiled from what they had done. But the time was ripe for him to intervene, and he promised himself an amusing week or two. Intensely amusing, too, was Julian's question as to whether Sybil thought that he knew. Did the boy take him for an idiot?

"I'll answer that question in my own way," thought Philip. "It will be great sport."

It was too late to go for his motor drive now, and, passing through the house, he went for a short stroll along the edge of the sand-cliffs that rose a hundred sheer feet above the sea. He had been married now for three years, having been over forty when first he met Sybil Mannering. At once he had determined that he must possess this golden girl of nineteen. He was not in the least in love with her, but her beauty and her child-like vitality nourished him: it would be delicious to have the right to pet and caress her. She was poor, but he was rich, which was all to the good, for that made an ally of her mother. He made the appeal of the weak to the strong, of the pitiful little loving *crétin* (so he called himself) to the young Juno, and her compassion had aided his suit. Then, as she got to know him, there grew in her a horror of him, and that was pleasant; her fright and her horror were grand nourishment, for they fed his dainty sadism. He loaded her with jewels, he designed her dresses. He took her about everywhere, boring himself with parties and balls for the sake of seeing the admiration she excited. But when he had had enough he would go to his hostess and say, "Such a charming evening, but Sybil will scold me if we stop any longer."

Then as they drove home he would say to her, "Loving little wife, aren't I good to you, taking you out of the gutter and covering you with pearls? You must be good to me. Give me a kiss," and he would burst out into his little goat-like laugh at the touch of her cold lips. Then he had tired of that sport, but to-day, as he limped perkily along the cliff-edge, he thought he would renew his caresses. She shuddered at them before, she would shudder now with a far more acute loathing, and Julian would be there to see. Then he must make some needful alterations in his will. The chances were a hundred to one that she would survive him, and though nothing could prevent her from marrying Julian, he must make it as disagreeable as he could; make her feel that he wasn't quite done with yet. "I wonder if the dead can return," he thought. "What fun they might have!" He did not in the least contemplate dying for a long while yet, but in case anything happened to him he would get his lawyer to frame a codicil. That, however, was not so important as the neat little comedy that he was planning.

It was growing dark; the revolving beams from the Cromer lighthouse swept across the golf-links like the spokes of a luminous wheel, and shone where he walked and then passed on and scoured the sea. The house he had built here stood within a hundred yards of the cliff-edge, queer and rococo, with two sharp turrets like the pricked ears of some wary animal. A big hall-like sitting room with a gallery above running along the length of it, and communicating with the bedrooms, occupied the most of the ground floor. Out of it opened a small dining room hatched to the kitchen, and close to the front door was Philip's sitting-room where a tape-machine ticked out Stock Exchange prices and the news of the day. You could scarcely call him a gambler, so acute and so well-reasoned were his conclusions as to the effect of the news of the day on markets, and often he spent the entire evening here, making out what would be the effect of the latest news on the market next day, and selling or buying first thing in the morning.

But to-night he had a more amusing diversion; there was to be dancing. He had the furniture in the hall moved away to the sides of the room and the rugs rolled up, and the polished boards made a very decent floor for one couple. He sat himself by the gramophone with jazz records handy, and watched the two with little squeals of pleasure.

"You beautiful creatures," he cried. "Why, you're positively made for each other! Dance again! I'll find a more exciting tune. Hold her close, Julian. Bend your head down to her a little as if you wanted to kiss her. Forget that there's old hubby watching you. Look into his eyes, Sybil. Try to think that you're in love with him."

He gave his little goat-like laugh.

"Now we'll have a contrast," he cried. "You shall dance with me, darling. I can hop round in spite of my poor stiff leg."

He hugged her close to him, he skipped and capered round her, dragging her after him.

"Faster, more fire!" he cried. "Aren't I grotesque, and isn't it fun? I'm sure you never guessed I could be so nimble. Good Lord, how hot it makes one! Wait a second, while I take off my wig."

He threw it into a chair: his head was as hairless as an egg, and gleamed with sweat.

"Now come along again," he said. "You are kind to your poor little cripple!... Now have another turn with Julian, while I cool down. But give me a kiss first."

He gave her half a dozen little butterfly kisses, then kissed her on the mouth, cackling with laughter to see her eyes grow stale.

Every day he made traps and tortures for them. One night he went to bed early, passing with his limping tread along the gallery above the hall that led to the bedrooms beyond, knowing that, in spite of his injunction that they should sit up and amuse themselves together, he had poisoned the hour for them. He was right, and it was but a few minutes later that he heard them come upstairs, and Sybil went into her room next door, and Julian's step passed on.

He went in to see her before long in his yellow silk dressing-gown, and sent her maid away, saying that he would brush her hair for her. He kissed the nape of her neck, he talked to her about Julian, the handsomest boy he had ever seen: did not she think so? But did she think he was well? Sometimes he seemed to have something on his mind....

The next morning it would be Julian's turn. Philip told him he must be getting married soon. Wasn't there some nice girl he was fond of? Then he consulted him about Sybil. He thought she had something on her mind. Julian must find out—they were such friends—what was it, and tell him, and whatever it was, it must be put right. Sybil mustn't worry over any secret disquietude. They would dance again to-night, and dress up for it. What should Julian wear? Could he not make a costume—Sybil and he would help—out of a couple of leopard skins? Julian should be a young Dionysus, and Sybil a Mænad, wearing that Grecian frock that he had designed for her. They would have dinner in the loggia in the walled garden, and dance on the grass, and Julian should chase his Mænad over the lawn through moonlight and shadow. He laughed to see the boy's eyes gleam and then grown cold with hate. He was on the rack and no wonder, and the levers could be pulled over a little farther yet.

Then he had other devices for a day or two; he never let them be alone together for a moment, to see if that suited them better. He kept Julian at work all morning, he took Sybil out with him all afternoon, and there were prospectuses for his secretary to read and report on when dinner was over. He nagged at Sybil; he made mock of her before the servants, and it was amusing to see the angry blood leap to Julian's face, and the whiteness come to hers. Rare sport: they would have killed him, he thought, if they had the spirit of a louse between them.

"What happy times we're having," he said one day. "We'll stop on here into October, for we're such a loving harmonious little party. Do put your mother off, Sybil; she will spoil our lovely little triangle. Yet we've both got reason to be grateful to her for bringing us together. What about your marrying Mother Mannering, Julian? It would be nice to have you in the family. She can't be more than sixty, and as tough as a guinea-fowl without the guineas."

There they were then: they were bound on wheels for his breaking. He could wrench this one or that as he pleased, and the other could do nothing but look on impotently. For a day or two yet it was pleasant to make sport with them, but the edge was wearing off his enjoyment and it was time to make an end.

He took Julian for a stroll along the cliff one afternoon.

"I've got something to say to you, dear fellow," he said. "I hope it will meet with your approval, not that it matters very much. Now cudgel your clever brains, and see if you can guess what it is."

"I've no idea, sir," said Julian.

"Dull of you, sir. Not even if I give you three guesses?... Well, it's just this. I've had enough of you, and you can take yourself off to-morrow. A week's wages or a month's wages of course, whichever is right. My reason? Just that Sybil and I will be so very happy alone. That's all. What damned idiots you and she have been making of yourselves. So off



you go, and there will be a little discipline for her. You must think of us dancing in the evening. So that's all pleasantly settled."

He was walking on the very edge of the cliff, and, as he finished speaking, he turned and looked out seawards. A yard behind him there was an irregular zigzag crack in the turf, and now it ran this way and that, spreading and widening. Next moment the riband of earth on which he stood suddenly slipped down a foot or two, and with a shrill cry of fright he jumped for the solid. But the poised lump slid away altogether from him, and all he could do was to clutch with his fingers at the broken edge.

"Quick, get hold of my hands, you senseless ape," he squealed.

Julian did not move. If he had thrown himself on the ground and grasped at the fingers which clutched the crumbling earth he might perhaps have saved him. But for that crucial second of time his body made no response: if it could have moved at all, it must have leaped and danced at the thought of what would presently befall, and he looked smiling and unwavering into those lashless, panic-stricken eyes. Next moment he was alone on the empty down. He felt no smallest pang of remorse; he told himself that by no possibility could he have saved him. But, soft as the fall of a single snowflake, fear settled on his heart and then melted.

A flock of sheep were feeding not far away, and they scattered before him as he ran back to the house to get the help which his heart rejoiced to know must be unavailing.

## II

The house remained shut up for a year and the turrets pricked their ears in vain to hear the sounds of life returning to it. Philip, by the codicil he had executed the day before his death, had revoked his previous will, and had left to Sybil only certain marriage settlements which he had no power to touch and this house "where" (so ran his phrase) "we are now passing such loving and harmonious days." During this year Julian's father had died, and their marriage took place in the autumn.

To-day they came to spend here their month of honeymoon. Fenton, Philip's butler, and his wife had been living here as caretakers, the garden had been well looked after, and all was exactly as it had been a year ago. But the shadow of the mocking malevolence had passed for ever from it, and the spring sunshine in their hearts was as tranquil as the autumn radiance that lay on the lawns. Everything, flower-beds and winding path and sun-steeped wall, was full of memories from which all bitterness was purged; it was sweet to remember what had been, in a babble of talk.

"And there's the tennis court," said he, "with the summer house where we sat——"

"Yes, and bounced a ball to and fro between us——" she interrupted.

"And then I missed it and it rolled away, and we thought no more about it. Then I asked you if you thought he had guessed, and we kissed."

"Just here we stood," she said.

"And it was on that day that he began to mock us," he said. "How he enjoyed it! It made sport for him."

"I think he must have seen us," she said. "You could never tell what Philip saw. And he wove webs for us. Look, there's a wasp caught in a spider's web. I must let it free. I hate spiders. If ever I have a nightmare it's always about a spider. Oh, what a pity! The sunlight is fading. There's a sea fog coming up. How chilly it gets at once! Let's go indoors. And we won't talk about those things any more."

The mist formed rapidly, and before they got in it had spread white and low-lying over the lawn. A fire of logs burned in the hall, and as they sat over them in the fading light, a hundred memories which now they left unspoken, began to move about in their minds, like sparks crawling about the ashes of burnt paper that has flared and seems consumed. There was the cabinet gramophone to which they had danced ... there was the chair on to which Philip had thrown his wig; above, running the length of the hall, was the gallery along which his limping footstep had passed when he left them to go early to bed, bidding them stay up and divert themselves. How the sparks crawled about the thin crinkling ash! Presently it would all be consumed, and the past collapse into the grey nothingness of forgotten things.

Outside the mist had grown vastly denser, it beleaguered the house, and nothing was to be seen from the windows except a woolly whiteness. From the sea there came the mournful hooting of fog-horns.

"I like that," said Sybil. "It makes me feel comfortable. We're safe, we're at home, and we don't want anyone to know where we are, like those lost ships. But pull the curtains, it shuts us in more."

As Julian rattled the rings across the rod he paused, listening.

"Telephone wasn't it?" he said.

"It can't have been," said she. "Why, it's standing close by my chair, and I heard nothing. It was the curtain-rings."

"But there it is again," said he. "It isn't from this instrument, it sounds as if it came from the study. I think I'll go and see. The servants won't have heard it there."

"If it's for me, say I'm in my bath," said Sybil.

Julian went along the passage to the room that had been Philip's workroom close to the front door. It was dark now, and, as he fumbled for the switch by the door, the bell sounded again, rather faint, rather thin, as if the fog outside muffled it.

He took off the receiver.

"Hullo!" he said.

There came a little goat-like laugh, just audible, and then a voice.

"Settled in comfortably, dear boy?" it asked. "I'll look in on you before long."

"Who's speaking?" said Julian. He heard his voice crack as he asked.

Silence. Once more he asked and there came no reply.

Julian felt the snowflakes of fear settle on him again. But the notion that had flashed out of the darkness into his mind was surely the wildest nonsense. The laugh, the voice, had for that moment sounded unmistakable, but his sane self knew the absurdity of such an idea. He turned out the light and went back to Sybil.

"The telephone did ring, dear," he said, "but I couldn't make out who it was. Somebody is going to look in before long. Not at home, I think."

The fog cleared during the night before a light wind from the sea, and a crystalline October morning awaited them. Sybil had some household businesses that claimed her attention, and Julian walked along the shore until she was ready to come out. Not half a mile away was the precise spot he wished to visit, namely, that belt of shingle at the base of the cliff where, a little more than a year ago, they had found the shattered body on its back with wide-open eyes. He had dreamed of the place last night; he thought that he came here, and that, as he looked, the shingle began to stir and formed itself into the figure of a man lying there, and the dreamer had watched this odd process with interest, wondering what would come next. Then skin began to grow like swiftly spreading grey lichen over the head, and eyes and mouth moulded themselves on a face that was coming to life again; the eyes turned and looked into his, the mouth moved, and Julian awoke in the grip of nightmare. Even when the night was over and the morning luminous the taste of that terror still lingered, and he had to come to the place and convince himself of the emptiness of his dream. There lay the shingle shining and wet from the recession of the tide, and the wholesome sunlight dwelt on it.

Dusk had already fallen when they got home from a motor-drive that afternoon. As she got out Sybil stepped on the side of her foot and gave a little cry of pain. But it was nothing, she said, just a bit of a wrench, and she hobbled into the house.

As Julian returned from taking the car to the garage he noticed that there was a light in Philip's room by the front door. Sybil perhaps had gone in there, but, when he entered, he found the room was empty. The fire had been lit, and was beginning to burn up. No doubt the housemaid had thought he meant to use the room, and after lighting the fire had forgotten to turn off the switch.

He went on into the hall. Sybil was not there and she must have gone upstairs to take off her cloak and fur tippet and veil.

He sat down to look at the evening paper, got interested in a political article, and heard with only half an ear the opening of the door to the bedroom passage at the end of the gallery that crossed the hall. The floor of it was of polished oak boards, uncarpeted, and he heard her step coming along it, and she limped as she walked. Her ankle still hurts her, he thought, and went on with his reading. He wondered then what had happened to her, for she had crossed the gallery several minutes ago, and she had not yet appeared. He had made no doubt that that limping step was hers.

The door at the end of the hall into the kitchen-quarters opened and she came in. She was still in her cloak and furs.

"So sorry, dear," she said, "but there was a bit of a domestic upset. Fenton told the housemaid to light the fire in the study, and she came running back, rather hysterical, saying that as she was lighting it she saw a man outside in the dusk looking in at the window, and she was frightened."

"Perhaps she saw me looking in," said Julian, "When I came back from the garage I saw there was a light in the room."

"No doubt that was it. But Fenton and the gardener have gone to have a look round."

"And the foot?" he asked.

She stripped herself of her wrappings and threw them into a chair.

"Perfectly all right," she said. "It only lasted a minute."

Motoring had made Julian sleepy, and when, after tea, Sybil gathered up her things and went upstairs he must have fallen into a doze. He did not appear to himself to have gone to sleep, for there was no change of consciousness or of scene, and he thought he was still looking into the fire, and wondering to himself, with an uneasiness that he would not admit, what that limping footstep had been. He had felt no doubt at the time that it was Sybil's, but she had not been upstairs, nor did she halt in her walk. And he thought of that nightmare of his about the shingle on which Philip had fallen, and of the voice that he had heard on the telephone, and the familiar laugh, and the promise that the speaker would soon be here. Was he here in some bodiless form? Was he giving token of his unseen presence? Then (in his dream) he reached out for the paper he had been reading to divert his thoughts. As he did so his eye fell on the chair from which Sybil had picked up the cloak and veil and fur tippet she had thrown there, but apparently she had forgotten to take the tippet. Then he looked more closely at it and saw it was a wig.

He woke: there was Fenton standing by him.

"The dressing-bell has gone a quarter of an hour ago, sir," he said.

Julian looked at the chair beside him. There was nothing there: it was all a dream, but the dream had brought the sweat to his forehead.

"Has it really?" he said. "I must have fallen asleep. Oh, by the way, you went to see if there was anyone hanging about in the garden. Did you find anything?"

"No, sir. All quite quiet," said Fenton.

Sybil lingered behind in the dining-room after dinner to pour fresh water into the bowl of touzle-headed chrysanthemums that stood on the table, and Julian strolled on into the hall. The furniture was pushed aside from the centre of the room and the rugs rolled up, leaving the floor clear. Sybil had said nothing about that to him, but it would be fun to dance. Presently she followed him.

"Oh, Julian, what a good idea," she said. "How quick you've been. Turn on the gramophone. Why, it's a year since I have danced. Do you remember?... No, don't remember: forget it...."

Julian, standing with his back to her, picked out a record. Just as the first gay bars of the tune blared out, Sybil shrieked and shrieked again.

"Something's holding me," she cried. "Something's pressing against me. Something's laughing. Julian, come to me! Oh, my God, it's he!"

She was struggling in the grip of some invisible force. With her head craned back away from it, her hands wrestled

furiously with the empty air, and, still violently resisting, her feet began to make steps on the floor, now tip-toeing in a straight line, now circling. Julian rushed to her, he felt the shape of the unseen horror, he tore at the head and the shoulders of it, but his hands slipped away as if on slime, and fear sucked his strength from him. Then, as if suddenly released, Sybil dropped to the ground, and he knew that all the hellish forces of the unseen was turned on him.

It played on him like a blast of fire or freezing, and he fled from the room, for that was its will. Down the passage he ran with it on his heels, and out into the moonlit night. He dodged this way and that, he tried to bolt back into the house again but it drove him where it would, past the tennis-court and the bed of dahlias, and out of the garden gate and on to the cliff, where the beams of the lighthouse swept across the downs. There was a flock of sheep which scattered as he rushed in among them. There were a boy and a girl, who, as he fled by them, called to him to beware of the cliff-edge that lay directly in front of him. The pencil of light swept across it now, and as he plunged over the edge he saw the line of ripple breaking on to the shingle a hundred feet below, where, one evening, he and the fisherfolk found the shattered body of Philip staring with lashless eyes into the sky.



## THE HANGING OF ALFRED WADHAM

I had been telling Father Denys Hanbury about a very extraordinary séance which I had attended a few days before. The medium in trance had said a whole series of things which were unknown to anybody but myself and a friend of mine who had lately died, and who, so she said, was present and was speaking to me through her. Naturally, from the strictly scientific point of view in which alone we ought to approach such phenomena, such information was not really evidence that the spirit of my friend was in touch with her, for it was already known to me, and might by some process of telepathy have been communicated to the medium from my brain and not through the agency of the dead. She spoke, too, not in her own ordinary voice, but in a voice which certainly was very like his. But his voice was also known to me; it was in my memory even as were the things she had been saying. All this, therefore, as I was remarking to Father Denys, must be ruled out as positive evidence that communications had been coming from the other side of death.

"A telepathic explanation was possible," I said, "and we have to accept any known explanation which covers the facts before we conclude that the dead have come back into touch with the material world."

The room was quite warm, but I saw that he shivered slightly and, hitching his chair a little nearer the fire, he spread out his hands to the blaze. Such hands they were: beautiful and expressive of him, and so like the praying hands of Albert Dürer: the blaze shone through them as through rose-red alabaster. He shook his head.

"It's a terribly dangerous thing to attempt to get into communication with the dead," he said. "If you seem to get into touch with them you run the risk of establishing connection not with them but with awful and perilous intelligences. Study telepathy by all means, for that is one of the marvels of the mind which we are meant to investigate like any other of the wonderful secrets of Nature. But I interrupt you: you said something else occurred. Tell me about it."

Now I knew Father Denys's creed about such things and deplored it. He holds, as his church commands him, that intercourse with the spirits of the dead is impossible, and that when it appears to occur, as it undoubtedly does, the enquirer is really in touch with some species of dramatic demon, who is impersonating the spirit of the dead. Such a thing has always seemed to me as monstrous as it is without foundation, and there is nothing I can discover in the recognized sources of Christian doctrine which justifies such a view.

"Yes: now comes the queer part," I said. "For, still speaking in the voice of my friend the medium told me something which instantly I believed to be untrue. It could not therefore have been drawn telepathically from me. After that the séance came to an end, and in order to convince myself that this could not have come from him, I looked up the diary of my friend which had been left me at his death, and which had just been sent me by his executors, and was still unpacked. There I found an entry which proved that what the medium had said was absolutely correct. A certain thing—I needn't go into it—had occurred precisely as she had stated, though I should have been willing to swear to the contrary. That cannot have come into her mind from mine, and there is no source that I can see from which she could have obtained it except from my friend. What do you say to that?"

He shook his head.

"I don't alter my position at all," he said. "That information, given it did not come from your mind, which certainly seems to be impossible, came from some discarnate agency. But it didn't come from the spirit of your friend: it came from some evil and awful intelligence."

"But isn't that pure assumption?" I asked. "It is surely much simpler to say that the dead can, under certain conditions, communicate with us. Why drag in the devil?"

He glanced at the clock.

"It's not very late," he said. "Unless you want to go to bed, give me your attention for half-an-hour, and I will try to show you."

The rest of my story is what Father Denys told me, and what happened immediately afterwards.

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"Though you are not a Catholic," he said, "I think you would agree with me about an institution which plays a very large part in our ministry, namely Confession, as regards the sacredness and the inviolability of it. A soul laden with sin comes to his Confessor knowing that he is speaking to one who has the power to pronounce or withhold forgiveness, but who will never, for any conceivable reason, repeat or hint at what has been told him. If there was the slightest chance of the penitent's confession being made known to anyone, unless he himself, for purposes of expiation or of righting some wrong, chooses to repeat it, no one would ever come to Confession at all. The Church would lose the greatest hold it possesses over the souls of men, and the souls of men would lose that inestimable comfort of knowing (not hoping merely, but knowing) that their sins are forgiven them. Of course the priest may withhold absolution, if he is not convinced that he is dealing with a true penitent, and before he gives it, he will insist that the penitent makes such reparation as is in his power for the wrong he has done. If he has profited by his dishonesty he must make good: whatever crime he has committed he must give warrant that his penitence is sincere. But I think you would agree that in any case the priest cannot, whatever the result of his silence may be, repeat what has been told him. By doing so he might right or avert some hideous wrong, but it is impossible for him to do so. What he has heard, he has heard under the seal of confession, concerning the sacredness of which no argument is conceivable."

"It is possible to imagine awful consequences resulting from it," I said. "But I agree."

"Before now awful consequences have come of it," he said, "but they don't touch the principle. And now I am going to tell you of a certain confession that was once made to me."

"But how can you?" I said. "That's impossible, surely."

"For a certain reason, which we shall come to later," he said, "you will see that secrecy is no longer incumbent on me. But the point of my story is not that: it is to warn you about attempting to establish communication with the dead. Signs and tokens, voices and apparitions appear to come through to us from them, but who sends them? You will see what I mean."

I settled myself down to listen.

"You will probably not remember with any distinctness, if at all, a murder committed a year ago, when a man called Gerald Selfe met his death. There was no enticing mystery about it, no romantic accessories, and it aroused no public interest. Selfe was a man of loose life, but he held a respectable position, and it would have been disastrous for him if his private irregularities had come to light. For some time before his death he had been receiving blackmailing letters regarding his relations with a certain married woman, and, very properly, he had put the matter into the hands of the police. They had been pursuing certain clues, and on the afternoon before Selfe's death one of the officers of the Criminal Investigation Department had written to him that everything pointed to his man servant, who certainly knew of his intrigue, being the culprit. This was a young man named Alfred Wadham: he had only lately entered Selfe's service, and his past history was of the most unsavoury sort. They had baited a trap for him, of which details were given, and suggested that Selfe should display it, which, within an hour or two, he successfully did. This information and these instructions were conveyed in a letter which after Selfe's death was found in a drawer of his writing-table, of which the lock had been tampered with. Only Wadham and his master slept in his flat; a woman came in every morning to cook breakfast and do the housework, and Selfe lunched and dined at his club, or in the restaurant on the ground floor of this house of flats, and here he dined that night. When the woman came in next morning she found the outer door of the flat open, and Selfe lying dead on the floor of his sitting-room with his throat cut. Wadham had disappeared, but in the slop-pail of his bedroom was water which was stained with human blood. He was caught two days afterwards and at his trial elected to give evidence. His story was that he suspected he had fallen into a trap, and that while Mr. Selfe was at dinner he searched his drawers and found the letter sent by the police, which proved that this was the case. He therefore decided to bolt, and he left the flat that evening before his master came back to it after dinner. Being in the witness-box, he was of course subjected to a searching cross-examination, and contradicted himself in several particulars. Then there was that incriminating evidence in his room, and the motive for the crime was clear enough. After a very long deliberation the jury found him guilty, and he was sentenced to death. His appeal which followed was dismissed.

"Wadham was a Catholic, and since it is my office to minister to Catholic prisoners at the gaol where he was lying under sentence of death, I had many talks with him, and entreated him for the sake of his immortal soul to confess his guilt. But though he was even eager to confess other misdeeds of his, some of which it was ugly to speak of, he maintained his innocence on this charge of murder. Nothing shook him, and though as far as I could judge he was sincerely penitent for other misdeeds, he swore to me that the story he told in court was, in spite of the contradictions in which he had involved

himself, essentially true, and that if he was hanged he died unjustly. Up till the last afternoon of his life, when I sat with him for two hours, praying and pleading with him, he stuck to that. Why he should do that, unless indeed he was innocent, when he was eager to search his heart for the confession of other gross wickednesses, was curious; the more I pondered it, the more inexplicable I found it, and during that afternoon doubt as to his guilt began to grow in me. A terrible thought it was, for he had lived in sin and error, and to-morrow his life was to be broken like a snapped stick. I was to be at the prison again before six in the morning, and I still had to determine whether I should give him the Sacrament. If he went to his death guilty of murder, but refusing to confess, I had no right to give it him, but if he was innocent, my withholding of it was as terrible as any miscarriage of justice. Then on my way out I had a word with one of the warders, which brought my doubt closer to me.

"What do you make of Wadham?" I asked.

"He drew aside to let a man pass, who nodded to him: somehow I knew that he was the hangman.

"I don't like to think of it, sir," he said. "I know he was found guilty, and that his appeal failed. But if you ask me whether I believe him to be a murderer, why no, I don't."

"I spent the evening alone: about ten o'clock as I was on the point of going to bed, I was told that a man called Horace Kennion was below, and wanted to see me. He was a Catholic, and though I had been friends with him at one time, certain things had come to my knowledge which made it impossible for me to have anything more to do with him, and I had told him so. He was wicked—oh, don't misunderstand me; we all do wicked things constantly; the life of us all is a tissue of misdeeds, but he alone of all men I had ever met seemed to me to love wickedness for its own sake. I said I could not see him, but the message came back that his need was urgent, and up he came. He wanted, he told me, to make his confession, not to-morrow, but now, and his Confessor was away. I could not, as a priest, resist that appeal. And his confession was that he had killed Gerald Selfe.

"For a moment I thought this was some impious joke, but he swore he was speaking the truth, and still under the seal of confession gave me a detailed account. He had dined with Selfe that night, and had gone up afterwards to his flat for a game of piquet. Selfe told him with a grin that he was going to lay his servant by the heels to-morrow for blackmail. 'A smart spry young man to-day,' he said. 'Perhaps a bit off colour to-morrow at this time.' He rang the bell for him to put out the card-table: then saw it was ready, and he forgot that his summons remained unanswered. They played high points and both had drunk a good deal. Selfe lost partie after partie and eventually accused Kennion of cheating. Words ran high and boiled over into blows, and Kennion, in some rough and tumble of wrestling and hitting, picked up a knife from the table and stabbed Selfe in the throat, through jugular vein and carotid artery. In a few minutes he had bled to death.... Then Kennion remembered that unanswered bell, and went tiptoe to Wadham's room. He found it empty; empty, too, were the other rooms in the flat. Had there been anyone there, his idea was to say he had come up at Selfe's invitation, and found him dead. But this was better yet: there was no more than a few spots of blood on him, and he washed them in Wadham's room, emptying the water into his slop-pail. Then leaving the door of the flat open he went downstairs and out.

"He told me this in quite a few sentences, even as I have told it you, and looked up at me with a smiling face.

"So what's to be done next, Venerable Father?" he said gaily.

"Ah, thank God you've confessed!" I said. "We're in time yet to save an innocent man. You must give yourself up to the police at once." But even as I spoke my heart misgave me.

"He rose, dusting the knees of his trousers.

"What a quaint notion," he said. "There's nothing further from my thoughts."

"I jumped up.

"I shall go myself then," I said.

"He laughed outright at that.

"Oh, no, indeed you won't," he said. "What about the seal of confession? Indeed, I rather fancy it's a deadly sin for a priest ever to think of violating it. Really I'm ashamed of you, my dear Denys. Naughty fellow! But perhaps it was only a

joke; you didn't mean it.'

"'I do mean it,' I said. 'You shall see if I mean it.' But even as I spoke, I knew I did not. 'Anything is allowable to save an innocent man from death.'

"He laughed again.

"'Pardon me: you know perfectly well, that it isn't,' he said. 'There's one thing in our creed far worse than death, and that is the damnation of the soul. You've got no intention of damning yours. I took no risk at all when I confessed to you.'

"'But it will be murder if you don't save this man,' I said.

"'Oh, certainly, but I've got murder on my conscience already,' he said. 'One gets used to it very quickly. And having got used to it, another murder doesn't seem to matter an atom. Poor young Wadham: to-morrow isn't it? I'm not sure it won't be a sort of rough justice. Blackmail is a disgusting offence.'

"I went to the telephone, and took off the receiver.

"'Really this is most interesting' he said. 'Walton Street is the nearest police-station. You don't need the number: just say Walton Street Police. But you can't. You can't say "I have a man with me now, Horace Kennion, who has confessed to me that he murdered Selfe." So why bluff? Besides, if you could do any such thing, I should merely say that I had done nothing of the kind. Your word, the word of a priest who has broken the most sacred vow, against mine. Childish!'

"'Kennion,' I said, 'for the love of God, and for the fear of hell, give yourself up! What does it matter whether you or I live a few years less, if at the end we pass into the vast infinite with our sins confessed and forgiven. Day and night I will pray for you.'

"'Charming of you,' said he. 'But I've no doubt that now you will give Wadham full absolution. So what does it matter if he goes into—into the vast infinite at eight o'clock to-morrow morning?'

"'Why did you confess to me then,' I asked, 'if you had no intention of saving him, and making atonement?'

"'Well, not long ago you were very nasty to me,' he said. 'You told me no decent man would consort with me. So it struck me, quite suddenly, only to-day, that it would be pleasant to see you in the most awful hole. I daresay I've got Sadic tastes, too, and they are being wonderfully indulged. You're in torment, you know: you would choose any physical agony rather than to be in such a torture-chamber of the soul. It's entrancing: I adore it. Thank you very much, Denys.'

"He got up.

"'I kept my taxi waiting,' he said. 'No doubt you'll be busy to-night. Can I give you a lift anywhere? Pentonville?'

