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H. R. WAKEFIELD

**STRAYERS
FROM SHEOL**

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STRAYERS FROM SHEOL

by

H. RUSSELL WAKEFIELD

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Strayers From Sheol

Farewell to All Those!

I've written my last ghost story. Altogether I've had over a hundred published; some of them have been reprinted many times and in half a dozen different languages. I merely mention these egotistical statistics to establish my bona fides—I *should* know what I'm talking about—not to suggest I'm any genius at the art. I make no pretence to that.

I believe ghost story writing to be a dying art. It's just possible that another Montague Rhodes James may appear some day, but I profoundly doubt it. James had certain great advantages, besides his imagination and technique: he was an antiquary and an amateur. Antiquarian lore, old legends of antique places, old ruins and enigmas—from such worn stones and hallowed dust ghostly inspiration is readily breathed. And he was an amateur of amateurs. His comparatively sparse output was spread over a long life, and he never wrote save when the spirit moved him. His early tales were all composed for private circulation, and the financial aspect never, I believe, interested him much. And I can assure would-be aspirants that no one in his senses ever tried to write ghost stories for a living. Even James's first tales were published in rather obscure periodicals, and it was only the sinister and superlative merits of *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* which slowly secured him a wider public. Even so, it was never very wide.

Many—perhaps most—people simply *can't read* ghost stories, those poor relations of fiction. They'd as soon read binomial theorem stories. A large number of strangers have written to me over the years to this effect: "Why concern yourself with such inane tripe? Why waste a small talent on this bogusness? You're capable of better, saner things." I've found that the cult of such tales is confined mainly to a small subset of highest brows. They are extremely hypercritical, somewhat resembling ballet-maniacs in their encyclopaedic knowledge and zeal for odious comparisons. Even so, I think I should use the past tense, for I doubt that many of them survive. So I think James was the last of the great ones; he closed an epoch. Why is this?

James, in a kindly review of one of my books, rather suggested, I thought, that the author of ghost stories need not be a very violent believer

himself. That I categorically deny. Unless the writer can, at least temporarily, alarm himself, he will never alarm anyone else. While James was writing “*Oh, Whistle, and I’ll Come to You, My Lad,*” I’m certain he was also casting a furtive inner eye at spectral heaped bedclothes forming into fearful shapes. No doubt he soon laughed the image away, but he must have known it for a time. But it is becoming ever harder to get and transmit those tremors because psychic phenomena are now being subjected to scientific treatment (whether they are yielding to that treatment is another matter) and the public takes it for granted that such phenomena are no longer subjects for fiction, and that the ghostly fictionist is an interloper and mere scarifier. I think that’s partly why *I’ve* lost inspiration, too—that and advancing years.

But beware of supposing the mystery has been in any way solved. I must have read several million words on psychic research, most unremunerative words. Masses of alleged evidence, a welter of eager discordant theories—but the key to the maze remains perennially elusive. I doubt that the question, “Which phenomena are supernatural?” has been answered. Is telepathy supernormal? Is it not merely an extension of an old mystery—that of communication between man and man, though its modes are more flagrantly puzzling? Fooling about with marked cards seems to me the essence of futility. I’ve no doubt that some people are lucky with telepathic cards, just as some are “lucky” at bridge.

Why was I persuaded into this arduous (ghost stories are very difficult to write) and unremunerative game? I am a skeptic by temperament, though not, I hope, a wooden one, and the skeptical temperament is essentially a fair, open-spirited one, ever avid to examine and, if necessary, to accept evidence adverse to its creed. And I received such evidence during two weekends spent in a superficially charming and harmonious Queen Anne house about a mile and a half from Richmond Bridge. I mustn’t locate it more precisely because—and it is a significant fact—even the most rampant unbelievers often refuse to live in a reputedly haunted house.

And I can assure them they are very wise.

I visited this house in 1917, and during the previous thirty years it had known five suicides—the old gardener, strictly against orders, blurted out this ominous record in his cups, and it was verified. One had hanged herself in a powder-closet. One shot himself in the tool-shed. The others had drowned themselves in the river about a hundred yards away, always, it was said, at dawn. And now mark this! About a year after I went there, the valet of a famous nobleman also drowned himself in the river at first light. He

was seen running down the path as though a fearful fiend were hard upon his heels and plunging in to his death. I think you'll agree that gives one somewhat sombrely to think.

Someone who entered this house on a lovely summer day, knowing nothing of its record, remarked in astonishment, "How dark it is in here!" And that was so. Always it seemed unnaturally dim, as though seen through those "reducing" glasses artists use for toning down bright light.

The moment I passed its threshold, I knew a general feeling of devitalisation and psychic malaise, which remained with me till I left. The household were affected in varying degrees. Remember, some people simply *cannot* see or sense ghosts. The cook was one of them; she couldn't begin to understand what the trouble was. But one of the maids twice encountered a stranger, once in the room with the powder-closet, and once on the stairs. She couldn't "take it" and left. The lady of the house had one of those rare temperaments which are not frightened by ghosts, and yet she was always seeing and hearing something; for, particularly after dark, that house was sparking with venom, an obscure mode of energy, call it what you will.

My own particular bother consisted of a petrified insomnia. I lay awake till dawn, oppressed by a fear without a name. Call it just ghostly fear, if you like. I felt a craven and a worm, but I was utterly unable to snap out of it. Only those who have experienced something like it will sympathise. I had only one visual bother. I was sitting in the garden one afternoon under the mulberry tree and happened to glance up at the first floor windows. There was a blurred face at one of them. It was a man's face, but there was no man in the house. I wrote my first story about that house and called it *The Red Lodge*. Last year, a quarter of a century later, it was republished for the sixth time in America, and a play based on it was done on the radio. It also appeared in a Dutch anthology of ghost stories. No credit to me—it must all be given to the *permanent residents* of the Red Lodge. That is why I disagree with James. Before you can scare others, you must be scared yourself. Ghostly fear is transmitted, not concocted.

If some may sniff at my testimony as that of a suspect romancer, let me cite some very famous names in my support. The philosopher Kant, a genius of the most cautious and judicial mind, after examining the evidence, asserted he was convinced that authentic apparitions were sometimes seen. The great Richet spent a lifetime in psychical research, and declared in his final summing-up that such phenomena indisputably occurred, though they defied explanation. F. S. Smithe, the famous mountaineer, makes at least three references in his books to apparitions which crossed his high paths—

one in Scotland, one on the face of Mt. Blanc, one near the very peak of Everest. The word of such a man is impossible to doubt, is it not?

The great difficulty about ghosts is the number of essentially unverifiable explanations of them. Some are, of course, hallucinations. Hallucinations are very interesting and complex things about which much might be said, but I'll reluctantly disregard them. Then there are projected images. Everyone, with the possible exception of certain Oxford professors, sees images in his head. Some children and a very few adults can project them externally on to the screen of space in front of them. I have projected some myself. One was a vision of great beastliness, which has remained most vividly as an *interior image*, to this day. It was easy to mistake for a ghost, but I *believe* it was an image. Are hallucinations and eidetic images sufficient to explain ghosts away? I'm afraid not, for they are often seen by several persons simultaneously, which refutes their subjectivity, presumably.

I have no intention of pretending to a profundity I don't command, and I'm not going to say anything the meaning of which is not reasonably clear to me. It's so easy to talk windily, impressively and vaguely about psychic matters, and the temptation must be rigorously resisted. And it is absurd to suggest that I can succeed where Richet failed. I will first quote a remark of the famous philosopher, William James—"We can easily conceive of things that shall have no connection whatsoever with each other. We may assume them to inhabit different times and spaces, as the dreams of different persons do. They may be so unlike and incommensurable and so inert towards each other as never to jostle or interfere." That is only another way of saying that it is the extreme of egoism to suppose we perceive all there is to be perceived.

Our senses, our faculties, are designed for the practical purpose of successfully surviving and are, therefore, extremely limited in their range. Visually, we are almost blind. As Max Weber wrote, "These things (that we see) are only an infinitesimal part of the countless forces flashing through the immensity of the cosmos. The 'solid matter' we come up against is nothing less than a mask, a continual disguising of energy." The whole subject of perception is, of course, a venerable field of perennial battle, littered with dead, or merely shamming-dead, theories, and brave with the banners of discordant erudition, but, I suppose, we groundlings have a right to try and force a way through the sour and swaying scrummage. So if I say I believe ghosts are conceivably the sort of things William James imagined and that poltergeists are one of those disguised modes of energy, I am within

my rights. We who have seen will believe. Those who have never seen will continue to scoff.

I will say one other thing. I firmly believe all such psychic intrusions possess negative survival value and should in no way be encouraged. We have lost the power generally to experience them, for the very good reason that, as we've evolved, we've luckily, perhaps inevitably, lost touch with them. In my view, the cultivation of telepathy is a retrograde step. Highly and generally developed, it would lead to immense mental confusion. Again, when you see someone or something, you need to be sure it's "real" and not a ghost. Communication with the dead, if it occurs, should never be attempted; it inevitably confuses and distresses. As for precognition, could we *face* the future if we *knew* the future? Even eidetic images are a nuisance. That is why savages and, perhaps, the higher animals, are far more than ourselves susceptible to psychic shows. They are lower in the evolutionary scale and suffer accordingly. Only if psychical research were liable to reform us, make us less savage and corrupt, would I advocate it, and I see no reason why it should. At the same time, there is this to be realised and accepted: it is quite certain man will *not* leave psychic phenomena alone, he *will* play with these fires. And, perhaps, it is impossible to study the mind of man without casting a curious and studious eye on abnormal psychic intrusions. Experiments will go on. Researches will be carried to the final barrier. That is well enough, provided such experiments and researches are rigorously and scientifically conducted, and their evil, dangerous potentialities fully taken into account.

So that is why I've ceased to write ghost stories. Science has usurped their function and, I suppose, made a mockery of it. For example, fictional ghosts are usually and rightly malicious, malignant, *hunting* haunters, but there is no reason to suppose science will find them to be such. But wait! Why should I, in so defeatist a spirit, curmudgeonly spoil the market for those prepared to snatch the sinister torch from my failing hand? Why *shouldn't* ghosts be malignant, striving to destroy, or at least scare the wits out of us? They may be! They may *very* well be! Put that little whistle to your trembling lips and blow a tiny, far-carrying blast. What's that? A seagull's wing against the storm-wracked window? Let's hope it was nothing more! But look! Look! Those bedclothes forming into a horrid crouching shape! A scream bursts from your choking throat, and when the rescuers dash in, your face is the colour of those haunted sheets. A very narrow escape from death—and worse! Remember, too, those who galloped like crazed beasts from the Red House to their doom in the reeds!

No, don't be too sure that none of the old magic endures!

H. RUSSELL WAKEFIELD

London, England
February 17, 1961

The Triumph of Death

“Amelia,” said Miss Prunella Pendleham, “I have received a most impertinent letter this morning.”

“Yes, Miss Pendleham?”

“It is from some Society, and it has the insolence to suggest that this house is haunted by ghosts. Now you know that to be false, utterly false.”

“Yes, Miss Pendleham,” said Amelia listlessly.

“Do I detect a hesitant note in your tone? You mean what you say, I trust?”

“Oh yes, Miss Pendleham.”

“Very well. Now this Society actually wished to send down an investigator to examine and report on the house. I have replied that if any such person enters the grounds, he will be prosecuted for trespass. Here is my letter. Take it and post it at once.”

“Very well, Miss Pendleham.”

“You always seem so glad to get out of the house, Amelia! I wonder why. Now make haste there and back.”

A little later Miss Amelia Lornon was hurrying down the drive of Carthwaite Place. But as soon as she knew she was out of eye-shot from its upper windows, she slackened her pace. This she did for two reasons; she was feeling terribly frail and ill that morning, and to be out of that house, even for half an hour, meant a most blessed relief from that anguish which is great fear.

To reach the post-office of the little hamlet she had to pass the Rectory. Mrs. Redvale, the Rector’s wife, was glancing out of the drawing-room window at the time.

“There’s Amelia,” she said to her husband. “I’ve never seen her looking so ill. Poor creature! It’s time you did something about her, Claud, in my opinion.”

She was a handsome and determined-looking woman, quite obviously wearing the trousers, and her voice was sharply authoritative.

“What can I do, my dear?” replied the Rector with the plaintive testiness of the conscience-moved weakling.

“You can and must do *something*. You can listen to me for one thing. I’ve been meaning to have this out with you for some time; ever since I realized what was going on. That sight of her convinces me it must be now, at once. If she dies without our having done a hand’s turn to save her, I shall never know a minute’s peace again; and I don’t think you will either. Come quickly! Here she is going back.”

The Rector reluctantly went to the window. What he saw brought a look of genuine distress to his kindly, diffident face. “Yes,” he sighed, “I can see what you mean only too well.”

“Now sit down,” ordered his spouse. “I know we’re in a difficult position; Miss Pendleham puts two pounds in the plate every Sunday, which is an enormous help to us. ‘There are my servants’ wages,’ she seems to say, as she does it. But she is a very evil old woman; how evil, I don’t think either of us fully realises.”

“Yet she *does* come to church,” protested the Rector.

“Yes, she comes to church,” replied his wife sardonically, “and like a great many other people for a quite ulterior motive; she wants to keep *us quiet*, and she bribes us to do so—don’t argue—I know I’m right! Now we’ve been here only six months, but we’ve learnt quite a lot in that time. We’ve learnt that the Pendleham family have always shown a vicious, inherited streak; drunkards, ruthless womanisers, and worse, even criminals—and just occasionally a brilliant exception. This old woman is the last of the line, and it’ll be a very good thing when the horrid brood is extinct, in my opinion.”

“Of course,” said the Rector, “we have to trust Miles’s opinion for all this, *really*. And we know he’s utterly biased against her; he won’t even speak to her.”

“He’s been Churchwarden here for forty years; so he ought to know,” replied Mrs. Redvale. “Besides, he loses financially by his attitude—she never buys a thing at his shop. He strikes me as a perfectly honest and sincere old man. Don’t you think so?”

“I must say I do.”

“Well then, what’s his story? That she was crossed in love when very young, some other woman, as she believes, stealing her man away. So she made up her mind to have revenge on her sex in her own stealthy, devilish

way. He thinks her mind was permanently tainted at that time; that she is actually, if not technically, insane.”

“It all sounds so melodramatic!” murmured the Rector.

“Melodramatic doesn’t mean impossible,” answered his wife sharply; “there’s plenty of *real* melodrama in the world. Now Miles says she has had five companions since she marooned herself in that house thirty-five years ago. Three have died there and two escaped quickly, declaring Miss Pendleham was a devil and the house hell. And now there’s the sixth, Amelia; and she’s dying, too.”

“Dying of what?” asked the Rector.

“Of terror, if nothing else!”

“She could leave like those other two.”

“That’s so easy to say! You might say it of a rabbit in a stoat’s snare. When you’re sufficiently frightened you can neither run nor struggle. And she’s in a hopelessly weak position; ageing, penniless, naturally will-less and pliant. She’d never summon up courage to escape on her own.”

“But she seems, in a way, to like Miss Pendelham’s company!”

“Simply because she dreads being alone in that *foul* house. Now you know it’s haunted, Claud.”

“My dear Clara, you put me in a most difficult position, because, as you know, I agreed with Miss Pendleham, there were no such entities as ghosts.”

“Don’t be a humbug, Claud! You said that only out of politeness and a desire to please. You knew it was a lie when you said it.”

“My dear!”

“No cant! You remember when we first went there what was looking out of the window on the first floor?”

“There seemed to be something for a moment.”

“Was it a small boy with his face covered with blood?”

“I got such a fleeting glimpse, my dear.”

“Was it Miss Pendleham or Amelia?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“They are the only people living in the house. And I told you what I saw when I went to powder my nose. I can see it now! Do you believe me?”

“I’ve never known you to tell a *pointless* lie. Yet a bush sometimes closely resembles a bear.”

“But a little dead girl doesn’t resemble a bush! And you heard that scream?”

“I thought I heard something—a curious cry—it might have been a bird.”

“A bird! How would you like to live in that house with that sort of thing! You’d even—like Amelia—prefer Miss Pendleham’s company to *Theirs*. It often makes me feel physically sick to think of her there. If we don’t do something to save that poor woman, I shall be plagued by remorse till I die!”

“Do me the justice, Clara, to believe that is becoming true of me, also.”

“I wonder if you realise it as I do! I’m sensitive to places like that, and always have been. The very motes in the sunbeams there seem to make beastly patterns. I don’t wonder Amelia is dying by inches, has been dying for years. She told me, that when *They* are around her, the kettle will not boil. In other words, her brain is going as her body gives up the struggle!”

“Well, what can I do?” exclaimed the Rector. “Tell me, Clara! You are wiser than I in the affairs of this world, if I know more about the next.”

“And if there is such a place!” rapped Clara.

The Rector sighed. “I’m deeply grieved you’re such a skeptic, Clara.”

“Nonsense! Every parson should have an agnostic wife; it keeps his mind alive. Well, we’ll both think it over today and discuss it again tomorrow morning. I *mean* tomorrow. My mind is made up. As for that two pounds a week, could you go on taking it if Amelia died? Tomorrow at ten o’clock!”

“You were a long time, Amelia,” said Miss Pendleham.

“I was as quick as I could be, Miss Pendleham, but my heart was palpitating so.”

“Nonsense! You’re perfectly well. Don’t imagine things, Amelia!”

Miss Pendleham was one of those apparently timeless spinsters, so leisurely does the process of decay take its way with them. She was very tall and cylindrical in shape, an almost epicene, sexless body. She was invariably dressed in an iridescent grey garment of antique cut and rustling train. About her face, her nose in particular, the Rector had made one of his rare jests, by adapting to it a Max Beerbohm pleasantry, “Hints of the Iron

Duke at most angles”; and, indeed, that ungainly, craggy feature dominated the rest. Her mouth was small, thin-lipped, dry. Her eyes were quite round—monkey’s eyes—and an odd brimstone-yellow, a family stigma. Her hair was a dense grey mass. The face was a mask, as though modelled in wax from a corpse, quite colourless. Her age might have been anything from fifty-five to seventy.

Amelia was about forty-eight. Once upon a time she might have been a bonnie girl, for her features were well enough, but it required a sympathetic and perceptive eye so to scan and reconstruct the past. There are parasites which slowly devour and drain their hosts from within, till nothing is left but a thin, transparent envelope. A puff of wind and it disintegrates. Amelia might have been long entertaining some such greedy guest. Pounds under weight, gaunt and stooping, listless and lifeless of hair and eye, like a prisoner at long last delivered from a dungeon where she had lain neglected and forgotten. Death had his hand on her shoulder and was fast tightening his grip, but to give her her due it had taken nine hard years to bring her to this pass.

“I’ll go and cook the luncheon,” she said.

“Yes; what is there?”

“Chops.”

“I’ll have three. Are you hungry?”

“No, Miss Pendleham.”

“Then cook four, and let mine be red right through.”