"There are no words to describe certain darknesses and ecstasies that come to the soul, and I can only tell you that I can imagine no hell of remorse that could equal the hell that I was in. For in the bitterness of remorse we can see that our suffering is a needful and salutary experience: only through it can our sin be burned away. But here was a torture blank and meaningless.... And then my brain stirred a little, and I began to wonder whether, without breaking the seal of confession, I might not be able to effect something. I saw from my window that the light was burning in the clock-tower at Westminster: the House therefore was sitting, and it seemed possible that without violation I might tell the Home Secretary that a confession had been made me, whereby I knew that Wadham was innocent. He would ask me for any details I could give him, and I could tell him—And then I saw that I could tell him nothing: I could not say that the murderer had gone up with Selfe to his room, for through that information it might be found that Kennion had dined with him. But before I did anything, I must have guidance, and I went to the Cardinal's house by our Cathedral. He had gone to bed, for it was now after midnight, but in answer to the urgency of my request he came down to see me. I told him without giving any clue, what had happened, and his verdict was what in my heart I knew it would be. Certainly I might see the Home Secretary and tell him that such a confession had been made me, but no word or hint must escape me which could lead to identification. Personally, he did not see how the execution could be postponed on such information as I could give.

"'And whatever you suffer, my son,' he said, 'be sure that you are suffering not from having done wrong, but from having done right. Placed as you are, your temptation to save an innocent man comes from the devil, and whatever you may be



called upon to endure for not yielding to it, is of that origin also.'

"I saw the Home Secretary in his room at the House within the hour. But unless I told him more, and he realized that I could not, he was powerless to move.

"'He was found guilty at his trial,' he said, 'and his appeal was dismissed. Without further evidence I can do nothing.'

"He sat thinking a moment: then jumped up.

"'Good God, it's ghastly,' he said. 'I entirely believe, I needn't tell you, that you've heard this confession, but that doesn't prove it's true. Can't you see the man again? Can't you put the fear of God into him? If you can do anything at all, which gives me any justification for acting, up till the moment the drop falls, I will give a reprieve at once. There's my telephone number: ring me up here or at my house at any hour.'

"I was back at the prison before six in the morning. I told Wadham that I believed in his innocence, and I gave him absolution for all else. He received the Holy and Blessed Sacrament with me, and went without flinching to his death."

Father Denys paused.

"I have been a long time coming to that point in my story," he said, "which concerns that séance you spoke of, but it was necessary for your understanding of what I am going to tell you now, that you should know all this. I said that these messages and communications from the dead come not from them but from some evil and awful power impersonating them. You answered, I remember, 'Why drag in the Devil?' I will tell you.

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"When it was over, when the drop on which he stood yawned open, and the rope creaked and jumped, I went home. It was a dark winter's morning, still barely light, and in spite of the tragic scene I had just witnessed I felt serene and peaceful. I did not think of Kennion at all, only of the boy—he was little more—who had suffered unjustly, and that seemed a pitiful mistake, but no more. It did not touch him, his essential living soul, it was as if he had suffered the sacred expiation of martyrdom. And I was humbly thankful that I had been enabled to act rightly, and had Kennion now, through my agency, been in the hands of the police and Wadham alive, I should have been branded with the most terrible crime a priest can commit.

"I had been up all night, and after I had said my office I lay down on my sofa to get a little sleep. And I dreamed that I was in the cell with Wadham and that he knew I had proof of his innocence. It was within a few minutes of the hour of his death, and I heard along the stone-flagged corridor outside the steps of those who were coming for him. He heard them too, and stood up, pointing at me.

"'You're letting an innocent man die, when you could save him,' he said. 'You can't do it, Father Denys. Father Denys!' he shrieked, and the shriek broke off in a gulp and a gasp as the door opened.

"I woke, knowing that what had roused me was my own name, screamed out from somewhere close at hand, and I knew whose voice it was. But there I was alone in my quiet, empty room, with the dim day peering in. I had been asleep, I saw, for only a few minutes, but now all thought or power of sleep had fled, for somewhere by me, invisible but awfully present, was the spirit of the man whom I had allowed to perish. And he called me.

"But presently I convinced myself that this voice coming to me in sleep was no more than a dream, natural enough in the circumstances, and some days passed tranquilly enough. And then one day when I was walking down a sunny crowded street, I felt some definite and dreadful change in what I may call the psychic atmosphere which surrounds us all, and my soul grew black with fear and with evil imaginings. And there was Wadham coming towards me along the pavement gay and debonair. He looked at me, and his face became a mask of hate. 'We shall meet often I hope, Father Denys,' he said, as he passed. Another day I returned home in the twilight, and suddenly, as I entered my room, I heard the creak and strain of a rope, and his body, with head covered by the death-cap, swung in the window against the sunset. And sometimes when I was at my books the door opened quietly and closed again, and I knew he was there. The apparition or the token of it did not come often or perhaps my resistance would have been quickened, for I knew it was devilish in origin. But it came when I was off my guard at long intervals, so that I thought I had vanquished it, and then sometimes I

felt my faith to reel. But always it was preceded by this sense of evil power bearing down on me, and I made haste to seek the shelter of the House of Defence which is set very high. And this last Sunday only——"

He broke off, covering his eyes with his hand, as if shutting out some appalling spectacle.

"I had been preaching," he resumed, "for one of our missions. The church was full, and I do not think there was another thought or desire in my soul but to further the holy cause for which I was speaking. It was a morning service, and the sun poured in through the stained-glass windows in a glow of coloured light. But in the middle of my sermon some bank of cloud drove up, and with it this horrible forewarning of the approach of a tempest of evil. So dark it got that, as I was drawing near the end of my sermon, the lights in the church were switched on, and it leaped into brightness. There was a lamp on the desk in the pulpit, where I had placed my notes, and now when it was kindled it shone full on the pew just below. And there with his head turned upwards towards me, with his face purple and eyes protruding and with the strangling noose round his neck, sat Wadham.

"My voice faltered a second, and I clutched at the pulpit-rail as he stared at me and I at him. A horror of the spirit, black as the eternal night of the lost closed round me, for I had let him go innocent to his death, and my punishment was just.... And then like a star shining out through some merciful rent in this soul-storm came again that ray of conviction that as a priest I could not have done otherwise, and with it the sure knowledge that this apparition could not be of God, but of the devil, to be resisted and defied even as we defy with contempt some sweet and insidious temptation. It could not therefore be the spirit of the man at which I gazed, but some diabolical counterfeit.

"And I looked back from him to my notes, and went on with my sermon, for that alone was my business. That pause had seemed to me eternal: it had the quality of timelessness, but I learned afterwards that it had been barely perceptible. And from my own heart I learned that it was no punishment that I was undergoing, but the strengthening of a faith that had faltered."

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Suddenly he broke off. There came into his eyes as he fixed them on the door a look not of fear at all but of savage relentless antagonism.

"It's coming," he said to me, "and now if you hear or see anything, despise it, for it is evil."

The door swung open and closed again, and though nothing visible entered, I knew that there was now in the room a living intelligence other than Father Denys's and mine, and it affected my being, my self, just as some horrible odour of putrefaction affects one physically: my soul sickened in it. Then, still seeing nothing, I perceived that the room, warm and comfortable just now, with a fire of coal prospering in the grate, was growing cold, and that some strange eclipse was veiling the light. Close to me on the table stood an electric lamp: the shade of it fluttered in the icy draught that stirred in the air, and the illuminant wire was no longer incandescent, but red and dull like the embers in the grate. I scrutinized the dimness, but as yet no material form manifested itself.

Father Denys was sitting very upright in his chair, his eyes fixed and focused on something invisible to me. His lips were moving and muttering, his hands grasped the crucifix he was wearing. And then I saw what I knew he was seeing, too: a face was outlining itself on the air in front of him, a face swollen and purple, with tongue lolling from the mouth, and as it hung there it oscillated to and fro. Clearer and clearer it grew, suspended there by the rope that now became visible to me, and though the apparition was of a man hanged by the neck, it was not dead but active and alive, and the spirit that awfully animated it was no human one, but something diabolical.

Suddenly Father Denys rose to his feet, and his face was within an inch or two of that suspended horror. He raised his hands which held the sacred emblem.

"Begone to your torment," he cried, "until the days of it are over, and the mercy of God grants you eternal death."

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There rose a wailing in the air: some blast shook the room so that the corners of it quaked, and then the light and the

warmth were restored to it, and there was no one there but our two selves. Father Denys's face was haggard and dripping with the struggle he had been through, but there shone on it such radiance as I have never seen on human countenance.

"It's over," he said. "I saw it shrivel and wither before the power of His presence.... And your eyes tell me you saw it too and you know now that what wore the semblance of humanity was pure evil."

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We talked a little longer, and he rose to go.

"Ah, I forgot," he said. "You wanted to know how I could reveal to you what was told me in confession. Horace Kennion died this morning by his own hand. He left with his lawyer a packet to be opened on his death, with instructions that it should be published in the daily Press. I saw it in an evening paper, and it was a detailed account of how he killed Gerald Selfe. He wished it to have all possible publicity."

"But why?" I asked.

Father Denys paused.

"He gloried in his wickedness, I think," he said. "He loved it, as I told you, for its own sake, and he wanted everyone to know of it, as soon as he was safely away."

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# PIRATES

For many years this project of sometime buying back the house had simmered in Peter Graham's mind, but whenever he actually went into the idea with practical intention, stubborn reasons had presented themselves to deter him. In the first place it was very far off from his work, down in the heart of Cornwall, and it would be impossible to think of going there just for week-ends, and if he established himself there for longer periods what on earth would he do with himself in that soft remote Lotus-land? He was a busy man who, when at work, liked the diversion of his club and of the theatres in the evening, but he allowed himself few holidays away from the City, and those were spent on salmon river or golf links with some small party of solid and like-minded friends. Looked at in these lights, the project bristled with objections.

Yet through all these years, forty of them now, which had ticked away so imperceptibly, the desire to be at home again at Lescop had always persisted, and from time to time it gave him shrewd little unexpected tugs, when his conscious mind was in no way concerned with it. This desire, he was well aware, was of a sentimental quality, and often he wondered at himself that he, who was so well-armoured in the general jostle of the world against that type of emotion, should have just this one joint in his harness. Not since he was sixteen had he set eyes on the place, but the memory of it was more vivid than that of any other scene of subsequent experience. He had married since then, he had lost his wife, and though for many months after that he had felt horribly lonely, the ache of that loneliness had ceased, and now, if he had ever asked himself the direct question, he would have confessed that bachelor existence was more suited to him than married life had ever been. It had not been a conspicuous success, and he never felt the least temptation to repeat the experiment.

But there was another loneliness which neither married life nor his keen interest in his business had ever extinguished, and this was directly connected with his desire for that house on the green slope of the hills above Truro. For only seven years had he lived there, the youngest but one of a family of five children, and now out of all that gay company he alone was left. One by one they had dropped off the stem of life, but as each in turn went into this silence, Peter had not missed them very much: his own life was too occupied to give him time really to miss anybody, and he was too vitally constituted to do otherwise than look forwards.

None of that brood of children except himself, and he childless, had married, and now when he was left without intimate tie of blood to any living being, a loneliness had gathered thickly round him. It was not in any sense a tragic or desperate loneliness: he had no wish to follow them on the unverified and unlikely chance of finding them all again. Also, he had no use for any disembodied existence: life meant to him flesh and blood and material interests and activities, and he could form no conception of life apart from such. But sometimes he ached with this dull gnawing ache of loneliness, which is worse than all others, when he thought of the stillness that lay congealed like clear ice over these young and joyful years when Lescop had been so noisy and alert and full of laughter, with its garden resounding with games, and the house with charades and hide-and-seek and multitudinous plans. Of course there had been rows and quarrels and disgraces, hot enough at the time, but now there was no one to quarrel with. "You can't really quarrel with people whom you don't love," thought Peter, "because they don't matter...." Yet it was ridiculous to feel lonely; it was even more than ridiculous, it was weak, and Peter had the kindly contempt of a successful and healthy and unemotional man for weaknesses of that kind. There were so many amusing and interesting things in the world, he had so many irons in the fire to be beaten, so to speak, into gold when he was working, and so many palatable diversions when he was not (for he still brought a boyish enthusiasm to work and play alike), that there was no excuse for indulging in sentimental sterilities. So, for months together, hardly a stray thought would drift towards the remote years lived in the house on the hill-side above Truro.

He had lately become chairman of the board of that new and highly promising company, the British Tin Syndicate. Their property included certain Cornish mines which had been previously abandoned as non-paying propositions, but a clever mineralogical chemist had recently invented a process by which the metal could be extracted far more cheaply than had hitherto been possible. The British Tin Syndicate had bought the patent, and having acquired these derelict Cornish mines was getting very good results from ore that had not been worth treating. Peter had very strong opinions as to the duty of a chairman to make himself familiar with the practical side of his concerns, and was now travelling down to Cornwall to make a personal inspection of the mines where this process was at work. He had with him certain technical reports which he had received to read during the uninterrupted hours of his journey, and it was not till his train had left Exeter behind that he finished his perusal of them, and, putting them back in his despatch-case, turned his eye at the swiftly passing panorama of travel. It was many years since he had been to the West Country, and now with the thrill of

vivid recognition he found the red cliffs round Dawlish, interspersed between stretches of sunny sea-beach, startlingly familiar. Surely he must have seen them quite lately, he thought to himself, and then, ransacking his memory, he found it was forty years since he had looked at them, travelling back to Eton from his last holidays at Lescop. The intense sharp-cut impressions of youth!

His destination to-night was Penzance, and now, with a strangely keen sense of expectation, he remembered that just before reaching Truro station the house on the hill was visible from the train, for often on these journeys to and from school he had been all eyes to catch the first sight of it and the last. Trees perhaps would have grown up and intervened, but as they ran past the station before Truro he shifted across to the other side of the carriage, and once more looked out for that glimpse.... There it was, a mile away across the valley, with its grey stone front and the big beech-tree screening one end of it, and his heart leaped as he saw it. Yet what use was the house to him now? It was not the stones and the bricks of it, nor the tall hay-fields below it, nor the tangled garden behind that he wanted, but the days when he had lived in it. Yet he leaned from the window till a cutting extinguished the view of it, feeling that he was looking at a photograph that recalled some living presence. All those who had made Lescop dear and still vivid had gone, but this record remained, like the image on the plate.... And then he smiled at himself with a touch of contempt for his sentimentality.

The next three days were a whirl of enjoyable occupation: tin-mines in the concrete were new to Peter, and he absorbed himself in these, as in some new game or ingenious puzzle. He went down the shafts of mines which had been opened again, he inspected the new chemical process, seeing it at work and checking the results, he looked into running expenses, comparing them with the value of the metal recovered. Then, too, there was substantial traces of silver in some of these ores, and he went eagerly into the question as to whether it would pay to extract it. Certainly even the mines which had previously been closed down ought to yield a decent dividend with this process, while those where the lode was richer would vastly increase their profits. But economy, economy.... Surely it would save in the end, though at a considerable capital expenditure now, to lay a light railway from the works to the rail-head instead of employing these motor-lorries. There was a piece of steep gradient, it was true, but a small detour, with a trestle-bridge over the stream, would avoid that.

He walked over the proposed route with the engineer and scrambled about the stream-bank to find a good take-off for his trestle-bridge. And all the time at the back of his head, in some almost subconscious region of thought, were passing endless pictures of the house and the hill, its rooms and passages, its fields and garden, and with them, like some accompanying tune, ran that ache of loneliness. He felt that he must prow! again about the place: the owner, no doubt, if he presented himself, would let him just stroll about alone for half an hour. Thus he would see it all altered and overscored by the life of strangers living there, and the photograph would fade into a mere blur and then blankness. Much better that it should.

It was in this intention that, having explored every avenue for dividends on behalf of his company, he left Penzance by an early morning train in order to spend a few hours in Truro and go up to London later in the day. Hardly had he emerged from the station when a crowd of memories, forty years old, but more vivid than any of those of the last day or two, flocked round him with welcome for his return. There was the level-crossing and the road leading down to the stream where his sister Sybil and he had caught a stickleback for their aquarium, and across the bridge over it was the lane sunk deep between high crumbling banks that led to a footpath across the fields to Lescop. He knew exactly where was that pool with long ribands of water-weed trailing and waving in it, which had yielded them that remarkable fish: he knew how champions red and white would be in flower on the lane-side, and in the fields the meadow-orchis. But it was more convenient to go first into the town, get his lunch at the hotel, and to make enquiries from a house-agent as to the present owner of Lescop; perhaps he would walk back to the station for his afternoon train by that short cut.

Thick now as flowers on the steppe when spring comes, memories bright and fragrant shot up round him. There was the shop where he had taken his canary to be stuffed (beautiful it looked!): and there was the shop of the "undertaker and cabinet-maker," still with the same name over the door, where on a memorable birthday, on which his amiable family had given him, by request, the tokens of their good-will in cash, he had ordered a cabinet with five drawers and two trays, varnished and smelling of newly cut wood, for his collection of shells.... There was a small boy in jersey and flannel trousers looking in at the window now, and Peter suddenly said to himself, "Good Lord, how like I used to be to that boy: same kit, too." Strikingly like indeed he was, and Peter, curiously interested, started to cross the street to get a nearer look at him. But it was market-day, a drove of sheep delayed him, and when he got across the small boy had vanished among the passengers. Farther along was a dignified house-front with a flight of broad steps leading up to it, once the dreaded abode of Mr. Tuck, dentist. There was a tall girl standing outside it now, and again Peter involuntarily

said to himself, "Why, that girl's wonderfully like Sybil!" But before he could get more than a glimpse of her, the door was opened and she passed in, and Peter was rather vexed to find that there was no longer a plate on the door indicating that Mr. Tuck was still at his wheel.... At the end of the street was the bridge over the Fal just below which they used so often to take a boat for a picnic on the river. There was a jolly family party setting off just now from the quay, three boys, he noticed, and a couple of girls, and a woman of young middle-age. Quickly they dropped downstream and went forth, and with half a sigh he said to himself, "Just our number with Mamma."

He went to the Red Lion for his lunch: that was new ground and uninteresting, for he could not recall having set foot in that hostelry before. But as he munched his cold beef there was some great fantastic business going on deep down in his brain: it was trying to join up (and it believed it could) that boy outside the cabinet-maker's, that girl on the threshold of the house once Mr. Tuck's, and that family party starting for their picnic on the river. It was in vain that he told himself that neither the boy nor the girl nor the picnic-party could possibly have anything to do with him: as soon as his attention relaxed that burrowing underground chase, as of a ferret in a rabbit-hole, began again.... And then Peter gave a gasp of sheer amazement, for he remembered with clear-cut distinctness how on the morning of that memorable birthday, he and Sybil started earlier than the rest from Lescop, he on the adorable errand of ordering his cabinet, she for a dolorous visit to Mr. Tuck. The others followed half an hour later for a picnic on the Fal to celebrate the great fact that his age now required two figures (though one was a nought) for expression. "It'll be ninety years, darling," his mother had said, "before you want a third one, so be careful of yourself."

Peter was almost as excited when this momentous memory burst on him as he had been on the day itself. Not that it meant anything, he said to himself, as there's nothing for it to mean. But I call it odd. It's as if something from those days hung about here still....

He finished his lunch quickly after that, and went to the house agent's to make his enquiries. Nothing could be easier than that he should prowl about Lescop, for the house had been untenanted for the last two years. No card "to view" was necessary, but here were the keys: there was no caretaker there.

"But the house will be going to rack and ruins," said Peter indignantly. "Such a jolly house, too. False economy not to put a caretaker in. But of course it's no business of mine. You shall have the keys back during the afternoon: I'll walk up there now."

"Better take a taxi, sir," said the man. "A hot day, and a mile and a half up a steep hill."

"Oh, nonsense," said Peter. "Barely a mile. Why, my brother and I used often to do it in ten minutes."

It occurred to him that these athletic feats of forty years ago would probably not interest the modern world....

Pyder Street was as populous with small children as ever, and perhaps a little longer and steeper than it used to be. Then turning off to the right among strange new-built suburban villas he passed into the well-known lane, and in five minutes more had come to the gate leading into the short drive up to the house. It drooped on its hinges, he must lift it off the latch, sidle through and prop it in place again. Overgrown with grass and weeds was the drive, and with another spurt of indignation he saw that the stile to the pathway across the field was broken down and had dragged the wires of the fence with it. And then he came to the house itself, and the creepers trailed over the windows, and, unlocking the door, he stood in the hall with its discoloured ceiling and patches of mildew growing on the damp walls. Shabby and ashamed it looked, the paint perished from the window-sashes, the panes dirty, and in the air the sour smell of chambers long unventilated. And yet the spirit of the house was there still, though melancholy and reproachful, and it followed him wearily from room to room—"You are Peter, aren't you?" it seemed to say. "You've just come to look at me, I see and not to stop. But I remember the jolly days just as well as you...." From room to room he went, dining-room, drawing-room, his mother's sitting-room, his father's study: then upstairs to what had been the school-room in the days of governesses, and had then been turned over to the children for a play-room. Along the passage was the old nursery and the night-nursery, and above that attic-rooms, to one of which, as his own exclusive bedroom, he had been promoted when he went to school. The roof of it had leaked, there was a brown-edged stain on the sagging ceiling just above where his bed had been. "A nice state to let my room get into," muttered Peter. "How am I to sleep underneath that drip from the roof? Too bad!"

The vividness of his own indignation rather startled him. He had really felt himself to be not a dual personality, but the same Peter Graham at different periods of his existence. One of them, the chairman of the British Tin Syndicate, had

protested against young Peter Graham being put to sleep in so damp and dripping a room, and the other (oh, the ecstatic momentary glimpse of him!) was indeed young Peter back in his lovely attic again, just home from school and now looking round with eager eyes to convince himself of that blissful reality, before bouncing downstairs again to have tea in the children's room. What a lot of things to ask about! How were his rabbits, and how were Sybil's guinea-pigs, and had Violet learned that song "Oh 'tis nothing but a shower," and were the wood-pigeons building again in the lime-tree? All these topics were of the first importance....

Peter Graham the elder sat down on the window-seat. It overlooked the lawn, and just opposite was the lime-tree, a drooping lime making a green cave inside the skirt of its lower branches, but with those above growing straight, and he heard the chuckling coo of the wood-pigeons coming from it. They were building there again then: that question of young Peter's was answered.

"Very odd that I should just be thinking of that," he said to himself: somehow there was no gap of years between him and young Peter, for his attic bridged over the decades which in the clumsy material reckoning of time intervened between them. Then Peter the elder seemed to take charge again.

The house was a sad affair, he thought: it gave him a stab of loneliness to see how decayed was the theatre of their joyful years, and no evidence of newer life, of the children of strangers and even of their children's children growing up here could have overscored the old sense of it so effectually. He went out of young Peter's room and paused on the landing: the stairs led down in two short flights to the story below, and now for the moment he was young Peter again, reaching down with his hand along the banisters, and preparing to take the first flight in one leap. But then old Peter saw it was an impossible feat for his less supple joints.

Well, there was the garden to explore, and then he would go back to the agent's and return the keys. He no longer wanted to take that short cut down the steep hill to the station, passing the pool where Sybil and he had caught the stickleback, for his whole notion, sometimes so urgent, of coming back here, had wilted and withered. But he would just walk about the garden for ten minutes, and as he went with sedate step downstairs, memories of the garden, and of what they all did there began to invade him. There were trees to be climbed, and shrubberies—one thicket of syringa particularly where goldfinches built—to be searched for nests and moths, but above all there was that game they played there, far more exciting than lawn-tennis or cricket in the bumpy field (though that was exciting enough) called Pirates.... There was a summer-house, tiled and roofed and of solid walls at the top of the garden, and that was 'home' or 'Plymouth Sound,' and from there ships (children that is) set forth at the order of the Admiral to pick a trophy without being caught by the Pirates. There were two Pirates who hid anywhere in the garden and jumped out, and (counting the Admiral who, after giving his orders, became the flagship) three ships, which had to cruise to orchard or flower-bed or field and bring safely home a trophy culled from the ordained spot. Once, Peter remembered, he was flying up the winding path to the summer-house with a pirate close on his heels, when he fell flat down, and the humane pirate leaped over him for fear of treading on him, and fell down too. So Peter got home, because Dick had fallen on his face and his nose was bleeding....

"Good Lord, it might have happened yesterday," thought Peter. "And Harry called him a bloody pirate, and Papa heard and thought he was using shocking language till it was explained to him."

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The garden was even worse than the house, neglected utterly and rankly overgrown, and to find the winding path at all, Peter had to push through briar and thicket. But he persevered and came out into the rose-garden at the top, and there was Plymouth Sound with roof collapsed and walls bulging, and moss growing thick between the tiles of the floor.

"But it must be repaired at once," said Peter aloud.... "What's that?" He whisked round towards the bushes through which he had pushed his way, for he had heard a voice, faint and far off coming from there, and the voice was familiar to him, though for thirty years it had been dumb. For it was Violet's voice which had spoken and she had said, "Oh, Peter: *here* you are!"

He knew it was her voice, and he knew the utter impossibility of it. But it frightened him, and yet how absurd it was to be frightened, for it was only his imagination, kindled by old sights and memories, that had played him a trick. Indeed, how jolly even to have imagined that he had heard Violet's voice again.

"Vi!" he called aloud, but of course no one answered. The wood-pigeons were cooing in the lime, there was a hum of bees and a whisper of wind in the trees, and all round the soft enchanted Cornish air, laden with dream-stuff.

He sat down on the step of the summer-house, and demanded the presence of his own common sense. It had been an uncomfortable afternoon, he was vexed at this ruin of neglect into which the place had fallen, and he did not want to imagine these voices calling to him out of the past, or to see these odd glimpses which belonged to his boyhood. He did not belong any more to that epoch over which grasses waved and headstones presided, and he must be quit of all that evoked it, for, more than anything else, he was director of prosperous companies with big interests dependent on him. So he sat there for a calming five minutes, defying Violet, so to speak, to call to him again. And then, so unstable was his mood to-day, that presently he was listening for her. But Violet was always quick to see when she was not wanted, and she must have gone, to join the others....

He retraced his way, fixing his mind on material environments. The golden maple at the head of the walk, a sapling like himself when last he saw it, had become a stout-trunked tree, the shrub of bay a tall column of fragrant leaf, and just as he passed the syringa, a goldfinch dropped out of it with dipping flight. Then he was back at the house again where the climbing fuchsia trailed its sprays across the window of his mother's room and hot thick scent (how well-remembered!) spilled from the chalices of the great magnolia.

"A mad notion of mine to come and see the house again," he said to himself. "I won't think about it any more: it's finished. But it was wicked not to look after it."

He went back into the town to return the keys to the house-agent.

"Much obliged to you," he said. "A pleasant house, when I knew it years ago. Why was it allowed to go to ruin like that?"

"Can't say, sir," said the man. "It has been let once or twice in the last ten years, but the tenants have never stopped long. The owner would be very pleased to sell it."

An idea, fanciful, absurd, suddenly struck Peter.

"But why doesn't he live there?" he asked. "Or why don't the tenants stop long? Was there something they didn't like about it? Haunted: anything of that sort? I'm not going to take it or purchase it: so that won't put me off."

The man hesitated a moment.

"Well, there were stories," he said, "if I may speak confidentially. But all nonsense, of course."

"Quite so," said Peter. "You and I don't believe in such rubbish. I wonder now: was it said that children's voices were heard calling in the garden?"

The discretion of a house-agent reasserted itself.

"I can't say, sir, I'm sure," he said. "All I know is that the house is to be had very cheap. Perhaps you would take our card."

Peter arrived back in London late that night. There was a tray of sandwiches and drinks waiting for him, and having refreshed himself, he sat smoking awhile thinking of his three days' work in Cornwall at the mines: there must be a directors' meeting as soon as possible to consider his suggestions.... Then he found himself staring at the round rosewood table where his tray stood. It had been in his mother's sitting-room at Lescop, and the chair in which he sat, a fine Stuart piece, had been his father's chair at the dinner-table, and that book-case had stood in the hall, and his Chippendale card-table ... he could not remember exactly where that had been. That set of Browning's poems had been Sybil's: it was from the shelves in the children's room. But it was time to go to bed, and he was glad he was not to sleep in young Peter's attic.

It is doubtful whether, if once an idea has really thrown out roots in a man's mind, he can ever extirpate it. He can cut off its sprouting suckers, he can nip off the buds it bears, or, if they come to maturity, destroy the seed, but the roots defy him. If he tugs at them something breaks, leaving a vital part still embedded, and it is not long before some fresh evidence of its vitality pushes up above the ground where he least expected it. It was so with Peter now: in the middle of



some business-meeting, the face of one of his co-directors reminded him of that of the coachman at Lescop; if he went for a week-end of golf to the Dormy House at Rye, the bow-window of the billiard-room was in shape and size that of the drawing-room there, and the bank of gorse by the tenth green was no other than the clump below the tennis-court: almost he expected to find a tennis ball there when he had need to search it. Whatever he did, wherever he went, something called him from Lescop, and in the evening when he returned home, there was the furniture, more of it than he had realized, asking to be restored there: rugs and pictures and books, the silver on his table all joined in the mute appeal. But Peter stopped his ears to it: it was a senseless sentimentality, and a purely materialistic one to imagine that he could recapture the life over which so many years had flowed, and in which none of the actors but himself remained, by restoring to the house its old amenities and living there again. He would only emphasize his own loneliness by the visible contrast of the scene, once so alert and populous, with its present emptiness. And this "butting-in" (so he expressed it) of materialistic sentimentality only confirmed his resolve to have done with Lescop. It had been a bitter sight but tonic, and now he would forget it.

Yet even as he sealed his resolution, there would come to him, blown as a careless breeze from the west, the memory of that boy and girl he had seen in the town, of the gay family starting for their river-picnic, of the faint welcoming call to him from the bushes in the garden, and, most of all, of the suspicion that the place was supposed to be haunted. It was just because it was haunted that he longed for it, and the more savagely and sensibly he assured himself of the folly of possessing it, the more he yearned after it, and constantly now it coloured his dreams. They were happy dreams; he was back there with the others, as in old days, children again in holiday time, and like himself they loved being at home there again, and they made much of Peter because it was he who had arranged it all. Often in these dreams he said to himself 'I have dreamed this before, and then I woke and found myself elderly and lonely again, but this time it is real!'

The weeks passed on, busy and prosperous, growing into months, and one day in the autumn, on coming home from a day's golf, Peter fainted. He had not felt very well for some time, he had been languid and easily fatigued, but with his robust habit of mind he had labelled such symptoms as mere laziness, and had driven himself with the whip. But now it might be as well to get a medical overhauling just for the satisfaction of being told there was nothing the matter with him. The pronouncement was not quite that....

"But I simply can't," he said. "Bed for a month and a winter of loafing on the Riviera! Why, I've got my time filled up till close on Christmas, and then I've arranged to go with some friends for a short holiday. Besides, the Riviera's a pestilent hole. It can't be done. Supposing I go on just as usual: what will happen?"

Dr. Dufflin made a mental summary of his wilful patient.

"You'll die, Mr. Graham," he said cheerfully. "Your heart is not what it should be, and if you want it to do its work, which it will for many years yet, if you're sensible, you must give it rest. Of course, I don't insist on the Riviera: that was only a suggestion for I thought you would probably have friends there, who would help to pass the time for you. But I do insist on some mild climate, where you can loaf out of doors. London with its frosts and fogs would never do."

Peter was silent for a moment.

"How about Cornwall?" he asked.

"Yes, if you like. Not the north coast of course."

"I'll think it over," said Peter. "There's a month yet."

Peter knew that there was no need for thinking it over. Events were conspiring irresistibly to drive him to that which he longed to do, but against which he had been struggling, so fantastic was it, so irrational. But now it was made easy for him to yield and his obstinate colours came down with a run. A few telegraphic exchanges with the house-agent made Lescop his, another gave him the address of a reliable builder and decorator, and with the plans of the house, though indeed there was little need of them, spread out on his counterpane, Peter issued urgent orders. All structural repairs, leaking roofs and dripping ceilings, rotted woodwork and crumbling plaster must be tackled at once, and when that was done, painting and papering followed. The drawing-room used to have a Morris-paper; there were spring flowers on it, blackthorn, violets, and fritillaries, a hateful wriggling paper, so he thought it, but none other would serve. The hall was painted duck-egg green, and his mother's room was pink, "a beastly pink, tell them," said Peter to his secretary, "with a bit of blue in it: they must send me sample by return of post, big pieces, not snippets...." Then there was furniture: all the furniture in the house here which had once been at Lescop must go back there. For the rest, he would send down some

stuff from London, bedroom appurtenances, and linen and kitchen utensils: he would see to carpets when he got there. Spare bedrooms could wait; just four servants' rooms must be furnished, and also the attic which he had marked on the plan, and which he intended to occupy himself. But no one must touch the garden till he came: he would superintend that himself, but by the middle of next month there must be a couple of gardeners ready for him.

"And that's all," said Peter, "just for the present." "All?" he thought, as, rather bored with the direction of matters that usually ran themselves, he folded up his plans. "Why, it's just the beginning: just underwriting."

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The month's rest-cure was pronounced a success, and with strict orders not to exert mind or body, but to lie fallow, out of doors whenever possible, with quiet strolls and copious restings, Peter was allowed to go to Lescop, and on a December evening he saw the door opened to him and the light of welcome stream out on to his entry. The moment he set foot inside he knew, as by some interior sense, that he had done right, for it was not only the warmth and the ordered comfort restored to the deserted house that greeted him, but the firm knowledge that they whose loss made his loneliness were greeting him... That came in a flash, fantastic and yet soberly convincing; it was fundamental, everything was based on it. The house had been restored to its old aspect, and though he had ventured to turn the small attic next door to young Peter's bedroom into a bathroom, "after all," he thought, "it's my house, and I must make myself comfortable. They don't want bathrooms, but I do, and there it is." There indeed it was, and there was electric light installed, and he dined, sitting in his father's chair, and then pottered from room to room, drinking in the old friendly atmosphere, which was round him wherever he went, for They were pleased. But neither voice nor vision manifested that, and perhaps it was only his own pleasure at being back that he attributed to them. But he would have loved a glimpse or a whisper, and from time to time, as he sat looking over some memoranda about the British Tin Syndicate, he peered into corners of the room, thinking that something moved there, and when a trail of creeper tapped against the window he got up and looked out. But nothing met his scrutiny but the dim starlight falling like dew on the neglected lawn. "They're here, though," he said to himself, as he let the curtain fall back.

The gardeners were ready for him next morning, and under his directions began the taming of the jungly wildness. And here was a pleasant thing, for one of them was the son of the cowman, Calloway, who had been here forty years ago, and he had childish memories still of the garden where with his father he used to come from the milking-shed to the house with the full pails. And he remembered that Sybil used to keep her guinea-pigs on the drying-ground at the back of the house. Now that he said that Peter remembered it too, and so the drying-ground all overgrown with brambles and rank herbage must be cleared.

"Iss, sure, nasty little vermin I thought them," said Calloway the younger, "but 'twas here Miss Sybil had their hutches and a wired run for 'em. And a rare fuss there was when my father's terrier got in and killed half of 'em, and the young lady crying over the corpses."

That massacre of the innocents was dim to Peter; it must have happened in term-time when he was at school, and by the next holidays, to be sure, the prolific habits of her pets had gladdened Sybil's mourning.

So the drying-ground was cleared and the winding path up the shrubbery to the summer-house which had been home to the distressed vessels pursued by pirates. This was being rebuilt now, the roof timbered up, the walls rectified and whitewashed, and the steps leading to it and its tiled floor cleaned of the encroaching moss. It was soon finished, and Peter often sat there to rest and read the papers after a morning of prowling and supervising in the garden, for an hour or two on his feet oddly tired him, and he would doze in the sunny shelter. But now he never dreamed about coming back to Lescop or of the welcoming presences. "Perhaps that's because I've come," he thought, "and those dreams were only meant to drive me. But I think they might show that they're pleased: I'm doing all I can."

Yet he knew they were pleased, for as the work in the garden progressed, the sense of them and their delight hung about the cleared paths as surely as the smell of the damp earth and the uprooted bracken which had made such trespass. Every evening Calloway collected the gleanings of the day, piling it on the bonfire in the orchard. The bracken flared, and the damp hazel stems fizzed and broke into flame, and the scent of the wood smoke drifted across to the house. And after some three weeks' work all was done, and that afternoon Peter took no siesta in the summer-house, for he could not cease from walking through flower-garden and kitchen-garden and orchard now perfectly restored to their old order. A shower fell, and he sheltered under the lime where the pigeons built, and then the sun came out again, and in that gleam at

the close of the winter day he took a final stroll to the bottom of the drive, where the gate now hung firm on even hinges. It used to take a long time in closing, if, as a boy, you let it swing, penduluming backwards and forwards with the latch of it clicking as it passed the hasp: and now he pulled it wide, and let go of it, and to and fro it went in lessening movement till at last it clicked and stayed. Somehow that pleased him immensely: he liked accuracy in details.

But there was no doubt he was very tired: he had an unpleasant sensation, too, as of a wire stretched tight across his heart, and of some thrumming going on against it. The wire dully ached, and this thrumming produced little stabs of sharp pain. All day he had been conscious of something of the sort, but he was too much taken up with the joy of the finished garden to heed little physical beckonings. A good long night would make him fit again, or, if not, he could stop in bed to-morrow. He went upstairs early, not the least anxious about himself, and instantly went to sleep. The soft night air pushed in at his open window, and the last sound that he heard was the tapping of the blind-tassel against the sash.

He woke very suddenly and completely, knowing that somebody had called him. The room was curiously bright, but not with the quality of moonlight; it was like a valley lying in shadow, while somewhere, a little way above it, shone some strong splendour of noon. And then he heard again his name called, and knew that the sound of the voice came in through the window. There was no doubt that Violet was calling him: she and the others were out in the garden.

"Yes, I'm coming," he cried, and he jumped out of bed. He seemed—it was not odd—to be already dressed: he had on a jersey and flannel trousers, but his feet were bare and he slipped on a pair of shoes, and ran downstairs, taking the first short flight in one leap, like young Peter. The door of his mother's room was open, and he looked in, and there she was, of course, sitting at the table and writing letters.

"Oh, Peter, how lovely to have you home again," she said. "They're all out in the garden, and they've been calling you, darling. But come and see me soon, and have a talk."

Out he ran along the walk below the windows, and up the winding path through the shrubbery to the summer-house, for he knew they were going to play Pirates. He must hurry, or the pirates would be abroad before he got there, and as he ran, he called out:

"Oh, do wait a second: I'm coming."

He scudded past the golden maple and the bay tree, and there they all were in the summer-house which was home. And he took a flying leap up the steps and was among them.

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It was there that Calloway found him next morning. He must indeed have run up the winding path like a boy, for the new-laid gravel was spurned at long intervals by the toe-prints of his shoes.

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## THE WISHING-WELL

The village of St. Gervase lies at the seaward base of that broad triangular valley which lies scooped-out among the uplands of the north Cornish moors, and not even among the fells of Cumberland could you find so remote a cluster of human habitations. Four miles of by-road, steep and stony, lies between it and the highway along which in tourist-time the motor-buses pound dustily to Bude and Newquay, and eight more separate it from rail-head. Scarcely once in the summer does an inquisitive traveller think it worth while to visit a village which his guide-book dismisses with the very briefest reference to the ancient wishing-well that lies near the lych-gate of the churchyard there. The world, in fact, takes very little heed of St. Gervase, and St. Gervase hardly more of the outer world. Seldom do you see man or woman waiting at the corner, where the road from the village joins the highway, for the advent of the motor-bus, and seldom does it pause there to set down one of its passengers. An occasional trolley laden with sacks of coal and cargo of beer-barrels jolts heavily down the lane; for the rest the farms of the valley and the kitchen-gardens of the cottagers supply it with the needs of life and its few fishing-boats bring in their harvest from the sea. Nor does St. Gervase seek after any fruits of science or culture or religion save such as spring from its soil, which furnishes its wise women with herbs of healing for ailing bodies, and from its tradition of spells and superstition of a darker sort to be used in the service of love or of vengeance. These latter are not publicly spoken of save in one house at St. Gervase, but are muttered and whispered in quiet consultations, and thus the knowledge has been handed down from mother to daughter since the days when, three centuries ago, a screeching handcuffed band of women were driven from here to Bodmin, and, after a parody of a trial, burned at the stake.

It was strange that the Vicarage which might have been expected to be unblackened by the smoke of legendary learning was the one house where magic and witchcraft were openly and sedulously studied, but such study was purely academical, the Reverend Lionel Eusters being the foremost authority in England as a writer on folk-lore. His parochial duties were light and his leisure plentiful, for a couple of services on Sunday were, to judge by the congregation, sufficient for the spiritual needs of his parish, and for the rest of the week he was busy in the library of the creeper-covered vicarage that stood hard by the lych-gate that led to the churchyard. Here, patient but unremitting, he worked at his great book on witchcraft which had engaged him so many years, occasionally printing some sub-section of it as a pamphlet: the origin of the witch's broomstick, for instance, had furnished curious reading. He was a wealthy man with no expensive tastes save that for books on his subject and the big library he had built on to the Vicarage had now few empty shelves. Twenty years ago, when ill-health had driven him from the chill clays of Cambridge, he had been appointed to this remote college living, and the warm soft climate and the strange primitive traditions that hung about the place suited both his health and his hobby.

Mr. Eusters had long been a widower, and his daughter Judith, now a woman of forty years old, kept house for him. The time of her more marriageable maidenhood had been spent here in complete isolation from her own class, and though sometimes when she saw the courtships and childbirths of the village the sense of what she had missed made a bitter brew for her, she had long known that St. Gervase had cast some spell upon her, and that had a wooer from without sought her he must indeed be a magnet to her heart if he could draw her from this secluded valley into the world that lay beyond the moors. In the few visits she had paid to relations of her father and mother, she had always pined to be home again, and to wake to the glinting of the sun on the gorse-clad hills, or to the bellowing roar of some westerly gale that threw the sheets of rain against the window: a stormy day at home was worth all the alien sunshine, and the sandy beach of the bay with the waves asleep or toppling in, foam-laced and thunderous, was better than the brilliance of southern seas. Here alone her mind knew that background of content which is brighter than all the pleasures the world offers: here every day the spell of St. Gervase was like some magic shuttle weaving its threads through her.

Since her mother's death Judith's days had been of a uniform monotony. Household cares claimed a short hour of the morning, and then she went to the library where her father worked to transcribe his words if he had a section of his work ready for dictation, or to look up endless references in the volumes that lined the room, if he was preparing the notes which formed the material of his dictation. Some branch of witchcraft was always the subject of it, some magical rite for the fertility of the cattle, some charm for child-bearing, some philtre for love, or (what had by degrees got to interest her most), one that caused the man on whom a girl's heart was set, but who had nought for her, to wither in the grip of some nameless sickness and miserably to perish. Month by month as her father pushed his patient way forward through the ancient mists, these Satanic spells that blighted grew to be a fascination with Judith.

Just now he was deep in an exploration into wishing-wells, and there she sat this morning, pencil in hand for his

dictation, as he walked up and down the library, glancing now and then at his memoranda spread out on the table.

"These wishing-wells," he said, "are common to the whole of early European beliefs, but nowhere do we find that the power which supposedly presided over them was at the beck and call of any chance persons who invoked their efficacy. Only witches and those who had occult powers could set the spell working, and the origin of that spell was undoubtedly Satanic, and not till Christian times were these wells used for any purpose but that of invoking evil. The form of these wells is curiously similar; an arch or shelter of stonework is invariably built over them, and in the sides are cut small niches where, in Christian days, candles were placed or thank-offerings deposited. What they were previously used for is uncertain, but they were beyond doubt connected with the evil spells, and I conjecture that the name of the person devoted to destruction was scratched on a coin, or written on a slip of linen or paper, to await the action of the diabolical power. The most perfectly preserved of these wishing-wells known to me, is that of St. Gervase in Cornwall; its arched shelter is in excellent condition, and the well, as is usual, very deep. The local belief in its efficacy has survived to this day, though its power is never invoked, as far as I can ascertain, for evil purposes. A woman in pregnancy, for instance, will drink of the well and pray beside it, a girl whose lover has gone to sea will scratch her name on a silver coin and drop it into the water, thus insuring his safe return. The village folk are curiously reticent about such practices, but I can personally vouch for cases of this kind...."

He paused, fingering the short Vandyck beard that grew greyly from his chin.

"My dear, I wonder if that is quite discreet," he said to Judith. "But after all it is highly improbable that any copy of my work published by the University at a guinea, will find its way here. I think I will chance it.... Dear me, the bell for luncheon already! We will resume our work this evening, if you are at leisure, as I have much ready for dictation."

Judith smiled to herself as she paged the sheets.... She knew very much more about her father's parishioners than he, for he, scholar, recluse, and parson only lived on the fringe of their lives, whereas she, in chatty visits to the women who sat and knitted at their cottage-doors, had got into real touch with an inner life to which he was a stranger. She knew, for instance, that old Sally Trenair, whose death less than a week ago had been a source of such relief to her neighbours, was universally held to be a witch, and Sally was always muttering and mumbling round the wishing-well. None who crossed her will prospered, their cows went dry or threw stillborn calves, their sheep wilted, the atrocious henbane, fatal to cattle, appeared in their fields: so the prudent wished Sally a polite good day, and sent her honey from their hives and a cut of prime bacon when the pig was killed. But from some vein of secretiveness, Judith did not tell her father of such talk, whispered to her over the knitting-needles, which would have inclined him to modify his view about the surviving association of the wishing-well with evil invocations. It was idle gossip, perhaps, for if you had challenged her to say whether she believed such tales of old Sally, she would have certainly denied it.... And yet something deep down in her would have whispered "I don't only believe: I *know*."

To-day, when luncheon was finished, her father returned to his desk and Judith started to walk a couple of miles up the valley to the farm of John Penarth, whose family from time immemorial had owned those rich acres. For the last eight years he and his wife had lived there alone, for their only son Steven had gone out to America at the age of sixteen to seek his fortune. But fortune had not sought him, and now, when his father was growing old and his health declining, Steven was coming home with the intention of settling down here. Judith remembered him well, a big handsome boy with the blue of the sea in his eyes and the sunshine in his hair, and she wondered into what sort of man he would have grown. She had heard that he was already come, but though she was curious to see him, the motive for her visit was really the same as that which so often drew her to the Penarth farm, namely, to have a talk with Steven's mother. There was no one, thought Judith, who was so learned in what was truly worth knowing as Mrs. Penarth. She could not have pointed you India on the big globe that stood in her parlour, or have answered the simplest board-school question about Queen Elizabeth, or have added five to four without counting on her fingers, but she had rarer knowledge in the stead of such trivialities. She had the healing touch for man and beast: she stroked an ailing cow and next day it would be at pasture again, she whispered in the ear of a feverish child, plucking gently at its forehead and pulled the headache out so that the child slept. And she, alone of all the village, paid no court to Sally Trenair nor sought to propitiate her. One day, as she passed Sally's cottage, Sally had screamed curses on her, and followed her, yelling, half-way to the farm. Then suddenly Mrs. Penarth had turned and shot out her finger at her. "You silly tipsy old crone," she had cried. "Down on your knees and crave my pardon, and then get home and don't cross my way again."

Sure enough Sally knelt on the stones, and slunk off home, and thereafter, if Mrs. Penarth was down in the village, she would make haste to get into her cottage, and shut the door. Mrs. Penarth, it seemed, knew more than Sally.

Judith swung her easy way up the steep hill, hatless in spite of the hot sun, and unbreathed by the ascent. She was a tall woman, black-haired and comely, her skin clear and healthy with the bloom on it that only sun and air can give. Her full-lipped mouth hinted that passion smouldered there, her eyebrows, fine and level nearly met across the base of her forehead, her eyes big and black looked ever so slightly inwards. So small was the convergence that it was no disfigurement: when she looked directly at you it was not perceptible, but if she was immersed in her own thoughts, then it was there. Most noticeable was it when her father was dictating to her some grim story of malign magic or witchcraft.... But now she had come to the paved path through the garden of the farm-house set with flowers and herbs in front of the espaliered apple-trees, and there was Mrs. Penarth, knitting in the shade of the house during these hot hours before she went out again to chicken-run and milking-shed.

"Eh, but you're a welcome sight, Miss Judith," she said in the soft Cornish speech. "And you hatless in the sun, as ever, but indeed you're one of the wise who have made sun and rain their friends, and 'tis far you'd have to search ere you found better. Come in, dear soul, and have a glass of currant-water after your walk, and tell me the doings down to St. Gervase."

Judith always fell into their mode of speech when she was with the native folk!

"Sure, there's little to tell," she said. "There was a grand catch two days ago, and yesterday was the burying of old Sally Trenair."

Mrs. Penarth poured out for her a glass of the clear ruby liquor for which she was famous.

"Strange how the folk were scared of that tipsy old poppet," she said. "She had nobbut a few rhymes to gabble and a foul tongue to flap at them. A tale of curses she blew off at me one day, and I doubt not she hid my name in the wishing-well, though I never troubled to look."

"Hid your name in the wishing-well?" asked Judith, thinking of the morning's dictation.

Mrs. Penarth shot a swift oblique glance at her. There was certain things she had noticed about Judith, and they interested her.

"Aw my dear, you've sure got too much sense and book-learning to heed such tales," she said. "But when I was a girl my mother used to talk of them. Even now I scarce know what to make of such strange things."

"Oh, tell me of them," said Judith. "My father's just set on the wishing-wells and the lore of them. He was dictating to me of them all the morning."

"Eh, to think of that! Well, when I was a girl there were a many queer doings round the well. A maid would tell an old crone like Sally if she fancied a young man, and get some gabble to con over as she sipped the water. Or if a fellow had an ill-will toward another he'd consult a witch-woman and she'd write the name of his enemy for him, and bid him hide it in the well. And then, sure as eve or morning, tribulations drove fast on him, as long as his name bided there. His cows would go dry or his boat be wrecked or his children get deadly dwams or his wife break her marriage vows. Or he himself would pine and fail till he was scarce able to put foot to floor, and presently the bell would be tolling for him. Idle tales no doubt."

Judith had been drinking this in, eager as the thirsty earth drinks the rain after drought or as a starving man sets his teeth in food. Her mouth smiled, her blood beat high and strong, it was as if she was learning some news of good fortune which was hers by birthright. Just then there came a step in the passage and the door opened.

"Why, 'tis Steven," said Mrs. Penarth. "Come, lad, and pay your duty to Miss Judith, maybe she remembers you."

Tall as she was, he towered over her: he had a boy's face still, and the sea was in his eyes and the sun in his hair. And on the instant Judith knew that no magnet of man would avail to draw her from St. Gervase.

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There was dictation again for her up till supper-time, and when, after that, her father went back to his books, she strolled out, as she often did on hot nights like this, before going to bed. Never yet had she felt so strong an emotional excitement

as that afternoon when Mrs. Penarth, talking of those old beliefs of her girlhood, had somehow revealed Judith to herself. All that narrative about the wishing-well was already familiar to some secret cell in her brain: she needed only to be reminded of it to make it her own. On the top of that had come Steven's entry, and her heart had leaped to him. Some mixed brew of these two was at ferment within her now; sometimes a bubble from one, sometimes from the other rose luminous to the surface. She felt restless and tingling with stored energy, and she paused for a moment at the gate of the garden uncertain how to spend it.

The night was thickly overcast, the road that led down to the village a riband of grey, scarcely visible, and as she stood there she heard a step brisk and active coming along it, and there swung into view, recognizable even in the deep dusk by his height and gait, the figure of Steven on his way to the village. Dearly would she have loved to call to him and walk with him, but that could not be: besides another desire tugged at her, and when he was past, she turned in at the lych-gate to the churchyard. The white tombstones glimmered faintly in the dusk, and she looked up beyond them towards the grave by which she had stood two days ago at the burying of old Sally. Then her breath caught in her throat for she could see the mound of new-turned earth gleaming whitely. She made her way to it: this dark earth was certainly luminous with some wavering light, and on the moment she was conscious that Sally herself, not the mere bag of bones that had been put away in the earth, was close to her. So vivid was this impression that she whispered "Sally! Are you here, Sally?" No audible response came, but the answer tingled in every nerve in her body, and she knew that Sally was here, no pale wandering spirit, but a power friendly and sisterly and altogether evil. It was trickling into her, growing warm in her veins, as by some transfusion of blood. She went to the wishing-well and kneeling on the kerb stone of it drank of its water from her cupped hands.

Something stirred beside her, and turning she saw at her side, illuminated by some pale gleam, a little bent figure shrouded in clean grave-clothes and the brown wizened face, which she had last beheld in the composure and dignity of death, now all alive with glee and with welcome. And her flesh was weak, for in a spasm of terror she sprang to her feet with arms flung out against the spectre, and lo, there was nothing there but the quiet churchyard with the headstones of those who slumbered there, and at her feet the black invisible water of which she had drunk. Despising herself for the fright, and yet winged with it, she ran stumbling from the place, not halting till she was back at the vicarage, where the light shining from the library window showed that her father was still pursuing his academic researches into the world of things occult and terrible of which the doors were now swinging open to admit her in very truth.

For some days the horror of that moment by the well was effective, and she threw herself into the normal ways of life which lured her with a new brightness. She often saw Steven, for it was he who brought the milk of a morning from the farm, and she would be out in the garden by the time of his early arrival cutting roses for her vases or more strenuously engaged in weeding the borders. At first she gave him just a nodded "good morning," but soon they would stand chatting there for five minutes. She knew she made a fine handsome figure; she saw he appreciated her healthy splendour, he looked at her with the involuntary tribute a man pays to a good-looking woman. Fond, wild notions took root in her mind, spreading their fibres beneath in the soil, and anchoring there.... Another morning she heard him singing as he clattered down the road in the milk-cart, a big rough resonant voice, of high pitch for a man. Judith played the organ in church, conducting a choir-practice every Saturday for the singers, and next week Steven was sitting among the men while she took them through the canticles and hymns. Women and girls took alto and treble parts; the chief chorister was Nance Pascoe, a maid of twenty, and she was like a folded rose-bud just bursting into full flower. By some blind instinct Judith began to dislike her: she would stop in the middle of a verse to tell the trebles they were flat, which meant that Nance was the culprit. Again she would ask the tenors singly to sing some line over which they had bungled, and had a word of praise for Steven. Or she would go to the farm for a chat with Mrs. Penarth, and by some casual questions learn that Steven was hedge-clipping near by in the meadow. Then she would remember she wanted a chicken for next day, and go to tell him: it was but a step. In a hundred infinitesimal ways she betrayed herself.

Mixed with this growth of longing which had so firmly rooted itself was another of more poisonous breed. There was a power eager to help her, and like a frightened fool she had fled from its manifestation. But she knew she was making no way with Steven, and now she bethought herself again of it, and found that her terror had withered, and that her thirst for commerce with those dark enchantments was keen not only for the help they could give her, but for her own love of them. Once more in the evening, when her father was back at his books, she set out for the wishing-well.

Her step was noiseless on the grass of the churchyard, and she was close to the wishing-well, still screened by bushes that grew there, when she heard from behind them a ringing man's laugh, and a girl's voice joined in.

"Sure, she's terrible set on you, Steven. It makes me bubble within when she says at the choir-singing, 'Yes, very nice, Mr. Penarth,' and what the poor soul means is 'Aw, Steven, doo'ee come and give me a hug.'"

Steven laughed again.

"I'm fair scared of her," he said, "though mother laughs fit to burst when she's come up to the farm to see and order one egg or a sprig of mint. And every morning when I take the milk the old girl'll be weeding and hoeing, showing-off like, as if she was the strong man at the fair."

"Eh, I declare I'm sorry for her," said Nance, "for I know what it is to love you. Poor empty heart!"

"Nance, we must put our banns up," said he. "I'm scared, but give your lad a kiss to strengthen him, and I'll pluck up and ask Parson to read us out next Sunday."

There was silence.

"Eh, Steven, don't hug so tight," whispered Nance. "You'll get your fill of me ere long. Just a drink from the well for us both, and then I must get home."

Judith stole back along the grass and from behind the curtain in the parlour window saw the two, arm-entwined, pass down the road. No thought was there now in her mind of any love-philtre, no longer did she want the help of a friendly power to get Steven. He had mocked at her, he was scared of her, and soon he would have good reason for that. Of Nance she hardly thought: it was not for Nance that her heart was black as the water in the wishing-well.... She felt no hysterical rage of longing for revenge; it was a hellish glee that fed her soul. Quaint and pleasant was it, she thought, as she wrote on a slip of paper the name of "Steven Penarth," that it should have been his mother who had taught her that. Mrs. Penarth had laughed 'fit to burst' at her, so Mrs. Penarth must learn not to laugh so much.

She went forth with the inscribed slip. The power she courted was flooding into her, wave on wave. Now she was back at the well again, and there she knelt a moment drinking in like a thirsty field the dew of power with which the air was thick. She felt in the darkness for one of those fern-fringed niches in the wall, and deep among its fronds she hid the paper.

"Master of evil and of me," she muttered, "send sickness and death on him whom I here dedicate."

Something stirred beside her: she knew that the presence which had terrified her before was manifest again. She turned with hands of welcome, and there beside her was the shroud-wrapped figure and the wizened face, but now the shroud was white no longer but spotted with earth-mould, and the flesh was rotting from the face. Judith put her arms close round the spectre, and kissed the frayed lips fretted with decay, and she felt it melting into her. She shut her eyes in the ecstasy of that union: when she opened them she was clasping the empty air.

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She was down early next morning, full of youthful fire and fitness, and presently the milk-cart clattered up to the gate. But it was not Steven who drove it, but Mrs. Penarth.

"'Tis I who've come with your milk to-day, Miss Judith," she said, "for Steven's got a terrible bad headache, and I bade him lie abed. But he charged me to ask Parson to put up his banns, come Sunday."

"Oh, is Mr. Steven to be married?" asked Judith. "Who's the maid?"

"Just Nance Pascoe whom he's played with since he was a lad."

"Then he's lucky," said Judith, "for she's pretty as a picture. I'll tell my father about the banns. And I'm so sorry Mr. Steven's not well. But he'll mend quick."

The days passed on, and soon it was seen that Steven lay stricken with some sore fever to which neither his mother's healing hands nor the doctor's potions brought relief. Every morning Judith learned from Mrs. Penarth that he was no better, and every morning she felt herself the object of some keen, silent scrutiny. She was not one who prinked before her glass, but one day after Mrs. Penarth had gone, she ran upstairs and questioned her face. It certainly had changed: it



was sharper in outline, and that cast in her eye was surely more pronounced. But she liked that: it seemed an outward and visible sign of her power. Every night now she sat by the wishing-well concentrating on her desire. The news of Steven had been joyfully bad that day: his fever burned more fiercely, consuming the flesh on his bones and drinking up his strength. Twice now had his banns been called, but it was not likely that he would go to church next as a bridegroom.

The moon was soon to rise as Judith got up to go home: she fancied she heard something stir in the bushes by the well, and called "Sally, Sally," but no response came. Her limbs were light with joy, she danced along the strip of turf leaping high in the air for the very exuberance of her soul.... As soon as she turned out of the lych-gate Mrs. Penarth stole out of the bushes. She had a dark lantern with her, and she searched the walls of the wishing-well. She spied the paper Judith had hidden there, and she drew it out and read it. She tore it in half, and on the blank piece she wrote another name, and put it back exactly where it had been. That night Steven slept well and long, and in the morning, even as Judith had surmised, he was "mending quick."

Judith was not in the garden at the milk-hour to hear the favourable report, and later in the day Dr. Addis was called in: he found her suffering from just such an attack of fever as he had been attending for the past fortnight. It puzzled him, but his treatment of his other patient was proving successful, and he assured her father there was no cause for alarm: fevers ran their course. And Judith's fever ran its course even more fiercely.

She was lying in her bed facing the window some ten days after she had been taken ill. She knew that the power she had absorbed into her when she embraced that spectral horror by the wishing-well was being drained out of her by some vaster potency, which, vampire-like, was drinking up her own vitality as well. She had been quite conscious all day, but often she had seen, waveringly, like the flame of a candle blown this way and that in the draught, the dim semblance of that shrouded figure round which she had cast her welcoming arms. It seemed to be still attached to her by some band of filmy whiteness and to be incomplete, but about the hour of sunset she saw that the spectre stood by her bed, fully formed and severed from her. The face was now deeply pitted by corruption, and it floated away from her and drifted out of the window. She was left here, human once more, but sick unto death.

She remembered how she had written Steven's name, and dedicated him to the power of the wishing-well. Yet what had come of that? For the last week now Steven had brought the morning's milk, hale and handsome, with enquiries about her from his mother.

Could it be, she questioned herself, that she had failed in some point of the damnable ritual, and that what she had written was active not for his doom but for hers? It would be wise to destroy that slip of paper, if she could only get to it, not because she had ceased to wish him evil, but from the fear that it was her vitality that was being drained from her on that fruitless purpose.

She got out of bed, giddy with weakness, and managed to get into a skirt and jersey, and slip her feet into her shoes. The house was quiet, and step by step she struggled downstairs and to the door. The wholesome wind off the sea put a little life into her, and she shuffled along the strip of turf down which she had danced and capered, and which lay between the lych-gate and the well. She passed round the screen of bushes and there on the stone bench, was Steven's mother. She rose as Judith appeared and curtsied.