Carthwaite Place rose on the northern slopes above Lake Windermere. It was unmistakably Elizabethan: a huge sombre pile of brick with a multitude of mullioned, transomed windows and a flat roof. It had thirty-five bedrooms and one bathroom. It required many thousands spent on it to make it habitable, but that money would never be found; and it was very slowly breaking up and passing. The grounds surrounding it had gone back to a wild, disorderly nature. Miss Pendleham never left it, save to attend Matins on Sunday morning. Its one trace of modernity was a telephone, used for ordering her frugal wants from the market town six miles away.

Amelia dragged herself to the great stone vaulted kitchen and raked up the fire. She had begun to tremble again, and never did she glance behind her. Once she paused as though listening, her face revealing the greatest anxiety. Several times her mouth moved as though she were muttering something, but no sound came.

Presently she finished cooking and took the results to the dining-room where Miss Pendleham was already seated. The meal was eaten in dead silence and very quickly, for Miss Pendleham always attacked her food like a starving panther. On the wall facing Amelia was a tattered seventeenth century tapestry. It depicted a company of knights and ladies riding in pairs along a sinister serpentine path. On the left of the path were three rotting corpses in open coffins. The air above them was thronged with vile flying things. Amelia's eyes always flickered around the room trying not to see it. Miss Pendleham watched her covertly. At the end of the meal she said what she always said, "Wash up quickly and come and read to me."

"Very good, Miss Pendleham."

When she got back to the drawing-room, Miss Pendleham handed her a book. It was a translation of the Abbe Boissard's life of Gilles de Rais, realistically illustrated. Amelia had already read it out endless times before. She read well, though the details of that abattoir ritual came oddly from her precise and virginal voice.

Presently Miss Pendleham stopped her. "Something very similar," she said in her high, metallic tone, "is known to have been done here by an ancestor of my own. He killed by torture a number of children, chiefly young girls, and employed their bodies for some such curious ceremonies. It is owing to that, possibly, that the house has acquired its quite *false* repute of being a haunted place. Perhaps I have told you that before?"

"Yes, Miss Pendleham," replied Amelia mechanically.

"I'm going to doze now. Wake me at five with the tea. Sit here till it is time to prepare it."

This was an ordeal Amelia detested, but had long accepted as part of her daily calvary. Was Miss Pendleham asleep, or was she slyly watching her? Were her eyes quite closed?

It was a soaking afternoon, the small dense mountain rain streaming down the windows. There was just that steady rain-purr and the slow beat of the grandfather's clock to break the silence. Miss Pendleham never stirred nor did her breathing change. Slowly the light faded, and Amelia began to ache with stiffness and immobility. Suddenly there came from somewhere in the house a thin high cry of pain. Amelia's eyes went wild and she put her hand to her throat. Miss Pendleham opened her eyes wide and slowly leaned forward, staring at her. "What's the matter, Amelia?" she said slowly.

"Nothing, Miss Pendleham," gulped Amelia, "I'll go and get the tea."

Miss Pendleham glanced after her bowed back. For a moment the mask was raised and she smiled. But the smile merely contorted the lower part of her face, her yellow eyes took no share in it. There came again that remote, agonizing wail. The half-smile vanished, the yellow eyes flickered, the mask came down again.

After tea she played Patience and Amelia was left to her own devices till it was time to cook the supper. Anyone watching Miss Pendleham playing Patience, which is a stark test of virtue, would have decided, that if he ever did business with her, he'd have kept a sharp lawyer at his elbow, for she always cheated when necessary, but never more than necessary.

Anyone who had watched Amelia presently preparing the supper by the light of two candles would have gleaned some understanding of the phrase "mental torture". Those candles threw strange shadows on the bare walls and arched roof. That observer might have caught himself imitating Amelia, glancing up fearfully and furtively at those crowding, multi-formed shades, and learned her trick of flinching when she did so. Was that a small body lying prone and a tall figure with its hands to the small one's throat? And did that figure move? Just the flicker of the candle, of course. And yet that observer might well have wished himself away, but would he have had the heart to leave Amelia down there alone?

Supper was again a quite silent meal. Miss Pendleham scraped her well-piled plates tiger-clean. Amelia left half her sparse portions.

After supper Miss Pendleham said, "Fetch my wrap from my bedroom, Amelia; I forgot to bring it down." She said that almost every evening, perhaps because she knew how Amelia dreaded going up those dark stairs, ever since she had that fright four years ago.

Amelia fetched it, washed up, and returned again to the drawing-room. "Now," said Miss Pendleham, "you can read to me for an hour. Get those stories by James."

"Well, Claud," said Clara next morning, "have you been thinking it over?"

"Yes, my dear, but I can't see my way clear, I'm afraid. We say she tortures these women. But *how* does she torture them? She gives them board and lodging, pays them something, I suppose, a pittance, no doubt, but something. She is superficially kind to them. She does not—could not—legally compel them to stay. Who would call that torture, save ourselves?"

“And Mr. Miles!”

“And Mr. Miles, if you like. Suppose I did tackle her. If she didn’t at once show me the door, she’d probably call in Amelia and ask her if she had anything to complain about. ‘No, Miss Pendleham,’ she’d certainly reply; and what sort of fool should I look!”

Mrs. Redvale, like most women in the grip of logic, raised her voice. “You’ve got to be firm, Claud, and not be fooled by that sort of thing. You must take the offensive. She can neither sack you nor eat you. Tell her straight that you are certain Amelia is dying and must have immediate attention. Remind her three of her companions have already died in the house, and, if there’s a fourth, some very awkward questions are bound to be asked. There *is* Amelia again! I’ll get her in.”

She hurried from the room and out into the street.

“How are you, Miss Lornon?” she asked kindly.

“All right, thank you, Mrs. Redvale.”

“You don’t look it! Come in a moment.”

“Oh, I can’t! Miss Pendleham told me to hurry back with the stamps.”

“Never mind; it’s only for a minute.”

Amelia hesitated and then reluctantly followed her in.

The Rector scanned her closely as he greeted her.

Mrs. Redvale now assumed her most forcible manner.

“Miss Lornon, you’re in a very bad state, aren’t you? Don’t be afraid to tell me; it will go no further.”

Amelia began to cry in the most passive, hopeless way. “I suppose so,” she murmured.

“That house is killing you, isn’t it?”

“Oh, I can stand it, Mrs. Redvale.”

“No, you can’t! Have a good cry. You’ve *got* to get away from it!”

“I can’t! Miss Pendleham would never let me go.”

“She’ll have to! Look here, Amelia—I’m going to call you that—we’re determined to help you. In the meantime, remember nothing there can hurt you. They can frighten, they can’t *hurt*.”

“They can!” she sobbed. “They keep me awake nearly all night. In the summer it’s not so bad, because they go away at dawn, but in the long nights it’s terrible. I must go now.”

“You won’t have to stand it much longer! Bear up until we can do something.”

“There’s nothing to be done, thank you kindly, Mrs. Redvale. Oh, I mustn’t say any more. Miss Pendleham would be so cross if she knew I was talking like this!”

“Nonsense! Your health comes before everything!”

But Amelia had hurried from the room.

“You see!” exclaimed Clara. “I could strangle that she-devil with my bare hands!”

“There’s one thing I’ve never been sure about,” said the Rector, “does Miss Pendleham realise there’s something the matter with the house? If not, the force of the charge against her is greatly weakened.”

“Of course she does!”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I watched her when we heard that ghastly cry. She heard it, too, her demeanour showed it. But it doesn’t worry her, she welcomes it as an instrument of that torture. She makes Amelia think, ‘I must be going mad if I see and hear things that aren’t there.’ Can’t you see what I mean? Her mind is diseased like that of her foul forbears. Those things are echoes of evil and she is utterly evil too. Did the ‘first murderer’ frighten the other two? Of course not!”

“Clara, that is a fearful thing to say!”

“You’ve just seen that wretched woman, haven’t you! Look here, Claud, if you don’t do something about it I’ll lose all respect for you! This is the test of your Christianity and courage. *I’m* an infidel, but I’d do it myself if I thought she’d take any notice of me, but she wouldn’t for she hates and despises all women. But you are her spiritual adviser.”

“There’s no need to be sarcastic, my dear.”

“There’s need to be something to goad you to action! Will you, Claud?”

“Oh, I suppose so,” sighed the Rector, “but I wish I could consult the Bishop first.”

“You’d get nothing but vague boomings. Is your courage at the sticking-point?”

“Yes, I’ll do it.”

“Then go straight to the phone!”

He left the room and returned after a few moments. “She will see me at half-past nine tonight,” he said.

“Did you tell her what you wanted to see her about?”

“I just said something of importance.”

“And you were under-stating—it’s a matter of life and death, and we both know it!”

“Have you been crying, Amelia?”

“Oh no, Miss Pendleham, the cold wind caught my eyes.”

“It doesn’t seem cold to me. Give me the book of stamps and get luncheon ready.”

During the meal Miss Pendleham said, “You see that tapestry, Amelia?”

“Yes, Miss Pendleham.”

“You’re not looking at it!”

Amelia glanced flinchingly up. She noticed that as each cavalier and his paramour reached the three open coffins, their smiles and lascivious glances changed to looks of loathing and horror. Because, she thought, they are young and happy and haven’t learned to long for rest.

“It’s called *The Triumph of Death*,” said Miss Pendleham.

“Yes, so you’ve told me.”

“That reminds me of something. Have you finished?”

“Yes, Miss Pendleham.”

Miss Pendleham led the way into the drawing-room. “Today,” she said, “is the anniversary of the death of Miss Davis. She was my companion before you came. She was a foolish, fanciful girl in some ways. Have I told you about her before?”

“Only a little, Miss Pendleham.”

“Yes, she was fanciful. She used to fancy she heard and saw strange things in the house and that shows her mind was tainted, does it not?”

“Yes, Miss Pendleham.”

“I mean, if the house were haunted, we should both of us see and hear strange things, should we not?”

“Yes, Miss Pendleham.”

“Which we never do?”

“No, Miss Pendleham.”

“Of course not. Well, I should, perhaps, have dismissed Miss Davis earlier but I did not like to. Have I told you how she died?”

“No, Miss Pendleham.”

“I thought not. I had noticed she was getting thinner, and stranger in her manner, and she told me her sleep was disordered. I should have been warned when she came running to my room one day saying she had seen a child butchered in the kitchen—and she had other hallucinations which revealed her mind was in an abnormal state. One evening I sent her up to fetch my wrap, just as I sometimes send you, and, as she did not reappear, I went in search of her. I found her lying dead in the powder-closet of my room. The doctor said she had died of a heart-attack and asked me if she could have had a fright of some kind. I said not to my knowledge. I think she must have supposed she had seen something displeasing. Look behind you, Amelia!”

Amelia started from her chair with a cry.

“What is the matter with you!” said Miss Pendleham severely. “I merely wanted to draw your attention to the fact that the antimacassar was slipping from your chair. I hope *your* nerves are not giving way. Didn’t you imagine you had a fright of some kind a month ago?”

“It was nothing, Miss Pendleham.”

“You screamed loudly enough. Bear Miss Davis in mind. Becoming *fanciful* is often the first symptom of brain disease, so the doctor told me; *hearing* things, *seeing* things when there is nothing to see or hear. Now you can read to me.”

And this Amelia did; Miss Pendleham presently telling her to stop and *seeming* to doze off, while the windows rattled disconcertingly and, as the light faded and the fire shook out its last flame and sank to its death-glow,

something white seemed to dart across the Musicians' Gallery and something follow it as though in pursuit, and there came that thin wail of pain. Amelia went rigid with terror.

“What’s the matter, Amelia?” said Miss Pendleham, leaning forward in her chair.

“Nothing, Miss Pendleham. I’ll make up the fire and then get tea.”

While she was cooking the dinner that night she was thinking over what Miss Pendleham had said about Miss Davis. She had died of what was killing her, of course. She would die soon, now, very soon. She knew it, and then Miss Pendleham would get someone else, and one day that someone would die, too, for the same reason—unless—. Suddenly she paused in her work. What was that! Someone was crying in the servants’ hall! That was something she’d never heard before. Her heart hammered in her throat, stopped horribly long, then raced away again. A piercing pain ran through her. Who was that crying! She must be brave. It might be someone *real* and not one of Them! She took a candle and tiptoed along the passage of the hall, a bare, desolate place reeking of dirt and vermin, which Amelia dreaded and seldom entered. There was no one there, but the sound of sobbing was louder. “Oh, God,” moaned a voice, “I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!” Then came a laugh, a sly sinister chuckle and the wailing voice rose to a scream. “Oh, God, I cannot bear it!”

As Amelia went back to the kitchen her face twitched violently and uncontrollably. Was that *real* or not? Was it just a sound in her head as Miss Pendleham said it must be; just a *fancy*? If so, she was going mad like Miss Davis. What happened to mad people in that Other World? Were they mad *there*, too, and forever? That didn’t bear thinking about. She must die before that happened. She *was* dying; she knew that by the terrible pains in her heart. What would happen when she was dead? Miss Davis had died; she’d just heard her crying. No, that was just a sound in her head. Her face contorted again in the fearful effort to concentrate, to get it *straight* and clear in her mind. Well, she would die, like Miss Davis, and then Miss Pendleham would get someone else to look after her and it would all happen again with the new girl. No, it mustn’t. It would not be right. Miss Pendleham was very kind, but she didn’t understand about the house. It was all very curious and difficult, but it must not happen again. There was Miss Davis still crying, still crying in her head. But it would happen again unless—unless she was brave. If Miss Pendleham realised what sort of things happened to Miss

Davis and her and what they saw and heard, she wouldn't let it happen, of course, but she didn't and so—. Did she hate Miss Pendleham? Of course not; why should she? Again St. Vitus racked her face. But it wouldn't happen again. There was the man and the little girl! She flung up her hands to her ears. A red veil was drawn down before her eyes. She shook her hands from the wrist and stretched and curved her fingers. The expression on her face became at once hard and vacant, like that of a beast at bay. She retained that curious inhuman expression, and Miss Pendleham noticed it when she brought up the meal. It disturbed her and her own eyes went weazel-hard. Presently she said, "Eat your dinner, Amelia; what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, Miss Pendleham. I'm not very hungry."

"Eat your food! By the way, you haven't been talking to the Rector or his wife, have you?"

"I just said good morning to Mrs. Redvale."

"Are you sure that was all?"

"Yes, Miss Pendleham."

And then there was silence for a time till Miss Pendleham rose and remarked, "You can read to me for a while," and Amelia read out a tale about some bedclothes forming into a figure and frightening an old man in the other bed.

"What did you think of that, Amelia?" asked Miss Pendleham.

"Very nice, Miss Pendleham."

"Nice! I don't believe you are paying attention. You read very badly again!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Pendleham. The old man was mad, wasn't he, Miss Pendleham? Like Miss Davis and *me*?"

Miss Pendleham stared at her. "Get my wrap!" she said brutally.

Amelia got up slowly and went through the door leading to the stairs. As she started to climb them she crossed herself and stretched and curved her fingers. A fearful twitch convulsed her face.

Miss Pendleham went to the front door, opened it and left it ajar and went back to the drawing-room. Then, as the minutes passed, she cocked her head as though listening. There came that high torture-wail, and she straightened her head abruptly. The clock ticked, the windows throbbed and

hammered in the gale. Presently she got up and went to the foot of the stairs. "Amelia!" she called, her voice cracking oddly. There was no reply. She smiled and ran her thick tongue along her lips. She went up a few stairs and called again; then fetched a lighted candle from the drawing-room and ascended to the first landing. "Amelia!" she called. A sudden fierce gust of wind spurted down the passage and blew out the candle, leaving her in pitch darkness. She began to grope her way down the corridor, her fingers sliding along the wall. They came to a gap and she turned in to the left, moving forward till her thighs met a bed. "Amelia!" she called, and the echo was hurled hard back at her. She moved across the room, her hands groping out before her, till they found another gap—the powder-closet. This was crammed with her ancient and discarded clothes and stank of stale scent, sweat and decay. She touched a hanging frock and then another, her hands moving along. And then her right hand met something and she drew in her breath with a quickness. The next second she was twisting and writhing and from her lips came a choked scream. As she was ruthlessly drawn in among the reeking stuffs, swinging wildly on their hooks, she struck out blindly with her clenched fists again and again. At last she leaned forward, buckling at the knees, her arms fell quivering to her sides, there was a long vile rattle from her throat, and she was still.

"It's a quarter past nine;" said Clara, "time you were off. You'd better have a drink before you go; it will help you to be firm, and you've got to be very firm." She poured out a stiff whiskey which the Rector gulped down. Then he picked up his hat and coat and set out.

It had stopped raining, but it was still blowing a full gale and he had to fight his way against it. So soon as he entered the drive through the battered gates screeching on their hinges, he felt his nerves a-tingle. "As one who on a lonely road doth walk in fear and dread." The old lines leaped to his memory. He glanced fearfully up at the over-hanging boughs. Was that a footstep close behind him? He broke into a run. To his surprise he found the front door half-open and went in. He saw a light in the drawing-room, entered and found it empty. He waited a few moments and then called out timorously, "I'm here, Miss Pendleham!" Before the echo of his voice died away there came a long choked scream. "Good God, what was that!" he muttered, and sweat broke out on him. "It came from above. I must go up!"

He glanced distractedly around, picked up a candle-stick, lit the candle, and opened the door to the stairs with a quivering hand. As he hurried up the first flight, it seemed to him there was something astir in the house and that

the shadows on the wall came from a company of persons following him up, and that others were awaiting him on the landing. He trembled and his breath came fast.

“Miss Pendleham!” he quavered. No sound. He lurched down the corridor till he came to an open door, through which he passed into a huge room. He raised the candle-stick and peered fearfully about him. Ah, there was another door—open—and there was Miss Pendleham.

“Here I am, Miss Pendleham!” he said. What was she doing? He could only see her body from the waist down, the rest was buried in some clothes. He tiptoed into the closet and gingerly pulled the clothes aside. And then he sprang back with a clipped cry, for he was gazing into the battered, dead face of Amelia Lornon. She was leaning back against the wall, and she had drawn Miss Pendleham’s head down on her breast. Her hands clutched her neck so fiercely and the nails were driven in so deep, that the blood was seeping down over her lace collar. The last shred of self-control left him. The candle-stick fell from his hand, and he ran blunderingly from the room and down the stairs. The air seemed full of screams and laughter, something death-cold was pressed against his face, leaping figures ran beside him, till at last he staggered whimpering out into the night.

Ghost Hunt

Well, listeners, this is Tony Weldon speaking. Here we are on the third of our series of Ghost Hunts. Let's hope it will be more successful than the other two. All our preparations have been made, and now it is up to the spooks. My colleague tonight is Professor Mignon of Paris. He is the most celebrated investigator of psychic phenomena in the world, and I am very proud to be his collaborator.

We are in a medium size three-storey Georgian house not far from London. We have chosen it for this reason. It has a truly terrible history. Since it was built, there are records of no less than thirty suicides in or from it, and there may well have been more. There have been eight since 1893. Its builder and first occupant was a prosperous city merchant, and a very bad hat, it appears; glutton, wine-bibber and other undesirable things, including a very bad husband. His wife stood his cruelties and infidelities as long as she could and then hanged herself in the powder-closet belonging to the biggest bedroom on the second floor, so initiating a terrible sequence.