"Aw, dear. Why you look poorly indeed, Miss Judith," she said. "Is it wise for you to come out? To the wishing-well, too: there have been strange doings here."

"Oh, I'll be mending soon," said Judith. "A drink from the wishing-well was what I fancied."

She knelt down on the kerb leaning one hand against the wall of the well, while with the other she felt among the ferns that fringed it. There was the slip of paper she had hidden, and she drew it forth.

"Take your drink then, Miss Judith," said Mrs. Penarth. "Why, whatever have you found? That's a queer thing to have gotten! A slip of paper in it? Open it, dear soul: maybe there's some good news in it."

Judith crushed it up in her hand; there was no need for her to look, and even as she knelt there, she felt a sweet lightening and cooling of her fever come over her.

Mrs. Penarth shot out her hand at her.

"Open it, you slut, you paltry witch," she screamed. "Do my bidding!"

Judith opened it, and read her own name written there.

She tried to rise to her feet; she swayed and staggered and she fell forward into the wishing-well. It was very deep, and the sides of it were slippery with slime and water-moss. Once she caught at the step on which she had knelt, but her fingers failed to grasp it, and she sank. Once after that she rose and then there came a roaring in her ears, and to her eyes a blackness, and down her throat there poured the cool water of the wishing-well.

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## THE BATH-CHAIR

Edmund Faraday, at the age of fifty, had every reason to be satisfied with life: he had got all he really wanted, and plenty of it. Health was among the chief causes of his content, and he often reflected that the medical profession would have a very thin time of it, if everyone was as fortunate as he. His appreciation of his good fortune was apt at times to be a little trying: he ate freely, he absorbed large (but in no way excessive) quantities of mixed alcoholic liquors, pleasantly alluding to his immunity from any disagreeable effects, and he let it be widely known that he had a cold bath in the morning, spent ten minutes before an open window doing jerks and flexings, and had a fine appetite for breakfast. Not quite so popular was his faint contempt for those who had to be careful of themselves. It was not expressed in contemptuous terms, indeed he was jovially sympathetic with men perhaps ten years younger than himself who found it more prudent to be abstemious. "Such a bore for you, old man," he would comment, "but I expect you're wise."

In addition to these physical advantages, he was master of a very considerable income, derived from shares in a very sound company of general stores, which he himself had founded, and of which he was chairman: this and his accumulated savings enabled him to live precisely as he pleased. He had a house near Ascot, where he spent most weekends from Friday to Monday, playing golf all day, and another in Massington Square, conveniently close to his business. He might reasonably look forward to a robust and prosperous traverse of that table-land of life which with healthy men continues till well after they have passed their seventieth year. In London he was accustomed to have a couple of hours' bridge at his club before he went back to his bachelor home where his sister kept house for him, and from morning to night his life was spent in enjoying or providing for his own pleasures.

Alice Faraday was, in her own department, one of the clues of his prosperous existence, for it was she who ran his domestic affairs for him. He saw little of her, for he always breakfasted by himself, and encountered her in the morning only for a moment when he came downstairs to set out for his office, and told her whether there would be some of his friends to dinner, or whether he would be out; she would then interview the cook and telephone to the tradesmen, and make her tour of the house to see that all was tidy and speckless. At the end of the day again it was but seldom that they spent a domestic evening together: either he dined out leaving her alone, or three friends or perhaps seven were his guests and made up a table or two tables of bridge. On these occasions Alice was never of the party. She was no card player, she was rather deaf, she was silent and by no means decorative, and she was best represented by the admirable meal she had provided for him and his friends. At the house at Ascot she performed a similar role, finding her way there by train on Friday morning, so as to have the house ready for him when he motored down later in the day.

Sometimes he wondered whether he would not be more comfortable if he married and gave Alice a modest home of her own with an income to correspond, for, though he saw her but seldom, her presence was slightly repugnant to him. But marriage was something of a risk, especially for a man of his age who had kept out of it so long, and he might find himself with a wife who had a will of her own, and who did not understand, as Alice certainly did, that the whole reason of her existence was to make him comfortable. Again he wondered whether perfectly-trained servants like his would not run the house as efficiently as his sister, in which case she would be better away; he would, indefinitely, be more at his ease if she were not under his roof. But then his cook might leave, or his housemaid do her work badly, and there would be bills to go through, and wages to be paid, and catering to be thought of. Alice did all that, and his only concern was to draw her a monthly cheque, with a grumble at the total. As for his occasional evenings with her, though it was a bore to dine with this rather deaf, this uncouth and bony creature, such evenings were rare, and when dinner was over, he retired to his own den, and spent a tolerable hour or two over a book or a crossword puzzle. What she did with herself he had no idea, nor did he care, provided she did not intrude on him. Probably she read those gruesome books about the subconscious mind and occult powers which interested her. For him the conscious mind was sufficient, and she had little place in it. A secret unsavoury woman: it was odd that he, so spick and span and robust, should be of the same blood as she.

This regime, the most comfortable that he could devise for himself, had been practically forced on Alice. Up till her father's death she had kept house for him, and in his old age he had fallen on evil days. He had gambled away in stupid speculation on the Stock Exchange a very decent capital, and for the last five years of his life he had been entirely dependent on his son, who housed them both in a dingy little flat just around the corner from Massington Square. Then the old man had had a stroke and was partially paralysed, and Edmund, always contemptuous of the sick and the inefficient, had grudged every penny of the few hundred pounds which he annually allowed him. At the same time he admired the powers of management and economy that his sister manifested in contriving to make her father comfortable

on his meagre pittance. For instance, she even got him a second-hand bath-chair, shabby and shiny with much usage, and on warm days she used to have him wheeled up and down the garden in Massington Square, or sit there reading to him. Certainly she had a good idea of how to use money, and so, on her father's death, since she had to be provided for somehow, he offered her a hundred pounds a year, with board and lodging, to come and keep house for him. If she did not accept this munificence she would have to look out for herself, and as she was otherwise penniless, it was not in her power to refuse. She brought the bath-chair with her, and it was stored away in a big shed in the garden behind her brother's house. It might come into use again some day.

Edmund Faraday was an exceedingly shrewd man, but he never guessed that there was any psychical reason, beyond the material necessity, why Alice so eagerly accepted his offer. Briefly, this reason was that his sister regarded him with a hatred that prospered and burned bright in his presence. She hugged it to her, she cherished and fed it, and for that she must be with him: otherwise it might die down and grow cold. To hear him come in of an evening thrilled her with the sense of his nearness, to sit with him in silence at their rare solitary meals, to watch him, to serve him was a feast to her. She had no definite personal desire to injure him, even if that had been possible, but she must be near him, waiting for some inconjecturable doom, which, long though it might tarry, would surely overtake him, provided only that she kept the dynamo of her hatred ceaselessly at work. All vivid emotion, she knew, was a force in the world, and sooner or later it worked out its fulfilment. In her solitary hours, when her housekeeping work was accomplished, she directed her mind on him like a searchlight, she studied books of magic and occult lore that revealed or hinted at the powers which concentration can give. Witches and sorcerers, in the old days, ignorant of the underlying cause, made spells and incantations, they fashioned images of wax to represent their victims, and bound and stabbed them with needles in order to induce physical illness and torturing pains, but all this was child's play, dealing with symbols: the driving force behind them, which was much better left alone to do its will in its own way without interference, was hate. And it was no use being impatient: it was patience that did its perfect work. Perhaps when the doom began to shape itself, a little assistance might be given: fears might be encouraged, despair might be helped to grow, but nothing more than that. Just the unwearied waiting, the still intense desire, the black unquenchable flame....

Often she felt that her father's spirit was in touch with her, for he, too, had loathed his son and when he lay paralysed, without power of speech, she used to make up stories about Edmund for his amusement, how he would lose all his money, how he would be detected in some gross dishonesty in his business, how his vaunted health would fail him, and how cancer or some crippling ailment would grip him; and then the old man's eyes would brighten with merriment, and he cackled wordlessly in his beard and twitched with pleasure. Since her father's death, Alice had no sense that he had gone from her, his spirit was near her, and its malevolence was undiminished. She made him partner of her thoughts: sometimes Edmund was late returning from his work, and as the minutes slipped by and still he did not come, it was as if she still made stories for her father, and told him that the telephone bell would soon ring, and she would find that she was being rung up from some hospital where Edmund had been carried after a street accident. But then she would check her thoughts; she must not allow herself to get too definite or even to suggest anything to the force that was brewing and working round him. And though at present all seemed well with him, and the passing months seemed but to endow him with new prosperities, she never doubted that fulfilment would fail, if she was patient and did her part in keeping the dynamo of hate at work.

Edmund Faraday had only lately moved into the house he now occupied. Previously he had lived in another in the same square, a dozen doors off, but he had always wanted this house: it was more spacious, and it had behind it a considerable plot of garden, lawn and flower-beds, with a high brick wall surrounding it. But the other house was still unlet, and the house agent's board on it was an eyesore to him: there was money unrealized while it stood empty. But to-night, as he approached it, walking briskly back from his office, he saw that there was a man standing on the balcony outside the drawing-room windows: evidently then there was someone seeing over it. As he drew nearer, the man turned, took a few steps towards the long open window and passed inside. Faraday noticed that he limped heavily, leaning on a stick and swaying his body forward as he advanced his left leg, as if the joint was locked. But that was no concern of his, and he was pleased to think that somebody had come to inspect his vacant property. Next morning on his way to business he looked in at the agent's, in whose hands was the disposal of the house, and asked who had been enquiring about it. The agent knew nothing of it: he had not given the keys to anyone.

"But I saw a man standing on the balcony last night," said Faraday. "He must have got hold of the keys."

But the keys were in their proper place, and the agent promised to send round at once to make sure that the house was duly locked up. Faraday took the trouble to call again on his way home, only to learn that all was in order, front door

locked, and back door and area gate locked, nor was there any sign that the house had been burglariously entered.

Somehow this trumpery incident stuck in Faraday's mind, and more than once that week it was oddly recalled to him. One morning he saw in the street a little ahead of him a man who limped and leaned on his stick, and instantly he bethought himself of that visitor to the empty house for his build and his movement were the same, and he quickened his step to have a look at him. But the pavement was crowded, and before he could catch him up the man had stepped into the roadway, and dodged through the thick traffic, and Edmund lost sight of him. Once again, as he was coming up the Square to his own house, he was sure that he saw him walking in the opposite direction, down the other side of the Square, and now he turned back in order to come round the end of the garden and meet him face to face. But by the time he had got to the opposite pavement there was no sign of him. He looked up and down the street beyond; surely that limping crippled walk would have been visible a long way off. A big man, broad-shouldered and burly in make: it should have been easy to pick him out. Faraday felt certain he was not a householder in the Square, or surely he must have noticed him before. And what had he been doing in his locked house: and why, suddenly, should he himself now catch sight of him almost every day? Quite irrationally, he felt that this obtrusive and yet elusive stranger had got something to do with him.

He was going down to Ascot to-morrow, and to-night was one of those rare occasions when he dined alone with his sister. He had little appetite, he found fault with the food, and presently the usual silence descended. Suddenly she gave her little bleating laugh. "Oh, I forgot to tell you," she said. "There was a man who called to-day—didn't give any name—who wished to see you about the letting of the other house. I said it was in the agent's hands: I gave him the address. Was that right, Edmund?"

"What was he like?" he rapped out.

"I never saw his face clearly at all. He was standing in the hall with his back to the window, when I came down. But a big man, like you in build, but crippled. Very lame, leaning heavily on his stick."

"What time was this?"

"A few minutes only before you came in."

"And then?"

"Well, when I told him to apply to the agent, he turned and went out, and, as I say, I never saw his face. It was odd somehow. I watched him from the window, and he walked round the top of the Square and down the other side. A few minutes afterwards I heard you come in."

She watched him as she spoke, and saw trouble in his face.

"I can't make out who the fellow is," he said. "From your description he seems like a man I saw a week ago, standing on the balcony of the other house. Yet when I enquired at the agent's, no one had asked for the keys, and the house was locked up all right. I've seen him several times since, but never close. Why didn't you ask his name, or get his address?"

"I declare I never thought of it," she said.

"Don't forget, if he calls again. Now if you've finished you can be off. You'll go down to Ascot to-morrow morning, and let us have something fit to eat. Three men coming down for the week-end."

Faraday went out to his morning round of golf on Saturday in high good spirits: he had won largely at bridge the night before, and he felt brisk and clear-eyed. The morning was very hot, the sun blazed, but a bastion of black cloud coppery at the edges was pushing up the sky from the east, threatening a downpour, and it was annoying to have to wait at one of the short holes while the couple in front delved among the bunkers that guarded the green. Eventually they holed out, and Faraday waiting for them to quit saw that there was watching them a big man, leaning on a stick, and limping heavily as he moved. "That's he," he thought to himself, "so now I'll get a look at him." But when he arrived at the green the stranger had gone, and there was no sign of him anywhere. However, he knew the couple who were in front, and he could ask them when he got to the clubhouse who their friend was. Presently the rain began, short in duration but violent, and his partner went to change his clothes when they got in. Faraday scorned any such precaution: he never caught cold, and never yet in his life had he had a twinge of rheumatism, and while he waited for his less robust partner he made enquiries of the couple who had been playing in front of him as to who their lame companion was. But they knew nothing

of him: neither of them had seen him.

Somehow this took the edge off his sense of well-being, for indeed it was a queer thing. But Sunday dawned, bright and sparkling, and waking early he jumped out of bed with the intention of a walk in the garden before his bath. But instantly he had to clutch at a chair to save himself a fall. His left leg had given way under his weight, and a stabbing pain shot through his hip-joint. Very annoying: perhaps he should have changed his wet clothes yesterday. He dressed with difficulty, and limped downstairs. Alice was there arranging fresh flowers for the table.

"Why, Edmund, what's the matter?" she asked.

"Touch of rheumatism," he said. "Moving about will put it right."

But moving about was not so easy: golf was out of the question, and he sat all day in the garden, cursing this unwonted affliction, and all day the thought of the lame man, in build like himself, scratched about underground in his brain, like a burrowing mole.

Arrived back in London Faraday saw a reliable doctor, who, learning of his cold baths and his undisciplined use of the pleasures of the cellar and the table, put him on a regime which was a bitter humiliation to him, for he had joined the contemptible army of the careful. "Moderation, my dear sir," said his adviser. "No more cold baths or port for you, and a curb on your admirable appetite. A little more quiet exercise, too, during the week, and a good deal less on your week-ends. Do your work and play your games and see your friends. But moderation, and we'll soon have you all right."

It was in accordance with this distasteful advice that Faraday took to walking home if he had been dining out in the neighbourhood, or, if at home, took a couple of turns round the Square before going to bed. Contrary to use, he was without guests several nights this week, and on the last of them, before going down into the country again, he limped out about eleven o'clock feeling ill at ease and strangely apprehensive of the future. Though the violence of his attack had abated, walking was painful and difficult, and his halting steps, he felt sure, must arrest a contemptuous compassion in all who knew what a brisk, strong mover he had been. The night was cloudy and sweltering hot, there was a tenseness and an oppression in the air that matched his mood. All pleasure had been sucked out of life for him by this indisposition, and he felt with some inward and quaking certainty that it was but the shadow of some more dire visitant who was drawing near. All this week, too, there had been something strange about Alice. She seemed to be expecting something, and that expectation filled her with a secret glee. She watched him, she took note, she was alert...

He had made the complete circuit of the Square, and now was on his second round, after which he would turn in. A hundred yards of pavement lay between him and his own house, and it and the roadway were absolutely empty. Then, as he neared his own door, he saw that a figure was advancing in his direction; like him it limped and leaned on a stick. But though a week ago he had wanted to meet this man face to face, something in his mind had shifted, and now the prospect of the encounter filled him with some quaking terror. A meeting, however, was not to be avoided, unless he turned back again, and the thought of being followed by him was even more intolerable than the encounter. Then, while he was still a dozen yards off, he saw that the other had paused opposite his door, as if waiting for him.

Faraday held his latchkey in his hand ready to let himself in. He would not look at the fellow at all, but pass him with averted head. When he was now within a foot or two of him, the other put out his hand with a detaining gesture, and involuntarily Faraday turned. The man was standing close to the street lamp, and his face was in vivid light. And that face was Faraday's own: it was as if he beheld his own image in a looking-glass.... With a gulping breath he let himself into his house, and banged the door. There was Alice standing close within, waiting for him surely.

"Edmund," she said—and just as surely her voice trembled with some secret suppressed glee—"I went to post a letter just now, and that man who called about the other house was loitering outside. So odd."

He wiped the cold dew from his forehead.

"Did you get a look at him?" he asked. "What was he like?"

She gave her bleating laugh, and her eyes were merry.

"A most extraordinary thing!" she said. "He was so like you that I actually spoke to him before I saw my mistake. His walk, his build, his face: everything. Most extraordinary! Well, I'll go up to bed now. It's late for me, but I thought you would like to know that he was about, in case you wanted to speak to him. I wonder who he is, and what he wants. Sleep

well!"

In spite of her good wishes, Faraday slept far from well. According to his usual custom, he had thrown the windows wide before he got into bed, and he was just dozing off, when he heard from outside an uneven tread and the tap of a stick on the pavement, his own tread he would have thought, and the tap of his own stick. Up and down it went, in a short patrol, in front of his house. Sometimes it ceased for a while, but no sooner did sleep hover near him than it began again. Should he look out, he asked himself, and see if there was anyone there? He recoiled from that, for the thought of looking again on himself, his own face and figure, brought the sweat to his forehead. At last, unable to bear this haunted vigil any longer, he went to the window. From end to end, as far as he could see, the Square was empty, but for a policeman moving noiselessly on his rounds, and flashing his light into areas.

Dr. Inglis visited him next morning. Since seeing him last, he had examined the X-ray photograph of the troublesome joint, and he could give him good news about that. There was no sign of arthritis; a muscular rheumatism, which no doubt would yield to treatment and care, was all that ailed him. So off went Faraday to his work, and the doctor remained to have a talk to Alice, for, jovially and encouragingly, he had told him that he suspected he was not a very obedient patient, and must tell his sister that his instructions as to food and tabloids must be obeyed.

"Physically there's nothing much wrong with him, Miss Faraday," he said, "but I want to consult you. I found him very nervous and I am sure he was wanting to tell me something, but couldn't manage it. He ought to have thrown off his rheumatism days ago, but there's something on his mind, sapping his vitality. Have you any idea—strict confidence, of course—what it is?"

She gave her little bleat of laughter.

"Wrong of me to laugh, I know, Dr. Inglis," she said, "but it's such a relief to be told there's nothing really amiss with dear Edmund. Yes: he has something on his mind—dear me, it's so ridiculous that I can hardly speak of it."

"But I want to know."

"Well, it's a lame man, whom he has seen several times. I've seen him, too, and the odd thing is he is exactly like Edmund. Last night he met him just outside the house, and he came in, well, really looking like death."

"And when did he see him first? After this lameness came upon him, I'll be bound."

"No: before. We both saw him before. It was as if—such nonsense it sounds!—it was as if this sort of double of himself showed what was going to happen to him."

There was glee and gusto in her voice. And how slovenly and uncouth she was with that lock of grey hair loose across her forehead, and her uncared-for hands. Dr. Inglis felt a distaste for her: he wondered if she was quite right in the head.

She clasped one knee in her long bony fingers.

"That's what troubles him—oh, I understand him so well," she said. "Edmund's terrified of this man. He doesn't know *what* he is. Not *who* he is, but *what*he is."

"But what is there to be afraid about?" asked the doctor. "This lame fellow, so like him, is no disordered fancy of his own brain, since you've seen him too. He's an ordinary living human being."

She laughed again, she clapped her hands like a pleased child. "Why, of course, that must be so!" she said. "So there's nothing for him to be afraid of. That's splendid! I must tell Edmund that. What a relief! Now about the rules you've laid down for him, his food and all that. I will be very strict with him. I will see that he does what you tell him. I will be quite relentless."

For a week or two Faraday saw no more of this unwelcome visitor, but he did not forget him, and somewhere deep down in his brain there remained that little cold focus of fear. Then came an evening when he had been dining out with friends: the food and the wine were excellent, they chaffed him about his abstemiousness, and loosening his restrictions he made a jolly evening of it, like one of the old days. He seemed to himself to have escaped out of the shadow that had lain on him, and he walked home in high good humour, limping and leaning on his stick, but far more brisk than was his wont. He must be up betimes in the morning, for the annual general meeting of his company was soon coming on, and to-

morrow he must finish writing his speech to the shareholders. He would be giving them a pleasant half-hour; twelve per cent free of tax and a five per cent bonus was what he had to tell them about Faraday's Stores.

He had taken a short cut through the dingy little thoroughfare where his father had lived during his last stricken years, and his thoughts flitted back, with the sense of a burden gone, to the last time he had seen him alive, sitting in his bath-chair in the garden of the Square, with Alice reading to him. Edmund had stepped into the garden to have a word with him, but his father only looked at him malevolently from his sunken eyes, mumbling and muttering in his beard. He was like an old monkey, Edmund thought, toothless and angry and feeble, and then suddenly he had struck out at him with the hand that still had free movement. Edmund had given him the rough side of his tongue for that; told him he must behave more prettily unless he wanted his allowance cut down. A nice way to behave to a son who gave him every penny he had!

Thus pleasantly musing he came out of this mean alley, and crossed into the Square. There were people about to-night, motors were moving this way and that, and a taxi was standing at the house next his, obstructing any further view of the road. Passing it, he saw that directly under the lamp-post opposite his own door there was drawn up an empty bath-chair. Just behind it, as if waiting to push it, when its occupant was ready, there was standing an old man with a straggling white beard. Peering at him Edmund saw his sunken eyes and his mumbling mouth, and instantly came recognition. His latchkey slipped from his hand, and without waiting to pick it up, he stumbled up the steps, and, in an access of uncontrollable panic, was plying bell and knocker and beating with his hands on the panel of his door. He heard a step within, and there was Alice, and he pushed by her, collapsing on to a chair in the hall. Before she closed the door and came to him, she smiled and kissed her hand to someone outside.

It was with difficulty that they got him up to his bedroom, for though just now he had been so brisk, all power seemed to have left him, his thigh-bones would scarce stir in their sockets, and he went up the stairs crab-wise or corkscrew-wise sidling and twisting as he mounted each step. At his direction, Alice closed and bolted his windows and drew the curtains across them; not a word did he say about what he had seen, but indeed there was no need for that.

Then leaving him she went to her own room, alert and eager, for who knew what might happen before day? How wise she had been to leave the working out of this in other hands: she had but concentrated and thought, and, behold, her thoughts and the force that lay behind them were taking shape of their own in the material world. Fear, too, that great engine of destruction, had Edmund in its grip, he was caught in its invisible machinery, and was being drawn in among the relentless wheels. And still she must not interfere: she must go on hating him and wishing him ill. That had been a wonderful moment when he battered at the door in a frenzy of terror, and when, opening it, she saw outside the shabby old bath-chair and her father standing behind it. She scarcely slept that night, but lay happy and nourished and tense, wondering if at any moment now the force might gather itself up for some stroke that would end all. But the short summer night brightened into day, and she went about her domestic duties again, so that everything should be comfortable for Edmund.

Presently his servant came down with his master's orders to ring up Dr. Inglis. After the doctor had seen him, he again asked to speak to Alice. This repetition of his interview was lovely to her mind: it was like the re-entry of some musical motif in a symphony, and now it was decorated and amplified, for he took a much graver view of his patient. This sudden stiffening of his joints could not be accounted for by any physical cause, and there accompanied it a marked loss of power, which no bodily lesion explained. Certainly he had had some great shock, but of that he would not speak. Again the doctor asked her whether she knew anything of it, but all she could tell him was that he came in last night in a frightful state of terror and collapse. Then there was another thing. He was worrying himself over the speech he had to make at this general meeting. It was highly important that he should get some rest and sleep, and while that speech was on his mind, he evidently could not. He was therefore getting up, and would come down to his sitting-room where he had the necessary papers. With the help of his servant he could manage to get there, and when his job was done, he could rest quietly there, and Dr. Inglis would come back during the afternoon to see him again: probably a week or two in a nursing home would be advisable. He told Alice to look in on him occasionally, and if anything alarmed her she must send for him. Soon he went upstairs again to help Edmund to come down, and there were the sounds of heavy treads, and the creaking of banisters, as if some dead weight was being moved. That brought back to Alice the memory of her father's funeral and the carrying of the coffin down the narrow stairs of the little house which his son's bounty had provided for him.

She went with her brother and the doctor into his sitting-room and established him at the table. The room looked out on to the high-walled garden at the back of the house, and a long French window, opening to the ground, communicated with



it. A plane-tree in full summer foliage stood just outside, and on this sultry overcast morning the room was dim with the dusky green light that filters through a screen of leaves. His table was strewn with his papers, and he sat in a chair with its back to the window. In that curious and sombre light his face looked strangely colourless, and the movements of his hands among his papers seemed to falter and stumble.

Alice came back an hour later and there he sat still busy and without a word for her, and she turned on the electric light, for it had grown darker, and she closed the open window, for now rain fell heavily. As she fastened the bolts, she saw that the figure of her father was standing just outside, not a yard away. He smiled and nodded to her, he put his finger to his lips, as if enjoining silence; then he made a little gesture of dismissal to her, and she left the room, just looking back as she shut the door. Her brother was still busy with his work, and the figure outside had come close up to the window. She longed to stop, she longed to see with her own eyes what was coming, but it was best to obey that gesture and go. The hall outside was very dark, and she stood there a moment, listening intently. Then from the door which she had just shut there came, unmistakably, the click of a turned key, and again there was silence but for the drumming of the rain, and the splash of overflowing gutters. Something was imminent: would the silence be broken by some protest of mortal agony, or would the gutters continue to gurgle till all was over?

And then the silence within was shattered. There came the sound of Edmund's voice rising higher and more hoarse in some incoherent babble of entreaty, and suddenly, as it rose to a scream, it ceased as if a tap had been turned off. Inside there, something fell with a thump that shook the solid floor, and up the stairs from below came Edmund's servant.

"What was that, miss?" he said in a scared whisper, and he turned the handle of the door. "Why, the master's locked himself in."

"Yes, he's busy," said Alice, "perhaps he doesn't want to be disturbed. But I heard his voice, too, and then the sound of something falling. Tap at the door and see if he answers."

The man tapped and paused, and tapped again. Then from inside came the click of a turned key, and they entered.

The room was empty. The light still burned on his table but the chair where she had left him five minutes before was pushed back, and the window she had bolted was wide. Alice looked out into the garden, and that was as empty as the room. But the door of the shed where her father's bath-chair was kept stood open, and she ran out into the rain and looked in. Edmund was lying in it with head lolling over the side.

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# MONKEYS

Dr. Hugh Morris, while still in the early thirties of his age, had justly earned for himself the reputation of being one of the most dexterous and daring surgeons in his profession, and both in his private practice and in his voluntary work at one of the great London hospitals his record of success as an operator was unparalleled among his colleagues. He believed that vivisection was the most fruitful means of progress in the science of surgery, holding, rightly or wrongly, that he was justified in causing suffering to animals, though sparing them all possible pain, if thereby he could reasonably hope to gain fresh knowledge about similar operations on human beings which would save life or mitigate suffering; the motive was good, and the gain already immense. But he had nothing but scorn for those who, for their own amusement, took out packs of hounds to run foxes to death, or matched two greyhounds to see which would give the death-grip to a single terrified hare: that, to him, was wanton torture, utterly unjustifiable. Year in and year out, he took no holiday at all, and for the most part he occupied his leisure, when the day's work was over, in study.

He and his friend Jack Madden were dining together one warm October night at his house looking on to Regent's Park. The windows of his drawing-room on the ground-floor were open, and they sat smoking, when dinner was done, on the broad window-seat. Madden was starting next day for Egypt, where he was engaged in archæological work, and he had been vainly trying to persuade Morris to join him for a month up the Nile, where he would be engaged throughout the winter in the excavation of a newly-discovered cemetery across the river from Luxor, near Medinet Habu. But it was no good.

"When my eye begins to fail and my fingers to falter," said Morris, "it will be time for me to think of taking my ease. What do I want with a holiday? I should be pining to get back to my work all the time. I like work better than loafing. Purely selfish."

"Well, be unselfish for once," said Madden. "Besides, your work would benefit. It can't be good for a man never to relax. Surely freshness is worth something."

"Precious little if you're as strong as I am. I believe in continual concentration if one wants to make progress. One may be tired, but why not? I'm not tired when I'm actually engaged on a dangerous operation, which is what matters. And time's so short. Twenty years from now I shall be past my best, and I'll have my holiday then, and when my holiday is over, I shall fold my hands and go to sleep for ever and ever. Thank God, I've got no fear that there's an after-life. The spark of vitality that has animated us burns low and then goes out like a windblown candle, and as for my body, what do I care what happens to that when I have done with it? Nothing will survive of me except some small contribution I may have made to surgery, and in a few years' time that will be superseded. But for that I perish utterly."

Madden squirted some soda into his glass.

"Well, if you've quite settled that——" he began.

"I haven't settled it, science has," said Morris. "The body is transmuted into other forms, worms batten on it, it helps to feed the grass, and some animal consumes the grass. But as for the survival of the individual spirit of a man, show me one tittle of scientific evidence to support it. Besides, if it did survive, all the evil and malice in it must surely survive too. Why should the death of the body purge that away? It's a nightmare to contemplate such a thing, and oddly enough, unhinged people like spiritualists want to persuade us for our consolation that the nightmare is true. But odder still are those old Egyptians of yours, who thought that there was something sacred about their bodies, after they were quit of them. And didn't you tell me that they covered their coffins with curses on anyone who disturbed their bones?"

"Constantly," said Madden. "It's the general rule in fact. Marrowy curses written in hieroglyphics on the mummy-case or carved on the sarcophagus."

"But that's not going to deter you this winter from opening as many tombs as you can find, and rifling from them any objects of interest or value."

Madden laughed.

"Certainly it isn't," he said. "I take out of the tombs all objects of art, and I unwind the mummies to find and annex their scarabs and jewellery. But I make an absolute rule always to bury the bodies again. I don't say that I believe in the

power of those curses, but anyhow a mummy in a museum is an indecent object."

"But if you found some mummied body with an interesting malformation, wouldn't you send it to some anatomical institute?" asked Morris.

"It has never happened to me yet," said Madden, "but I'm pretty sure I shouldn't."

"Then you're a superstitious Goth and an anti-educational Vandal," remarked Morris.... "Hullo, what's that?" He leant out of the window as he spoke. The light from the room vividly illuminated the square of lawn outside, and across it was crawling the small twitching shape of some animal. Hugh Morris vaulted out of the window, and presently returned, carrying carefully in his spread hands a little grey monkey, evidently desperately injured. Its hind legs were stiff and outstretched as if it was partially paralysed.

Morris ran his soft deft fingers over it.