I used the expression "suicides in and from it", because while some have shot themselves and some hanged themselves, no less than nine have done a very strange thing. They have risen from their beds during the night and flung themselves to death in the river which runs past the bottom of the garden some hundred yards away. The last one was actually seen to do so at dawn on an autumn morning. He was seen running headlong and heard to be shouting as though to companions running by his side. The owner tells me people simply will not live in the house and the agents will no longer keep it on their books. He will not live in it himself, for very good reasons, he declares. He will not tell us what those reasons are; he wishes us to have an absolutely open mind on the subject, as it were. And he declares, that if the Professor's verdict is unfavourable, he will pull down the house and rebuild it. One can understand that, for it almost seems to merit the label "Death-Trap".

Well, that is sufficient introduction. I think I have convinced you it certainly merits investigation, but we cannot guarantee to deliver the goods or the ghosts, which have an awkward habit of taking a night off on these occasions.

And now to business. Imagine me seated at a fine satinwood table, not quite in the middle of a big reception-room on the ground floor. The rest of the furniture is shrouded in white protective covers. The walls are light oak panels. The electric light in the house has been switched off; so all the illumination I have is a not very powerful electric lamp. I shall remain here with a mike, while the Professor roams the house in search of what he may find. He will not have a mike as it distracts him, and he has a habit, so he says, of talking to himself while conducting these investigations. He will return to me as soon as he has anything to report. Is that all clear? Well, then, here is the Professor to say a few words to you before he sets forth on his tour of discovery. I may say he speaks English far better than I do. Professor Mignon.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Professor Mignon. This house is without doubt, how shall I say, impregnated with evil. It affects one profoundly. It is bad, bad, bad! It is soaked in evil and reeking with emanations from its wicked past. It must be pulled down, I assure you. I do not think it affects my friend, Mr. Weldon, in the same way, but he is not psychic, not mediumistic as I am. Now shall we see ghosts, spirits? Ah, that I cannot say! But they are here and they are evil; that is sure. I can feel their presence. There is maybe, danger. I shall soon know. And now I shall start off with just one electric torch to show me the way. Presently I will come back and tell you what I have seen, or if not seen, felt and perhaps suffered. But remember, we can summon spirits from the vastly deep, but will they come when we call for them? We shall see.

Well, listeners, I'm sure if anyone can, it's the Professor. You must have found those few words far more impressive than anything I said. That was an expert speaking on what he knows. Personally, alone here in this big silent room, I didn't find his words very reassuring. In fact, he wasn't quite correct when he said this place didn't affect me at all. I don't find it a cheerful spot by any means. You can be sure of that. I may not be psychic, but I've certainly got a sort of feeling it doesn't want us here, resents us, and would like to see the back of us. *Or else!* I felt that way as soon as I entered the front door. One sort of had to wade through the hostility. I'm not kidding or trying to raise your hopes.

Well, listeners, it's very quiet here. I'm having a look around the room. This lamp casts some queer shadows. There is an odd one near the wall by the door, but I realise now it must be a reflection from a big Adams book-

case. I know that's what it is because I peeped under the dust-cover when I first came in. It's a very fine piece. It's queer to think of you all listening to me. I shouldn't really mind if I had some of you for company. The owner of the house told us we should probably hear rats and mice in the wainscoting. Well, I can certainly hear those now. Pretty hefty rats from the sound of them. Even you can almost hear them, I should think.

Well, what else is there to tell you about? Nothing very much, except that there's a bat in the room. I think it must be a bat and not a bird. I haven't actually seen it, only its shadow as it flew past the wall just now, and then it fanned past my face. I don't know much about bats, but I thought they went to bed in the winter. This one must suffer from insomnia. Ah, there it is again. It actually touched me as it passed. Now I can hear the Professor moving about in the room above. I don't suppose you can; have a try. Now listen carefully.

Hullo! Did you hear that! He must have knocked over a chair or something—a heavy chair from the sound of it. I wonder if he's having any luck. Ah, there's that bat again. It seems to like me. Each time it just touches my face with its wing as it passes. They're smelly things, bats. I don't think they wash themselves often enough. This one smells kind of rotten. I wonder what the Professor knocked over, because I can see a small stain forming on the ceiling. Perhaps a flower bowl or something. Hullo! Did you hear that sharp crack? I think you must have. The oak-panelling stretching, I suppose, but it was almost ear-splitting in here. Something ran across my foot, then, a rat perhaps. I've always loathed rats. Most people do, of course. That stain on the ceiling has grown quite a lot. I think I'll just go to the door and shout to the Professor to make sure he's all right. You'll hear me shout and his answer, I expect.

Professor! Professor!

Well, he didn't answer, I believe he's a little bit deaf. But he's sure to be all right. I won't try again just yet as I know he likes being undisturbed on these occasions. I'll sit down again for a minute or two. I'm afraid this is rather dull for you, listeners. I'm not finding it so, but then of course—there, I heard him cough. Did you hear that cough, listeners, a sort of very throaty double cough? It seemed to come from—I wonder if he's crept down and is having a little fun with me, because, I tell you, listeners, this place is beginning to get on my nerves just a wee little bit, just a bit. I wouldn't live in it for a pension, a very large pension. Get away you brute! That bat. Faugh! It stinks.

Now listen carefully.

Can you hear those rats? Having a game of rugger from the sound of them. I wonder if you could hear them. I really shall be quite glad to get out of here. I can quite imagine people doing themselves in in this house. Saying to themselves, after all it isn't much of a life when you think of it, figure it out, is it? Just work and worry and getting old and seeing your friends die. Let's end it all in the river!

Well, I'm not being very cheerful, am I! It's this darned house. Those other two places we investigated didn't worry me a bit, but this—I wonder what the Professor's doing besides coughing. I can't quite make that cough out because—get away, you brute, that bat'll be the death of me! Death of me! Death of me!

I'm glad I've got you to talk to, listeners, but I wish you could answer back. I'm beginning to dislike the sound of my own voice. After a time, if you've been talking in a room alone, you get fanciful. Have you ever noticed that? You sort of think you can hear someone talking back.

There!

No, of course you couldn't have heard it, because it wasn't there, of course. Just in my head. Just subjective, that's the word. That's the word. Very odd. That *was* me laughing, of course. I'm saying "Of course" a lot. Of course I am. Well, listeners, I'm afraid this is awfully dull for you. Not for me, though, not for me! No ghosts so far, unless the Professor is having better luck.

There! You must have heard that! What a crack that panelling makes. Well, you must have heard that, listeners, better than nothing. Ha! Ha! Professor! Professor! Phew, what an echo!

Now listeners, I'm going to stop talking for a moment. I don't suppose you'll mind. Let's see if we can hear anything. . .

Did you hear it? I'm not exactly sure what it was. Not sure. I wonder if you heard it. Not exactly, but the house shook a little and the windows rattled. I don't think we'll do that again. I'll go on talking. I wonder how long one could endure the atmosphere of this place. It certainly is inclined to get one down.

Gosh, that stain has grown! The one on the ceiling. It's actually starting to drip. I mean form bubbles. They'll start dropping soon. Coloured bubbles,

apparently. I wonder if the Professor is okay? I mean he might have shut himself in a powder-closet or something and the powder-closets in this house aren't particularly—well you never know, do you. Now I should have said that shadow had moved. No, I suppose I put the lamp down in a slightly different position. Shadows do make odd patterns, you must have noticed that. This one might be a body lying on its face with its arms stretched out. Cheerful, aren't I! An aunt of mine gassed herself, as a matter of fact. Well, I don't know why I told you that. Not quite in the script.

Professor! Professor!

Where is that darned old fuzzy-whiskers! I shall certainly advise the owner to have this place pulled down. Emphatically. Then where'll *you* go! I must go upstairs in a minute or two and see what's happened to the Professor. Well, I was telling you about Auntie. . .

D'you know, listeners, I really believe I'd go completely crackers if I stayed here much longer. More or less, anyway and quite soon, quite soon, quite soon. Absolutely stark, staring! It wears you down. That's exactly it, it wears you down. I can quite understand, well, I won't say all that again. I'm afraid this is all awfully dull for you, listeners. I should switch off if I were you. I should! What's on the other programme? I mean it, switch off! There, what did I tell you, that stain's started to drip drops, drip drops, drip drops, drip drops! I'll go and catch one on my hand. . .

Good God!

Professor! Professor! Professor! Now then up the stairs! Now which room would it be? Left or right? Left, right, left, right, left has it. In we go.

Well, gentlemen, good evening! What have you done with the Professor? I know he's dead. See his blood on my hand? What have you done with him? Make way, please, gentlemen. What have you done with him? D'you want me to sing it, Tra-la-la.

Switch off, you fools!

Well, if this isn't too darned funny. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Hear me laughing, listeners.

Switch off, you fools!

That can't be him lying there. He hadn't a *red* beard! Don't crowd round me, gentlemen! Don't crowd me, I tell you! What d'you want me to do? You want me to go to the river, don't you? Ha! Ha! Now? Will you come with me? Come on, then! To the river! To the river!

The Third Shadow

“And the other man on the rope, Andrew,” I asked, “did you ever encounter him?”

He gave me a quick glance and tapped the ash from his cigarette.

“Well, *is* there such a one?” he asked, smiling.

“I’ve many times read of him,” I replied. “Didn’t Smythe actually see him on the Brenva Face and again on that last dread lap of Everest?”

Sir Andrew paused before replying.

No one glancing casually at that eminent and superbly discreet civil servant, Sir Andrew Poursuivant, would have guessed that in his day and prime he had been the second-best amateur mountaineer of all time, with a dozen first ascents to his immortal fame, and many more than a dozen of the closest looks at death vouchsafed to any man. One who had leaped almost from the womb on to his first hill, a gravity defier by right of birth, soon to revolutionise the technique of rock-climbing and later to write two of the very finest books on his exquisite art. Yet there was something about that uncompromising buttress, his chin, the superbly modelled arête, his nose, those unflinching blue tarns, his eyes, and the high, wide cliff of his brow, to persuade the reader of faces that here was a born man of action, endowed with that strange and strangely named faculty, presence of mind, which ever finds in great emergency and peril the stimulus to a will and a cunning to meet and conquer them.

We were seated in my state room in the *Queen Elizabeth* bound for New York, he for some recurrent brawl, I on the interminable quest for dollars. The big tub was pitching hard into a nor-west blizzard and creaking her vast length.

I am but an honorary member of the corps of mountaineers, having no “head” for the game. But I love it dearly by proxy, and as the sage tells us, “He who *thinks on* Himalcha shall have pardon for all sins,” and the same is true, I hope, of lesser ranges.

I dined with Sir Andrew perhaps half-a-dozen times a year and usually persuaded him on these felicitous occasions to tell me some great tale of the past. Hence on this felicitous occasion my “fishing” enquiry.

“Yes, so I remember,” he presently said, “but are there not nice, plausible explanations for that? The illusions consequent on great height, great strain? You may remember Smythe, who is highly psychic, saw something else from Everest, very strange wings beating the icy air.”

“He isn’t the only one,” I said, “it’s a well-documented tradition.”

“It is, I agree. Guides, too, have known his presence, and always at moments of great stress and danger, and he has left them when these moments passed. And if they do not pass, the fanciful might suggest he meets them on the Other Side. But who he is no one knows. I grant you, also, I myself have sometimes felt that over, say twelve thousand feet, one moves into a realm where nothing is quite the same, or, perhaps, and more likely, it is just one’s mind that changes and becomes more susceptible and exposed to—well, certain *oddities*.”

“But you have never encountered this particular oddity?” I insisted.

“What an importunate bag-man you are!”

“I believe you have, Andrew, and you must tell me of it!”

“That is not quite so,” he replied, “but—it will be thirty-five long years ago next June, I did once have a very terrible experience that had associated with it certain subsidiary experiences somewhat recalcitrant to explanation.”

“That is a very cautious pronouncement, Andrew!”

“Phrased in the jargon of my trade, Bill.”

“And you are going to relate it to me?”

“I suppose so. I’ve never actually told it to another, and it will give me no pleasure to rouse it from my memory. But perhaps I owe it you.”

“Fill your glass, mind that lurch and proceed.”

“I haven’t told it before,” said Sir Andrew, “partly because it’s distasteful to recall, and partly, for the reason that the prudent sea-captain turns his blind eye on a sea serpent and keeps a buttoned lip over the glimpse he caught; no one much appreciates the grin of incredulous derision.”

“I promise to keep a straight face,” I assured him.

“Yes, I rather think you will. Well, all those years ago, in that remote and golden time, I knew and climbed with a man I will call ‘Brown.’ He was about my age. He had inherited considerable position and fortune and he

was heir, also, to that irresistible and consuming passion for high places, their conquest and company, which, given the least opportunity, will never be denied, and only decrepitude or death can frustrate. Technically, he was a master in all departments, a finished cragsman and just as expert on snow and ice. But there was just occasionally an unmastered streak of recklessness in him which flawed him as a leader, and everyone, including myself, preferred to have him lower down the rope.

“It was, perhaps, due to one of these feckless seizures that, after our fourth season together, he proposed to a wench, who replied promptly in the affirmative. He was a smallish fellow, though immensely lithe, active, strong and tough. She was not far short of six feet and tipped the beam at one hundred and sixty-eight pounds, mostly muscle. With what suicidal folly, my dear Bill, do these infatuate pigmies, like certain miserable male insects, doom themselves with such Boadiceas, and how pitilessly and jocundly do those monsters pounce upon their prey! This particular specimen was terribly, viciously, ‘County’, immensely handsome, and intolerably authoritarian. Speaking evil of the dead is often the only revenge permitted us and I have no intention of refraining from saying that I have seldom, almost certainly *never* disliked anyone more than Hecate Quorn. Besides being massive and menacing to the nth degree, she was endowed with a reverberating contralto which loaned a fearsomely oraculate air to her insistent spate of edicts. Marry for lust and repent in haste, the oldest, saddest lesson in the world, and one my poor friend had almost instantly to learn. Once she’d gripped him in her red remorseless maw, she bullied him incessantly and appeared to dominate him beyond hope of release. Such an old story I need enlarge upon no more! How many of our old friends have we watched fall prostrate before these daughters of Masrur!

“She demanded that he should at least attempt to teach her to climb, and females of her build are seldom much good at the game, particularly if they are late beginners. She was no exception, and her nerve turned out to be surprisingly more suspect on a steepish slope than her ghastly assurance on the level would have suggested. Poor Brown plugged away at it, because he feared, if she chucked her hand in, he would never see summer snow again. He did his very desperate best. He hired Fritz Mann, the huskiest and best-tempered of all the Chamonix guides, and between them on one searing and memorable occasion they shoved and pulled and hauled and slid her on feet and rump to creditably near the summit of Mt. Blanc. She loathed the ordeal, but she refused to give in, just because she knew poor Brown was longing to join up with a good party, and have some fun. I need say no more, you have sufficient imagination fully to realise the melancholy and humiliating pass

of my sad friend. And, of course, it wasn't only in Haute-Savoie and Valais she made his life hell, it was at least purgatory for the rest of the year; his was eternal punishment, one might say. A harsh sentence for a moment's indiscretion!"

"What about those occasional feckless flashes?" I asked; "had she quenched and overlaid those, too?"

"Permit me to tell this story my own way and pour me out another drink. In the second summer after their marriage the Browns had preceded me by a few days to the Montenvert, which, doubtless you recall, is a hotel overlooking the Mer de Glâçe, three thousand feet above Chamonix. When I arrived there late one evening I found the place in a turmoil, and Brown apparently almost out of his mind. Hecate had fallen down a crevasse that morning and, as a matter of fact, her body was never recovered. I took him to my room, gave him a stiff drink, and he blurted out his sorry tale. He had taken her out on the Mer de Glâçe for a morning's training, he said, determined to take no risks whatsoever. They had wandered a little way up the glacier, perhaps rather further than he'd intended. He'd cut some steps for her to practice on, and so forth. Presently he'd encountered a crevasse, crossed by a snow-bridge, which he'd tested and found perfectly reliable. He'd passed over himself, but, when she followed, she'd gone straight through, the rope had snapped—and that was that. They'd lowered a guide, but the hole went down forever and it was quite hopeless. Hecate must have died instantly; that was the only assuaging thought.

'Should that rope have gone, Arthur?' I asked. 'Can I see it?'

"He produced it. It was poor stuff, an Austrian make, which had once been very popular but had been found unreliable and the cause of several accidents. There was also old bruising near the break. It wasn't a reassuring bit of stuff. 'I realise' said Brown hurriedly, 'I shouldn't have kept that piece. As you know, I'm a stickler for perfection in a rope. But we were just having a little easy work and, as that rope's light and she always found it so hard to manage one, I took it along. I'd no intention of actually having to trust to it. We were just turning back when it happened. I swear to you that bridge seemed absolutely sound.' 'She was a good deal heavier than you, Arthur,' I said. 'I know, but I made every allowance for that.' 'I quite understand,' I said. 'Well, it's just too bad,' or words to that effect. I was rather at a loss for appropriate expressions. He was obviously acting a part. I didn't blame him, he had to. He had to appear heavy with grief when he was feeling, in a sense, as light as mountain air. He got a shade tight that evening, and his efforts to sustain two such conflicting moods would have

amused a more cynical and detached observer than myself. Besides, I foresaw the troubles ahead.

“The French held an enquiry, of course, and inevitably exonerated him completely, then I took him home to face the music, which, as I’d expected, was strident and loud enough. How far was it justified? I asked myself. He should, perhaps, not have taken Hecate up so far. Even if that rope hadn’t gone, he’d never have been able to pull her up by himself—it would have taken two very strong men to have done that. He could merely have held her there, and she would, I suppose have died of slow strangulation, unless help had quickly come. Yet there is always risk, however prudently you try to play that game: it is the first of its rules and nothing will ever eliminate it. You must take my word for all this, which is rather outside your sphere of judgment. All the same the condition of that rope—and I wasn’t the only one to examine it—didn’t help things. Still, all that wouldn’t have mattered nearly so much if he’d been a happily married man. I needn’t dwell on that. Anyway the dirty rumour followed him home and resounded there.”

“What was your candid opinion, Andrew?” I said.

“I must ask you,” he replied, “to believe a rather hard thing, that I had and have no opinion, candid or otherwise. It *could* have been a pure accident. All could have happened exactly as he said it did. I’ve no valid reason to suppose otherwise. He may have been a bit careless: I might have been so myself. One takes such practice mornings rather lightly. There *is* risk, as I’ve said, but it’s miniscule compared with the real thing. The expert mountaineer develops an exquisitely nice and certain ‘feel’ for degrees of danger, it is the condition precedent of his survival,—and adjusts his whole personality to changing degrees. He must take the small ones in his stride. The errors of judgment, if any, that Brown committed were petty and excusable. His reason for taking that rope was sensible enough in a way.”

“Yes,” I put in, “I can more or less understand all that, but you actually knew him well and you’re a shrewd judge of character. You were in a privileged position to decide.”

“Was I? A very learned judge once told me he’d find it far easier to decide the guilt or innocence of an absolute stranger than of a close friend; the personal equation confuses the problem and pollutes the understanding. I think he was perfectly right. Anyway I am shrewd enough to know when I am baffled, and I have always felt the balance of probability was peculiarly nicely poised. In a word, I have no opinion.”

“Well, I have,” I proclaimed. “I think he had a sudden fearful temptation. I don’t think it was exactly premeditated, yet always, as it were, at the back of his mind. He realised that bridge would go when she had her weight on it, knew a swift, reckless temptation, and let it rip. I think he’d kept that rotten rope because he’d always felt in a vague half-repressed way, it might, as they say, ‘come in handy one day’.”

Sir Andrew shrugged his shoulders. “Very subtle, no doubt,” he said, “and you may be right. But I know I shall never be able to decide. Perhaps it is that personal equation, for I was always very fond of him, and he saved my life more than once at the greatest peril to his own; and since his marriage, that ordeal of thumb-screw and rack, I had developed profound sympathy for him. Hecate was far better dead. I greeted his release with a saturnine cheer. We will leave that point.

“Well, he had to face a very bad time. Hecate’s relatives were many and influential and they pulled no punches, no stabs in the back, rather. No one, of course, actually cried: ‘Murder!’ in public, but such terms as ‘Darned odd!’, ‘*Very* happy release!’ ‘Accidents *must* happen!’ and so on, were in lively currency.

“Very few people comprehend the first thing about mountaineering, just sultry, celluloid visions of high-altitude villains slashing ropes, so this sepsis found receptive blood-streams. I did my best to foster antibodies and rallied my fellow-climbers to the defence. But we were hopelessly outnumbered and out-gunned, and it was lucky for poor Brown he had more than sufficient private means to retire from public life to his estate and his farming, and insulate himself to some extent against the slings and arrows which were so freely and cruelly flying about.

“I spent a week-end with him in April and was shocked at his appearance: even life with Hecate had never reduced him to such a pass. His nerves were forever on the jump, he had those glaring insomniac eyes, he was drinking far more and eating far less than was good for him; he looked a driven, haunted man.”

“Haunted?” I asked.

“I know what you mean,” said Sir Andrew, “but I don’t think I can be more definite. I will say, however, I found the atmosphere of the house unquiet and was very glad to quit it. Anyway, something had to be done.

“‘You must start climbing again, Arthur,’ I said.

“‘Never! My nerve’s gone!’ he replied.

“‘Nonsense!’ I said. ‘We’ll leave on June 3rd for Chamonix. You must conquer all this and at the very place which tests you most starkly. You will be amongst friends. It will be a superb nerve tonic. This tittle-tattle will inevitably die down—it has started to do so already, I fancy. There is nothing to fear, as you’ll discover once you’re fit again. Come back to your first, your greatest, your only real love!’

“‘What will people say?’ he muttered uncertainly.

“‘What say they, let them say! Actually I think it’ll be very good propaganda: no one’d believe a guilty man would return to the scene of such a crime. My dear Arthur, you’re a bit young to die, aren’t you! If you stay moping here you’ll be in the family vault in a couple of years. I’ll get the tickets and we’ll dine together at the Alpine Club on June the second at eight p.m. precisely.’

“To this he promptly agreed and his fickle spirits rose. So the fourth of June saw us entering the Montenvert, where our reception was cordial enough.

“It took him over a week, far longer than usual, to get back to anything like his old standard, but I’d expected that. On the ninth day I decided it was time for a crucial test of his recovery. It was no use frittering about, he’d got to face the hard thing, something far tougher than the practice grounds.

“After some deliberation I chose the Dent du Géant for the trial run. It was an old friend of ours, and the last time we’d done it, four years before, we’d simply raced to the aluminium Madonna which more or less adorns its summit. The Géant, I will remind you, is a needle, some thirteen thousand feet high, situated towards the southern rim of that great and glorious lake of ice, part French, part Swiss, part Italian, from which rise some of the most renowned peaks in the world, and of those the acknowledged monarchs are the Grandes Jurasses, the Grépon Aiguilles and, of course, the Mont Blanc Massiv itself. It is sacred ground to our fraternity and the very words ring like a silver peal. The Géant culminates in a grotesque colossal ‘tooth’ of rock, some of which is in a fairly advanced state of decay. These things are relative, of course, it will almost certainly be standing there, somewhat diminished, in five thousand years time. It provides an interesting enough climb, not, in my view, one of the most severe, but sheer and exposed enough. Nowadays, I understand, the livelier sections are so festooned with spikes and cords that it resembles the fruit of the union of a porcupine and a puppet. But I have not revisited it for years and, for very sure, I never shall again.

“Brown agreed with my choice, which he declared himself competent to tackle, so off we went late on a promising morning and made our leisurely way up and across the ice to the hat. He seemed in pretty good shape, and once, when a most towering and displeasing sérac fell almost dead on our line, he kept his head, his footing and his life. Yet somehow I didn’t quite like the look of him. He didn’t improve as the day wore on and, to tell the truth, I didn’t either.”

Here Sir Andrew paused, lit a cigarette, and continued more slowly. “You are not familiar with such matters, but I will try and explain the cause of my increasing preoccupation. We were, of course, roped almost all day, and from very early on I began to experience those *intimations*—it is difficult to find the precise, inevitable word—which were increasingly to disturb and perplex me on that tragic expedition. It is extremely hard to make them plain and plausible to you, who have never been hitched to a manila. When merely pursuing a more or less untrammelled course over ice it is our custom to keep the rope neither trailing nor quite taut, but always—I speak as leader—of course, one is very conscious of the presence and pressure of the man behind. Now—how shall I put it?—Well, over and over again it seemed to me as if that rope was behaving oddly, as though the ‘pull’ I experienced was inconsistent with the distance Brown was keeping behind me, as though something else was exercising pressure nearer to me. Do I make myself at all plain?”

“I think so,” I replied. “You mean, as though there was someone tied to that rope between you and Brown.”

“Nothing like so definite and distinct as that. Imagine if you were driving a car and you continually got the impression the brakes were coming on and off, though you knew they were not. You would be puzzled and somewhat disconcerted. I’m afraid that analogy isn’t very illuminating. It was just that I was conscious of some inexplicable anomaly connected with our roped progress that day. I remember I kept glancing round in search of an explanation. I tried to convince myself it was due to Brown’s somewhat inept, sluggish and erratic performance, but I was not altogether successful in this attribution. To make it worse a thick mist came on in the afternoon and this increased our difficulties, delayed us considerably, and intensified my sombre and rather defeatist mood.

“Certain pious, but, in my view, misguided persons, profess to find in the presence, the atmosphere, of these doomed Titans, evidence for a benevolent Providence, and a beneficent cosmic principle. I am not enrolled in their ranks. At best these eminences seem aloof and neutral, at worst, viciously

and virulently hostile—I reverse the pathetic fallacy. That is, to a spirited man, half their appeal. Only once in a long while have I been lulled into a sense of their goodwill. And if one must endow them with a Pantheon, I would people it with the fickle and malicious denizens of Olympus and Valhalla, and not the allegedly philanthropic triad of heaven. In no place is the working of a ruthless, blind causality more starkly shewn. And never, for some reason, have I felt that oppressive sense of malignity more acutely than during the last four hours of our climb that day, as we forced our groping way through a nightmare world of ice-pillars, many of them as high and ponderous as the Statue of Liberty, destined each one of them soon to fall with a thunder like the crack of doom. And all the while I was bothered with that rope. Several times, as I glanced round through the murk, I seemed to sense Brown almost at my heels, when he was thirty feet away. Once I actually saw him, as I thought, near enough to touch. It was a displeasing illusion.”

“Were you scared?” I asked.

“I was certainly keyed-up and troubled. I am never scared, I think, when actually on the move. It was just that there was a noxious puzzle I couldn’t solve. We were in no great danger, just experiencing the endemic risks inherent in all such places. But I was mainly responsible for the safety of us both and my mode of securing that safety was impaired.”

“I imagine,” I said, “that the rope establishes, as it were, some psychic bond between those it links.”

“An unexpectedly percipient remark,” replied Sir Andrew. “That is precisely the case. The rope makes the fate of one the fate of all; and each betrays along its strands his spiritual state; his hopes, anxieties, good cheer, or lack of confidence. So I could feel Brown’s hesitation and poor craftsmanship, as well as this inexplicable interruption of my proper connection with him.

“When we eventually reached the hut I had in no way elucidated the problem. I didn’t like the look of Brown; he was far more tired than he should have been and his nerves were sparking again. He put the best face he could on it, as good mountaineers are trained to do, and declared a night’s rest would put him right. I hoped for the best.”

“Did you mention your trouble with the rope?”

“I did not,” said Sir Andrew shortly. “For one thing, it might have been purely subjective. For another, what was there to say? And the first duty of

the mountaineer is to keep his fears to himself, unless they are liable to imperil his comrades. Never lower the 'psychic temperature' if it can possibly be avoided. Yet somehow, I cannot define precisely how, I gained the impression he had noticed something and that this was partly the cause of his malaise.

"The hut was full, but not unpleasantly so, with young Italians for the most part, and we secured good sleeping places. Then we fed and lay down. It was a night of evil memory. Brown went to sleep almost at once, to sleep and to dream, and to tell of his dreams. He was, apparently, well, beyond all doubt, dreaming of Hecate and, how shall I put it?, in contact, in debate with her. And what made it far more trying to the listener, he was mimicking her voice with perfect virtuosity. This was at once horrible and ludicrous, the most pestilential and disintegrating combination of all, in my opinion. He was, it seemed, pleading with her to leave him alone, to spare him, and she was ruthlessly refusing. I say 'it seemed,' because the repulsive surge of words was blurred, and only at times articulate; just sufficient to give, as it were, the sense of the dialogue. But that was more than enough. The sleep-hungry Italians were naturally and vociferously infuriated, and I was compelled to rouse Brown over and over again, but each time he relapsed into that vilely haunted sleep. Once he raised himself on his elbow and thrust out blindly with his arms. And Hecate's minatory contralto spewed from his throat, while the Italians mocked and cursed. It was a bestial pandemonium.

"The Italians left early, loud in their execrations of us. One of them, his black eyes wide with fear and anger, shook his lantern in my face and exclaimed 'Who is this woman!' 'What woman?' I replied. He shrugged his shoulders and said: 'That is for you to say. I do not think I would climb the Géant with him if I were you! Good luck, Signore, *I think you will need it!*' Then they clattered off, and at four o'clock we followed them.

"I know now I should have taken that Italian's advice and got Brown back by the easiest and quickest route to the hotel, but when I tentatively suggested it, he almost hysterically implored me to carry on. 'If I fail this time,' he said, 'I shall never climb again, I know it! *I must conquer it!*' I was very tired, my judgment and resolution were at a disgracefully low ebb, and I half surrendered. I decided we would go up some of the way to a ledge or platform I remembered, at about the twelve thousand foot level, rest, eat, and turn back.

"We had a tiresome climb up the glacier, Brown in very poor form, and that nuisance on the rope beginning again almost at once. We crossed the big

crevasse where the glacier meets the lower rocks and began to ascend. There was still some mist, but it thinned as the sun rose. I led and Brown, making very heavy weather, followed. The difference between his performance this time and that other I have mentioned, was gross and terrifying. I remember doubting if he would ever be a climber again and realising I had made a shocking error in going on. I had to nurse him with the greatest care and there was always that harassing behaviour of the rope. Only those with expert knowledge of such work could realise the great and deadly difference it made. I could never be quite sure when I had it properly firm on Brown, and he was climbing like a nervous novice. My own standard of the day was, not surprisingly, none too high. I'd had a damned bad, worried night and my mind was fussed and preoccupied. Usually one climbs half-subconsciously, that is the sign-manual of the expert, a rhythmic selection and seizure of 'holds,' with only now and again a fully controlled operation of will and decision. But now I was at full stretch all the time and ever ready for Brown to slip. Over and over again I was forced to belay the rope to some coign of vantage and coax and ease him up, and there was forever that strong interruption between us. The Géant was beating us hands down all the time and I hadn't felt so outclassed since my first season in the Alps. The light became most sinister and garish, the sun striking through the brume, creating a potent and prised dazzle. So much so that more than once I fancied I saw Brown's outline duplicated, or rather revealed at different levels. And several times it seemed his head appeared just below me when he was still struggling far down. And then there were our shadows, cast huge on the snow-face across the gulf, vast and distorted by those strange rays.

"That there were *three* such shadows, now stationary, now in motion, was an irresistible illusion. There was mine, there was the lesser one of Brown, and there was another in between us. What was causing it? This fascinating and extraordinary puzzle served somewhat to distract my mind from its heavy and intensifying anxiety. At last, to my vast relief, I glanced up and saw that hospitable little platform not more than sixty feet above me. Once there, the worst would be, I thought, over, for I could lower Brown down more easily than get him up. I shouted down to him. 'We're nearly there!', but he made no reply. I shouted again and listened carefully. And then I could hear him talking, using alternatively *his* voice and Hecate's.

"I cannot describe to you the kind of ghostly fear which then seized me. There was I fifteen hundred feet up on a pretty sheer precipice with someone whose mind had clearly gone, on my rope. And I had to get him, first to the ledge, then try and restore him to a condition in which descent might be

possible. I could never leave him there; we must survive or die together. First, I must reach that platform. I set myself to it, and for the time being he continued to climb, clumsily and mechanically, and carrying on that insane dialogue, yet *he kept moving!* But for how much longer would that mechanism continue to function and bring him to his holds? I conquered my fear and rallied again that essential detachment of spirit without which we were both certainly doomed.

“So I set myself with the utmost care to reach that ledge. Between me and it was a stretch of the Géant’s rottenest rock, which I suddenly remembered well. It is spiked and roped now, I believe. When that gneiss is bad, it is very, very evil indeed. Mercifully, the mist was not freezing or we should have been dead ere then. How I cursed my insensate folly, the one great criminal blunder of my climbing career! This rush of rage may have saved me, for just when I was struggling up that infamous forty-five feet I got a fearful jerk from the rope. I was right out, attacking a short over-hang, exposed a hundred per cent, and how I sustained that jerk I shall never know. I even drove my teeth into the rock. It was one of those super-human efforts only possible to a powerful, fully-trained man at the peak of his physical perfection when he knows that failure means immediate death. Somehow then he draws out his final erg of strength and resilience.

“At last I reached the ledge, belayed like lightning, gasped for breath and looked down. As I did so, Brown ceased to climb, screamed, and then a torrent of wild, incoherent words spewed from his mouth. I yelled at him encouragement and assurance, but he paid no heed. And, though he was stationary, clawing to his holds, the rope was still under pressure, working and sounding on the belay. No explanation of that has ever been vouchsafed me. For a moment my glance flickered out across the great gulf on to the dazzling slope opposite; and there were my shadow and Brown’s, and another which seemed still on the move and reaching down towards him.

“I could see his body trembling in every muscle and I knew he must go at any second. I shouted down wildly again and again, telling him I had him firm and that he could take his time, but again he paid no heed, I couldn’t get him up, I must go down to him. There was just one possible way which, a shade technical, I will not describe to you. Nor is there need or point in doing so, for suddenly Brown relinquished all holds and swung out. As my eye followed him, once more it caught those shadows, and now there were but two, Brown’s hideously enlarged. For a moment he hung there screaming and thrashing out with his arms, his whole body in violent motion. And then he began to spin most horribly, faster and faster, and

almost it seemed, in the visual chaos of that whirl, as though there were two bodies lashed and struggling in each other's arms. Then somehow in his writhings he worked free of the rope and fell two thousand feet to his death on the glacier below, leaving my shadow alone gigantic on the snow.

“That is all, and I want no questions, because I know I should have no answers for them and I am off to bed. As for your original question, I've done my best to answer it. But remember this, perchance such questions can never quite be answered.”

The Gorge of the Churels

“Mr. Sen,” said the Reverend Aloysius Prinkle, “I am going to take a holiday tomorrow. I’m feeling a bit jaded. I thought we’d have a picnic, if it’s fine. You must come with us, of course.”

“A pleasant idea, certainly,” smiled Mr. Sen. He was a Bengali babu, aged about thirty, who acted as Secretary and general factotum to the incumbents of the Mission Station. Mr. Prinkle had taken him over from his predecessor three months before. He was a slightly enigmatic young man, habitually smiling and obliging, but not quite as “open” as he might be, was Mr. Prinkle’s verdict. His enemies called him a “Rice Christian”, meaning he had found the Christian side of the bread the better buttered. His friends replied, “Very sensible of Mr. Sen, if he is right about the rice.” His English was fluent and personally idiomatic. His intonation pedantically precise with a wavy melody-line.

“Have you yet decided on a site for the occasion?” he added. “Possibly my advice may be welcome; possibly not.”

“Well, Mrs. Prinkle and I passed what we considered an ideal spot the other day. It’s a little gorge off the Kulan Valley. It’s known, I understand, as The Gorge of the Churels. You know where I mean?”

Mr. Sen didn’t reply for a moment. He continued to wear that smile, but it contracted somewhat as though he were moved by some not entirely pleasant reflections. At length he remarked, “Yes, I am familiar with the locality you mention, but is it not rather a long way to go? Just a suggestion, of course.”

“Not a bit of it!” laughed Mr. Prinkle; “just three-quarters of an hour in the car and a beautiful drive into the bargain.”

“Did you consider taking the youngster with you?” asked Mr. Sen slowly.

“Why, naturally! He’ll love it; and it’ll give his Ayah the day off.”

“It is not perhaps a very satisfactory place for young children,” said Mr. Sen.

“Why ever not! Snakes?”

“No, I was not thinking so much of snakes,” replied Mr. Sen aloofly; “those are, in a way, everywhere and easily avoided, terrified, or destroyed.”

“Then what *are* you thinking about?” asked Mr. Prinkle. His voice was benignly patronising.

“There is a good deal of water there; a stream and a pool, and so on. All this may be dangerous for the tender-yearred, of course.”

“Of course *not!*” laughed Mr. Prinkle. “We shall see Nikky doesn’t come to a premature and watery end! It is not good, you know, Mr. Sen, to be too nervous about children. It makes *them* nervous, too. ‘Fear and be slain!’ There’s a lot of truth in that, you know!”

“There is, also, of course,” smiled Mr. Sen, “the Heavenly Father on guard.”

Mr. Prinkle glanced at him sharply. Was he being a shade sarcastic? One could never be quite sure with Mr. Sen. A pity he couldn’t be more *open!*

“Now, Mr. Sen,” he said, “I don’t think you’re being quite candid with me. I don’t think those are your real reasons. Now tell me quite frankly, please, why you dislike going to this place, for I can see you do.”

“Oh, I don’t mind really,” said Mr. Sen with a quick little giggle. “I was perhaps reverting to type, if you know what I mean, just being foolish, a silly primitive Indian.”

“I *suppose* I know what you’re getting at,” said Mr. Prinkle quizzingly, “the place has some sort of evil repute; is that what you mean?”

“Since you press me on the matter, that is so. Quite absurd, of course!”

Mr. Prinkle saw fit to issue a rather rogueish reprimand.

“You mean, Mr. Sen, it is thought to be haunted by spirits of some kind?”