"What's the matter with the little beggar, I wonder," he said. "Paralysis of the lower limbs: it looks like some lesion of the spine."

The monkey lay quite still, looking at him with anguished appealing eyes as he continued his manipulation.

"Yes, I thought so," he said. "Fracture of one of the lumbar vertebræ. What luck for me! It's a rare injury, but I've often wondered.... And perhaps luck for the monkey too, though that's not very probable. If he was a man and a patient of mine, I shouldn't dare to take the risk. But, as it is ..."

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Jack Madden started on his southward journey next day, and by the middle of November was at work on this newly-discovered cemetery. He and another Englishman were in charge of the excavation, under the control of the Antiquity Department of the Egyptian Government. In order to be close to their work and to avoid the daily ferrying across the Nile from Luxor, they hired a bare roomy native house in the adjoining village of Gurnah. A reef of low sandstone cliff ran northwards from here towards the temple and terraces of Deir-el-Bahari, and it was in the face of this and on the level below it that the ancient graveyard lay. There was much accumulation of sand to be cleared away before the actual exploration of the tombs could begin, but trenches cut below the foot of the sandstone ridge showed that there was an extensive area to investigate.

The more important sepulchres, they found, were hewn in the face of this small cliff: many of these had been rifled in ancient days, for the slabs forming the entrances into them had been split, and the mummies unwound, but now and then Madden unearthed some tomb that had escaped these marauders, and in one he found the sarcophagus of a priest of the nineteenth dynasty, and that alone repaid weeks of fruitless work. There were nearly a hundred *ushaptiu* figures of the finest blue glaze; there were four alabaster vessels in which had been placed the viscera of the dead man removed before embalming: there was a table of which the top was inlaid with squares of variously coloured glass, and the legs were of carved ivory and ebony: there were the priest's sandals adorned with exquisite silver filagree: there was his staff of office inlaid with a diaper-pattern of cornelian and gold, and on the head of it, forming the handle, was the figure of a squatting cat, carved in amethyst, and the mummy, when unwound, was found to be decked with a necklace of gold plaques and onyx beads. All these were sent down to the Gizeh Museum at Cairo, and Madden reinterred the mummy at the foot of the cliff below the tomb. He wrote to Hugh Morris describing this find, and laying stress on the unbroken splendour of these crystalline winter days, when from morning to night the sun cruised across the blue, and on the cool nights when the stars rose and set on the vapourless rim of the desert. If by chance Hugh should change his mind, there was ample room for him in this house at Gurnah, and he would be very welcome.

A fortnight later Madden received a telegram from his friend. It stated that he had been unwell and was starting at once by long sea to Port Said, and would come straight up to Luxor. In due course he announced his arrival at Cairo and Madden went across the river next day to meet him: it was reassuring to find him as vital and active as ever, the picture of bronzed health. The two were alone that night, for Madden's colleague had gone for a week's trip up the Nile, and they sat out, when dinner was done, in the enclosed courtyard adjoining the house. Till then Madden had shied off the subject of himself and his health.

"Now I may as well tell you what's been amiss with me," he said, "for I know I look a fearful fraud as an invalid, and physically I've never been better in my life. Every organ has been functioning perfectly except one, but something suddenly went wrong there just once. It was like this."

He paused a moment.

"After you left," he said, "I went on as usual for another month or so, very busy, very serene and, I may say, very successful. Then one morning I arrived at the hospital when there was one perfectly ordinary but major operation waiting for me. The patient, a man, was wheeled into the theatre anaesthetized, and I was just about to make the first incision into the abdomen, when I saw that there was sitting on his chest a little grey monkey. It was not looking at me, but at the fold of skin which I held between my thumb and finger. I knew, of course, that there was no monkey there, and that what I saw was a hallucination, and I think you'll agree that there was nothing much wrong with my nerves when I tell you that I went through the operation with clear eyes and an unshaking hand. I had to go on: there was no choice about the matter. I couldn't say: 'Please take that monkey away,' for I knew there was no monkey there. Nor could I say: 'Somebody else must do this, as I have a distressing hallucination that there is a monkey sitting on the patient's chest.' There would have been an end of me as a surgeon and no mistake. All the time I was at work it sat there absorbed for the most part in what I was doing and peering into the wound, but now and then it looked up at me, and chattered with rage. Once it fingered a spring-forceps which clipped a severed vein, and that was the worst moment of all.... At the end it was carried out still balancing itself on the man's chest.... I think I'll have a drink. Strongish, please.... Thanks."

"A beastly experience," he said when he had drunk. "Then I went straight away from the hospital to consult my old friend Robert Angus, the alienist and nerve-specialist, and told him exactly what had happened to me. He made several tests, he examined my eyes, tried my reflexes, took my blood-pressure: there was nothing wrong with any of them. Then he asked me questions about my general health and manner of life, and among these questions was one which I am sure has already occurred to you, namely, had anything occurred to me lately, or even remotely, which was likely to make me visualize a monkey. I told him that a few weeks ago a monkey with a broken lumbar vertebra had crawled on to my lawn, and that I had attempted an operation—binding the broken vertebra with wire—which had occurred to me before as a possibility. You remember the night, no doubt?"

"Perfectly," said Madden, "I started for Egypt next day. What happened to the monkey, by the way?"

"It lived for two days: I was pleased, because I had expected it would die under the anaesthetic, or immediately afterwards from shock. To get back to what I was telling you. When Angus had asked all his questions, he gave me a good wiggling. He said that I had persistently overtaxed my brain for years, without giving it any rest or change of occupation, and that if I wanted to be of any further use in the world, I must drop my work at once for a couple of months. He told me that my brain was tired out and that I had persisted in stimulating it. A man like me, he said, was no better than a confirmed drunkard, and that, as a warning, I had had a touch of an appropriate delirium tremens. The cure was to drop work, just as a drunkard must drop drink. He laid it on hot and strong: he said I was on the verge of a breakdown, entirely owing to my own foolishness, but that I had wonderful physical health, and that if I did break down I should be a disgrace. Above all—and this seemed to me awfully sound advice—he told me not to attempt to avoid thinking about what had happened to me. If I kept my mind off it, I should be perhaps driving it into the subconscious, and then there might be bad trouble. 'Rub it in: think what a fool you've been,' he said. 'Face it, dwell on it, make yourself thoroughly ashamed of yourself.' Monkeys, too: I wasn't to avoid the thought of monkeys. In fact, he recommended me to go straight away to the Zoological Gardens, and spend an hour in the monkey-house."

"Odd treatment," interrupted Madden.

"Brilliant treatment. My brain, he explained, had rebelled against its slavery, and had hoisted a red flag with the device of a monkey on it. I must show it that I wasn't frightened at its bogus monkeys. I must retort on it by making myself look at dozens of real ones which could bite and maul you savagely, instead of one little sham monkey that had no existence at all. At the same time I must take the red flag seriously, recognize there was danger, and rest. And he promised me that sham monkeys wouldn't trouble me again. Are there any real ones in Egypt, by the way?"

"Not so far as I know," said Madden. "But there must have been once, for there are many images of them in tombs and temples."

"That's good. We'll keep their memory green and my brain cool. Well, there's my story. What do you think of it?"

"Terrifying," said Madden. "But you must have got nerves of iron to get through that operation with the monkey watching."

"A hellish hour. Out of some disordered slime in my brain there had crawled this unbidden thing, which showed itself, apparently substantial, to my eyes. It didn't come from outside: my eyes hadn't told my brain that there was a monkey sitting on the man's chest, but my brain had told my eyes so, making fools of them. I felt as if someone whom I absolutely trusted had played me false. Then again I have wondered whether some instinct in my subconscious mind revolted against vivisection. My reason says that it is justified, for it teaches us how pain can be relieved and death postponed for human beings. But what if my subconscious persuaded my brain to give me a good fright, and reproduce before my eyes the semblance of a monkey, just when I was putting into practice what I had learned from dealing out pain and death to animals?"

He got up suddenly.

"What about bed?" he said. "Five hours' sleep was enough for me when I was at work, but now I believe I could sleep the clock round every night."

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Young Wilson, Madden's colleague in the excavations, returned next day and the work went steadily on. One of them was on the spot to start it soon after sunrise, and either one or both of them were superintending it, with an interval of a couple of hours at noon, until sunset. When the mere work of clearing the face of the sandstone cliff was in progress and of carting away the silted soil, the presence of one of them sufficed, for there was nothing to do but to see that the workmen shovelled industriously, and passed regularly with their baskets of earth and sand on their shoulders to the dumping-grounds, which stretched away from the area to be excavated, in lengthening peninsulas of trodden soil. But, as they advanced along the sandstone ridge, there would now and then appear a chiselled smoothness in the cliff and then both must be alert. There was great excitement to see if, when they exposed the hewn slab that formed the door into the tomb, it had escaped ancient marauders, and still stood in place and intact for the modern to explore. But now for many days they came upon no sepulchre that had not already been opened. The mummy, in these cases, had been unwound in the search for necklaces and scarabs, and its scattered bones lay about. Madden was always at pains to reinter these.

At first Hugh Morris was assiduous in watching the excavations, but as day after day went by without anything of interest turning up, his attendance grew less frequent: it was too much of a holiday to watch the day-long removal of sand from one place to another. He visited the Tomb of the Kings, he went across the river and saw the temples at Karnak, but his appetite for antiquities was small. On other days he rode in the desert, or spent the day with friends at one of the Luxor hotels. He came home from there one evening in rare good spirits, for he had played lawn-tennis with a woman on whom he had operated for malignant tumour six months before and she had skipped about the court like a two-year-old. "God, how I want to be at work again," he exclaimed. "I wonder whether I ought not to have stuck it out, and defied my brain to frighten me with bogies."

The weeks passed on, and now there were but two days left before his return to England, where he hoped to resume work at once: his tickets were taken and his berth booked. As he sat over breakfast that morning with Wilson, there came a workman from the excavation, with a note scribbled in hot haste by Madden, to say that they had just come upon a tomb which seemed to be unrifled, for the slab that closed it was in place and unbroken. To Wilson, the news was like the sight of a sail to a marooned mariner, and when, a quarter of an hour later, Morris followed him, he was just in time to see the slab prised away. There was no sarcophagus within, for the rock walls did duty for that, but there lay there, varnished and bright in hue as if painted yesterday, the mummy-case roughly following the outline of the human form. By it stood the alabaster vases containing the entrails of the dead, and at each corner of the sepulchre there were carved out of the sandstone rock, forming, as it were, pillars to support the roof, thick-set images of squatting apes. The mummy-case was hoisted out and carried away by workmen on a bier of boards into the courtyard of the excavators' house at Gurnah, for the opening of it and the unwrapping of the dead.

They got to work that evening directly they had fed: the face painted on the lid was that of a girl or young woman, and presently deciphering the hieroglyphic inscription, Madden read out that within lay the body of A-pen-ara, daughter of the overseer of the cattle of Senmut.

"Then follow the usual formulas," he said. "Yes, yes ... ah, you'll be interested in this, Hugh, for you asked me once about it. A-pen-ara curses any who desecrates or meddles with her bones, and should anyone do so, the guardians of her sepulchre will see to him, and he shall die childless and in panic and agony; also the guardians of her sepulchre will tear the hair from his head and scoop his eyes from their sockets, and pluck the thumb from his right hand, as a man plucks the young blade of corn from its sheath."

Morris laughed.

"Very pretty little attentions," he said. "And who are the guardians of this sweet young lady's sepulchre? Those four great apes carved at the corners?"

"No doubt. But we won't trouble them, for to-morrow I shall bury Miss A-pen-ara's bones again with all decency in the trench at the foot of her tomb. They'll be safer there, for if we put them back where we found them, there would be pieces of her hawked about by half the donkey-boys in Luxor in a few days. 'Buy a mummy hand, lady?... Foot of a Gypsy Queen, only ten piastres, gentlemen' ... Now for the unwinding."

It was dark by now, and Wilson fetched out a paraffin lamp, which burned unwaveringly in the still air. The lid of the mummy-case was easily detached, and within was the slim, swaddled body. The embalming had not been very thoroughly done, for all the skin and flesh had perished from the head, leaving only bones of the skull stained brown with bitumen. Round it was a mop of hair, which with the ingress of the air subsided like a belated *soufflé*, and crumbled into dust. The cloth that swathed the body was as brittle, but round the neck, still just holding together, was a collar of curious and rare workmanship: little ivory figures of squatting apes alternated with silver beads. But again a touch broke the thread that strung them together, and each had to be picked out singly. A bracelet of scarabs and cornelians still clasped one of the fleshless wrists, and then they turned the body over in order to get at the members of the necklace which lay beneath the nape. The rotted mummy-cloth fell away altogether from the back, disclosing the shoulder-blades and the spine down as far as the pelvis. Here the embalming had been better done, for the bones still held together with remnants of muscle and cartilage.

Hugh Morris suddenly sprang to his feet.

"My God, look there!" he cried, "one of the lumbar vertebræ, there at the base of the spine, has been broken and clamped together with a metal band. To hell with your antiquities: let me come and examine something much more modern than any of us!"

He pushed Jack Madden aside, and peered at this marvel of surgery.

"Put the lamp closer," he said, as if directing some nurse at an operation. "Yes: that vertebra has been broken right across and has been clamped together. No one has ever, as far as I know, attempted such an operation except myself, and I have only performed it on that little paralysed monkey that crept into my garden one night. But some Egyptian surgeon, more than three thousand years ago, performed it on a woman. And look, look! She lived afterwards, for the broken vertebra put out that bony efflorescence of healing which has encroached over the metal band. That's a slow process, and it must have taken place during her lifetime, for there is no such energy in a corpse. The woman lived long: probably she recovered completely. And my wretched little monkey only lived two days and was dying all the time."

Those questing hawk-visioned fingers of the surgeon perceived more finely than actual sight, and now he closed his eyes as the tip of them felt their way about the fracture in the broken vertebra and the clamping metal band.

"The band doesn't encircle the bone," he said, "and there are no studs attaching it. There must have been a spring in it, which, when it was clasped there, kept it tight. It has been clamped round the bone itself: the surgeon must have scraped the vertebra clean of flesh before he attached it. I would give two years of my life to have looked on, like a student, at that masterpiece of skill, and it was worth while giving up two months of my work only to have seen the result. And the injury itself is so rare, this breaking of a spinal vertebra. To be sure, the hangman does something of the sort, but there's no mending that! Good Lord, my holiday has not been a waste of time!"

Madden settled that it was not worth while to send the mummy-case to the museum at Gizeh, for it was of a very ordinary type, and when the examination was over they lifted the body back into it, for reinterment next day. It was now long after midnight and presently the house was dark.

Hugh Morris slept on the ground-floor in a room adjoining the yard where the mummy-case lay. He remained long awake marvelling at that astonishing piece of surgical skill performed, according to Madden, some thirty-five centuries ago. So occupied had his mind been with homage that not till now did he realize that the tangible proof and witness of the operation would to-morrow be buried again and lost to science. He must persuade Madden to let him detach at least three of the vertebræ, the mended one and those immediately above and below it, and take them back to England as demonstration of what could be done: he would lecture on his exhibit and present it to the Royal College of Surgeons for example and incitement. Other trained eyes beside his own must see what had been successfully achieved by some unknown operator in the nineteenth dynasty.... But supposing Madden refused? He always made a point of scrupulously reburying these remains: it was a principle with him, and no doubt some superstition-complex—the hardest of all to combat with because of its sheer unreasonableness—was involved. Briefly, it was impossible to risk the chance of his refusal.

He got out of bed, listened for a moment by his door, and then softly went out into the yard. The moon had risen, for the brightness of the stars was paled, and though no direct rays shone into the walled enclosure, the dusk was dispersed by the toneless luminosity of the sky, and he had no need of a lamp. He drew the lid off the coffin, and folded back the tattered cerements which Madden had replaced over the body. He had thought that those lower vertebræ of which he was determined to possess himself would be easily detached, so far perished were the muscle and cartilage which held them together, but they cohered as if they had been clamped, and it required the utmost force of his powerful fingers to snap the spine, and as he did so the severed bones cracked as with the noise of a pistol-shot. But there was no sign that anyone in the house had heard it, there came no sound of steps, nor lights in the windows. One more fracture was needed, and then the relic was his. Before he replaced the ragged cloths he looked again at the stained fleshless bones. Shadow dwelt in the empty eye-sockets, as if black sunken eyes still lay there, fixedly regarding him, the lipless mouth snarled and grimaced. Even as he looked some change came over its aspect, and for one brief moment he fancied that there lay staring up at him the face of a great brown ape. But instantly that illusion vanished, and replacing the lid he went back to his room.

The mummy-case was reinterred next day, and two evenings after Morris left Luxor by the night train for Cairo, to join a homeward-bound P. & O. at Port Said. There were some hours to spare before his ship sailed, and having deposited his luggage, including a locked leather despatch-case, on board, he lunched at the Café Tewfik near the quay. There was a garden in front of it with palm trees and trellises gaily clad in bougainvillias: a low wooden rail separated it from the street, and Morris had a table close to this. As he ate he watched the polychromatic pageant of Eastern life passing by: there were Egyptian officials in broad-cloth frock coats and red fezzes; barefooted splay-toed fellahin in blue gabardines; veiled women in white making stealthy eyes at passers-by; half-naked gutter-snipes, one with a sprig of scarlet hibiscus behind his ear; travellers from India with solar topees and an air of aloof British superiority; dishevelled sons of the Prophet in green turbans; a stately sheik in a white *burnous*; French painted ladies of a professional class with lace-rimmed parasols and provocative glances; a wild-eyed dervish in an accordion-pleated skirt, chewing betel-nut and slightly foaming at the mouth. A Greek boot-black with box adorned with brass plaques tapped his brushes on it to encourage customers, an Egyptian girl squatted in the gutter beside a gramophone, steamers passing into the Canal hooted on their syrens.

Then at the edge of the pavement there sauntered by a young Italian harnessed to a barrel-organ: with one hand he ground out a popular air by Verdi, in the other he held out a tin can for the tributes of music-lovers: a small monkey in a yellow jacket, tethered to his wrist, sat on the top of his instrument. The musician had come opposite the table where Morris sat. Morris liked the gay tinkling tune, and feeling in his pocket for a piastre, he beckoned to him. The boy grinned and stepped up to the rail.

Then suddenly the melancholy-eyed monkey leaped from its place on the organ and sprang on to the table by which Morris sat. It alighted there, chattering with rage in a crash of broken glass. A flower-vase was upset, a plate clattered on to the floor. Morris's coffee-cup discharged its black contents on the tablecloth. Next moment the Italian had twitched the frenzied little beast back to him, and it fell head downwards on the pavement. A shrill hubbub arose, the waiter at Morris's table hurried up with voluble execrations, a policeman kicked out at the monkey as it lay on the ground, the barrel-organ tottered and crashed on the roadway. Then all subsided again, and the Italian boy picked up the little body from the pavement. He held it out in his hands to Morris.

"*E morto*," he said.

"Serve it right, too," retorted Morris. "Why did it fly at me like that?"

He travelled back to London by long sea, and day after day that tragic little incident, in which he had had no responsible part, began to make a sort of colouring matter in his mind during those hours of lazy leisure on ship-board, when a man gives about an equal inattention to the book he reads and to what passes round him. Sometimes if the shadow of a seagull overhead slid across the deck towards him, there leaped into his brain, before his eyes could reassure him, the ludicrous fancy that this shadow was a monkey springing at him. One day they ran into a gale from the west: there was a crash of glass at his elbow as a sudden lurch of the ship upset a laden steward, and Morris jumped from his seat thinking that a monkey had leaped on to his table again. There was a cinematograph show in the saloon one evening, in which some naturalist exhibited the films he had taken of wild life in Indian jungles: when he put on the screen the picture of a company of monkeys swinging their way through the trees Morris involuntarily clutched the sides of his chair in hideous panic that lasted but a fraction of a second, until he recalled to himself that he was only looking at a film in the saloon of a steamer passing up the coast of Portugal. He came sleepy into his cabin one night and saw some animal crouching by the locked leather despatch-case. His breath caught in his throat before he perceived that this was a friendly cat which rose with gleaming eyes and arched its back....

These fantastic unreasonable alarms were disquieting. He had as yet no repetition of the hallucination that he saw a monkey, but some deep-buried "idea," to cure which he had taken two months' holiday, was still unpurged from his mind. He must consult Robert Angus again when he got home, and seek further advice. Probably that incident at Port Said had rekindled the obscure trouble, and there was this added to it, that he knew he was now frightened of real monkeys: there was terror sprouting in the dark of his soul. But as for it having any connection with his pilfered treasure, so rank and childish a superstition deserved only the ridicule he gave it. Often he unlocked his leather case and sat poring over that miracle of surgery which made practical again long-forgotten dexterities.

But it was good to be back in England. For the last three days of the voyage no menace had flashed out on him from the unknown dusks, and surely he had been disquieting himself in vain. There was a light mist lying over Regent's Park on this warm March evening, and a drizzle of rain was falling. He made an appointment for the next morning with the specialist, he telephoned to the hospital that he had returned and hoped to resume work at once. He dined in very good spirits, talking to his manservant, and, as subsequently came out, he showed him his treasured bones, telling him that he had taken the relic from a mummy which he had seen unwrapped and that he meant to lecture on it. When he went up to bed he carried the leather case with him. Bed was comfortable after the ship's berth, and through his open window came the soft hissing of the rain on to the shrubs outside.

His servant slept in the room immediately over his. A little before dawn he woke with a start, roused by horrible cries from somewhere close at hand. Then came words yelled out in a voice that he knew:

"Help! Help!" it cried. "O my God, my God! Ah—h—" and it rose to a scream again.

The man hurried down and clicked on the light in his master's room as he entered. The cries had ceased: only a low moaning came from the bed. A huge ape with busy hands was bending over it; then taking up the body that lay there by the neck and the hips he bent it backwards and it cracked like a dry stick. Then it tore open the leather case that was on a table by the bedside, and with something that gleamed white in its dripping fingers it shambled to the window and disappeared.

A doctor arrived within half an hour, but too late. Handfuls of hair with flaps of skins attached had been torn from the head of the murdered man, both eyes were scooped out of their sockets, the right thumb had been plucked off the hand, and the back was broken across the lower vertebræ.

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Nothing has since come to light which could rationally explain the tragedy. No large ape had escaped from the neighbouring Zoological Gardens, or, as far as could be ascertained, from elsewhere, nor was the monstrous visitor of that night ever seen again. Morris's servant had only had the briefest sight of it, and his description of it at the inquest did not tally with that of any known simian type. And the sequel was even more mysterious, for Madden, returning to England at the close of the season in Egypt, had asked Morris's servant exactly what it was that his master had shown him the evening before as having been taken by him from a mummy which he had seen unwrapped, and had got from him



a sufficiently conclusive account of it. Next autumn he continued his excavations in the cemetery at Gurnah, and he disinterred once more the mummy-case of A-pen-ara and opened it. But the spinal vertebræ were all in place and complete: one had round it the silver clip which Morris had hailed as a unique achievement in surgery.

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## CHRISTOPHER COMES BACK

During five years of childless marriage Nellie Mostyn had lived in bondage to the fancied ailments and literary industry of her husband. For the last three of these Christopher had been engaged on a life and a definitive edition of the lyrics of the most obscure of Elizabethan poets—the little-known and less-read Francis Holder,—and morning after morning it had been Nellie's occupation to sit with her husband in his study, looking up references, copying out his notes, receiving his dictation, and rising at punctual intervals to fetch him his tonic, or his aspirin, or his glass of hot water. In the afternoon she took a drive with him, and was almost equally busy with putting one window of the car an inch up, or the other two inches down, with telling the chauffeur not to drive so fast or a shade faster, with adjusting the collar of Christopher's coat, or with shifting his hot-water bottle. Sometimes, if it was not too warm or too cold, he got out to walk for half a mile, and then she carried his woollen muffler, so that he could assume it again at a moment's notice if the breeze grew chilly or the sun went behind clouds. When he got back into the car he would say: "Well, we've had a famous walk to-day, Petsy," and then perhaps he would doze a little, with his large head nodding and lolling on that wrinkled neck, which was so like that of a plucked chicken. Or he had little tendernesses for her, of much the same nature as those that an elderly woman has for her lap-dog—little strokings and squeezes and pattings, with pet names and baby language. Her youth and vigour were always tonic to him, and he was eager to get home and set to work again.

It was so this afternoon, on this day of peerless spring weather, as they passed through woods tapestried with primrose and anemone, and more than once she had to use the speaking-tube to tell the chauffeur to go a shade faster, for Christopher would like two clear hours for dictation between tea-time and seven o'clock, when he always rested for half an hour. If he fell asleep it was Nellie's duty to give him five minutes' law and then wake him.

"And this evening, Petsy," he said, "it may be—though I promise nothing—that I shall have a little surprise for you. Ah! I think we will have the window quite up; the spring weather is often treacherous. Be quick, Nellikins, there is a considerable draught.... A surprise, I was saying. How excited you will be when I tell you. Now you shan't get a word more out of me; don't tease me into telling you, my little rascal girl!"

They had left the woods seething with spring below them, and were mounting the flank of the hill where the village of Pole-Street stood on a shelf of the high downs. A couple of dozen shops lined the entrance to it, and after that came a circle of brick-built houses round the Green, antique and mellow, a survival of more spacious days, when land and leisure were not so dearly bought as now. It was at the farthest of these that their motor drew up; beyond it stood the church, the graveyard of which came up to the low garden wall, and below the ground fell rapidly away towards the woods through which they had passed. Tea was ready, and before five o'clock, Christopher, with his rug spread over his knees and his notes in front of him, had begun to dictate. They worked at the big table in his study, lined with books, and by the fireside was the rocking-chair in which he sat when Nellie read over to him some finished section. A pause occasionally broke the even flow of his voice when he sipped his hot water.

Nellie took down his words automatically; her hand had formed a habit of accurate transcription, and she could unleash her thoughts to wander where they willed. To-day they were alive with the sense of spring; they went dancing with the daffodils, coming back only now and then to supervise her manual employment. Her blood was alert with April, and here she sat day after day, so many of them, over her sapless employment, without lot or portion in the rights of her own spring-season, and in the briskness of her youth. Never did any of their neighbours, with one exception, cross the threshold of the joyless house, for after the morning's work Christopher could not contemplate the strain of a guest at lunch, who might linger unduly and curtail the hours of his motor drive. Tea was followed by work again, and after that he did not feel up to more than a quiet frugal dinner with a little reading aloud till bedtime. Nor could he accept hospitalities from others, if it was thus impossible to return them; besides, hostesses, ignorant of the sad plight of his digestion, might provide a dinner which would be just so many plates of poison to him, and Nellie, of course, could not go out and leave him alone. All this had long been fermenting within her, a perilous brew, and the sense of spring to-day had caused it to bubble afresh.

It may easily be conjectured who was the one person from outside who entered this hermitage. Dr. Bernard Eves paid a visit here regularly once a week to see that no disquieting symptoms were sprouting, to approve the continuance of the current dietary, or suggest some modification, and, in addition to this, he was usually summoned once or twice between his fixed visits to dispel chance alarms. He was a young man, lately come here, and Christopher had the highest opinion of his abilities. He was cheerful, he had a laughing eye, which became suitably grave when he tapped and pressed, and

brightened up again as he congratulated his patient on his general soundness. When the examination was over he interviewed Nellie, and gave her the prescribed commissariat for the next week. Hardly a word, at present, of personal import had passed between them, but both knew that there was fire kindling.

She recalled herself to her work; opposite her sat her husband with his velvet skull-cap on his head, fingering the scanty greyish-brown beard that dripped from his chin. Though he was not yet fifty he appeared an old man; his mouth had a senile droop, his eyes an unfocused watery vagueness, his hands were creased with wrinkled skin. Fresh from her April thoughts, Nellie suddenly shuddered with a qualm of horror and repulsion at the sight of him...

His custom was to spread slips of paper with his notes written on them over the table in front of his oak arm-chair. His dictation was founded on these, and as each was finished with he tore it up. Now there was but one left, and he was beginning to tear it.

"For me," he said, "it will be sufficient reward to have rescued from oblivion one who, whatever his failings, we must consider to be one of the sweetest minor singers in the choir of English melody."

Nellie took down his words, and paused for the next. Then she understood.

"Oh, Christopher!" she said, "I see what your surprise is. The book's finished."

He rose with a chuckle of delight and a fondling hand.

"Clever Nellie!" he said. "But is it not wonderful? Little did I think, when three years ago I set myself this great task, that I should have strength to finish it. To-morrow, Nellikins, we will have a holiday, and then we must buckle to again. You shall do the talking then, lazy girl, reading it all over to me from the beginning, just for verbal corrections, and then off it goes to be typed. Shall Christopher give Nellie 'ickle kiss for her cleverness in guessing? Such a bright little Petsy!"

The reading of the finished manuscript duly began after a day's holiday. Christopher found it less fatiguing to listen than to dictate, and an after-dinner session was added to the usual hours for work. Never was such progress made, until one evening when progress ceased altogether. Christopher was seized with an attack of severe pain which hot water failed to soothe. Dr. Eves was sent for. He recommended an examination by X-Ray. That left little doubt that his patient was suffering from malignant disease, and no doubt at all that an operation was impossible.

One morning some six months later Bernard Eves had paid his daily visit to the sick-room, and was now giving his report to Nellie.

"He has very little pain," he was saying, "because he's really only half-conscious. It's like an uneasy dream, probably, to him, not more than that. What's so astonishing is his vitality. A few months ago I should have said it was quite impossible that he should live through the summer."

Nellie's face was like a mask. For weeks now that hardness had been habitual to it.

"Tell me what you expect," she said.

"I don't know what to expect," he said. "All I can do is to keep him free from pain. Any recovery is absolutely out of the question, but his resistance amazes me."

Suddenly the mask dropped from her face; she got up quivering and shaking.

"Bernard, I can't bear it much longer," she said. "It's a daily horror, and something is giving way inside me under it. His eyes are like the eyes of a dead man, who is yet terribly alive. It's a miracle, you say, that he's alive at all; what if another miracle happens and he gets well? I simply couldn't go through more years of it."

"Nellie, darling, he can't get well," said Bernard. "You may take my word for that. Of course, for everybody's sake—his, yours, mine—one hopes it will be over soon."

She shook her head; she found no comfort there.

"And sometimes I think he knows how I shudder at him," she said, "and why I long for it to be over. He looks from me to you, and then back again. When people go on living on the brink of death like that, who knows but that the veil of

material things wears thin, and they see the things of the spirit? I believe he knows."

He looked up at her sharply.

"Come, Nellie, you're talking nonsense," he said. "It's an awful strain on you, I know, but you can keep a hold on yourself, and you must. I wish you could go away till it's all over, but that's impossible. Remember that he's hardly conscious, and when he gives those long looks at you and then at me he is like someone half asleep, who sees figures by his bed. They are no more than dreams are to us. Besides, how could he know? Utterly impossible."