“That is what I may term the rough idea,” replied Mr. Sen. “I do not desire to discuss the matter at further length, if you do not mind.”

“But I *do mind*, Mr. Sen. I have instructed you that the only evil spirits are in the hearts of men. To suppose they can materialise themselves and infest certain localities is a childish superstition, primitive, as you say. Such ideas distract and confuse men’s minds; they must be eradicated. I am rather surprised at you, Mr. Sen, after all you’ve been taught. It doesn’t seem to have sunk in, for in spite of your protestations, I can see that you still, in some ways, share these barbarous notions. We *will* go to this gorge and

enjoy ourselves thoroughly—*all* of us! Come now to my bungalow and give me my Urdu lesson, and let's have no more reversion to type!"

Mr. Sen smiled and did as he was told, but behind the mask he was charged with a great anger almost perfectly controlled. So during the next hour he delicately permitted Mr. Prinkle to realise he considered him a person of lethargic wits and quite devoid of linguistic ability; that instructing him was a considerable strain on the patience and by no means a labour of love. And later he quite refused to obey the pious injunction not to let the sun go down upon his wrath, for he lay long awake that night, his fury festering, because he had been ridiculed, humiliated, and reprovved, and it was like a rodent ulcer in his spirit.

Mr. Prinkle was very young, earnest, pink-and-white and naively self-confident. Though he had landed at Bombay but fourteen weeks before, he felt he already knew India and the Indian mind pretty well, and the chapter headings of a book dealing with the Missionary problems of the Sub-Continent were already in his notebook. His wife, Nancy, was very young and earnest too, but much more pleasing to the eye and by no means so confident. In her heart she thought India a frightening place, and that she and her husband were really strangers in a very strange land, unwelcome strangers to ninety per cent of its inhabitants, at any rate those of the Northern Punjab. She was an intelligent girl and her little boy Nicholas was an intelligent child. He was a charming, small blond body, much too young for the climate, pronounced the pundits. He was inclined to solemnity, too, and it seemed the genes of earnestness were already busy within him.

The next morning, September 13th, was spotlessly fine and not wickedly hot, for the scimitar edge of the summer sun was by now mercifully blunted.

Punctually at eleven the four of them packed into the V-8, and Mr. Prinkle facetiously exclaimed, "Chai! Chai!" as though urging on an elephant, for he was very proud of his few words of the lingo. So, soon they were speeding through the tea-gardens and raising a dense, low-lying, light ochre dust.

At length they reached the chotal, or head of the little pass, and there below them was the Kulan Valley, the river like a sapphire necklace in an emerald case, and above it the glossy, sparkling silver of the gods of the Hindu Kush stroked the sky. They paused a moment to revel in this view, though only Nancy really recognized how flabbergastingly well composed it was, and how brilliantly it just escaped the obvious. Then they began coasting down to the vale.

“What is the meaning of the word Churel, Mr. Sen?” asked Nancy, turning round in the front seat to face that person.

Mr. Sen paused before replying. He was still angry and indignant, and this was a very dangerous question, of which he'd have preferred to have received notice. He decided it was a moment for the exercise of that gift for sarcasm on which he prided himself, and which was often a good defensive dialectical weapon. With him sarcasm and verbosity went arm in arm.

“The word Churel,” he remarked in his most sing-song tone, “is a typical example of the poor superstitious Indians' ineradicable tendency to charge vague and fearful notions with materialist implications.”

“Very likely,” said Nancy, trying not to laugh, “but what does it mean?”

“The poor primitive Indians,” replies Mr. Sen, “cherish fearful ideas about women who pass over in giving birth to their young. They fondly imagine that the spirits or ghosts of such unfortunate females continue to haunt the earth, with a view to seizing the soul of some living child and carrying it off to the void to comfort them. Then, if they are successful in this morbid ambition, they are content, and roam their favourite places no more. Such ghosts are called ‘Churels’, and this gorge we are visiting is one of such favoured places. It is all very absurd, of course.”

“I think it's a strange and sad idea,” said Nancy; “the child dies, I suppose?”

“Oh yes, naturally,” smiled Mr. Sen; “its vital principle has been removed.”

“*You* don't believe such stuff, I hope,” said Mr. Prinkle insinuatingly.

Mr. Sen who believed it with fearful intensity, replied, “Naturally, since my conversion to the true faith and the instruction of two reverends, I regard the concept as wholly fatuous.”

“It is queer,” said Nancy, frowning, “how such ideas ever get into people's heads. I mean someone must have *started* the Churel idea. Why? Does the word mean anything else, Mr. Sen? Has it any secondary meaning?”

“Oh no, indeed. Just what I have informed you. Just a silly Indian notion, altogether.”

“Then I can't quite understand it,” said Nancy.

Mr. Prinkle decided it was time a superior intellect was brought to bear on the topic. Pulling out the vox parsonica stop, he proclaimed authoritatively, "My dear girl, it is one of a myriad such phantasies connected in some way with procreation, which is always a kinetic mystery to the primitive mind. Once formed, the phantasy is *named*, inevitably. These encapsuled animistic relics in the human mind are very hard to eradicate, but I'm going to do my best to cleanse the midden; I regard it as an essential part of my mission to India."

Mr. Sen maintained his bland grin, but behind it a formidable seethe of emotions was writhing: contempt, rage, hate, a growing fear and a horrid hope. He glanced at little Nikky, who was regarding him in a steady, searching way. Mr. Sen wriggled uneasily; for some complex reason he was perturbed by that appraising stare.

"What are you talking about, Mummy?" asked the small one.

"Oh nothing," replied Nancy. "We shall soon be there."

The Gorge of the Churels ran up from the eastern flank of the valley. It was a re-entrant from the low, limestone cliff which lined the vale. It had been burrowed out during countless aeons by a hard-running little stream, which rose somewhere in the foothills and fed the Kulan half a mile away. The entrance to it was narrow and stark, but it widened out to a breadth of some five hundred yards and was a mile or so in depth. At its eastern ending the burn fell over a steep bank, died for a moment in a deep circular basin, and poured out again from its western rim. The gorge was full of deodars, peepuls and kikars, and a few great dominating teaks. The surface was thick grass interspersed with bamboo. It was a very shady, aloof place, death-quiet, save for the splash of the fall, the murmur of the burn, and the occasional cry of a bird.

They parked the car just inside it and then strolled about for a while.

"It *is* rather a sombre spot," said Nancy, "though," she added hurriedly, "quite lovely of course."

Mr. Sen grinned.

Mr. Prinkle said: "Now *you're* getting fanciful, my dear. I don't find it sombre in the least; quite charming. Remote, no doubt, and cut off from the busy world of men; but what a relief that is! If it were in England, it would be coated with orange peel and old newspapers, and cacophonous with gramophones and loud speakers. Let's have lunch."

They spread out the cloth in the shade of a mighty deodar. Little Nikky was very quiet during the meal and not as hungry as usual. His eyes kept wandering in the direction of the pool.

“You’d like to fish in there, wouldn’t you, darling?” said Nancy.

“Yes, Mummy,” he replied listlessly.

“Before we come again we must get a little rod for you,” said Nancy.

Nikky just smiled in a perfunctory way.

After the feast they smoked a cigarette, chatted for a while, and then Mr. Prinkle yawned and said, “I feel like a nap. Most unusual for me, the reaction from a very hard week I suppose.”

“I do, too,” said Nancy. “Would you like forty winks, Nikky?”

“No, thank you, Mummy.”

“Well, what would you like to do?”

“Just play about.”

“Then don’t go near the pond! What about you, Mr. Sen?”

“I do not wish to sleep, thank you,” grinned that person. “I will watch over the young shaver, if that is what you imply.”

“That’s very kind of you. Just see he doesn’t get into mischief. Now remember, darling, be good and *don’t* go near the pond!”

“All right, Mummy.”

Mr. and Mrs. Prinkle then stretched themselves under a long branch of the deodar, hung out like the groping arm of a blind man. They put handkerchiefs over their faces, wriggled into comfortable positions and soon slept.

Mr. Sen squatted down in the open whence he could keep Nikky in view, and began to think in his own tongue. He didn’t like this place; it stirred ancestral forebodings. These callow, impercipient Europeans were fools to have come here—with a child. Because they were blind they thought there was nothing to see. Yes, he really hated them, despised them from the bottom of his heart. Let him be open with himself for once—wide open! Of course it paid him—not well, but enough—to pretend to like and respect them and their idiotic gods, but they were blind and insolent and conceited fools. If they were not, they would worship Brahma, the greatest of all god-ideas. Not, he thought to himself, that I am really greatly impressed even by

Brahma, for what does he *do*? Now that I am being open, I will confess he seems to *do* nothing, and evil spirits freely defy him.

He would like to see these people punished for their vanity and stupidity. What would be the worst punishment they could suffer? The loss of the child, of course, and this was a fearful death-trap for children. No woman would bring her child near the gorge by night, and not even by day unless protected by some appropriate powerful charm. He ran his tongue across his lips. What was the little Nikky doing? He was kneeling down and staring across towards the pool, an oddly intent look on his face. Mr. Sen watched him for a few moments and then followed the direction of his gaze. He leaned forward, peered hard, and drew in his breath with a quick hiss. His face became set and rigid with terror. Just to the left of the basin was a circular grove of mulberry trees, and at the centre of this circle was something which had no business to be there; at least so it seemed to Mr. Sen. The sun's rays coiling between the leaves, dappled and, as it were, camouflaged this intruder, so that it appeared just a thing of light and shade; like every other visible entity in the world, of course, yet somehow this was essentially incorporeal, not linked to earth, but painted thinly on the freckled air. It was this appearance which little Nikky seemed to be observing so intently, yet intermittently.

Sometimes he would look down and pretend to be playing with the grass and flowers, and then he would glance up swiftly and stealthily and become quite still and taut. He was, Mr. Sen decided, trying in an innocent way to deceive anyone who might be watching him. And Mr. Sen knew why he was doing this, and trembled. He pulled up the sleeve of his right arm where, round the biceps, was what resembled a large leather wrist-watch strap, but in the container was a piece of narrow scroll on which a very sacred text was inscribed. For this was a charm, idolatrously obtained by Mr. Sen from an extremely ancient and holy Sadhu, and, though not a protection against the full power of certain demons, a great shield for sure against most dangers and evils. His possession of it he kept a close, dark secret, especially from his reverend employers. He touched this charm and muttered to himself.

Presently little Nikky toddled slowly forward in the direction of the grove. Then he knelt again and nervously plucked up some blades of grass. The fretted and dubious shape remained motionless.

After a while the child glanced quickly up and moved forward again. He was now about fifteen yards from the grove. Mr. Sen began to tremble violently, not only with fear, but from some subtle emotion, atavistic and nameless. His teeth clattered and he clutched the charm. Again little Nikky

glanced up from his feigned play and stared hard in front of him. Mr. Sen could see he was smiling in a vague, rapt way. It was very quiet, the light toss of the fall, the stir of the brook seemed but to join the stillness and intensify it. But Mr. Sen was aware of a horrid tension in the air, like the swelling potential before the lightning stroke.

Suddenly Nikky uttered a happy little cry and ran forward as fast as his chubby legs would carry him. As he reached the verge of the grove, it seemed to the entranced and quivering Mr. Sen as though the thing of light and shadow moved forward to meet and greet him. The little boy threw out his arms and in another moment the two would have mingled.

And then Mr. Sen, as the odd and pregnant saying has it, “came to himself.” He leapt to his feet and ran headlong towards the grove, fiercely clutching the charm and uttering repeatedly, loudly, and hoarsely some words of warning or incantation. Little Nikky paused, glanced round and fell on his face, and the thing of light and shade seemed to lose its form and pass into the stippled air.

Mr. and Mrs. Prinkle came running out, dishevelled and heavy with sleep.

“What’s the matter?” they cried in unison to Mr. Sen, who had taken Nikky in his arms.

“The little chap fell down,” he said shrilly. “Perhaps a touch of the sun; I do not know!”

Nancy seized the child, who had fallen into a deep sleep.

“We’d better get him home,” said Mr. Prinkle urgently. And soon they had packed up and were hurrying on their way.

Presently little Nikky stirred from his deep doze, opened his round blue eyes, smiled and said, “Pretty lady!” and went to sleep again.

“He’s quite all right,” laughed Nancy in relief; “when he smiles like that he’s always well and happy.”

“Just a little tired perhaps,” said her husband resignedly. “Just a false alarm. Rather spoilt our day!”

“Why did you shout, Mr. Sen?” asked Nancy.

“Ah!” grinned that person, “I am ashamed to confess it, but *I* had a snooze too. Very negligent of me, but I was properly punished, for I had a very bad dream, I assure you!”

“What did you dream about?” asked Mr. Prinkle mockingly, “those bereft and acquisitive Churels!”

“Ah no,” replied Mr. Sen with a protesting smile, and slipping his left arm up his right sleeve; “it is not fair of you, Mr. Prinkle, to pull my legs so, and remind me of the ridiculous superstitions of us poor, ignorant, primitive Indians!”

Mr. Ash's Studio

It was the return of the road-breaking battalion with their accursed compressed-air drills which made Mr. Horrocks' greying hairs bristle with determination. He could oathfully endure the foul orchestra of horns and gears, the cacophony of canned dance music; even the piano-pounding of the infernal brat in the flat below. But at the first renewal of that quivering, booming patter from East Street he knew something must be done if he was to finish his novel. "Why not take a studio while you're looking for another flat?" said a friend in the Club. He picked up a copy of the *Connoisseur*. "Here you are. . . 'Within ten minutes' walk of Knightsbridge Tube Station, roomy, out-door studio. Very quiet. Easy terms.' Why not have a look at that? There are heaps of others vacant if it doesn't suit you."

Very occasionally, about twice a year, Mr. Horrocks acted with extreme decision. Within ten minutes he was on his way to the agent's. He was a small, sturdy, thrusting little person of forty-six. He had a long head, rather flat along the top, the hair at the sides brushed forward which gave him a slightly old-fashioned appearance. His eyes were very quick and dark, mouth small and mobile, chin pointed but emphatic. He made a rather contradictory impression on the discerning beholder, alert but contemplative, irascible but benign. He regarded censors, kill-joys, puritans and that sort with an unbridled loathing in theory—but if he came in actual contact with one of them he was in practice, courteous, understanding, reasonable, inquisitive; the true novelist's mind being inevitably time-serving.

"Anyone in Rooper's Court will direct you," said the agent handing him a key. "Ask for Mr. Ash's studio."

"Thank you," replied Mr. Horrocks and trotted off. Keeping a wary eye open, he eventually discovered Rooper's Court, which began in a narrow arched passage-way off the Brompton Road and developed into what had been known in his youth as a "Mews." Now it was a series of lock-up garages and an occasional small private house—re-built coachmen's quarters. There were many chauffeurs sluicing and attending to their charges. Mr. Horrocks, looking round for a guide, caught sight of a tall young man standing at the door of a charming little yellow house with gay blue window boxes. Mr. Horrocks went up to him and put his question.

“Certainly,” he replied in a pleasant, genial way. “Come with me.” He conducted Mr. Horrocks to an opening on the right-hand side round a corner where there was a small railed-in grass space. At the far end was a rather high hut with a corrugated iron roof, over which leaned a plane tree with many drooping branches.

“That’s the studio,” said the tall young man, “the door is up the other end.”

“Thanks very much,” said Mr. Horrocks. “It looks nice and quiet.”

The young man seemed to be considering something. “Are you a painter?” he asked presently.

“No,” replied Mr. Horrocks. “I try to write; my name is Samuel Horrocks; but I don’t suppose you’ve ever heard of it.”

“Of course I have. And may I say I greatly admire your stories of the supernatural. May I ask how you were put on to this studio?”

“Oh, I just happened to see it advertised.”

The young man remained thoughtful for a moment. Then he appeared to make up his mind. “Well,” he said, “I hope you’ll find it all right for your purposes. My name is Landen and I live in that little yellow house. If I can be of any service to you, let me know.” Mr. Horrocks thanked him and they said good-bye.

“Very courteous young fellow,” thought Mr. Horrocks as he stepped forward; “looks highly intelligent, too, but I wonder what service he thought he could render me?” Ah, there was the door. He pushed the key in the lock. He had to use some force to open the door as it was jammed from damp, he supposed, at the bottom and sides. He found himself in a room surprisingly more spacious than its exterior suggested. There appeared to be two rooms, as a matter of fact, for there was another door at the far end. The place was lit by three high windows. It smelled rather fusty and there were patches of damp on the distempered walls. Ah, there was an easel with a picture on it and a couple of rather dilapidated chairs. He’d see what was behind the other door. It *was* another room, quite a small one, full of odds and ends, packing cases, an oil stove, a kettle and so on. What a peculiar smell! What was that red stain on the small packing case? He bent down. Good heavens it was alive, a cluster of moths. How very curious! Beautiful colour. They must be feeding on something. He put out his hand to disturb them when suddenly they all sprang up at his face. Little brutes! He lashed out at them and beat a hasty retreat, shutting the door behind him. Venomous little

beasts! Well, what about this studio? He wasn't greatly taken with it, but it was most certainly quiet. Mr. Horrocks was a shop-assistant's glad-dream, for he almost invariably took the first thing offered him and hurried out of the shop. The last thing he wanted was to go hunting about, fussing with agents and keys, and asking his way and that sort of thing. He wanted a place to work in and he wanted it at once. This would surely do. Not in the winter, perhaps, but with the summer coming on—Why not in the winter? Mr. Horrocks vaguely considered this proviso. Too damp, perhaps, and also—well there was something rather—rather sombre about it. It was the contrast, no doubt, between its aloofness, quietness and isolation and the raging stress and promiscuous din only a hundred yards away. Something like that. Oh yes, it would do. He'd get a desk in and a stove for the damp, and just exploit that aloofness and quiet. That was settled. He strolled over to the easel. Portrait of a woman. Good-looking girl—in a way very beautiful, and yet there was something about her expression—something enigmatic. Wonder who this fellow Ash was. Ah, there were his palette and brushes on the floor behind the easel. Curious smudged, rainbow thing, a palette. It was rather humiliating, but he hadn't really the smallest knowledge of the way a painter went to work. However, he'd never pretended otherwise. How loud his footsteps sounded on the wood floor! Showed how quiet it was. Before leaving he peeped through the door into the small room. Yes, there they were back again, forming a sort of pattern—wonderful patch of colour, dark ruby. Little brutes seemed to be staring at him. He laughed out loud. What an echo! He must get some lunch. He'd take the studio that afternoon for a month. That was settled and a great relief. As he caught hold of the door on getting outside, it seemed to swing hard at him of its own momentum and it slammed harshly, thrusting him back. He was a little ruffled. Not exactly a hospitable atmosphere about that place, he thought.

The tall young man was still standing outside the yellow house as he repassed up the court. "Well?" he asked.

"I've decided to take it," said Mr. Horrocks. "It's not, perhaps, a very cheerful spot, but its quietness decided me."

The young man nodded. "Are you taking it for long?"

"No, just by the month."

"I see. Well, good luck with the book—I hope you'll give us some more ghost stories soon."

“It’s rather difficult to get plots for them,” replied Mr. Horrocks, “but I’ll do my best. Good morning.”