The nurse who attended Christopher went out for a couple of hours in the afternoon, leaving Nellie to sit in his room or in the dressing-room adjoining. Usually he lay in a drugged torpor, but she had instructions to give him a dose from an opiate mixture if he got restless or showed any signs of being in pain. This afternoon when she was with him he began muttering and turning in bed, and she went to the table where the bottle stood. There were three doses left in it, and she poured the whole into his glass and gave it to him. In a few minutes he was quiet again, and after some half-hour she told a servant to ring up Dr. Eves and bid him come at once. In ten minutes more he was with her, and she pointed to the empty bottle.

"Bernard, I gave him three doses of the opiate," she said.

He stared at her, incredulous.

"It's quite true," she said.

He rushed back to his surgery a hundred yards away, where he dispensed drugs, and brought back with him certain apparatus and a bottle unconnected with them. But his efforts to revive the patient were unavailing, and when the nurse came in from her walk Christopher Mostyn was dead, and in the bottle of opiate mixture were three doses.

"A sudden collapse," he said to her, "such as I have been expecting for many days."

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The funeral was over, and Nellie came back to the house feeling that the last rim of the shadow of the eclipsed years had passed off, even as the blinded windows once more let in the day. She had no touch of remorse or regret for what she had done. Christopher had been doomed to death, and she had but freed him from further days of drugged discomfort. Since that afternoon she had not seen Bernard, for he had received news almost in the same hour of his mother's serious illness, and had gone off at once. Nor had she heard from him since, but nothing was more natural than that he should not write to her just yet. He knew everything, he had been prompt and wise in filling up the bottle to the level at which it had stood when the nurse went out, and she felt that by that action he had accepted what she had done. Before he left he had written the certificate of death, giving malignant disease followed by heart failure as the cause, and when he came back the past would be dead and done with. They would have to wait some months, she supposed, possibly a year, before they married.

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The day was closing in, chilly, with flaws of rain that tapped against the windows. Otherwise the house was quite quiet; no muffled sounds came from the bedroom immediately above; nor would she presently hear the step of the nurse on the stairs coming down to give her news of the patient. Often about this hour he had grown restless and asked to see her, and then he would lie staring at her, but as Bernard had said, perhaps not knowing her. It was an infinite relief to sit here, secure from these ghastly errands, and listen to the rain on the darkening windows, and the soft flapping of the flame on the hearth.

Then there came to her ears the sound of an electric bell, and her heart leaped, for Bernard might have returned. She heard the step of a servant in the passage outside, but instead of turning the corner to the front door it went on towards Christopher's study. After a pause it returned, and the door opened.

"What was that bell?" she asked. "Not the front door?"

"No, ma'am. It was the bell from the study," said the maid. "I supposed you were there."

"You must have made a mistake," said Nellie. "See if it is not the front door."

The maid did not come back, so there could have been no one at the door, and Nellie rose and went to the study. It was nearly dark now, and as she turned on the switch for the light she thought she heard a creak from the oak rocking-chair where for so many mornings of work Christopher had sat over his notes. She looked, and saw that the chair was oscillating slightly as if someone had just got up from it.

For a moment she stared at it motionless and tense, for that familiar movement conveyed to her the sense of Christopher's presence in a manner terribly vivid; had he stood there visibly, reaching up for a book from the shelves, she could not have received a sharper impression of him. She glanced round the room, almost expecting to see him or hear his voice. But there was nothing; just the gleam of light on the big polished table, and lying there on his blotting-pad a duplicate of the printed proofs of his book, which had arrived only a week or two ago, when he was past all thought of them.

The movement of the rocking-chair died away, but the shock to her nerves remained, and, determined to control and master them, she moved about the room, and finally went to the window and looked out. The rain had ceased, and a splash of sullen red in the west showed that the sun had already set. Just outside lay the bounding-wall of the churchyard with its rows of headstones, and close at hand the mound of earth that marked the most recent of the graves. In this queer dim light the dark soil looked like a hole cut in the grass, as if the grave had never been filled in. She drew the blind, ran the curtains along their pole, and left the room, locking the door.

Her nervous perturbation passed off, and she settled down for a tranquil, undisturbed evening. To-morrow, she thought, rain or fine, she would go for a long tramp on the downs, and by to-morrow night, perhaps, Bernard would be back, or she would at least have heard from him. If he was back he would be sure to let her know, and he must dine with her. She would tell him about that chair so strangely rocking, and he would laugh at her for imagining anything of the sort. Some germ of fear still lurked in her mind, for she wanted to be assured that it was but her eyes that had played her a trick, or her tread on a loose board that had caused that rocking movement.... She dozed a little, she read a little, basking in the sense that no call could come for her; she told her parlour-maid that she need not sit up. By eleven o'clock she was ready for bed, and she went along the passage, quenching the lights, past Christopher's study to the stairs.

Opposite the door she paused; that germ of fear had fructified, and she must destroy its brood. So, with a summons to her courage, she unlocked the door and entered. But now there was no need to press the switch, for his green-shaded reading-lamp by the rocking-chair was burning, and on the table beside it lay the printed proofs of his book. And the rocking-chair was again oscillating to and fro, as if its invisible occupant had risen on her entry. Even as she stood there, feeling her hands grow cold and moist, that spectral light faded, and she was looking into the blackness of an unlit room. But something stirred there; she heard the faint thud of a footfall on the carpet, pacing there and pausing in the darkness.

She woke next morning to the radiance of a crisp October day, and, what was even better, to an indifference to that which last night had made her shake as with an ague. What did it matter, after all, if the spirit of Christopher or some astral semblance of it had survived the crumbling and perishing of his body, and haunted the scene of his earthly labours? It could not hurt her, it could not cramp and mummify, as he had done, the life which tingled within her, and which was now free of him. There was business to be got through in the morning, but she lunched early, and set off not for one of those "good walks" of a quarter of an hour, but for a long swinging circuit of the windy downs. Hour after hour she drank of the clear wine of the sun and open spaces, and it was not till dusk was gathering that she came back past the village green. But as she let herself into the house she felt that something was waiting for her return, and her vigour and briskness began to slip from her. There were letters on the hall table, but the one she looked for was still missing.

It seemed as if the presence which had manifested itself in Christopher's study last night was spreading like some chilly mist through the house. She went upstairs to change her walking attire, and on her way down again, as she passed the door of the room where he had died, she found that it was open. She could not imagine who had gone in there ... or was it that someone had come out? She looked in; it was dark, but she heard coming from the place where the sheeted bed stood a sound as of moaning and muttering, very faint. She turned on the light, but the room was empty. Only on the table by the bed there stood a bottle, and she saw that it was the same which held three doses of the opiate mixture. She could have sworn that it had been removed with all the other appliances of the sick-room, and she advanced a step or two with the intention of taking it away. But some invincible horror seized her, and she left it standing there.

Downstairs her parlour-maid was bringing in her tea, and she noticed that the woman looked scared and white.

"What's the matter, Mary?" she said. "Anything ... anything wrong?"

The woman looked at her with twitching lips.

"No, ma'am," she said.

Nellie was a good mistress; she was on friendly, confidential terms with her servants.

"Come, Mary," she said kindly, "something's upset you. Won't you tell me?"

"I was shutting up in here half an hour ago, ma'am," she said, "and I heard someone moving about in the master's room overhead. I thought perhaps it was you—that you had come in by the garden gate, and I went upstairs to see."

Nellie gave a little sigh of relief.

"Ah! And left the door of the room open," she said.

"No, ma'am, it was open, and I shut it," said Mary.

The woman went back to the servants' quarters, and again the house was quiet. But presently Nellie rose and went along the passage to Christopher's study. It was just because she feared going there that she had to do so; her fear was the force that pulled her. She unlocked the door, and once more there was no need to turn up the light, for the reading-lamp by the rocking-chair was burning, and in the chair, with his proofs in his hand, sat Christopher. He turned and looked at her, setting the chair in oscillation ... and then she found herself staring into blackness.

She closed the door and stood leaning against the wall outside, bracing herself against this wave of terror, cold as the Arctic seas, which streamed over her, and though she had left him inside the room, yet he was here close beside her in the brightly lit passage. As she fought against this awful sense of his encompassing presence, she heard a bell ring somewhere in the house. Was he summoning her to come back and read his proofs to him? She fled from the place back to her sitting-room, and then there came steps in the passage, there was a hand on the door, and in panic she crouched in her chair. "No, no; don't come in. I can't bear it!" she whimpered.

And then the door opened, and Bernard stood there. She flew to him, hands outstretched.

"Oh, Bernard, you've come, you've come!" she cried. "How I've been longing for you! I've been terrified, but that's all past now that you're here. But I can't stop here——"

She looked at him, and her voice died away into silence.

"What is it?" she said at length. But she knew what it was.

He tried to speak, but could not. He put out his hands to her, and drew them back. She watched him, curiously detached and emotionless.

"I'll tell you then," she said. "You've come to say that you can't see me again, because I killed him."

She moved a step away towards the tea-table, and then suddenly her terror, stilled for the moment by Bernard's presence, and her love for him surged back on her together.

"Bernard, you can't leave me," she said. "You know what I did was merciful. Besides, we love each other.... And there's more than that. Christopher has come back; he's in the house. He was in his study last night, though I did not see him, and his lamp was lit, and his chair rocking."

Her voice rose.

"This afternoon he was in the bedroom where he died," she said, "and just now I saw him visibly. He's getting more hold over me, his grip is tightening, and it's only you who can loosen it. He knows, and he's trying to keep us apart, so that he'll get possession of me again, and I shall be his. But I'm not his; I'm yours, and you must save me from him. He can't come between us if we are one. He mustn't...."

Her voice, which had risen to a scream, died away again, and the last words were but whispered. Her eyes were on Bernard no longer, but on some point in the air between them, and were focused intently on it. And he, watching her, saw what she was looking at.

A mist of filmy grey began to form there, twining and wreathing within itself, and growing swiftly more substantial, and taking the form and outline of a man. Features defined themselves on the face, blind-looking, watery eyes, and scanty beard, a bald head covered with a black skull-cap. From being transparent the spectre assumed a seeming solidity, the mouth twitched and mumbled as if trying to speak, the hands were held out as if to sever them. Then its solidity melted again; the weaving vapours out of which it had formed itself grew thin and vanished, and the two who were left were looking at each other, white and blanched with the helpless horror that stared from their answering eyes.

A couple of hours later the parlour-maid came in to tell Nellie that her dinner was ready. She was asleep, apparently, in her chair by the fire, and on the table by her stood the empty bottle which had held three doses of the opiate mixture.

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## THE SANCTUARY

Francis Elton was spending a fortnight's holiday one January in the Engadine, when he received the telegram announcing the death of his uncle, Horace Elton, and his own succession to a very agreeable property: the telegram added that the cremation of the remains was to take place that day, and it was therefore impossible for him to attend, and there was no reason for his hurrying home.

In the solicitor's letter that reached him two days later Mr. Angus gave fuller details: the estate consisted of sound securities to the value of about £80,000, and there was as well Mr. Elton's property just outside the small country town of Wedderburn in Hampshire. This consisted of a charming house and garden and a small acreage of building land. Everything had been left to Francis, but the estate was saddled with a charge of £500 a year in favour of the Reverend Owen Barton.

Francis knew very little of his uncle, who for a long time had been much of a recluse; indeed he had not seen him for nearly four years, when he had spent three days with him at this house at Wedderburn. He had vague but slightly uneasy memories of those days, and now on his journey home, as he lay in his berth in the rocking train, his brain, rummaging drowsily among its buried recollections, began to disinter these. There was nothing very definite about them: they consisted of suggestions and side-lights and oblique impressions, things observed, so to speak, out of the corner of his eye, and never examined in direct focus.

He had only been a boy at the time, having just left school, and it was in the summer holidays, hot sultry weather of August, he remembered, that he had paid him this visit, before he went to a crammer's in London to learn French and German.

There was his Uncle Horace, first of all, and of him he had vivid images. A grey-haired man of middle age, large and extremely stout with a cushion of jowl overlapping his collar, but in spite of this obesity, he was nimble and light in movement, and with a merry blue eye that was equally alert, and seemed constantly to be watching him. Then there were two women there, a mother and daughter, and, as he recalled them, their names occurred to him, too: they were Mrs. Isabel Ray and Judith. Judith, he supposed, was a year or two older than himself, and on the first evening had taken him for a stroll in the garden after dinner. She had treated him at once as if they were old friends, had walked with her arm round his neck, had asked him many questions about his school, and whether there was any girl he was keen on. All very friendly, but rather embarrassing. When they came in from the garden, certainly some questioning signal had passed between the mother and the girl, and Judith had shrugged her shoulders in reply.

Then the mother had taken him in hand; she made him sit with her in the window-seat, and talked to him about the crammer's he was going to: he would have much more liberty, she supposed, than he had at school, and he looked the sort of boy who would make good use of it. She tried him in French and found he could speak it very decently, and told him that she had a book which she had just finished, which she would lend him. It was by that exquisite stylist Huysman and was called *Là-Bas*. She would not tell him what it was about: he must find out for himself. All the time those narrow grey eyes were fixed on him, and when she went to bed, she took him up to her room to give him the book. Judith was there, too: she had read it, and laughed at the memory of it. "Read it, darling Francis," she said, "and then go to sleep immediately, and you will tell me to-morrow what you dreamed about, unless it would shock me."

The vibrating rhythm of the train made Francis drowsy, but his mind went on disinterring these fragments. There had been another man there, his uncle's secretary, a young fellow, perhaps twenty-five years old, clean-shaven and slim and with just the same gaiety about him as the rest. Everyone treated him with an odd sort of deference, hard to define but easy to perceive. He sat next to Francis at dinner that night, and kept filling his wine-glass for him whether he wanted it or not, and next morning he had come into his room in pyjamas, sat on his bed, looked at him with odd questioning eyes, had asked him how he got on with his book, and then taken him to bathe in the swimming-pool behind the belt of trees at the bottom of the garden.... No bathing-costume, he said, was necessary, and they raced up and down the pool and lay basking in the sun afterwards. Then from the belt of trees emerged Judith and her mother, and Francis, much embarrassed, draped himself in a towel. How they all laughed at his delightful prudery.... And what was the man's name? Why, of course, it was Owen Barton, the same who had been mentioned in Mr. Angus's letter as the Reverend Owen Barton. But why "reverend," Francis wondered. Perhaps he had taken Orders afterwards.

All day they had flattered him for his good looks, and his swimming and his lawn-tennis: he had never been made so



much of, and all their eyes were on him, inviting and beckoning. In the afternoon his uncle had claimed him: he must come upstairs with him and see some of his treasures. He took him into his bedroom, and opened a great wardrobe full of magnificent vestments. There were gold-embroidered copes, there were stoles and chasubles with panels of needlework enriched with pearls, and jewelled gloves, and the use of them was to make glorious the priests who offered prayer and praise to the Lord of all things visible and invisible. Then he brought out a scarlet cassock of thick shimmering silk, and a cotta of finest muslin trimmed round the neck and the lower hem with Irish lace of the sixteenth century. These were for the vesting of the boy who served at the Mass, and Francis, at his uncle's bidding, stripped off his coat and arrayed himself, and took off his shoes and put on the noiseless scarlet slippers which were called sanctuary shoes. Then Owen Barton entered, and Francis heard him whisper to his uncle, "God! What a server!" and then he put on one of those gorgeous copes and told him to kneel.

The boy had been utterly bewildered. What were they playing at, he wondered. Was it charades of some sort? There was Barton, his face solemn and eager, raising his left hand as if in blessing: more astonishing was his uncle, licking his lips and swallowing in his throat, as if his mouth watered. There was something below all this dressing-up, which meant nothing to him, but had some hidden significance for the two men. It was uncomfortable: it disquieted him, and he wouldn't kneel, but disrobed himself of the cotta and cassock. "I don't know what it's about," he said: and again, as between Judith and her mother, he saw question and answer pass between them. Somehow his lack of interest had disappointed them, but he felt no interest at all: just a vague repulsion.

The diversions of the day were renewed: there was more tennis and bathing, but they all seemed to have lost the edge of their keenness about him. That evening he was dressed rather earlier than the others, and was sitting in a deep window-seat of the drawing-room, reading the book Mrs. Ray had lent him. He was not getting on with it; it was puzzling, and the French was difficult: he thought he would return it to her, saying that it was beyond him. Just then she and his uncle entered: they were talking together, and did not perceive him.

"No, it's no use, Isabel," said his uncle. "He's got no curiosity, no leanings: it would only disgust him and put him off. That's not the way to win souls. Owen thinks so, too. And he's too innocent: why when I was his age ... Why, there's Francis. What's the boy reading? Ah, I see! What do you make of it?"

Francis closed the book.

"I give it up," he said. "I can't get on with it."

Mrs. Ray laughed.

"I agree, too, Horace," she said. "But what a pity!"

Somehow Francis got the impression, he remembered, that they had been talking about him. But, if so, *what* was it for which he had no leanings?

He had gone to bed rather early that night, encouraged, he thought, to do so, leaving the rest at a game of Bridge. He soon slept, but awoke, thinking he heard the sound of chanting. Then came three strokes of a bell, and a pause and three more. He was too sleepy to care what it was about.

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Such, as the train rushed through the night, was the sum of his impressions about his visit to the man whose substance he had now inherited, subject to the charge of £500 a year to the Reverend Owen Barton. He was astonished to find how vivid and how vaguely disquieting were these memories, which now for four years had been buried in his mind. As he sank into sounder sleep they faded again, and he thought little more of them in the morning.

He went to see Mr. Angus as soon as he got to London. Certain securities would have to be sold in order to pay death duties, but the administration of the estate was a simple matter. Francis wanted to know more about his benefactor, but Mr. Angus could tell him very little. Horace Elton had, for some years, lived an extremely sequestered life down at Wedderburn, and his only intimate associate was his secretary, this Mr. Owen Barton. Beyond him, there were two ladies who used often to stay with him for long periods. Their names?—and he paused, searching his memory.

"Mrs. Isabel Ray and her daughter Judith?" suggested Francis.

"Exactly. They were often there. And, not infrequently, a number of people used to arrive rather late in the evening, eleven o'clock or even later, stay for an hour or two and then be off again. A little mysterious. Only a week or so before Mr. Elton died, there had been quite a congregation of them, fifteen or twenty, I believe."

Francis was silent for a moment: it was as if pieces of jig-saw puzzle were calling for their due location. But their shapes were too fantastic....

"And about my uncle's illness and death," he said. "The cremation of his body was on the same day as that on which he died; at least so I understood from your telegram."

"Yes: that was so," said Mr. Angus.

"But why? I should instantly have come back to England in order to be present. Was it not unusual?"

"Yes, Mr. Elton, it was unusual. But there were reasons for it."

"I should like to hear them," he said. "I was his heir, and it would have been only proper that I should have been there. Why?"

Angus hesitated a moment.

"That is a reasonable question," he said, "and I feel bound to answer it. I must begin a little way back.... Your Uncle was in excellent physical health apparently, till about a week before his death. Very stout, but very alert and active. Then the trouble began. It took the form at first of some grievous mental and spiritual disturbance. He thought for some reason that he was going to die very soon, and the idea of death produced in him an abnormal panic terror. He telegraphed for me, for he wanted to make some alteration in his will. I was away and could not get down till the next day, and by the time I arrived he was too desperately ill to give any sort of coherent instructions. But his intention, I think, was to cut Mr. Owen Barton out of it."

Again the lawyer paused.

"I found," he said, "that on the morning of the day I got down to Wedderburn, he had sent for the parson of his parish, and had made a confession to him. What that was I have not, of course, the slightest idea. Till then he had been in this panic fear of death, but was physically himself. Immediately afterwards some very horrible disease invaded him. Just that: invasion. The doctors who were summoned from London and Bournemouth had no idea what it was. Some unknown microbe, they supposed, which made the most swift and frightful havoc of skin and tissue and bone. It was like some putrefying internal corruption. It was as if he was dead already.... Really, I don't know what good it will do to tell you this."

"I want to know," said Francis.

"Well: this corruption. Living organisms came out as from a dead body. His nurses used to be sick. And the room was always swarming with flies; great fat flies, crawling over the walls and the bed. He was quite conscious, and there persisted this frantic terror of death, when you would have thought that a man's soul would have been only too thankful to be quit of such a habitation."

"And was Mr. Owen Barton with him?" asked Francis.

"From the moment that Mr. Elton made his confession, he refused to see him. Once he came into the room, and there was a shocking scene. The dying man screamed and yelled with terror. Nor would he see the two ladies we have mentioned: why they continued to stop in the house I can't imagine. Then on the last morning of his life—he could not speak now—he traced a word or two on a piece of paper, and it seemed that he wanted to receive the Holy Communion. So the parson was sent for."

The old lawyer paused again: Francis saw that his hand was shaking.

"Then very dreadful things happened," he said. "I was in the room, for he signed to me to be near him, and I saw them with my own eyes. The parson had poured the wine into the chalice, and had put the bread on the paten, and was about to

consecrate the elements, when a cloud of those flies, of which I have told you, came about him. They filled the chalice like a swarm of bees, they settled in their unclean thousands on the paten, and in a couple of minutes the chalice was dry and empty and they had devoured the bread. Then like drilled hosts, you may say, they swarmed on to your uncle's face, so that you could see nothing of it. He choked and he gasped: there was one writhing convulsion, and, thank God, it was all over."

"And then?" asked Francis.

"There were no flies. Nothing. But it was necessary to have the body cremated at once and the bedding with it. Very shocking indeed! I would not have told you, if you had not pressed me."

"And the ashes?" asked he.

"You will see that there is a clause in his will, directing that his remains should be buried at the foot of the Judas-tree beside the swimming pool in the garden at Wedderburn. That was done."

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Francis was a very unimaginative young man, free from superstitious twitterings and unprofitable speculations, and this story, suggestive though it was, of ghastly sub-currents, did not take hold of his mind at all or lead to the fashioning of uneasy fancies. It was all very horrible, but it was over. He went down to Wedderburn for Easter with a widowed sister of his and her small boy, aged eleven, and they all fairly fell in love with the place. It was soon settled that Sybil Marsham should let her house in London for the summer months, and establish herself here. Dickie, who was a delicate boy, rather queer and elfin, would thus have the benefit of country air, and Francis the benefit of having the place run by his sister and occupied and in commission whenever he was able to get away from his work.

The house was of brick and timber, with accommodation for half a dozen folk, and stood on high ground above the little town. Francis made a tour of it, as soon as he arrived, rather astonished to find how the sight of it rubbed up to clearness in the minutest details his memory of it. There was the sitting-room with its tall bookcases and its deep window-seats overlooking the garden, where he had sat unobserved when his uncle and Mrs. Ray came in talking together. Above was his uncle's panelled bedroom, which he proposed to occupy himself, with the big wardrobe containing vestments. He opened it: they were under their covering sheets of tissue paper, shimmering with scarlet and gold and finest lawn foamed with Irish lace: a faint smell of incense hung about them. Next to that was his uncle's sitting-room, and beyond that the room which he had slept in before, and was now appropriated to Dickie. These rooms lay on the front of the house, looking westwards over the garden, and he went out to renew acquaintance with it. Flower-beds gay with spring blossoms ran below the windows: then came the lawn, and beyond the belt of trees that enclosed the swimming pool. He passed along the path that threaded it between tapestries of primrose and anemone, and came out into the clearing that surrounded the water. The bathing shed stood at the deep end of it by the sluice that splashed riotously into the channel below, for the stream that supplied the pool was running full with the rains of March. In front of the copse on the far side stood a Judas-tree decked gloriously with flowers, and the reflection of it was cast waveringly on the rippled surface of the water. Somewhere below those red-blossoming boughs, there was buried a casket of ashes. He strolled round the pool: it was quite sheltered here from the April breeze, and bees were busy in the red blossoms. Bees, and large fat flies, a quantity of them.

He and Sybil were sitting in the drawing-room with the deep window-seats as dusk began to fall. A servant came in to say that Mr. Owen Barton had called. Certainly they were at home, and he entered, and was introduced to Sybil.

"You will hardly remember me, Mr. Elton," he said, "but I was here when you paid a visit to your uncle: four years ago it must have been."

"But I remember you perfectly," he said. "We bathed together, we played tennis: you were very kind to a shy boy. And are you living here still?"

"Yes: I took a house in Wedderburn after your uncle's death. I spent six very happy years with him as his secretary, and I got much attached to the country. My house stands just outside your garden palings opposite the latched gate leading into the wood round the pool."

The door opened and Dickie came in. He caught sight of the stranger and stopped.

"Say 'how do you do' to Mr. Barton, Dickie," said his mother.

Dickie performed this duty with due politeness and stood regarding him. He was a shy boy usually; but, after this inspection, he advanced close to him, and laid his hands on his knees.

"I like you," he said confidently, and leant up against him.

"Don't bother Mr. Barton, Dickie," she said rather sharply.

"But indeed he's doing nothing of the kind," said Barton, and he drew the boy towards him so that he stood clipped between his knees.

Sybil got up.

"Come, Dick," she said. "We'll have a walk round the garden before it gets dark."

"Is he coming, too?" asked the boy.

"No: he's going to stop and talk to Uncle Francis."

When the two men were alone Barton said a word or two about Horace Elton, who had always been so generous a friend to him. The end, mercifully short, had been terrible, and terrible to him personally had been the dying man's refusal to see him during the last two days of his life.

"His mind, I think, must have been affected," he said, "by his awful sufferings. It happens like that sometimes: people turn against those with whom they have been most intimate. I have often mourned over that, and deeply regretted it.... And I owe you a certain word of explanation, Mr. Elton. No doubt you were puzzled to find in your uncle's will that I was entitled 'the Reverend.' It is quite true, though I do not call myself so. Certain spiritual doubts and difficulties caused me to give up my orders, but your uncle always held that if a man is once a priest he is always a priest. He was very strong about that, and no doubt he was right."

"I didn't know my uncle took any interest in ecclesiastical affairs," said Francis. "Ah, I had forgotten about his vestments. Perhaps that was only an artistic taste."

"By no means. He regarded them as sacred things, consecrated to holy uses.... And may I ask you what happened to his remains? I remember he once expressed a wish to be buried by the swimming pool."

"His body was cremated," said Francis, "and the ashes were buried there."

Barton stayed but little longer, and Sybil on her return was frankly relieved to find he had gone. Simply, she didn't like him. There was something queer, something sinister about him. Francis laughed at her: quite a good fellow, he thought.

Dreams, of course, are a mere hash-up of recent mental images and associations, and a very vivid dream that came to Francis that night could easily have arisen from such topics. He thought he was swimming in the bathing pool with Owen Barton, and that his uncle, stout and florid, was standing underneath the Judas-tree watching them. That seemed quite natural, as is the way of dreams: merely he was not dead at all. When they came out of the water, he looked for his clothes, but found that there was laid out for him a scarlet cassock and a white lace-trimmed cotta. This again was quite natural; so, too, was the fact that Barton put on a gold cope.

His uncle, very merry and licking his lips, joined them, and each of them took an arm of his and they walked back to the house together singing a hymn. As they went the daylight died, and by the time they crossed the lawn it was black night, and the windows of the house were lit. They walked upstairs, still singing, into his uncle's bedroom which was now his own. There was an open door, which he had never noticed before opposite his bed, and there came a very bright light from it. Then the sense of nightmare began, for his two companions, gripping him tightly, pulled him along towards it, and he struggled with them knowing there was something terrible within. But step by step they dragged him, violently resisting, and now out of the door there came a swarm of large fat flies that buzzed and settled on him. Thicker and thicker they streamed out, covering his face, and crawling into his eyes, and entering his mouth as he panted for breath. The horror grew to breaking-point, and he woke sweating with a hammering heart. He switched on the light, and there

was the quiet room and the dawn beginning to be luminous outside, and the birds just tuning up.

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Francis's few days of holiday passed quickly. He went down to the village to see Barton's house, and found it a most pleasant little dwelling, and its owner an exceedingly pleasant fellow. Barton dined with them one evening, and Sybil went so far as to admit that her first judgment of him was hasty. He was charming with Dickie, too, and that disposed her in his favour, and the boy adored him. Soon it was necessary to find some tutor for him, and Barton readily agreed to undertake his education, and every morning Dickie trotted across the garden and through the wood where the swimming pool lay to Barton's house. His ill-health had made him rather backward in his studies, but he was now eager to learn and to please his instructor, and he got on quickly.

## II

It was now that I first met Francis, and during the next few months in London we became close friends. He told me that he had lately inherited this place at Wedderburn from his uncle, but for the present I knew no more than that of the previous history which I have just recorded. Sometime during July he told me he was intending to spend the month of August there. His sister, who kept house for him, and her small boy would be away for the first week or two, for she had taken him off to the seaside. Would I then come and share his solitude, and get on there, uninterrupted, with some work I had on hand. That seemed a very attractive plan, and we motored down together one very hot afternoon early in August, that promised thunder. Owen Barton, he told me, who had been his uncle's secretary was coming to dine with us that night.

It wanted an hour or so yet to dinner-time when we arrived, and Francis directed me, if I cared for a dip, to the bathing pool among the trees beyond the lawn. He had various household businesses to look into himself, so I went off alone. It was an enchanting place, the water still and very clear, mirroring the sky and the full-foliaged trees, and I stripped and plunged in. I lay and floated in the cool water, I swam and dived again, and then I saw, walking close to the far bank of the pool, a man of something more than middle-age, and extremely stout. He was in dress clothes, dinner-jacket and black tie, and instantly it struck me that this must be Mr. Barton coming up from the village to dine with us. It must therefore be later than I thought, and I swam back to the shed where my clothes were. As I climbed out of the water, I glanced round. There was no one there.

It was a slight shock, but very slight. It was odd that he should have come so unexpectedly out of the wood and disappeared again so suddenly, but it did not concern me much. I hurried home, changed quickly and came down, expecting to find Francis and his guest in the drawing-room. But I need not have been in such haste for now my watch told me that there was still a quarter of an hour before dinner-time. As for the others, I supposed that Mr. Barton was upstairs with Francis in his sitting-room. So I picked up a chance book to beguile the time, and read for a while, but the room grew rather dark, and, rising to switch on the electric light, I saw standing outside the French window into the garden the figure of a man, outlined against the last of a stormy sunset, looking into the room.

There was no doubt whatever in my mind that he was the same person as I had seen when I was bathing, and the switching on of the light made this clear, for it shone full on his face. No doubt then Mr. Barton finding he was too early was strolling about the garden till the dinner-hour. But now I did not look forward at all to this evening: I had had a good look at him and there was something horrible about him. Was he human, was he earthly at all? Then he quietly moved away, and immediately afterwards there came a knock at the front door just outside the room, and I heard Francis coming downstairs. He went to the door himself: there was a word of greeting, and he came into the room accompanied by a tall, slim fellow whom he introduced to me.