Three days later he revisited the studio, which now housed a desk, a couple of comfortable chairs and his portable typewriter. It was a brilliantly fine May morning and the place seemed a bit more genial, but not really very much, he considered. However, now for work. He was about a third of the way through his novel and irritatingly uncertain exactly how to develop it. Also he had promised his agent to have a ghost story ready fairly soon for the Christmas number of a magazine which paid very well. But at the moment he hadn’t an idea in his head. For the time being he would concentrate on the novel. He sat down at his desk and began to cogitate. His weakness, he knew it well, was a tendency to flippancy. The more he saw and read of the world and its denizens the harder he found it to take them with the proper seriousness. As far as the tale of humanity was concerned he was inclined to laugh at the wrong places, a serious flaw in a novelist! His characters would adopt an unbecoming impishness at critical moments and mock their creator’s efforts to control them. It was probably due to the fact that their creator had never succeeded in measuring humanity flatteringly in accordance with the cosmic scale. He was, therefore, delighted to find that the atmosphere of Mr. Ash’s studio was an excellent corrective to this levity. He wrote a whole chapter by lunch time, a very critical chapter, and he knew that it was good. The motley streak was rigidly eliminated from it. With an aching arm but satisfied soul he got up at half-past one, yawned, stretched himself, and found himself regarding the picture on the easel. Seen by this stronger light it appeared a very vivid piece of work. It almost seemed as if it had been more worked on than when he’d seen it before. Certainly her face was a puzzle. He went up to it and covered first her eyes, then her mouth and chin with his hand in an attempt to discover where the secret of that oddness lay. As a result he decided it was immanent and not to be traced. He’d have a look and see what those little red devils were doing. There they were bunched on the packing case making that same pattern, motionless and intent. Funny pattern, almost like a human face. Vague memories of “bug-hunting” at school came back to him. He was very certain that nothing resembling them had ever found its way into his killing bottle. Singular markings on their heads. He bent down, and at once the swarm rose together and flew savagely into his face. He struck out at them. How extraordinary, it seemed impossible to touch one! Artful little dodgers. What a filthy smell they made, nauseating and corrupt. He’d leave them alone in future.

He spent the afternoon at Kew Gardens, in his opinion the most delectable place in the world on a fine spring day. As he strolled about the lawns and threw crumbs to the birds, he sought some inspiration for that infernal ghost story. A reviewer had once credited him with the possession of a “malignant imagination” for such fiction. At the moment he had a malignant lack of it. All the same the atmosphere of that studio ought to be kinetic. Presently he felt like a rest and sat down on a seat by the rhododendrons. Drowsily he began to day-dream. A succession of images elusively patrolled his brain. A girl’s head on an easel—a dark stain on a packing case. He found himself examining the studio almost inch by inch, for his visualising power was very highly developed. He scrutinised the girl’s face closely, and then was jerked back into full consciousness, for it had seemed to him that a brush had fallen on the face and slightly emphasised the line from her left nostril to upper lip. Amusing illusion! Might be an idea for a story there; whole thing taking place in narrator’s subconscious. Damned difficult. Well he must be getting home, those road-breakers would have knocked off by the time he reached there.

From then on he went to the studio four days a week always in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon. He invariably approached it with oddly mixed emotions. Never had he known any place more stimulating to his imagination, yet he never felt at home there. The moment he unlocked the door he felt a sense of obscure excitement which, in fact, began to come over him as soon as he passed into Rooper’s Court, and intensified itself until he was actually inside and face to face with the girl on the easel. And as he wrote he often paused and looked up at her. Each time he came to the studio she seemed subtly and indefinitely to have changed, developed, become at once more “realised” yet harder to nail down and analyse. He imagined that was what was meant by learning to “see” a painting; that like a poem or a piece of music it only revealed its inner, profounder meaning to those who lavished as much care on deciphering it as the artist had in inscribing it. She was very useful, too, for she seemed to have become identified in a way with the chief female character in his novel—“heroine” would have been a somewhat satirical term for that dark-hearted vampire. And how excellently and reassuringly the book was going! For once his publisher’s plaintive and oft-repeated blurbed insistence that “Samuel Horrocks’ latest work is also his greatest,” showed every evidence of being justified. Certainly it revealed an almost ruthless lack of flippancy. As it moved to its inevitable climax the shadows darkened and gathered round it. That meant drastically revising the first third of it, a laborious necessity but unescapable.

He left the little room and the moths alone. Their business was none of his, he felt, and somehow they were peculiar to the place. He gathered that Mr. Ash, whoever he might be, had felt a keen interest in them, for he discovered a sketch book of his, presumably his, on one of the window ledges. This contained dozens of preliminary studies for the girl's head, each one decoratively framed in moth-dusters. One of them gave him rather a dubious reaction, for the girl's head was flung hard back from her shoulders and there was poured over her face a stream of dark red, delicately though unmistakably articulated into the couched shape of moths. What the artist was thinking about when he put his pencil to work on so morbid a conception Mr. Horrocks was at a loss to understand; yet it fascinated him, and he several times examined it in a hurried, shamefaced way. All the same, if it hadn't been someone else's property he was almost certain he would have torn it into very small pieces.

He spent, perhaps, twenty hours a week in the studio, yet in a sense he was there for much longer. That was due to his recently-developed tendency to day-dream, reinforced by his abnormal power of visualisation. This tendency was by no means welcome, in fact it was decidedly exasperating, for his subconscious, the breeding-ground, he supposed, of these day-dreams, appeared to be quite determined that he should be compelled to take an urgent interest in what occurred at the studio when its tenant wasn't there. Of course *nothing* went on, and yet the fact remained that he might be taking a walk or trying to read when all of a sudden he would find himself, as *it* were, just inside the studio and regarding its interior. His view of it was hazy and it appeared much diminished, but it was quite recognisable. He couldn't see his desk or chairs, but there was the girl's head on the easel, and there were the windows and the door into the little room. And he was forced to admit there was frequently something else, *someone* to be more precise, and that he—yes, it was a man—was moving about. A tall man with an odd walk, as if he limped. But, however hard he concentrated, he could never quite get this person into focus. The effort to do so often made him sweat and his heart race, but he simply couldn't get a proper look at this person's face. Surely he was tall and dark. Who could he be? While he was still in this fussed state and before he pulled himself together and called himself a fool, he often felt a violent, crazy impulse to dash off to Rooper's Court to make quite certain whether there was or was not someone prowling about the studio. More than once he could only just rally enough strength of mind to resist this insensate craving. He reassured himself that his eccentric preoccupation with a dingy hut was a symptom of over-work, not exactly that, perhaps, but excessive absorption in his novel. But how blessed that all

those wavering uncertain currents had coalesced so perfectly into a steady stream. He had to thank the dingy hut for that, and he could see the end in sight.

He met Landen when he was leaving the studio late one afternoon and accepted his invitation to come in for a glass of sherry. The little yellow house was as charming inside as out, fitted and furnished with a nice careless discretion.

“So you really find the place a congenial workshop?” his host inquired on hearing of the progress the book was making.

“Well, it depends on what you mean by that,” replied Mr. Horrocks. “I’ve certainly written forty thousand words there and, as golfers say, I ‘don’t want them back,’ but congenial—well, I mustn’t be ungrateful—but it’s not an adjective I feel appropriate to the place.”

Landen was silent for a moment. “No,” he said presently, “I think I understand what you mean.”

“You’ve been inside it?”

“Oh, yes,” said Landen.

“It’s got an atmosphere of its own. Almost, one might say, a personality. There are places like that, I think.”

“Are you clairvoyant in that way? I mean have you had actual experiences of a psychic sort?”

“As a matter of fact, I have,” replied Mr. Horrocks, “quite a number. But as I’ve found these experiences were not shared by others, I’ve kept quiet about them.”

“That is my case, also,” said Landen, “and I’ve learnt to keep my mouth shut, when to open it results in being regarded as a self-assertive liar. It must be a great relief to you to get them out of your system in the form of fiction. Are you writing a story now?”

Mr. Horrocks shrugged his shoulders. “I’m not sure,” he said, “but I’m inclined to think there *is* one forming itself in my harassed old pate. But I mustn’t hurry it or keep pulling it up to have a look, like an impatient fisherman. If it’s hooking something I shall feel that unmistakable ‘bite’ when the time comes.”

“That’s rather a revealing metaphor,” said Landen. “I can’t write fiction—‘think of stories’—myself, I’m an architect, but I understand just what

you mean. By the way, I always remember that story of yours, *At the Going Down of the Sun*; I believe the Ray theory of psychic phenomena you hinted at there is the most probable.”

“It was the undoubted evidence for phantoms of the living which gave me the idea,” replied Mr. Horrocks, somewhat gratified.

“Yes, quite,” said Landen. “By the way, you don’t work at night in the studio, do you?”

“I haven’t so far.”

“Well, I shouldn’t. There are some tough characters about this neighbourhood at night. If they saw a light they might pay you a somewhat unceremonious visit.”

“I should, of course, lock the door,” said Mr. Horrocks.

“Yes, naturally, but all the same, I shouldn’t run any risk.”

At length the day came when Mr. Horrocks typed the word “Finis” and the date below it, May 29th, and knew that the preceding ninety thousand words represented the best work he’d done in his life; so good and yet so alien to his customary manner both in atmosphere and style that he hardly recognised it as his. Almost, he modestly said to himself, as if he’d been a tiny bit inspired. Tomorrow he’d hand it to his publisher and go straight off to Cornwall for a long rest. And then he’d start hunting for a tolerably quiet flat. So it was good-bye to the studio. Would he be sorry to bid it farewell? Once again he failed to give a decided answer to that question. It had been a most excellent tonic and stimulant to his imagination, yet he *was* a little afraid of it. Yes, better to say the word, there was something about it which ruffled his nerves and, no doubt, caused that ridiculous yet oppressive day-dreaming. He’d have a last leisurely stroll round it; and a last look at the girl. It really was a most baffling illusion for he could have sworn that the expression on her face had drastically changed. She was still exquisitely beautiful and she’d always look like one to be wary of, but now she wore an air of mocking, heartless frigidity, a most lovely, perilous vampire, a devil. He had a sudden desire to crash his fist into her face. And then he laughed at himself and said out loud, “Well, my most adorable but evil one, I shan’t see you again. Give my love to Mr. Ash and—” he stopped abruptly. He had spoken in a light, bantering tone, but the echo of his words came back to him in a most mournful yet somehow mocking way. He felt a sudden gust of uneasiness and depression and impulsively turned the canvas round. On the back of it he casually noticed some carefully drawn but undecipherable

hieroglyphics. And now for a last look at the little red beasts. Yes, there they were, glowing, motionless and obscene, like a stain of blood with a hundred eyes. Supposing he picked up that piece of planking and crashed it down on them. The little devils seemed to read his thoughts, for they sprang up at him and drove him from the room. How they stank! Well, that was that. As he opened the door to leave he took a last look back and then the door swung hard at him—Runk!—and slammed to. As he strolled towards his club for lunch his mind turned to the subject of that infernal ghost story he'd got to write. It was beginning to get urgent. Obscurely he felt that the studio was the only possible place in which to conceive of it and write it. Perhaps he'd given it up too soon. What a curse it was! Just as he'd finished a most delicate and exhausting piece of work, he'd got to tackle another. Well, he would have *one* day off, he told himself irritably. If his imagination wouldn't let him rest, he'd drown it. The bank rate had been lowered that morning and his business friends at the club, who'd been feeling the overdraft severely, were in the mood for some alcoholic enthusiasm and celebration. Mr. Horrocks was reasonably abstemious, but for once he found their spiritual state catching and comforting. Consequently, after a large and cheerful lunch, sherry, hock and a double port, he was more than prepared for a restorative snooze in his favourite chair in the chess-room. It was sweet and dreamless, so he was all the more annoyed when, on waking, he found himself staring, not at the trees in St. James's Park, but straight down the length of the studio. And there was that—no, he *wouldn't* look! He got up brusquely and went to the bar. He completely mistrusted the *fata Morgana* amenities of alcohol, but his nerves were jangled and something must be done. He did it with discretion. The result was quite unexpected and bizarre, for he began to experience an exalted resolve to visit the studio again that night, and then and there conceive of that accursed short story. He was sure of it. He'd have a good dinner, just enough to keep his optimism untarnished but leave his head fairly clear, and *he'd get that story*. It sounded ludicrous, but he'd had such irrational surges of certainty before and they'd always been justified. He *would* go.

Successfully maintaining his resolution and good hope, he hailed a taxi at ten-thirty and twenty minutes later was at Rooper's Court, feeling rather excited and venturesome. Yet the enterprise began to reveal itself rather more starkly in the court than it had in the club smoking-room. It was a boisterous night, the wind veering to the west and stiffening sharply. The weather was breaking, and with much low cloud it was very dark. Rooper's Court appeared desolate and uninviting. Landen seemed to be in, as there was a light in his sitting-room. This reminded Mr. Horrocks of his advice about not

visiting the studio after dark. Oh, well, he could take care of himself. As he turned the corner he took an electric torch from his pocket. That tree made it damned dark. What a wind! Curious sound the branches made on the roof; like stealthy footsteps. Ah, there was the keyhole. Door had stuck as usual. He put his shoulder to it, whereupon it yielded so suddenly that he staggered forward and dropped the torch. Then the door swung back and crashed. Now where was that cursed torch? His hands swept the floor. Ah, there it was. Click. Click. Blast the thing, it wouldn't work now! Yes, just a faint glow. He'd wait a moment till his eyes got used to it. Rather a fool to have come. What was he really doing in this rather dreadful place? How those branches lashed the roof. Yes, really rather a dreadful place. What would those moths be doing? Probably just making that pattern and listening to him, their foul little eyes staring and intent. He moved forward cautiously. He could just see his way now. What a daunting suggestion of menace seemed hovering in the place. Well, that was an absurd exaggeration. After all, that was the atmosphere he'd come to absorb. Hulloo! what was that? It almost seemed as if the room had become smaller, as if the walls had come crouching in towards him. Ah, there was the easel! But he'd turned the girl's face round! Who could have—Good God, the moths were on it! He stood motionless and rigid, his heart beating wildly, for wasn't her head flung back from the shoulders and weren't they crawling, crawling—! And weren't those walls closing in on him, and who was that standing and watching him from the small door? For a moment he felt he could never move again; then he wrenched himself free and began to run for the door. He dropped the torch and with trembling hands groped his way along a wall. Where was the door! Was that it? No! Yes! Yes! As he flung it open it seemed as though a myriad little wings came beating round his eyes. He tore down the path, the door crashing to behind him. As he reached the corner someone approached him. He flinched back. Then a voice said: "It's all right. This is Landen. You're perfectly safe. Come with me—"

"But how did you know?" cried Mr. Horrocks hysterically.

"I heard you shouting," he replied quietly, "and guessed the rest."

Mr. Horrocks walked panting by his side to his house and into the sitting-room. There was a tantalus and glasses on the table. "Sit down," said Landen, "and make yourself comfortable while I mix you a drink."

"It's very good of you," said Mr. Horrocks. "I'm afraid I quite lost my head, but I had rather a shock. I see now I should have taken your advice, but I didn't realise—"

“Perhaps I should have been more explicit,” replied Landen, handing him a glass, “but as you found the place congenial for your writing I didn’t want to prejudice you against it, but it is, of course, well, shall we say, highly impregnated. You’ve gone into such matters far more than I, but as you have stated, they remain without convincing explanation.”

“Absolutely so,” replied Mr. Horrocks, raising his glass with a still unsteady hand. “Any tentative suggestions I have made were simply guesswork. There is no theory ever advanced which begins to cover the ground. It was horrible, horrible!”

“I’ll give you such facts as I know about that studio,” said Landen, sitting down and lighting a cigarette. “It was built by a person named Raphael Ash four years ago. His father was a Highland Scot in business at Teheran. There he married a Persian woman of high degree. Their son was brought up in Persia and eventually sent to Oxford. A friend of mine was up at New College with him. He was a very enigmatic character. Outwardly imperturbable and bland, yet keeping himself aloof from college life and somehow forbidding. He was extremely unpopular for some reason, I believe, not unconnected with a certain doubt as to how he spent his plentiful leisure time. The occupants of the other rooms in his corridor thought at times they saw and heard dubious things. So four enterprising and intoxicated sportsmen broke into his rooms one night. They got rather badly frightened, but would say nothing of their experiences. By a coincidence they all died within a year or so. Ash came under the notice of the college authorities and was sent down after a couple of terms; for reasons best known to themselves. Whereupon he built this studio and began to paint. He also fell in love. I may say he inherited a great deal of money. The lady concerned seemed for a time to reciprocate his feelings and she certainly made his money fly. However, someone else desired her and he was just as rich and socially far more eligible. I knew this lady and you have seen a brilliantly clever likeness of her, but no portrait could do her justice. She was exquisitely lovely, an accomplished actress and an utterly amoral, soulless rogue. Well, she married the other man and went to live with him at his place in Surrey. A few weeks later she met her death. She was seen one afternoon by a gamekeeper running through a wood near the house. He stated at the inquest that she was beating out at something with her hands. He imagined she was being attacked by a swarm of bees and ran after her; but before he could reach her she had fallen over the edge of a quarry. She was dying when he got to her, but still beating out with her hands as if to keep something from her face. Shortly after Ash was shot dead in the small room in the studio.”

“Good God!” exclaimed Mr. Horrocks. “Was it suicide?”

“That was the verdict,” replied Landen slowly. “The evidence was slightly conflicting. One witness stated that he had heard voices coming from the studio that afternoon, and the medical evidence was slightly indefinite. However, the coroner was satisfied. Well, that’s all I know about Mr. Ash and his studio—or almost. When I came to live here I discovered it had a certain reputation amongst the frequenters of the court. I wondered why, got the key and went there late one winter evening. And then I no longer wondered. It has had one temporary tenant besides you since Ash died. He gave it up after a few days. I believe it is to be pulled down soon. And now you must have another little drink and I’ll join you.”

“Well, just a very small one. There is one other thing; those moths—”

“You will not find their like in the Natural History Museum,” replied Landen. “Perhaps you might search the world over and never do so; for I once described them to a distinguished Orientalist and he told me that he had never met anyone who had encountered such an insect, but that he’d received obscure hints concerning such creatures, though there was a very general reluctance to refer to them. Once or twice he had succeeded in overcoming this reluctance. He gathered that they were known as ‘The Servants of Eblis’—in a rough translation. Personally he didn’t believe in their existence and was greatly puzzled as to how I’d heard of them. I will tell you something; you and one other are the only persons I’ve known who could see them.”

“Who could see them?” echoed Mr. Horrocks astonished.

“Yes, I have made some experiments. You and I in that respect at least are privileged people.”

“And that other?” asked Mr. Horrocks, after a pause.

“She is dead,” replied Landen quietly.

Mr. Horrocks was silent for a while. Presently he said: “Was Ash very dark and did he limp slightly?”

“Yes,” replied Landen.

Woe Water

Wear Lodge.