We had a very pleasant evening: Barton talked fluently and agreeably, and more than once he spoke of his friend and pupil Dickie. About eleven he rose to go, and Francis suggested to him that he should walk back across the garden which gave him a short cut to his house. The threatening storm still held off, but it was very dark overhead, as we stood together outside the French window. Barton was soon swallowed up in the blackness. Then there came a bright flash of lightning, and in that moment of illumination I saw that there was standing in the middle of the lawn, as if waiting for him, the figure I had seen twice already. "Who is that?" was on the tip of my tongue, but instantly I perceived that Francis had seen nothing of it, and so I was silent, for I knew now what I had already half-guessed that this was no living man of

flesh and blood whom I had seen. A few heavy drops of rain plopped on the flagged walk, and, as we moved indoors, Francis called out "Good night, Barton!" and the cheery voice answered.

Before long we went up to bed, and he took me into his room as we passed, a big panelled chamber with a great wardrobe by the bed. Close to it hung an oil-portrait of kit-cat size.

"I'll show you what's in that wardrobe to-morrow," he said. "Rather wonderful things.... That's a picture of my uncle."

I had seen that face before this evening.

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For the next two or three days I had no further glimpse of that dreadful visitant, but never for a moment was I at ease, for I was aware that he was about. What instinct or what sense perceived that, I have no idea: perhaps it was merely the dread I had of seeing him again that gave rise to the conviction. I thought of telling Francis that I must get back to London; what prevented me from so doing was the desire to know more, and that made me fight this cold fear. Then very soon I perceived that Francis was no more at ease than I was. Sometimes as we sat together in the evening he was oddly alert: he would pause in the middle of a sentence as if some sound had attracted his attention, or he would look up from our game of bezique and focus his eyes for a second on some corner of the room or, more often, on the dark oblong of the open French window. Had he, I wondered, been seeing something invisible to me, and, like myself, feared to speak of it?

These impressions were momentary and infrequent, but they kept alive in me the feeling that there was something astir, and that something, coming out of the dark and the unknown, was growing in force. It had come into the house, and was present everywhere.... And then one awoke again to a morning of heavenly brightness and sunshine, and surely one was disquieting oneself in vain.

I had been there about a week when something occurred which precipitated what followed. I slept in the room which Dickie usually occupied, and awoke one night feeling uncomfortably hot. I tugged at a blanket to remove it, but it was tucked very tightly in between the mattresses on the side of the bed next to the wall. Eventually I got it free, and as I did so I heard something drop with a flutter on to the floor. In the morning I remembered that, and found underneath the bed a little paper notebook. I opened it idly enough, and within were a dozen pages written over in a round childish handwriting, and these words struck my eye:

"Thursday, July 11th. I saw great-uncle Horace again this morning in the wood. He told me something about myself which I didn't understand, but he said I should like it when I got older. I mustn't tell anybody that he's here, nor what he told me, except Mr. Barton."

I did not care one jot whether I was reading a boy's private diary. That was no longer a consideration worth thinking about. I turned over the page and found another entry.

"Sunday, July 21st. I saw Uncle Horace again. I said I had told Mr. Barton what he had told me, and Mr. Barton had told me some more things, and that he was pleased, and said I was getting on and that he would take me to prayers some day soon."

I cannot describe the thrill of horror that these entries woke in me. They made the apparition which I had seen infinitely more real and more sinister. It was a spirit corrupt and malign and intent on corruption that haunted the place. But what was I to do? How could I, without any lead from Francis, tell him that the spirit of his uncle—of whom at present I knew nothing—had been seen not by me only, but by his nephew, and that he was at work on the boy's mind? Then there was the mention of Barton. Certainly that could not be left as it was. He was collaborating in that damnable task. A cult of corruption (or was I being too fantastic?) began to outline itself. Then what did that sentence about taking him to prayers mean? But Dickie was away, thank goodness, for the present, and there was time to think it over. As for that pitiful little notebook, I put it into a locked despatch case.

The day, as far as outward and visible signs were concerned, passed pleasantly. For me there was a morning's work, and for both of us an afternoon on the golf-links. But below there was something heavy; my knowledge of that diary kept intervening with mental telephone-calls asking "What are you going to *do*?" Francis, on his side, was troubled; there were sub-currents, and I did not know what they were. Silences fell, not the natural unobserved silences between those

who are intimate, which are only a symbol of their intimacy, but the silences between those who have something on their minds of which they fear to speak. These had got more stringent all day: there was a growing tenseness: all common topics were banal, for they only cloaked a certain topic.

We sat out on the lawn before dinner on that sultry evening, and breaking one of these silent intervals, he pointed at the front of the house.

"There's an odd thing," he said. "Look! There are three rooms aren't there on the ground floor: dining-room, drawing-room, and the little study where you write. Now look above. There are three rooms there: your bedroom, my bedroom, and my sitting-room. I've measured them. There are twelve feet missing. Looks as if there was a sealed-up room somewhere."

Here, at any rate, was something to talk about.

"Exciting," I said. "Mayn't we explore?"

"We will. We'll explore as soon as we've dined. Then there's another thing: quite off the point. You remember those vestments I showed you the other day? I opened the wardrobe, where they are kept, an hour ago, and a lot of big fat flies came buzzing out. A row like a dozen aeroplanes overhead. Remote but loud, if you know what I mean. And then there weren't any."

Somehow I felt that what we had been silent about was coming out into the open. It might be ill to look upon...

He jumped from his chair.

"Let's have done with these silences," he cried. "He's here, my uncle, I mean. I haven't told you yet, but he died in a swarm of flies. He asked for the Sacrament, but before the wine was consecrated the chalice was choked with them. And I know he's here. It sounds damned rot, but he is."

"I know that, too," I said. "I've seen him."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I thought you would laugh at me."

"I should have a few days ago," said he. "But I don't now. Go on."

"The first evening I was here I saw him at the bathing pool. That same night, when we were seeing Owen Barton off, a flash of lightning came, and he was there again standing on the lawn."

"But how did you know it was he?" asked Francis.

"I knew it when you showed me the portrait of him in your bedroom that same night. Have you seen him?"

"No; but he's here. Anything more?"

This was the opportunity not only natural but inevitable.

"Yes, much more," I said. "Dickie has seen him too."

"That child? Impossible."

The door out of the drawing-room opened, and Francis's parlour-maid came out with the sherry on a tray. She put the decanter and glasses down on the wicker table between us, and I asked her to bring out the despatch case from my room. I took the paper notebook out of it.

"This slipped out from between my mattresses last night. It's Dickie's diary. Listen:" and I read him the first extract.

Francis gave one of those swift disconcerting glances over his shoulder.

"But we're dreaming," he said. "It's a nightmare. God, there's something awful here! And what about Dickie not telling anybody except Barton what he told him? Anything more?"

"Yes. 'Sunday, July 21st. I saw Uncle Horace again. I said I had told Mr. Barton what he told me, and Mr. Barton told me some more things, and that he was pleased and said I was getting on, and that he would take me to prayers some day soon. I don't know what that means.'"

Francis sprang out of his chair.

"What?" he cried. "Take him to prayers? Wait a minute. Let me remember about my first visit here. I was a boy of nineteen, and frightfully, absurdly innocent for my age. A woman staying here gave me a book to read called *Là-Bas*. I didn't get far in it then, but I know what it's about now."

"Black Mass," said I. "Satan worshippers."

"Yes. Then one day my uncle dressed me up in a scarlet cassock, and Barton came in and put on a cope and said something about my being a server. He used to be a priest, did you know that? And one night I awoke and heard the sound of chanting and a bell rang. By the way, Barton's coming to dine to-morrow ..."

"What are you going to do?"

"About him? I can't tell yet. But we've got something to do to-night. Horrors have happened here in this house. There must be some room where they held their Mass, a chapel. Why, there's that missing space I spoke of just now."

After dinner we set to work. Somewhere on the first floor on the garden front of the house there was this space unaccounted for by the dimensions of the rooms there. We turned on the electric light in all of them, and then going out into the garden we saw that the windows in Francis's bedroom and in his sitting-room next door were far more widely spaced than they should have been. Somewhere, then, between them lay the area to which there was no apparent access and we went upstairs. The wall of his sitting-room seemed solid, it was of brick and timber, and large beams ran through it at narrow intervals. But the wall of his bedroom was panelled, and when we tapped on it, no sound came through into the other room beyond.

We began to examine it.

The servants had gone to bed, and the house was silent, but as we moved about from garden to house and from one room to another there was some presence watching and following us. We had shut the door into his bedroom from the passage, but now as we peered and felt about the panelling, the door swung open and closed again, and something entered, brushing my shoulder as it passed.

"What's that?" I said. "Someone came in."

"Never mind that," he said. "Look what I've found."

In the border of one of the panels was a black stud like an ebony bell-push. He pressed it and pulled, and a section of the panelling slid sideways, disclosing a red curtain cloaking a doorway. He drew it aside with a clash of metal rings. It was dark within, and out of the darkness came a smell of stale incense. I felt with my hand along the frame of the doorway and found a switch, and the blackness was flooded with a dazzling light.

Within was a chapel. There was no window, and at the West end of it (not the East) there stood an altar. Above it was a picture, evidently of some early Italian school. It was on the lines of the Fra Angelico picture of the Annunciation. The Virgin sat in an open loggia, and on the flowery space outside the angel made his salutation. His spreading wings were the wings of a bat, and his black head and neck were those of a raven. He had his left hand, not his right, raised in blessing. The virgin's robe of thinnest red muslin was trimmed with revolting symbols, and her face was that of a panting dog with tongue protruding.

There were two niches at the East end, in which were marble statues of naked men, with the inscriptions "St. Judas" and "St. Gilles de Raies." One was picking up pieces of silver that lay at his feet, the other looked down leering and laughing at the prone figure of a mutilated boy. The place was lit by a chandelier from the ceiling: this was of the shape of a crown of thorns and electric bulbs nestled among the woven silver twigs. A bell hung from the roof, close beside the altar.

For the moment, as I looked on these obscene blasphemies, I felt that they were merely grotesque and no more to be



regarded seriously than the dirty inscriptions written upon empty wall-spaces in the street. That indifference swiftly passed, and a horrified consciousness of the devotion of those who had fashioned and assembled these decorations took its place. Skilled painters and artificers had wrought them and they were here for the service of all that is evil; that spirit of adoration lived in them dynamic and active. And the place was throbbing with the exultant joy of those who had worshipped here.

"And look here!" called Francis. He pointed to a little table standing against the wall just outside the altar-rails.

There were photographs on it, one of a boy standing on the header-board at the bathing pool about to plunge.

"That's me," he said. "Barton took it. And what's written underneath it? 'Ora pro Francisco Elton.' And that's Mrs. Ray, and that's my uncle, and that's Barton in a cope. Pray for him, too, please. But it's childish!"

He suddenly burst into a shout of laughter. The roof of the chapel was vaulted and the echo that came from it was loud and surprising, the place rang with it. His laughter ceased, but not so the echo. There was someone else laughing. But where? Who? Except for us the chapel was empty of all visible presences.

On and on the laughter went, and we stared at each other with panic stirring. The brilliant light from the chandelier began to fade, dusk gathered, and in the dusk there was brewing some hellish and deadly force. And through the dimness I saw, hanging in the air, and oscillating slightly as if in a draught the laughing face of Horace Elton. Francis saw it too.

"Fight it! Withstand it!" he cried as he pointed to it. "Desecrate all that it holds sanctified! God, do you smell the incense and the corruption?"

We tore the photographs, we smashed the table on which they stood. We plucked the frontal from the altar and spat on the accursed table: we tugged at it till it toppled over and the marble slab split in half. We hauled from the niches the two statues that stood there, and crash they went on to the paved floor. Then appalled at the riot of our iconoclasm we paused. The laughter had ceased and no oscillating face dangled in the dimness. Then we left the chapel and pulled across the doorway the panel that closed it.

Francis came to sleep in my room, and we talked long, laying our plans for next day. We had forgotten the picture over the altar in our destruction, but now it worked in with what we proposed to do. Then we slept, and the night passed without disturbance. At the least we had broken up the apparatus that was hallowed to unhallowed uses, and that was something. But there was grim work ahead yet, and the issue was un conjecturable.

Barton came to dine that next evening, and there hung on the wall opposite his place the picture from the chapel upstairs. He did not notice it at first, for the room was rather dark, but not dark enough yet to need artificial light. He was gay and lively as usual, spoke amusingly and wittily, and asked when his friend Dickie was to return. Towards the end of dinner the lights were switched on, and then he saw the picture. I was watching him, and the sweat started out on his face that had grown clay-coloured in a moment. Then he pulled himself together.

"That's a strange picture," he said. "Was it here before? Surely not."

"No: it was in a room upstairs," said Francis. "About Dickie? I don't know for certain when he'll come back. We have found his diary, and presently we must speak about that."

"Dickie's diary? Indeed!" said Barton, and he moistened his lips with his tongue.

I think he guessed then that there was something desperate ahead, and I pictured a man condemned to be hanged waiting in his cell with his warders for the imminent hour, as Barton waited then. He sat with an elbow on the table and his hand propping his forehead. Immediately almost the servant brought in our coffee and left us.

"Dickie's diary," said Francis quietly. "Your name figures in it. Also my uncle's. Dickie saw him more than once. But, of course, you know that."

Barton drank off his glass of brandy.

"Are you telling me a ghost story?" he said. "Pray go on."

"Yes, it's partly a ghost story, but not entirely. My uncle—his ghost if you like—told him certain stories and said he must

keep them secret except from you. And you told him more. And you said he should come to prayers with you some day soon. Where was that to be? In the room just above us?"

The brandy had given the condemned man a momentary courage.

"A pack of lies, Mr. Elton," he said. "That boy has got a corrupt mind. He told me things that no boy of his age should know: he giggled and laughed at them. Perhaps I ought to have told his mother."

"It's too late to think of that now," said Francis. "The diary I spoke of will be in the hands of the police at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. They will also inspect the room upstairs where you have been in the habit of celebrating the Black Mass."

Barton leant forward towards him.

"No, no," he cried. "Don't do that! I beg and implore you! I will confess the truth to you. I will conceal nothing. My life has been a blasphemy. But I'm sorry: I repent. I abjure all those abominations from henceforth: I renounce them all in the name of Almighty God."

"Too late," said Francis.

And then the horror that haunts me still began to manifest itself. The wretched man threw himself back in his chair, and there dropped from his forehead on to his white shirt-front a long grey worm that lay and wriggled there. At that moment there came from overhead the sound of a bell, and he sprang to his feet.

"No!" he cried again. "I retract all I said. I abjure nothing. And my Lord is waiting for me in the sanctuary. I must be quick and make my humble confession to him."

With the movement of a slinking animal he slid from the room, and we heard his steps going swiftly upstairs.

"Did you see?" I whispered. "And what's to be done? Is the man sane?"

"It's beyond us now," said Francis.

There was a thump on the ceiling overhead as if someone had fallen, and without a word we ran upstairs into Francis's bedroom. The door of the wardrobe where the vestments were kept was open, some lay on the floor. The panel was open, too, but within it was dark. In terror at what might meet our eyes, I felt for the switch and turned the light on.

The bell which had sounded a few minutes ago was still swinging gently, though speaking no more. Barton, clad in the gold-embroidered cope, lay in front of the overturned altar, with his face twitching. Then that ceased, the rattle of death creaked in his throat, and his mouth fell open. Great flies, swarms of them, coming from nowhere, settled on it.



## THURSDAY EVENINGS

With the death of Mrs. Georgiana Wallace, in 1920, a very notable link with certain artistic activities in the mid-Victorian era was severed. She had long passed her eightieth year, but her mental faculties were quite unclouded—the link, in fact, was unruined and untarnished—and only a couple of days before she died she gave the last of her famous Thursday evenings. I was taken there by a friend, and that was the solitary occasion on which I saw Mrs. Wallace alive. She was tremendously vivacious that night in praise of past time and (with many little shakes of her pretty porcelain head and holdings-up of her hands loaded with mourning rings) in condemnation of the grotesque gods which the present age has enshrined in the Temple of Art. Her fairness of mind was shown in the fact that she considered that much in the Golden Age of Victorian Art was "sad rubbish." That horrid old cynic, Mr. Thackeray, for instance, was one of her hottest aversions; Dickens, with his odious vulgar descriptions of low life, was another; the pre-Raphaelite movement was just "a piece of impertinence"; and when Mr. Swinburne was incautiously mentioned, she flushed a little and changed the subject.

Mrs. Wallace, then, did not regard any of these distinguished people as precious metal, and I found myself beginning to wonder where the lode lay. So far from these persons being pure gold, she did not consider them as being possessed of the smallest touch of gilding. But then her face lit up as she talked to us of that memorable evening when she heard the first performance of that famous song "The Lost Chord."

"That's what I mean by music," she said, "and where are you to find such music now? I went to a concert the other day at the Queen's Hall, but after sitting through an hour of it I had to come away. Such a caterwauling I never heard! There was an Overture by that dreadful Mr. Wagner, and there was a Symphony by Brahms—shocking stuff, and there was a piece by Debussy, which finished me: *Un après-midi d'un Faune*, they called it. I'm sure I wondered what he had had for lunch to give him such a nightmare afterwards. I stopped my ears, my dear, until it was over; and then I came home, and sang 'The Lost Chord' through twice, to put all those dreadful noises out of my head. Ah, I shall never forget the evening when it was sung for the first time at St. James's Hall. There wasn't a dry eye in the place. The words, too, by Miss Adelaide Anne Procter! A bit of lovely poetry!"

Then, with very little encouragement, after a sniff at her lavender salts, the old lady suffered herself to be led to "the instrument," as she called the piano, and sang the masterpiece again in a faint far-away voice which sounded as if it came from the next house but one.

She spoke of the tremendous excitement at the Private View of the Academy when the "Derby Day" appeared on its walls; and passing on to literature, she recounted how, soon after she was married, Mr. Wallace had read aloud to her Mr. Robert Montgomery's magnificent poem called "Satan," which he considered the finest thing which had appeared since Milton's *Paradise Lost*. He held the most advanced views on literary subjects, and she described how when *Adam Bede* burst like a bombshell into the placid circles of the novel-reading public, scaring and shocking so many, Mr. Wallace had always maintained that, though too daring in parts, and not fit to be read aloud, it was a fine book, and she shared his view. No doubt it was an extraordinary thing for a woman to touch such a theme, but if Miss Evans had accepted her invitation to any of the Thursday evenings, both she and Mr. Wallace would have given her a warm welcome in the name of Art.

She spoke, too, of the early years of these famous Thursdays, of which this was to prove the last. All the noblest in the realms of Art and Culture assembled in this very studio where we now sat, "and I assure you," said Mrs. Wallace, audaciously, "there were a great many gentlemen always present!" There was a dinner-party first in the dining-room next door, to which some twenty of the brightest and best were bidden, and the brilliance of the conversation was perfectly paralysing. After the crinolines had retired, the gentlemen would not sit long over their wine, for they were eager in those days to join the ladies. (This was said with great archness, and I wondered how many hearts Mrs. Wallace had seriously damaged in her time.) Moreover, the odious indulgence in tobacco was then quite unknown, even as it had remained in Mrs. Wallace's house to this day, and the gentlemen were quick on the ladies' heels. Soon the party began to arrive: artists, musicians, writers, actors (she gave us a catalogue of names which I cannot remember) poured in, and the wit and the recitations, the music and the singing, were the talk of the town next day. Mr. Wallace was Scotch, and the tartan-paper which streaked the walls to-night was then newly put up. We sat in the same stiff mahogany chairs; the same worsted-work curtains shut out the noises of London; the same antimacassars were spread on the backs of sofas; even the same "instrument," which had just now tinkled under Mrs. Wallace's fingers, stood in its old place; the same colza-oil

lamps were reflected in the heavy mirrors and in the polished tables. Nothing in that shrine sanctified by the conversaciones of the Golden Age, had ever been altered.

Even as she spoke I seemed to get a glimpse of the toughness of the psychical bond which, while Mrs. Wallace lived, bound the Golden Age to ours. Week by week for all those mid-Victorian years the spirit of "The Lost Chord," and the "Derby Day," and Mr. Montgomery's poems had been pouring into the room, impregnating and haunting it, and it expressed itself not only in the mahogany and the colza-oil lamps, in the worsted curtains and the flowered carpet, but even more potently in the whole psychic environment. Drop by drop, from crinoline and conversation, sweet as lavender and remote as the stars, that essence, unrecapturable except through the mediumship, so to speak, of our venerable hostess, had soaked the spiritual atmosphere. She alone held it there; when she was no longer able to do that, the ancient volatile fragrance must surely fade, and be perceptible no longer to our modern bustling senses. So when, two days later, I saw in the paper the announcement of Mrs. Wallace's death, I felt that the Golden Age of Victoria, as loved and understood by her, had passed away for ever from the earth. It seemed to have fallen with a remote hissing sound (as when you drop a match into the river), down, down into the dark well of years, and to have been promptly quenched... Never in my life have I been so hopelessly and outrageously wrong.

There was a sale of the contents of the house, and, in spite of the extravagant prices then paid for furniture, those faded flowered carpets, those heavy mahogany chairs, those colza-oil lamps, failed to arouse the cupidity of purchasers, and it was melancholy to reflect how, but a few weeks ago, these objects had been the splendour and embellishment of a venerated sanctuary. Now that shrine was empty, and they were tumbled out undesired and unhallowed to freeze on the pavements outside second-hand furniture shops till their final dispersion into callous homes. There were engravings, too, "The Monarch of the Glen," "Derby Day," "Queen Victoria Opening the Great Exhibition," which scarcely fetched the price of the gilding on their frames. Lot after lot was rapidly and contemptuously disposed of, and at the end of the day I found myself the possessor of a glass case of wax flowers and two pink vases, the hideousness of which was absolutely irresistible. With them in my hand I took one more look round the scene of the Thursday evenings, and for the moment I was alone there, as the auctioneer was finishing the disposal of the "boudoir" fittings. Just as I turned to leave I distinctly heard a voice at my elbow. It spoke very clearly, in a voice that I recognized at once.

"They may get rid of my things," it said, "but they don't get rid of me."

I was so startled that I dropped one of the pink vases, and, clutching my other possessions more tightly, I stole away on tiptoe.

Soon after came the sale of the house itself: the purchaser was Mr. Humphrey Lodge, the musical composer, whom the enlightened admire so greatly. His wife, as all the world knows, is the Cubist portrait-painter who sees the faces of her sitters as a series of planes separated from each other by coloured lines. In a few weeks the house was redecorated according to the most modern ideas, and resembled the setting of a Russian ballet gone mad, or, perhaps, a house so camouflaged that it ceased to be like a house at all. Electric light, of course, was introduced, and the lamp-shades were in the shape of large paper cauliflowers, bunches of carrots, and bundles of asparagus, painted by Mrs. Lodge. The walls of the studio were purple, with large green clouds sailing across them, out of which sprang flashes of magenta lightning, and dotted about among the clouds were some houses and steeples and a few faces. The room was extremely large, and there was plenty of space for Mrs. Lodge's easels in one half, and a big table for her husband in the other. Just now he was composing his twenty-third symphony for a small band: his siren-whistles, pieces of emery-paper rubbed together, watchmen's rattles, and penny whistles found places in the newer orchestra. Neither of them ever stopped smoking cigarettes, and neither was the least mad, but only modern.

One morning, as they worked together, she at a portrait of her husband, he at the slow movement of his Symphony, he scribbled the date across the page, and got up.

"That's finished," he said.

"Ah, you shall play it me in a moment, dear," said she. "Just sit still one minute more. I want to catch—yes, that's right."

She painted for a little while in silence, while he, reconsidering his last bars, put in a fortissimo semi-breve for the B flat rattle.

"And I've finished, too," she said, drawing a line of crimson across the plane of his nose. Then, putting back her head, she sniffed curiously at the thick air.

"It's odd," she said. "All the morning, while working, I thought I smelt that spiky thing that grows in gardens and among clothes."

"Lavender?" he asked.

"Yes, that's it. It must be my imagination if you can't smell it. Come and play me your slow movement."

He went across to the piano. This alone remained of Mrs. Wallace's furniture, for Humphrey Lodge had attended the sale, and, running his fingers over the antique keys, had discovered in them exactly that tinkly remote tone which he wanted for certain surprising orchestral effects, and had bought it on the spot. He spread the score on the music-rest, and picked up from the table half a dozen weird instruments.

"I can only give you the sketchiest idea of it," he said. "Yes, you take the two rattles and whirl them when I nod to you."

The crazy performance began. Humphrey was extremely agile with arpeggios for one hand, a few raps at the xylophone with the other, with hurried rubbings of the emery-paper and chromatic blasts on the siren which he held in his mouth. But, though Julia supplemented these activities with the rattles in E flat and B flat, he could but render a sketch, an adumbration of the score. With the musician's gift of internal audition, he could, as he followed his text, imagine the parts which want of fingers compelled him to omit, and the complete effect was as fully realized by him as if the omitted noises were all in full blast. Suddenly he stopped.

"There it is again," he said. "I've been hearing that at intervals all the morning."

"Hearing what?" asked Julia, checking the rattle.

"It's some kind of reedy sound which doesn't occur in my score at all," said he. "It's like an old lady singing in the next house, and it keeps interrupting me. Sometimes I catch a bar or two of a tune, some sort of hymn tune in G. This kind of thing:"

And with an exasperated finger he played a couple of lines of "The Lost Chord."

Julia listened; a dim recognition awoke in her fine eyes. "But that's a real tune," she said; "I've heard it before. Play it again, Humphrey; I shall remember what it is."

He repeated the ecclesiastical melody.

"I don't call it a tune," he said. "And, anyhow, there's nothing in my score that remotely resembles it. Why do I keep on hearing it?"

"I know what it is now," said Julia. "My mother used to sing it. It's called 'The Lost Chord,' 'Seated one day at the organ'—that's how the words began—and there's something about the crimson twilight and the sound of a great Amen."

She put out her hand, and touched the keys, attempting, rather unsuccessfully, to pick out the sound of the great Amen with one finger.

"I'm beginning to remember it," she said hopefully.

Humphrey jumped up with a start.

"But there it is again, correcting you," he cried. "Can't you hear it?"

For one second Julia Lodge certainly thought she heard a faint, flute-like voice crooning from somewhere behind her easel. Whether it was an illusion or not, the impression was only momentary; but once again, more vividly, she thought she smelt the odour of lavender.

"Yes, I thought I heard something," she said. "What is it?"

A little shudder of goose-flesh passed over her.

"It's all imagination," she said. "Let's get on with your lovely slow movement. Where are my rattles?"

From that morning a series of trivial but inexplicable incidents began to invade the domestic routine of the house; things

trumpery in themselves, but inconvenient, like pebbles in shoes, and also arresting because no possible explanation could be found for them. Some of them suggested that a practical joker was exercising his despicable wit on the Lodges, for one morning there appeared on the hall table a package, addressed in a tall, slanting hand to Julia, which, when opened, proved to contain a wretched reproduction of "The Monarch of the Glen"; and on the same day, and in the same place, was found a similar package addressed to Humphrey, which contained a well-thumbed copy of one of Mr. Wetherby's songs. These packets had not passed through the post; but, even granting collusion with their servants, they could think of no one who would have thought it worth while to cut such childish capers. More inexplicable was the insertion in Humphrey's score of his new Overture of a passage for the tenor horn which proved to be the opening bars of an obsolete song called "Dresden China," by Mr. Molloy, whom he ascertained to have been an admired melodist of the nineteenth century. Of course, he indignantly erased it, and even while his knife was scratching at it, he thought he heard some noise, a mixture between a sob and a sniff, from the corner of the dusky studio. Again, one morning Julia found her cubist picture of her husband, which was still not yet dry, fallen face downwards on the floor, and much obliterated, because the wet paint had stuck to the carpet. This time there was no sob or sniff by way of comment, but a little noise, scarcely audible, which sounded to her much more like a cackle of laughter, followed up by an overwhelming whiff of lavender. Again, it was very odd that a copy of *Adam Bede*, a book of which neither of them had ever heard, well-worn, with passages heavily underlined, and pencilled in the margin with notes of approbation, should appear during lunch-time, on the lid of the piano. Curious noises were heard in the house—the tapping of shoes, the rustle of skirts, and once, when Julia and her husband were dining out, the servants in the kitchen, which lay below the studio, were amazed at the tinkle of the piano above their heads, and the parlour-maid came up with a tray of siphons and whisky, supposing that they had returned. She noticed a line of light under the studio door, clearly indicating that it was lit within. But on opening it she found herself staring into a darkness redolent with the smell of colza-oil. After a hysterical night she gave notice next morning, and Julia was obliged to sacrifice several days from her painting in order to find a new maid.

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It was at this point that I had begun to form a certain intimacy with my new neighbours, and, meeting them one night at the theatre, they took me home for a half-hour of cigarettes and conversation. At present I knew nothing about these curious occurrences, but as we entered the studio I could not help observing that Humphrey cast a suspicious eye round the room, and Julia looked anxiously in the direction of her easel. They both seemed very *distracts*, and, as we sat down, a silence fell. Then suddenly Humphrey said:

"Let's tell him," and proceeded to enthrall me with such details as I have already recorded. Instantly my own little experience in this room, which startled me into dropping one of my pink vases, flashed into my mind.

"I'm sure there's a ghost here," said Julia as he finished. "And I believe it's a woman, because it's much nicer to Humphrey than to me. There's lots you've left out, Humphrey. It's always leaving little nosegays of violets done up in mutton-cutlet frills on your dressing-room table. It——"

She gave a little gasp and pointed to the corner where her easel stood.

"Look!" she said, in a strange whisper.

I turned quickly, following her finger, and caught a glimpse of a green crinoline, of a low-cut bodice, of a lively but malicious little face with a chaplet of artificial rosebuds round its hair. The features were unmistakable, though fifty years of Thursday evenings had been peeled off them. There was no longer the slightest doubt in my mind that Mrs. Wallace, now a *Poltergeist* of infinite ingenuity, was at the bottom of all these strange happenings.

"That's Mrs. Wallace," I said firmly, and even as I spoke Julia's easel came rattling to the ground for the second time.

Julia rose.

"Well, it's very rude of her," she said. "She has no business here. Humphrey bought the house; it's his. Why do you suppose she comes and haunts it? Has she done some atrocious crime in this room?"

Humphrey gave a scornful laugh.

"Julia, how can you be so ridiculous?" he said. "It's true that decades of atrocious crimes went on in this room, though.

They talked Art here, the Art of 1860. They sang 'The Lost Chord' here. The room wallows in crime. But ghosts! There aren't any!"

There came a sudden crack from his music table; he went rather hurriedly across to it, and took up one of his orchestral instruments.

"And now she's broken my siren," he observed, greatly annoyed.