Oct. 3rd: At last! What a huge relief to be away from all that foul publicity, the brutally cynical reporters, the cruel animal stares of the mob, those hard-eyed detectives, hoping to get their hands on me, and all the bestiality I've been through during the last month. This house is, of course, much too big for just Barratt and me, but I was in no mood to be selective and took the first more or less suitable place that offered. One thing, my privacy will not be violated here. We are two miles from the village and the grounds are extensive and well wired-in. I shall be merciless to trespassers.

Only ten anonymous letters this morning—the rush is over! This experience has taught me what sub-human devils people can be, and what a lust consumes them to believe the worst and grind into the mire the unfortunate who is *down*. As if any sane person could possibly believe I wouldn't have done, and didn't do, my very best to save poor Angela? Of course that perverse fool of a Welsh coroner was responsible for much of my tribulation. He should have realised that when I said it was Angela who suggested going bathing that night it was simply a slip of the tongue. (What a strange displeasing cry that is! Bird or beast?) As for that bruise on the head, it could *not* have been acquired *before* death, as that fool of a doctor suggested. Absurd! Impossible! And what conceivable motive had I for ridding myself of her? We had our differences like any other married couple—no more, no less. She was a little difficult at times and no doubt, I was, too.

As for her money—I never wanted it; I had enough for my simple wants, and I didn't care if she didn't leave me a penny, though I'm quite sure it was untrue she was thinking of making a new will disinheriting me. Sims, her lawyer, must have misunderstood her, and his evidence, again, made a very bad impression. Everything seemed to conspire against me at that inquest and the "Open" verdict was meant as a slur on me. Of course it ought to have been "Misadventure"! I am becoming more and more convinced that some men are born unlucky, born in the Red, destined inevitably to suffer, the pack of Fate stacked rigorously against them, always that Red turning up to consolidate their doom.

I am going to keep a diary for the future. It will be something to do, and help, perhaps, to comfort and clarify my mind. I shall be very lonely for the rest of my life, I suppose. Barratt is an excellent servant and a good enough fellow, but an uneducated man is never really company for an educated one, and I don't believe he really likes me, even though he has been with me so long. Angela was his favourite. I am also going to prepare a statement giving the true version of these events, so that when it is read after my death it will be understood how terribly I've been the victim of circumstance, of shameful suspicion and malignant tongues. (There's that cry again!) It is strange and awful to realise how a perfectly innocent man can be slandered and tortured as I have been. It has made me much more sympathetic and understanding towards unlucky men, so-called "failures", for I see clearly how easily they can fall into ghastly traps, as I did, and how their fate can pursue them to the bitter, hopeless end.

I still dread the postman's knock, but, though I'm sleeping very badly, I think that recurrent nightmare of choking and struggling, which is so unnerving, is, perhaps, not quite so vivid. Curiously enough, I have at times a powerful sense of Angela's presence after dark; so odd because she never entered, or even heard of, this house. It will probably fade after a while. If only the dead could speak! (There is that cry once more! What can it be?)

Oct. 4th: I took this place in such a hurry—almost panic—that I had never properly explored the grounds till today, when I strolled around with old Carlman, the gardener. He is a grizzled and rather unforthcoming rustic, at least he was hardly polite to me, though I provide his bread and butter. Of course he has heard things and I am hardened to that sort of treatment by now. To my astonishment I found there is a pool, a small lake, actually, in the southeast corner of the estate. I suppose the reason I didn't notice it on my one hurried visit is that it is entirely surrounded by a barrier of weeping willows. It is an ellipse in shape, about a hundred yards across the major axis, eighty across the lesser. It is an odd, slate-black hue due, perhaps, to the over-hang of the willows and the shadows they cast.

The old man surveyed it with some solemnity, and almost made me laugh for the first time since *it* happened, by informing me its depth was unknown, bottom in the middle never having been reached, a ludicrous yarn which I'll disprove before long. I got the impression he is somewhat nervous of it, and it is undoubtedly sombre and forbidding. He told me it was called "Woe Water" and used to be on common land, but was enclosed—polite term for "stolen"—many years ago, and that the villagers have never forgiven this. "It's always been a place of sin and death," he said; an

enigmatic remark, which I found by cross-examination meant a favoured venue for suicides—fifteen in his lifetime! This sounds hardly credible, and no doubt he was drawing the Long Bow. I asked him in a joking way why the sparse inhabitants of Drarley Parva were so addicted to self-slaughter. “There are wicked men here as everywhere,” he replied, “and they come to the water to cleanse away their sins.” By which I deduced he belongs to the Bible-thumping brigade. “And their scarlet sins colour the water,” he went on, “so that when there is a body within it, it takes the look of blood, and the body troubles the water while it is lying within it, troubles it for seven days, and on the seventh day the people come to meet and greet the dead man, and his sinful body comes up white as snow and picked clean of its evil flesh.”

“How d’you mean ‘troubles it’?” I asked as seriously as I could manage.

“It is all astir,” he replied, “wind or no wind, and the dead man’s wave runs across it.”

Just a bit of yokel myth-making, of course. I asked him if there were any fish in it, and he said he didn’t think so.

At that very moment there was a huge “rise” out in the middle—a monster carp, I imagine, and I said mockingly, “What about *that!*” But he just muttered and hurried away.

Paid the bill for Angela’s funeral today, as they’ve been pressing me. A hundred and forty pounds, extortionate, of course, but then they know I daren’t query anything in my position, and naturally nothing could be too good for her. A peculiarly infamous anonymous letter this morning—fifteen pages! Would you credit that anyone could be so sparking with venomous malignity as to spend what must have been hours composing such a vicious screed? And the writer’s no half-wit either. He makes what he is pleased to call “six points which indicate irrefutably your guilt.” In the course of time I am going to get down on paper a complete answer to this cowardly, knavish brute, point by point.

I have several times alluded to a strange piercing cry which I hear as I sit writing late at night. It comes from the direction of the pool and is made presumably by some water bird. A heron? I do not know. Apart from fishing, I am very ignorant of country matters, and I mean to study the birds and beasts which visit my domain. There it is again! It has an almost human, despairing note. Rather blood-chilling, rather too reminiscent of—no! I won’t even think of such a comparison. That is craven and contemptible, and I must train my mind away from all such frailties. My nerves have enough to carry as it is.

I'll order a small rowboat for the lake and try for that big fish. I've drunk too much whiskey today. I never used to indulge like this, but I think it will help me to sleep. Sense of Angela's presence very strong at the moment.

Oct. 5th: Been in poorish spirits today, bored and lonely. Thinking too, of my poor dead father, who suffered as I am suffering and from that odious woman, my mother. Getting tired of my own company, I suppose, but it can't be helped and must be endured. Everyone of my so-called "friends" would cut me dead if he met me in the street. Barratt is no good to me; he is sullen and irresponsible. That cry is becoming rather too *much*—very oppressive. It starts at dusk and recurs at intervals from then on. Curiously enough, I could see no signs of any water fowl when I visited the lake today. Perhaps they just come there to roost. I'll go out there one night with a gun, for I fear that thing responsible, whatever it may be, will have to die. There it is again!

That anonymous slanderer's first point was that Angela was afraid of water and would never have bathed that night unless I'd forced her to. What nonsense! *I'm* the one who fears water, always have since that fortune-teller warned me against it years ago, but I've fought the phobia with some success. It is true, as that chambermaid said, that I wanted Angela to come with me. It was a lovely night, I dislike being alone in the sea, and I thought a bath would be good for her nerves. But that spying maid was lying when she swore she overheard me *threaten* Angela. It was spite; I should have tipped her more at the end of the first week in the hotel.

I wonder if cotton wool in my ears would help to damp and dim the stridency of that cry? I'll try it. I've finished a whole bottle today. I must strive to cut down.

Oct. 6th: Seven anonymous letters this morning. One included my horoscope, says I'll be dead before the end of the year, which "will be good riddance of a bestial wife-murderer." Some nice people in the world. Took another stroll with old Carlman this morning. We visited the pool and I questioned him some more. He says they never drag for the bodies which, he repeated, always surface again on the seventh day and the villagers flock down to see them rise. Well, they won't do that again while I'm here. There'll be no more suicides in my time, the suicidal trespasser will be prosecuted as rigorously as all others. He'll have to select another spot. I asked him about waterfowl.

"None ever come here," he said, "and no bird visits these trees." And indeed, I confess I haven't seen or heard one in the neighbourhood of the

pool *by day*.

The second point made by that cowardly swine is that I am a strong swimmer and that Angela was a poor one. Not so poor, really! And that I deliberately took her too far out, and asks, why I didn't stay near her? Why did I swim so far from her? according to my account. "In reality," he writes, "you *did* stay close to her and struck her over the head with your fist and let her drown." And that I didn't expect the bruise would be discovered because of her thick hair. That shows to what lengths a foul, diseased imagination can go! The fact is I was floating on my back, and Angela swam away from me, not purposely, but pursuing her own way, until she was dangerously far from me. I called her, but got no reply and must have swum in the wrong direction. The tide was on the ebb and we must have been carried out further than I expected. She must have got cramp, and it was then she cried out so horribly—like that! No *not* like that! Curse that creature whatever it may be! As for the bruise, the body was not recovered for twelve hours, and some flotsam must have struck her during that time. I shan't deal with any more of the vicious brute's insinuations in this diary. I find doing so troubles me and racks my nerves, and these sleepless nights are wearing me down. I keep looking up furtively to see if there's anyone in the room. There comes that devilish cry again; cotton wool does *no* good. I am going out now to kill that bird. I can stand it no more.

Later. No luck! There was some moonlight, but I could see nothing. Yet the cry came both as I was going out and returning. The pool looked very sinister and forbidding. I can understand, in a way, how it might lure a suicide to his doom. It even exerts a certain perverse attraction over me. It works on that *phobia* of mine. It is often, too often, in my thoughts. I am half-drunk again, utterly exhausted, and may sleep for once.

Oct. 8th: The rowboat came this morning and was launched on the lake. I rowed out into the middle with a leaded line, but, oddly enough, I couldn't find bottom. There seems to be some sort of current which swings the line. I don't think any pole would be long enough. It doesn't matter, but I'd like to have shown old Carlman, who I spotted peering at me through the trees, what a superstitious old fool he is. In the afternoon I tried some fishing, and again with no luck at all. There was not a breath of wind and the pool lay black, thick, a lake of oil, it seemed. I gave my float a lot of line and at once it received a tremendous tug which almost jerked the rod from my hand and started the reel screaming. Then the line went slack, and on reeling in I found it had been snapped well above the float. This seemed very queer and I tried once more, with the same startling result. It must be, I suppose, that

the reeds grip it in some way, but I have known nothing like it in a long piscatorial experience. It does seem to be true about the birds. After landing I carefully searched the trees, but didn't see or start a wing. Perhaps these willows are disliked by them.

Yet what is that cry I hear? There it comes again. I have definitely come to the conclusion that the lake is a very strange place, almost, it seems, with laws of its own. Nothing seems quite normal about it. I shall keep away from it as much as I can. I'm sorry I wasted money on that boat, it was impulsive and heedless.

Oct. 10th: Barratt came to me this morning. I could tell by his face something was wrong. I haven't liked the look of him for some time. He had the impudence to say he could no longer keep silent about that *other* matter. It was too much on his conscience. His conscience! He should acquire a brain first. I swore to him, almost desperately, that it had been a pure accident, that Angela must have somehow switched on the gas as she was undressing. He said truculently that that might be so, but the authorities should be told; that they'd left the verdict "open" to see if any more evidence came out, and this should be made known. The ignorance and insolence of the man! I can see he hates me in his heart. We argued for over an hour, and at last I said, "Why this sudden change of mind? I've paid you well. You promised to keep your mouth shut. Why this new resolve?" At first he wouldn't say, but at last he blurted out, "It's that screaming every night. It's the voice of the Missus. And I feel her about, too, and she wants the truth known." I pretended to laugh heartily at this, and told him it was just a bird at the pool. "I've seen it," I said, "and tried to shoot it!" He appeared unconvinced; so I went on, "Come to the lake tonight and I'll show it you. Will *that* satisfy you?" "If you show me the thing that makes that cry, sir, I'll think it over," he replied. "Otherwise I'll have to tell what I know."

"Remember," I said, "if you do that wicked, stupid act, I'll sack you without a character and say you tried to blackmail me, and good jobs aren't so easy to come by for men of your age."

"Never mind about that," he replied with effrontery, "you show me the bird which screams like a drowning woman!" And he went on his way. I'm writing this in great agitation. I've burnt my boats. I shall have to fool him now. I daren't let him tell of that incident. It was a pure accident, and if Angela had let me share her room it would never have happened. It would mean re-opening the whole thing and I cannot face it. I daren't, especially as the doctor who attended Angela was very "sticky" about it at the time, and

his evidence would be dangerous. I can stand no more persecution. I must use my wits tonight.

Later. A terrible thing has happened—Barratt was drowned at the pool! It was a pure accident. We went there together at ten o'clock, as arranged. It was dark except for starlight. As we approached, that cry came, but it was *no nearer*. I was terrified lest Barratt should realise this. As it was, he hesitated. I put my hand on his shoulder and found he was trembling violently. "Don't be a coward!" I whispered. "That is the bird. I'll show it you. Keep quiet and move stealthily." I led the way till we reached the tree barrier and, moving a branch, peered through. Then I whispered again to Barratt, "Come up beside me and try to follow the direction of my arm." He did so and I said, "There, Man, on the shore, can't you see it?" In his eagerness he moved still further forward. The bank was damp, he seemed to slip, and the next moment he was in. There was a splash but no other sound. It was a *pure accident!*

I dashed round to the boat and searched the spot, but could find nothing. And then, heaven be my witness, I saw a wave moving across the face of the water. It swung the boat high and broke on the further shore. And that fearful cry came and its echo screamed in my head. What to do now? It was an accident, but dare I tell the truth after all that has happened? No, I dare not. I must plan otherwise. Luckily Barratt has no relatives alive, no friends, I fancy; no one will enquire after him. I must impersonate him for a week till his body comes up, and then I must dispose of it. I'll weight it heavily and sink it again for ever. Then I'll take the car and drive up to town very late at night, tell the agent *I* found the place too lonely and unsuitable, and tell him to put it on the market. Then I'll go abroad—the Argentine, which I know well, and have all my funds transferred there. I'll burn Barratt's trunk and all his clothes save one suit and his cap. Luckily he was about my height and not too unlike me in build and appearance. I swear to God it was an accident!

This has shattered my nerves. I thought I *saw* Angela just now, standing by the door in her shroud, her eyes hard on me. Just an illusion. I've been drinking too much! that is it. I'm near drunk now. My one longing is to leave this hellish place. There is that cry again! I must stick it out this week, drunk or sober, and then my troubles will be over.

Oct. 11th: All went well. I rose early and dressed in Barratt's suit and cap, which I pulled down over my eyes. I knew him so long I can imitate his walk and even his voice. I took a short stroll in the garden to show myself, and when the milkman came, I waved to him from a distance. There will be

the butcher tomorrow and I shall just say, “Nothing this week,” through the door.

Then I changed into my own clothes and carefully surveyed the pool just in case. I have prepared some weighted ropes and will bury them near the pool tomorrow. I searched it again in the evening just before dark. It is very strange and inexplicable, but it seems to have changed colour. It is now a sinister, sullen carmine in hue, so that it resembles a lake of blood, and it is continually disturbed by a huge ripple which passes across it. I noticed old Carlman kept out of my way. I don’t know why, but it was quite obvious. I mistrust this. I shall have a hard struggle to fight myself through this week. Every time I doze off I wake from hideous dreams. I have to drink to keep sane. Thought I saw Barratt in his pantry when I was getting my supper. I keep fancying I see Angela—keep glancing up. The day seems endless.

Oct. 14th: All goes well. My impersonation of Barratt has worked perfectly. Tradespeople not calling again. Old Carlman still avoids me, that is all that worries me, during the *day*, but, O God, the evening and the night! The body should reappear Sunday, but I am keeping the closest watch. I shall spend all day on the lake on Sunday pretending to fish. How fortunate it is so hemmed in; little chance of being overlooked while I’m doing the job. There’ll be a risk, of course, but, by God, I’m hardened to those by now! The pool is still that horrid hue and is continually disturbed, ever restless and reeking—yes, it stinks! Wants rain to freshen it. I shan’t write in the diary again till it is over. The trembling and sweating of my hand make it almost impossible. Oh, these fearful, endless days! Sometimes I have to force my lips together with my hand lest I start to scream, and if I started, I could never stop. Am as far gone as that! Only four days to wait, only four. Supposing it doesn’t reappear! I dare not think of that. That cry again, that death cry. Angela is standing by the door.

Oct. 19th: What can have happened? When I looked out of my bedroom window at dawn this morning, I could see a number of people moving towards the pool and breaking down the wire fence. I hurried out to them and bade them begone, threatened to prosecute every one of them. They took not the slightest notice of me, completely ignored me, simply looked through me, and continued to pour through the gap. They even shouldered me brutally aside when I tried to dispute their passage. Even old Carlman forced his way past me, his eyes, like theirs, rapt and staring. They are like devotees obsessed and absorbed in some rite and drilled in its enactment. I saw not one speak or smile, and each took up his place on the bank till the pool was entirely surrounded, and then they fixed their eyes on the water. I

know why they are there! I cursed and raved at them, but they had no ears for me.

So I came back to the house and am watching from the window. How did they know! How could they have known! It is deadly still and I could hear any sound they make, but they make no sound. What shall I do? Angela and Barratt are here in the room with me. Speak! Speak! you dead and absolve me! So it has come to this. Water! Water! As was prophesied. Shall I get the police? Shall I take the car and fly? What will they do when. I shall swear to them Barratt fell in. I'll defend myself to the last. I did my best to save him. How much longer to wait? Shall I. . . . Hark! Hark! A great and dreadful shout comes from them! He has risen! I know it! Father! Father!

(On December 16th, 1921 James Greville Leas was hanged for the murder of his servant, George William Barratt, at Reading Gaol.)

A Kink in Space-Time

I had been feeling somewhat better since coming to this so quiet, remote place, far less strained and apprehensive; that shattering sense of fear of the unknown, that formless, hen-eyed terror had almost left me. My head-sounds, too, especially that horrid sudden bell-tolling, had been less frequent and intense. I was beginning to be oh so *tenderly* hopeful of eventual recovery. I had written Kostner about this and he'd replied he was very pleased and that all was going well.

And then, four days ago, I saw *him*, running around the bend of the river from the west. That first sight of him affected me most powerfully. It was almost dusk and he was coming down the small way so that I could not discern his face, but it was his general guise, the "wholeness" of him, which seemed so unexplicably "known" to me. He did not, I think, even glance at me, but hurried on his way. I gained the impression that he was greatly agitated. He disappeared behind the cottage where the river bends to the north. I judged him to be a man of near my own age, my stature, too, and build.

For a moment I had a violent desire to follow him. Why? I cannot tell. He was a stranger to the hamlet; that I was certain. I hadn't seen him here before. Then why was he so—so—familiar to me!