Julia, like a good wife, did not call attention to the singular inconsistency of this, but picked up her easel, and grew red with passion.

"She's spoiled it again," she said. "But we won't give in; we'll fight the odious old woman for all we're worth. She's a spiritual blackmailer; she wants to frighten us into some sort of surrender. It's monstrous that the next world should interfere with ours in this scandalous fashion."

Humphrey threw the fragments of the siren into the fireplace.

"Oh, bosh!" he exclaimed. "Bosh!" he repeated, as if to encourage himself.

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I left them determined to keep the materialistic flag flying. But the next week witnessed a swift development in the power of the haunting presence. It—we may say "she"—began to materialize in the most convincing manner, and it was clear that this earth-bound spirit was just as "arch" as she had been fifty years ago. She constantly appeared to Humphrey in simpering Victorian attitudes; she gave him little shy smiles, and seemed to be trying to propitiate him. Her attitude to Julia, on the other hand, had become far more aggressive: not content with casting her easel to the ground whenever she had made a peculiarly inspired cube on it, she visited her with the most atrocious nightmares, she broke her looking-glass, she cloyed her palate with lavender. When Julia came into her black bathroom with the purple ceiling and the pink floor, she would hear the whisk of skirts behind the cistern; if she went into her bedroom to dress for dinner she would find the simulacrum of a green crinoline and a wreath of roses laid out on her bed. It was perfectly clear that Mrs. Wallace wanted to annoy the woman and wheedle the man into something that suited her ghostly will. And a week afterwards, sitting alone one evening, I received a telephone message that Mrs. Lodge would like me "to step round," if I was disengaged, on a matter of some importance.

They were both sadly changed. Humphrey wore a wild and hunted eye, Julia was full of jerky apprehensive movements. I was given a short and dismal account of these new experiences.

"Can you suggest anything that she would particularly like?" asked Julia humbly. "You say you met her once. What did she particularly value in her life in this house?"

"I should say her Thursday evenings," I answered.

"Bunkum!" said Humphrey, without conviction. "Besides, how are we to give her her Thursday evenings? We can't arrange evenings for the dead."

Julia had gone to her bureau by the window, and she took up an engagement-book, which she examined by the light of one of the cauliflower lamp-shades.

"To-morrow is Thursday," she said. "We're dining out."

There was silence. Here, at the top of the square, which is a cul-de-sac, there was no sound of traffic, and the silence began to sing in my ears. It began to sing a tune. Humphrey must have heard it, too, for he gave a loud squeal and clutched his hair.

"There it is again," he said. "I shall go crazy if this continues! I sat up till three last night, reading *Adam Bede*. I didn't want to, but I had to. I shall sit up again to-night, I know. Thank God, there are only fifty pages left."

"But she'll make you begin another book," said Julia. "It may be *The Wide, Wide World* next time."

"What do you want to do, then?" he asked.

"Darling, just to leave the studio empty to-morrow night," she said. "To lock the door and leave it. Then, if that succeeds, we might do the same thing the next Thursday. It's worth trying."

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It was only a few evenings ago that I dined with the Lodges. It was, in fact, on Thursday. We sat rather long round the table, and Julia, looking at the clock, got up hurriedly.

"We won't sit in the studio to-night," she said. "It is pleasant upstairs."

We went upstairs, and I demanded news. Humphrey interspersed Julia's narrative with unconvinced expressions such as "Pish!" or "Rot!" She told me in brief how every Thursday afternoon she put bunches of lavender in the studio, and left some suitable pictures and books about. She also took out of the room her easel, and the score on which Humphrey was engaged, for fear of annoying "them". Since they had made these arrangements they hadn't been "bothered".... The clock struck ten, and, remembering that Mrs. Wallace's famous conversaciones always began at half-past nine, my curiosity rose.

"I have left my cigarettes in my coat pocket downstairs," I said. "I will go and fetch them."

Humphrey is not a fool; he did not say "There are plenty here." As for Julia, her eyes sparkled.

"Dare you?" she asked.

For some reason I kicked off my shoes when I got outside the drawing-room, and paddled noiselessly down to the floor below.

A short passage leads from the hall to the studio and dining-room; this was dark, but from below the studio door, at the end of it, there came a thin line of light. As I crept closer I heard the dim sound of many voices coming from it. Closer and closer I crept and my ear focused itself to the murmur.

"A fine book, in spite of its coarseness," I heard. "But one doesn't want to talk about it. Ah, Georgiana, here's Mr. Molloy asking if he may lead you to the instrument."

I heard the sound of the piano, less tinkly than when I heard it last, and then, unmistakably, the sound of a human voice. It was all thin and remote, as if borne from some great distance on the wind.

"And now," I said to myself, "I shall open the door and go in."

And then I did nothing of the kind. Poltroon and coward, I retraced my steps, looking fearfully behind me, in order to be sure that the studio door had not opened, and that from it some wraith of days long past was not spying on the impertinent future. I scurried upstairs, and with my shoes in my hand entered the drawing-room.

"Well?" said Humphrey and Julia, in one breath.

"There was a light under the studio door," I said. "There were voices, words, music."

"And you didn't go in?" asked Humphrey.

"Certainly not. If it comes to that, why don't you go in yourself? They are there."

He pondered a moment. "Bosh!" he said, with an effort.

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# THE PSYCHICAL MALLARDS

Timothy Mallard was gifted from childhood with a variety of supernormal powers, which rendered him utterly different from all other children that his parents had ever come across, and his involuntary exercise of them extended back into his very earliest days. He was, in fact, hardly a month old when he first gave evidence of his peculiar endowments. One day he cried so long and loud (after being as "good as gold" throughout his four weeks of earthly pilgrimage) that his nurse took him out of his cradle and set him on her knee, where she proceeded to adopt the usual soothing process of rocking him violently to and fro and up and down with the pitching and rolling motion of a boat in a storm, in order to reduce him to the requisite state of dizzy quiescence. For some five minutes she persevered in this traditional treatment, but to no effect, and was just about to give it up in despair, and put him to bed again till nature was exhausted, when a large flake of the ceiling fell, crushing his cradle into a pancake of wicker and blanket. And as if a tap had been turned off his crying ceased....

That incident, naturally enough, was put to the credit of coincidence, and it was considered "very lucky" that his nurse had taken Master Tim out of the cradle just then, though it would have, perhaps, been "luckier" if there had been no such fall of lath and plaster. But from that time onwards the young years of Timothy Mallard were enveloped in a net of such curious phenomena, that it became impossible to attribute them all to coincidence, and his parents—healthy, normal people—were forced to the reluctant conclusion that there was something very odd about the child himself.

It was no use, for instance, making him put out his tongue, and then, with a bright smile, telling him that for a treat he was going to be given a spoonful of the most delicious red-currant jelly, because, without having tasted it, he announced that it was "powdery." But he tempered the obduracy of his refusal to indulge in red-currant jelly with a promise to "fink" his ache away. Tim then closed his eyes, gave a few little twitches, and seemed to relapse into unconsciousness. They had hardly begun to shake him when he came to himself, and it was quite apparent that he had thought away that troublesome ache, while his tongue, on re-examination, was discovered to be of the requisite rose-leaf description. Similarly, when his first visit to the dentist was planned, and he was told that he and nurse were going for a jolly walk in the High Street, he made the astounding announcement that he hadn't got toothache, and that he would bite any alien finger that intruded itself into his mouth. In this case (so the scientific student may observe) it was conceivable that he might, subconsciously, have overheard a conversation about dentists between his mother and his nurse, but such an explanation does not account for the fact that at the age of six he drew a detailed sketch of his own inside, showing with complete accuracy the position of the liver, pancreas, kidneys, and other interesting organs. The family doctor, to whom this artistic effort was submitted without hint as to authorship, said it was the work of a trained pathologist.

Dr. Farmer was interested in occult phenomena, and, when informed that this accurate and beautiful map was the work of Timothy, he told his disgusted parents that the boy was possessed of some supernormal power of lucidity or clairvoyance, which enabled him to perceive what was hidden from the ordinary vision. Other instances of this gift were shown in the fact that he could announce that his Aunt Anne was putting on her hat and cloak with the intention of calling on her sister-in-law, and that his father, who was up in town for the day, had missed his train at Charing Cross. So, though weird, this gift had its practical advantages, for his mother had time on the one hand to tell her parlour-maid that she was out, and on the other to put off dinner.... Together with clairvoyance he developed a power of clair-audience, and by day and night heard voices which were quite inaudible to his elders and betters.

Apart from these little peculiarities Tim was normal enough, and at the age of thirteen presented the similitude of a big, merry boy, with large boots and tousled hair. His father determined to send him to Eton, where he had himself imbibed a love of cricket and a hatred of Greek, in the hopes that a sound classical education would speedily disperse those strange "clouds of glory" that the boy still trailed behind him. Roman history and hexameters and supines were powerful solvents of the unusual.

Mr. Mallard, puzzled though he was by these occult phenomena, still had a lurking feeling that the boy could curb them if he chose, and on the eve of his departure spoke to him kindly, but firmly, about it all.

"Remember, my dear Tim," he said, "that I am going to all this trouble and expense of sending you to Eton not merely that you should be able to write Latin verses and pass examinations with credit. You are growing up—boyhood passes very soon into manhood—and you must learn to behave as men behave. Those childish tricks, for instance——"

Tim, as is the custom of the new generation, treated his father like a child.

"But I've told you often and often," he said, "that I can't help it. I wish you would try to remember that. I don't want to see Aunt Anne in her bath, or know you are going to fall off your bicycle."

His father thumped the table.

"Now, I beg of you, Tim," he said, "not to argue like that. You can control those tricks perfectly well if you like. Dr. Farmer told me that they were of hysterico-ideo-exteriorizative origin——"

"What?" said Tim.

"The same as fidgets," said his father. "Occupy your mind with something else when you feel them coming on. You won't find yourself popular either with your teachers or your companions if you behave queerly. Queer! That's the word I wanted instead of Dr. Farmer's definition. There's nothing which wholesome English boys dislike so much as queerness. Get over your queerness, my dear, and do credit to the great middle class from which you come. I can let you enjoy an excellent education, and mix on equal terms with your superiors—never mind that—but you'll have to make your way in the world, and there's nothing that so goes against a man as queerness——"

He broke off suddenly and looked at Tim, who had shut his eyes and was twitching violently. He was naturally very much annoyed that the boy should give so small an attention to the remarks which he had so carefully prepared, and raised his voice.

"Tim, drop it!" he said. "Listen to me, Tim. *Tim!*"

Tim's twitching had ceased, and he lay back in his chair, breathing slowly and heavily. His father, irritated beyond endurance at this untimely exhibition of one of his tricks, was about to shake him violently by the shoulder, when his attention was attracted by a loud rattling noise behind him, and he observed his heavy knee-hole table advancing across the room without visible agency in the direction of the trance-stricken boy. He had barely time to skip out of the way of its ponderous march, when it came to a standstill, and he found himself with shaking knees and a dry throat staring at Tim across it. Dr. Farmer had already asked him whether Tim had shown any symptoms of teleo-kinesis, which (the obliging doctor explained) signified the movements of inanimate objects towards or from the boy, occurring without intervention of any visible agency, and, with a sinking of his heart, Mr. Mallard realized that here was a teleo-kinetic phenomenon.... Then, without warning, this heavy table began to creak and groan again, and, retreating from Tim with the same swiftness with which it had advanced, came to rest in its usual position. So, even if Tim had pulled it towards him with a string in some inexplicable manner, he would have had to employ some strong and rigid rod to repel it again. Mr. Mallard's common sense rejected such a theory, and he was forced to suppose that his poor boy had suddenly developed teleo-kinetic power.

At this moment, while Tim still lay inert in his chair, there came a hurried step on the stair, and Mrs. Mallard, who had been sitting below, waddled into the room.

"I heard such a noise overhead," she said, "as if you were moving all the furniture instead of telling Tim about Eton. Why, what's the matter with him?"

"Teleo-kinesis," muttered Mr. Mallard. "My knee-hole table has been behaving like a three-year-old."

Mrs. Mallard had the same wholesale dislike of occult phenomena as her husband.

"Oh, how tiresome!" she said. "But, thank goodness, the table has gone back. So upsetting for a housemaid to find all the furniture moved about. Dr. Farmer told me that we mustn't be surprised if something of the sort happened. He is a very naughty boy. He——"

Her voice froze in her throat, and she pointed a trembling finger at her only son. Mr. Mallard followed its faltering direction.

Tim was lying with closed eyes and crossed legs in his father's large arm-chair, and now began to rise out of it, not on to his feet, but into the air. It was as if some unseen arm-chair still supported him, for he rose in precisely the same position as that in which he had been lolling when he went into a trance, like a balloon gently leaving the ground. He was apparently without weight, for the draught from the door, which Mrs. Mallard had left wide, gently wafted him towards the open window, and, to his parents' horror, he floated out of it and lay suspended thirty feet above the pavement of the

High Street. Then some opposing current took possession of him, and after he had bumped once or twice against the panes of the second window, Mr. Mallard had the good sense to open it, and Tim floated in again. He circled round the room as if in a slow eddy, and then came to rest on the top of the knee-hole table.

"Levitation, drat it!" moaned Mr. Mallard. "Dr. Farmer——"

Tim shook himself, upset an ink-bottle, and rubbed his eyes. "Oh, bother!" he said to his father. "What have I been doing now? Hallo, I'm sitting in a pool of ink! Why on earth didn't you stop me, one of you?"

Mr. Mallard did not feel himself bound to repeat these tiresome occurrences to Tim's house-master, for it was not fair that the boy should begin his school-life under a cloud, and Tim left for Eton (in a new pair of trousers) next day. For some weeks Mr. Mallard had reason to congratulate himself on his high opinion of classics and congenial companionship as a cure for psychical tendencies, for nothing unusual disturbed the scholastic serenity of that educational establishment. But often before the deplorable agencies that were responsible for occult phenomena had remained dormant for long periods, and Mr. Mallard, when he received a letter with the Eton postmark, never opened it without a qualm. The weeks, however, went on, and his apprehensions began to get drowsy, and when, eventually, on a Monday morning he took out of its envelope a letter from Tim's house-master, he had no premonition of disastrous news. But he turned white as he read it, and passed it over to his wife with a hollow groan.

"I feel bound to tell you," wrote Tim's house-master, "that I am puzzled and pained by your son's conduct. Hitherto he has, beyond a few acts of boyish carelessness and disobedience, given me no cause for complaint. But this morning (Sunday), while attending chapel, some events occurred which it is impossible for me to pass over. He must have thrown his prayer-book at the chaplain (though no one actually saw him do it), for the book in question, with his name written in it by his mother, whose gift it was, certainly hit the reverend gentleman a severe blow in the eye, which completely incapacitated him from conducting divine service. He was led out of chapel, and the head master continued the office. What makes the offence more heinous is that your son then feigned complete unconsciousness. Had he owned up to throwing his prayer-book at the chaplain in some fit of boyish exasperation, I probably should not have troubled you with this serious report, and the head master would have dealt briefly with the whole question...."

Mrs. Mallard raised a blanched face from the perusal of this terrible letter.

"Poor darling," she said. "Teleo-kinesis."

"Read on," said Mr. Mallard, brokenly.

"I write," said Tim's house-master, "in a confusion of mind to which I am wholly unaccustomed. The Marquis of Essex and Moses Samuelson, two admirable and steady boys, both in my house, assisted your son out of chapel. They both aver, with the honesty that characterizes the English aristocracy and the ancient Semites, that when they came to the flight of steps leading from the chapel into the schoolyard, your son, still unconscious, floated out of their hands ('Levitation,' sobbed Mrs. Mallard), and was wafted on to the railings of the statue of Henry VI, where he came to himself in considerable pain. I have just had a long talk with the head master, who, as you may know, is an enthusiastic member of the Society for Psychical Research, and he is inclined (in my judgment) to take an altogether too lenient view of your son's conduct. I told him, however, as I am now telling you, that if any further incidents of the sort occur, I shall be unable to keep T. Mallard in my house. You need be under no apprehension about his physical well-being, for the school doctor tells me that, beyond a few abrasions and punctures (owing to the railings), the boy is no worse for his adventure. But for myself I hold all psychical phenomena in contempt and abhorrence as being wholly un-English, and on any repetition of them I shall have to ask you to remove T. Mallard from my care."

It was no wonder that the news of this sensational Sunday morning soon got abroad, for every boy in the school wrote home to his parents saying how much he had enjoyed chapel that day, and Tim's parents were besieged with requests from various Occult and Psychical Societies to let the boy embrace the mediumistic profession. These they invariably refused, and appeals pointing out to them their obvious duty in allowing their son's young energies to be employed in the noble task of tearing away the veil between the seen and the unseen did not produce the smallest effect on them. Offers of considerable sums of money for séances given by Tim were even harder to resist, and it does the utmost credit to Mr. and Mrs. Mallard that neither avarice nor duty (according to occultists) made them swerve a hairbreadth from their resolve to give Tim every chance of growing up into a sensible and conventional man. Like decent parents they had their son's true welfare at heart, and they returned emphatic negatives to all the allurements of even the wealthiest Psychical

Associations. As if to reward them, for a long time after this no further disturbance took place, and three happy years passed. Tim got his "Field" colours for football, he was likely to play at Lord's in the cricket team, and he developed an excellent repugnance for learning.... Poor wretches! They had no idea how his psychical reservoir was filling.

Mr. Mallard, in Tim's last year but one at Eton, was the prey of financial anxieties, but as long as the Khamshot Oil Company continued to pay a dividend of thirty-five per cent, no wolf could come within reasonable distance of his doors. But one evening during the Christmas holidays Tim, while in the middle of an account of a football match, became cataleptic, and, with groanings and screams, had shouted out "Horrible Khamshot: sell, sell, sell!" It was very disappointing that after three years' immunity from nonsense he had suddenly become nonsensical again, and Khamshot was expected to pay a forty per cent dividend this year, so Mr. Mallard, intentionally defiant, sold out next day all that he was possessed of in other investments in order to put his entire fortune into Khamshots. The forty per cent dividend was duly declared, and Mr. Mallard very naturally said, "So much for poor Tim's clairvoyance."

But in spite of the affluence which the forty per cent dividend produced, those Christmas holidays were very trying to Tim's parents, for the boy was prey to continuous psychical invasions just when it might have been hoped that he was growing out of such irregularities. He constantly went into rigid and profound trances, during which the heaviest articles of furniture were wont to whirl about the room; levitations were of almost daily occurrence; and he developed a new and uncomfortable gift which Dr. Farmer told the parents was undoubtedly ideo-plasticity. While in trance dreadful luminous spots used to appear on his waistcoat, from which exuded some wax-like substance that weaved itself into the semblance of human figures. These materializations took place in broad daylight, and since Dr. Farmer told Mr. Mallard that on no account must Tim be startled or violently awakened while these horrid simulacra were manifest (for a shock of any kind might derange his mind or even prove fatal), it was necessary to wait, with such patience as was possible, till these revolving exudations were absorbed again. Dinner on Christmas Day, for instance, was a very sorry banquet, for Tim had hardly begun on his turkey before he went into a profound trance, and plum pudding could not be served till nearly ten o'clock. He became markedly more clairvoyant, and what gave rise to profound uneasiness in his father, in view of the fact that Tim had so strongly urged him to sell Khamshot Oils, was that these visions invariably proved correct. He saw Aunt Anne writing her will afresh, and leaving her money to an orphan asylum instead of her brother; he saw himself holing a mashie shot at golf; he saw his mother sprain her ankle by slipping on a banana skin—all of which visions were promptly fulfilled. Aunt Anne died of pneumonia, and her will revealed this abominable codicil; Tim holed a topped mashie shot; and his mother was on the sofa for three days. But, with the obstinacy of a thoroughly sensible person, Mr. Mallard clung to his Khamshot Oils.

Tim still remembers with dreadful vividness the ensuing Ash Wednesday, when he was, of course, back at Eton. He had had a slight levitation that morning, but it had passed off unobserved, and his bureau had shown a tendency towards teleo-kinesis. But a keen game of fives had made him feel himself again, and he was on his way back to his house when he experienced a moment of terrible clairvoyance. Of its exact nature he never spoke, but the effect was that he rushed to the nearest telegraph office and sent off a wire to his mother, saying: "Don't let father get near razors." Ten minutes afterwards, passing a newsboard, his heart stood still, for he saw on it in large letters: "Stupendous Earthquake at Khamshot." He went in and bought the paper, and read ruinous tidings. All the oil wells had been engulfed in an immense schism in the earth, and the island had nearly entirely disappeared under the sea. A few scattered reefs alone stuck out. This, of course, explained his clairvoyance about his father, and he could only pray that his telegram had arrived in time. Alas! it had not, for later in the day, his house-master broke to him the terrible news that, in a fit of temporary insanity, caused by the loss of his entire fortune, his father had cut the throats of his cook, his wife, and his parlour-maid, and, subsequently, his own.

Youth is gifted with divine powers of recuperation, and after his first outburst of passionate grief was over, Tim resolutely faced the future. He was now quite alone in the world, his father's meagre balance at the bank was not more than sufficient to pay his school bills for this term, and it was clear that if he was to enjoy (as his poor father had wished) the full benefit of a Public School education, and spend another year at Eton, he must set himself to work to earn money in the holidays. With the full approval and consent of the head master, who, as has been already mentioned, was a serious student of the occult, he hired a couple of rooms in Sloane Street, neatly, but not expensively furnished, and announced in all the leading papers that Timothy Mallard, Esq. (the famous Eton medium) would give during the Easter Holidays a series of clairvoyant, teleo-kinetic, ideo-plastic and other séances at his rooms in Sloane Street. He claimed no spiritualistic powers, professed to tell no fortunes, and invited the inspection of the police and other trained observers of the occult. References were permitted to the head master of Eton and his brother the Suffragan Bishop of

Winchelsea.

Under such scholastic and ecclesiastical patronage the Eton medium spent a very busy and profitable Easter holiday. But, do what he would, he could not prevent enthusiastic spiritualists believing that he received and transmitted to them messages from the other side. It was no use Tim asserting that he only read their minds; they knew better than that, and insisted that they were in communication with all manner of defunct friends and relatives. Almost as popular were the materializations (ideo-plasticity), of which he could produce any quantity in broad daylight under the most searching test conditions, and the inexplicable movements of the largest pieces of furniture. Occasionally, the power failed altogether; but Tim, with a shrewdness that did credit to his classical education, never attempted to make good the temporary failure by fraud or conjuring tricks which, sooner or later, would be detected. The honest English boy refused to take the usual fees, and waited for the return of the power. But, though highly remunerative, the Easter holidays were very strenuous, and he was glad to get back to the quiet and leisure of the summer half.

He played cricket against Harrow that year at Lord's, and, naturally, as he walked out from the pavilion to bat, he made an experiment or two to see whether his occult powers were in working order. He tried to read the umpire's mind, but was disappointed to find that he could get no telepathic impression. But the teleo-kinetic gift was in full force, for without effort he caused one of the wicket-keeper's gloves to slip off his hand and trundle towards him along the ground. He felt, therefore, the utmost confidence in his batting powers, for he could apply the same treatment to the balls he received. The first was a yorker, but just before it touched his bat he exerted the full force of his mind, and, making a slogging gesture, caused it to soar away and break a window in the pavilion. This counted six runs, and, just to get his eye in, he repeated the feat with the remainder of the over. Then, to show he could play all round the wicket, he made some crisp cuts and pulled a few balls round to the boundary at mid-on. The power then completely failed, and he was bowled after just completing his century.

He had another year at Eton, and, by judicious mind-reading, won a scholarship at King's College, Cambridge. His holidays were spent in strenuous work, and before he took his degree he was not only living in the lap of luxury, but had taken a spacious house in Belgrave Square instead of the more modest quarters in Sloane Street, and had a thousand pounds to his credit at the bank. He was extremely industrious, and, finding that his power grew with practice, often spent an hour or two in trance without sitters, but with a stenographer to take down all that he said or did.

On one such evening he came to himself after a prolonged trance, bathed in perspiration, and feeling that his telepathic powers had projected his subconscious mind to some immense distance. He absently sipped a glass of Perrier Jouet (1894) as the stenographer arranged her notes.

"Well, what have I been saying?" he asked wearily.

She cleared her throat.

"Khamshot, Khamshot," she said. "Buy, buy, buy! Buy Khamshot! Fortune and opulence. Fresh earthquake and lakes of oil. Island emerged from sea again with enormous lake of oil constantly replenished by innumerable gushers."

"What?" said Tim.

She drew her finger down the page.

"Then you said, 'Buy!' nothing but 'Buy!' Mr. Mallard," said Miss Gray. "Then there's some more about the lake of oil. You talked about nothing else."

Tim put off his early sitters next morning, and went down to the city with a cheque in his pocket for a thousand and seventeen pounds, which represented his balance at Messrs Barclays. By an effort of cryptomnesia (or recalling what he had once known but completely forgotten) he remembered the name of his father's broker, and invested the whole of his savings in Khamshot Oils. The shares were to be had at the price of a few pence, and his money thus purchased (inclusive of brokerage) fifty-three thousand of them. He was already possessed of twenty thousand more, the only legacy which he had received from his poor father, so that he was now the holder of seventy-three thousand shares. Then he went back to Belgrave Square and resumed his séances.... The evening papers reported a prodigious earthquake among the reefs which had once been Khamshot Island.

This year a new medium took London by storm, and occult circles were evenly and acutely bisected as to whether she or

Tim was the more remarkable repository of supernormal power. Her name was Miriam Starlight, a girl of not more than twenty and of extraordinary physical beauty. The two met at a psychical tea-party and instantly fell violently in love with each other. Nothing could have been more suitable, and the occult world of London was thrilled with the anticipation of what manifestations would result from their joint mediumship. Within a few weeks of their meeting they were engaged, and a few weeks more saw them married.

It was quite in the earlier days of their honeymoon, which they spent at Rye, that it became apparent that psychical London was doomed to experience a most terrible disappointment. Not wishing to let their blissful weeks slip by without some little practice in their life-work, they trifled with some easy feats in levitation, cryptomnesia, teleo-kinesis, and ideo-plasticity. Tim and Miriam in turn went off singly into trance, and the most amazing results followed. Each of them, singly, levitated with the greatest ease, and floated out of the window into the street or the garden; the furniture of the house (kindly lent them by the President of the Psychical Association) whirled round the room, and materializations followed each other in bewildering succession. Thus they knew that marriage had not spoiled their individual gifts, and with Tim's stenographer to note results, they began on the experiments which they hoped would add an entirely new chapter to the veracious history of mediumship, and composing themselves in two arm-chairs, went into trance together. Miss Gray, the stenographer, was quite accustomed to psychical phenomena, and as soon as she had satisfied herself (by pinching them) that they were completely unconscious, sharpened her pencils and adopted the procedure which she often followed when observing Tim.

"Teleo-kinesis, please," she said, in a business-like voice.

A large bureau instantly began to move towards Tim. But it had hardly started when it came to a standstill and began violently to quiver. It was exactly as if some opposing force had met it and refused to let it advance. There was an ominous creaking sound from somewhere inside it.

Clever Miss Gray grasped the situation instantly.

"Teleo-kinesis, Mr. Mallard alone, please," she said, and the bureau slid swiftly over the carpet.

"Teleo-kinesis, Mrs. Mallard alone, please," she said, and the bureau began to retreat again.

Miss Gray was a fearless observer, and this vastly interested her.

"Teleo-kinesis together," she said, retreating behind her arm-chair. "Full speed ahead."

The bureau, violently agitated, remained exactly where it was, and it was evident to her that the two high horse-power teleo-kinetic agencies were in opposition. Before she had time to realize what the result must inevitably be, it had burst into a thousand fragments. One dynamism, it was clear, attracted it, the other stubbornly repelled it.

Not wishing to risk the destruction of another Queen Anne piece, she changed her tactics.

"Levitation, please," she said, and on the instant the bodies of the lovers rose in the air. But instead of floating placidly out of the window which she had opened for the sake of the experiment, they kept colliding with hollow bumps. More than that, there seemed to be an active antagonism between them, for they drew back, while floating in the air, only to charge each other with augmented violence. She called off the levitation and awoke the lovers, who instantly clasped each other's hands.

"Darling, it was lovely," said Miriam. "Though quite unconscious, I knew I was marvellously at one with you! What did we do, Miss Gray? Oh, what are those splinters all over the room?"

Miss Gray diffidently explained the origin of the splinters, and the pronounced hostility of their levitated bodies. A bruise on Miriam's elbow, and the initial discolorations of a black eye for Tim, proved the truth of her depressing narrative.

Further experiments only confirmed the conclusion that was but too manifest, and the lovers returned to London madly devoted to each other, but in the deepest professional dejection. Their values, it seemed sadly certain, so far from being enhanced by conjunction, neatly cancelled each other; instead of the equation " $x+x=2x$ ," they must rate themselves " $x-x=\text{nothing at all}$ ." It was interesting for their sitters to observe the unparalleled violence with which chairs and tables flew into fragments, and many phenomena of that sort could be instantly obtained (their materializations, for instance,

were extremely rude to each other), but psychical science made no further progress there. The two could not even hold separate séances simultaneously, for their bodies instantly levitated, escaped out of the windows, and had butting matches over the garden of Belgrave Square, at risk of doing each other serious injury. It was all very disappointing.

To make up for this, the most wonderful news came from Khamshot Island. The new earthquake had shouldered it out of the sea again, and when the water drained off, it was discovered to be a great crater full of oil renewed daily in prodigious quantities by gushers. An American company was formed, and the Khamshot one pound shares, of which Tim had bought so many thousand at the price of a few coppers, mounted to ten pounds. Even at that figure they paid twenty per cent, and Tim, when his wife was holding séances, and he himself was normal, tried to work out what percentage his thousand and seventeen pounds were bringing him in. Being a classical scholar he had no great grasp of mathematics, and his brain reeled in the computation of his dividends. But he dutifully put up beautiful tombstones, not only to his father and mother, but to the hapless cook and the murdered parlour-maid.



This curious and strictly historical narrative has now a strange sequel. Miriam bore one unique baby, who is close on four years old. Incompatible as were the magnetisms of his father and mother, Nature, by some reconciliatory process, seems to have united in him the psychical powers of each of his parents, and last night only I attended a séance given by this stupendous child. He recited in the original Hebrew the first chapter of the book of Genesis, and the Rabbi, Ben Habakkuk, who was present, confirmed the accuracy of every word (the child knowing no more of Hebrew than I do) and said that his pronunciation was of the purest Judaic inflection. He then gave the temperature at St. Moritz, accurately confirmed by this morning's "Times," and, pointing his baby-finger at me, said that "that man" would live to the very advanced age of ninety-three. So if "that man" retains his memory then, he will record in his palsied handwriting the fulfilment of this remarkable prophecy. We must have patience ...

**THE END**

[The end of *More Spook Stories* by Edward Frederic Benson]