Any worry, any strain on my mind is terribly bad for me; Kostner told me it would be. He warned me most straightly against any excitement or mental stress. That is why he sent me to this quiet place and I have done my best to obey him—but then *this* happened. I was trembling and in great distress. I only just managed to reach the inn and get to my room. The bell began tolling most reasonably, the throbbing overtones beating on my brain. I had slipped far back. I made a great effort to "stop the rot" and regain control of myself. Why had I upset myself like this? How? Just seeing and passing a stranger. A stranger? A stranger to this place, but was he a stranger to me? The effort to think clearly and steadily about him over-taxed me and I began to hear those voices again; the one that kept repeating, "Mad! Mad! Mad! Mad!" And the other that chuckled and suddenly whispered, "Look behind you! Quick! Look behind you!" And I looked behind me, and of course there was nothing. The sweat poured down on me. Who could he be, the one who'd passed me by? Why did he seem familiar? Could I have met him, known him in the past, at school, at Oxford or what was the

connection? My mind began to blur. The same thought came to it over and over again, and I repeated it out loud. "Possibly," I muttered, "I met him at Oxford. Yes, possibly, at Oxford. Possibly at Oxford."

How ludicrous that sounds! Yet that inability to pass a thought-point, that echo-back from the barrier, that crazy reiteration is intolerably disintegrating. One can see, as it were, the thought hurl itself against the screen, split into its sparkling, chromatic elements, form itself again in the brain, hurl itself, split. . . .! One feels one will never be able to think sanely again. One *has* to break that chain. I took a strong—an overdose of the hyoscine and bromide Kostner had given me for just such an emergency, and presently I began to regain a drugged grip on myself. I had some food brought to my room and forced myself to eat it, almost retching at each mouthful. And then I lay down on my bed. I improved steadily; the bell tolled more softly and died away, the voices merged themselves, as it were, into the proper sounds of an autumn night, my heart quieted down, general inhibition spread from area to area, and I slept till dawn.

When I awoke I was feeling far more composed. I was still vibrating, but the shake was dying in the string. I proceeded to argue myself out of an agitation which, I vehemently assured myself, had been unjustified, causeless and cowardly, merely one more symptom of a disorder which demanded moral courage to encounter and only time could cure. I told myself that that sensation of, "I have been here before", can apply to *persons* as to *places*, and is usually, possibly *always*, a baseless mind-construction, a mere freak, a prank of memory. Resolutely I wrote a full account of the experience to Kostner and assured him I had won a most reassuring victory over my trouble. I more than half believed it as I signed my name.

I determined, if possible, to find that fellow, speak to him, identify him, and once for all cleanse my mind of its perilous obsession. I spent the morning extemporising, improvising, mathematically, a phrase of my own which all mathematicians will understand. As in the case of music, I believe, it is often a pregnant mode of slipping into true composition. It was so now. My brain was brilliantly clear, cleansed by the storm, and I found a concise and elegant expression for a junctional relationship which had long eluded me. I was much elated and my spirits soared high. Such swift swings of mood, always at precarious equilibrium, are characteristic of my malady.

I rested after lunch and did not go out till four o'clock. I took a stroll, first through the village, keeping my eyes open for sight of the fellow. Then

I went to the pool by the bridge where the fishermen congregate. He wasn't of their company. I began to be reassured that I should not see him again.

With the dusk came a dense low-level mist and as it thickened, I turned for home. Suddenly *he* passed me, coming from the east this time. He came up from behind me and passed quickly into the murk, so that again I could not see his face, yet somehow that sense of familiarity was sharply intensified. Something on the ground attracted my attention; he had left behind him a trail of soaking river-slime. Suddenly I felt for him great loathing and some fear. This was caused by the *resemblance*, I feel sure. Professor Ingrid told me he was once introduced to a man reputed to be his double, and that he was seized with such a violent distaste for him he had to hurry from his presence. These things lie deep and obscure. I made a fierce effort to control myself; the effort brought back that thunderous bell and a whisper from the voices. After all he was just someone who'd come over for the fishing, I told myself. He must have fallen in, lost his footing in the mist, and been hurrying home to change. Then, why had he been *running* yesterday? But what business was that of mine!

I saw it was useless and dangerous to carry on this inane internecine duel in my mind. I must *meet* him, *speak* to him and so exorcise him. It should be easily done. I would find out his identity from Mr. Rimple, the landlord of the inn, and then I would seek him out and destroy him! Yes, that is what I said, "Destroy him." I was at once invaded by a great horror, for that murderous impulse had welled-up with irresistible urge from my subconscious. For a mad moment I indulged my hate unrestrainedly. I hated his height, his thin, weak body. I despised his folly in falling into the river; no doubt his mind was as feeble as his frame! A skulking figure, leaving a trail of slime! One day such a piteous, lanky dolt would find his brain going—just a little more every day, his memory failing, a horrid dazzle before his eyes, that breathless longing for sleep, that heart that raced and throbbed and hammered in the throat. And then one other day, he would ask himself, "Where is that bell tolling?" And in a flash of shame and fear know it was the Angelus of Madness sounding within him, and those voices—not those of friends for sure!—would start their sadist prattle, the one that told him with ruthless reiteration he was, "Mad! Mad! Mad! Mad!"—the other that slyly mocked and fooled him, "Look behind you! Quick! Look behind you!" And I looked behind me, dupe and craven that I was, and there was that trail of slime passing into the wall of fog.

Directly I reached the inn I took another dose of the drug and lay on my bed till it was doing its work—more slowly this time; one day only a death-

dose will work upon me! Then I went to the landlord's parlour, and after we had had a drink together and exchanged some maddening commonplaces, I said, "Who is the tall stranger, Mr. Rimple?" I know the words came out unnaturally, explosively. "Tall stranger?" he repeated. "Well, I haven't any such. How tall? As tall as you?"

"Yes, about my height, I suppose."

"How old would he be?"

"In his early forties, I should say."

"Where did you see him?"

"On the path by the river."

"Would he be a thin or a stoutish man?"

"Thin. I have passed him twice, yesterday and again this evening."

"A gentleman, as you might say?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I couldn't be sure."

I could see that Rimple was regarding me curiously. Already I regretted having broached the accursed topic.

"Is he dark or fair?" he asked.

"Dark, I think. I think, too, he's a fisherman, for today he left a trail of damp behind him."

"Why should he do that, I wonder? All the fishing is from the bank," said the landlord slowly.

"Possibly he had fallen in," I said, wishing I was back in my room, "he had no rod with him."

"I think if anyone had fallen in and lost his gear, I'd have heard of it," said the landlord, "but, sir, I'll make some inquiries and let you know."

"Oh, don't trouble to do that," I protested, "I was just a little curious, that was all."

"No trouble, sir, *I'm* curious too. The only tall, dark, slim gentleman I've seen around here of late is you, Sir George." And he gave a quick, uneasy laugh.

I left him, feeling deeply humiliated. I could see he was just *humouring* me. I hadn't realised properly till then that he quite recognized my state and that I was to be *humoured* in my delusions and treated like an ailing, stupid

child. His clumsiness had revealed that clearly enough. I felt most a deep depression, a dense, spiritual darkness without the thinnest beam of light. I was *not* improving. This—this—this *incident* proved it. I meet a stranger, someone who does not concern me in the least and at once for no reason I am gripped by this insane obsession. *Insane* is the word. Just a tall, thin, dark fellow!

I wish Kostner was here so that I could tell him about it. Those in my state are terribly lonely. If they are even worse than I am, perhaps their fate is easier. They are segregated with their sorry kin, it's true, but they are not so *isolated*. Of course I have friends but I will not inflict myself upon them, for I know that nothing is more psychically destructive than contact with a tainted mind. Only the hardest or the most callous can endure such connection. The higher, more sensitive, shun the mentally sick, for it is always their recessive horror that they may have to call them *Brother* one day. The sanity of all men, and the sanest know it best, is balanced on a razor's edge, and any weakening will allow the virus of madness to take hold.

I haven't seen his *face*. Twice he has passed me without revealing it. I must see it! But supposing I recognize it to be—! It cannot be helped. I have a passionate longing to see it. I cannot endure this suspense. That was an accursed thing Rimple said, "The only tall, dark, slim gentleman I've seen around here of late is you." He meant something by that! It was an insinuation, I know it! What he really meant was—no, I won't follow up that horrid, dangerous line of thought. But I *must* see his face. When I meet him, I'll go right up to him and compel him to show it me. And now I must try and sleep. It can't go on, this loneliness, this febrile and fatuous state of mind, this generalized torpidity of my brain. It cannot be endured. For I remember when that brain was an almost flawless mechanism, and my temperament cool, unhurried, undeviable from its purposes; when I was supremely confident, sought out and respected. The contrast is intolerable. It must end soon. I wasn't ready, when trouble came.

A bad night with poignant dreams of the old days. When I came down at lunch time Rimple said with a sort of uneasy smirk, "Well, I've made some inquiries, sir, but I can't find any trace of your *tall, thin, dark* gent; no one but *you* seems to have seen him." He said it with some obvious animosity; I think he was wishing I'd leave his place; wondering what I'd be up to next.

"That's all right," I replied, my heart beginning to pound. "No doubt he was just a stranger passing through. And no doubt, after one look at Clayton-on-Stow, very glad to pass through the dreariest backwater in

Christendom. Please think no more about it. I am no longer interested in him, merely envious of him that he has escaped so easily from this derelict midden.”

Rimble saw my unstable temper had taken a leap and cringed. “Very good, Sir George,” he said quickly, “that’s what he was, for sure, just a passer-by.”

During that lovely afternoon, so restful, warm and shining, such profound shadows on the stream, the year dying with such grace, I knew some uncertain peace of mind, merely due, I suppose, to the fact that the effect of the drug had not quite yet worn off. He’d been just a stranger passing by, I thought, my interest in him just a sign of my disease; just a temporary peak on its graph. I should see him no more. But if I did, I should say to him, “You were just a peak on the graph of my disease, dear man. You didn’t realize, did you, how oddly you’d been symbolized?” If I saw his face *then*, there’d be a queer look on it! I drowsed with the day till the mist began thinly lifting the level of the land, and then I rose to go home.

He came running as before, like some crazed beast, straight ahead, unseeing, with a vile animal lope. After he’d passed me I knew a moment’s fearful indecision. The bell beat sonorously many times. The voices began their vile chattering. Then I ran in pursuit of him. He must not go before I had seen his face! As he rounded the bend he was twenty yards ahead of me. When I saw him again he was standing facing the river. Then he flung up his arms and hurled himself in. A man at the cottage door ran down and leaped in after him. He came to the surface and went down again. At last he appeared with a body in his arms. Others went to his aid and he and his burden were dragged to the bank. I thrust my way between them, and then for the first time I saw his face.

“It’s the queer gent from the *Stook and Sickle*,” said one of the men.

“I’m very much obliged to you, Dr. Kostner, for coming to give evidence,” said the Coroner. “Sir George Maskell had a severe nervous breakdown, I understand?”

“Yes. He was a mathematical physicist of the highest order. He worked for the country untiringly during the war and was knighted for his services. Shortly after the end of hostilities he broke down through incessant self-effacing, self-sacrificing over-work.”

“Was he recovering, do you think?”

“There was a chance he might have got better, but I was always pessimistic about him, though, of course, I never allowed him to know it. The lesion he had suffered was profound.”

“You have, I know, read the document that was found in his pocket after his body was recovered.”

“I have.”

“Is there anything you would care to say about it?”

“Nothing whatever.”

“It seems,” said the Coroner with deference and diffidence, “that he actually foresaw, literally and precisely foresaw, his own fate, met his own ghost as it were?”

Kostner made no reply.

“That would seem,” said the Coroner hurriedly, “unexplicable, impossible!”

“Those are words,” said the specialist coldly and aloofly, “I have learnt profoundly to distrust.”

He glanced out of the window of the school-room to where a hearse was waiting, the driver, his antique black toppler glinting rustically in the sun, nodding over his drowsy nags.

Messrs. Turkes and Talbot

When young Bob Fanning was asked by his affluent parent which profession he would like to adopt on coming down from Oxford he replied, "Publishing." It must be confessed that by so doing he revealed neither originality nor commercial acumen; for the undergraduate of culture, refinement, horn-rimmed spectacles and dark blue shirts and collars, almost invariably hankers after that onerous and unremunerative career. He fancies that his working day will be spent in discovering best-selling masterpieces and lunching with such persons as Mr. Wells and Mr. Galsworthy, and in discussing deep literary stuff. The dreary truth is, that that Aunt Sally of the book business, the publisher, spends most of his time yawning over typed garbage, and in trying to make a farthing do the work of a halfpenny. However, this is not a thesis on that sad trade. Young Bob, though he wore horn-rimmed spectacles, had very good eyes, or rather an "eye," behind them, and played four games creditably well. In consequence, he missed his "first" in English Literature, which by no means distressed his sire, who had the healthy-minded merchant's distrust of scholarship. He mistrusted publishing also, but young Bob's tennis "blue" gratified him, and he consented to allow his son to adopt this dubious and little-esteemed mode of money-making. So he set about it. He lunched at the club fairly often with a director of one of the few quite solvent publishing houses in Great Britain, and he asked for his advice.

"I believe Turkes, of Turkes & Talbot, has an opening for a pupil," he replied. "He hasn't a very big business, but he's clever and knows his job inside out, which hardly any of us do. I've pinched five authors from him and they've all sold well. He found 'em, I've made 'em, and that's the way of the world. He'd love to shoot me at any dawn, so don't mention my name. Just write to him and say Bob wants to learn publishing, and has he any opening for a pupil."

"Thanks very much, Joe, I will," replied old Bob, and he did as he was bid.

By return post a reply came, suggesting that Mr. Fanning and his son should come to see Mr. Turkes at his office in Great Lewisham Street, Bloomsbury, between three and five the next day. The two Bobs turned up at three-thirty. Number 43 Great Lewisham Street is a four-storey building built about the beginning of the last century. While they were being

conducted up the stairs by an office boy, Bob thought how dark and thin the house seemed to be. The staircase was narrow and twisty and steep, and it being a sombre October afternoon, the lights were already on. But there were suggestions of parsimony in their number and candlepower. A bit gloomy, thought young Bob. As Mr. Turkes had his room on the top floor, they were panting a bit when they reached it. The office boy knocked, opened the door and they entered. Mr. Turkes rose from his chair at a thickly populated desk and greeted them effusively.

Young Bob's first impression of the publisher was uncertain. He was too young to be much of a judge of character and Mr. Turkes was no easy object for analysis. He was almost tiny and physically meagre, and his dark suit looked its considerable age, though it was trim and well kept. Also he wore what Bob was accustomed to term a "slit" collar, about an inch and a quarter high, vaguely clerical, a neck-wear species almost extinct. He looked about fifty-five and his face was not unprepossessing, though Bob noticed it was slightly asymmetrical, one eye being placed a little higher in the head than the other. Those eyes were black and piercing and, in a way, belied the extreme cordiality of his manner. He wore a short naval beard on a powerful chin. His hair was thick and without a grey one. Bob thought he looked, in general, a bit "weird," and, in fact, his face was sharply inconsistent. He stated he would be delighted to train young Mr. Fanning for a period of nine months at a fee of one hundred and fifty guineas.

"And after that?" asked Bob's practical parent.

"Well," replied the publisher, "if, as I have no doubt will be the case, he seems well fitted for my trade, I shall be glad to have him as my partner, provided, of course, he takes a financial interest in the business."

"What exactly does that mean?" asked Fanning Senior.

"Oh, possibly a few thousand pounds, but these are early days to go into details. Whatever his investment might be, he would receive, of course, a relative share of the profits. I may say my business is prospering; during the last three years my turnover has increased by over sixteen per cent, but quite frankly I could do with more capital. I am taking few risks, but *building up*; by that *I* mean buying the type of book which is what we call the 'bread-winner,' the book of a steady permanent, rather than a spectacular immediate, success. However, before I ask you to put any money into my firm I will put all the facts and figures concerning it frankly and in a detailed way before you. The first thing is to discover if your son shows aptitude and

a certain passion for publishing. Without those two tendencies it would be grossly impolitic for him to go into this branch of the book business.”

He was almost a bit “oily,” thought young Bob; his father summed him up as a very astute man of affairs. His room, though crammed with miscellaneous and mysterious articles, looked highly systematised—those articles gave the general impression of being in their rightly appointed places. In any case, thought Fanning Senior, a hundred and fifty isn’t a fortune, and nine months no fatal spell to waste, even if it were wasted, which there was no particular reason to expect.

So, to make a short interview even shorter, the decision was made that young Bob should begin his apprenticeship on the following Monday week, and that a cheque for one hundred and fifty guineas should be in Mr. Turkes’ hands before that day.

“Well, what d’you think of that bird, Bob?” asked his father as they drove back to Hyde Park Mansions.

“Oh, he seemed all right.”

“I’ll tell you what I think. He’s clever, he wants more capital, and he knows I’m a rich man. And he knows, too, that if I buy you a partnership I’ll put up a decent sum. Therefore, he’ll do his best to make you useful to him. I don’t think I took much of a fancy to him personally, but he impressed me as a very good business man. One day, perhaps, I’ll buy him right out. However, we’ll see.”

So on Monday week at ten o’clock young Bob announced himself at Number 43 and was shown up to Mr. Turkes’ room, there to be launched on his career. There is no need to describe in detail the manifold and various things he was set to study and absorb. He had to read many typescripts, chiefly novels, and he had never realised that it was possible for human beings to write so vilely as most of their authors. And there were agreements to be studied, and papers and types and bindings and all the versatile details which went to the learning of his trade; and he took to it all like a hungry horse to his nosebag.

Mr. Turkes realised very soon that Bob had inherited much, possibly all, of his father’s business *flair* and instinct for figures and that, though he had a respectable literary taste and critical judgment, he had mercifully not enough of either to afflict him with a sense of the futility of it all.

In other words, he was going to be very useful to him.

If Mr. Turkes studied young Bob, the latter, in a diffident way, returned the compliment and came to some tentative conclusions concerning him. He instinctively knew he was a master of his art and had a knack of imparting his knowledge to another. However, he was compelled also to face the fact that Mr. Turkes' nerves were sometimes a bit shaky and that he was inclined to be parsimonious. The latter fact was impressed upon him when the publisher entertained him to lunch at a small temperance hotel round the corner, chiefly patronised by the provincial clergy and profoundly unappetising American ladies. His host observed, with a disarming smile, that he was a very poor lunch eater, so young Bob politely stated that he, too, was never very hungry in the middle of the day, a tactful but utterly inaccurate remark. However, it seemed to please Mr. Turkes, who ordered two portions of rather remotely originated cold beef and ditto of the sort of vegetables which have always been such very poor propaganda for the British kitchen. Then some bread and mousetrap cheese. In consequence, the bill was easily covered by a ten-shilling note, but that didn't prevent Mr. Turkes from scrutinising it with detective care, while he seemed to be searching his memory to check each of the few and inexpensive items. The waitress got tuppence—and looked it. Young Bob knew enough about people to realise that one very dominating side of Mr. Turkes' character had revealed itself during that three-quarters of an hour. That his nerves were not quite all they should be was impressed on him when he went to his room one evening about five o'clock to ask him a question. He forgot to knock and opened the door rather sharply. As he did so he heard, "Who's that? Who's that?" in a rather horribly anxious tone of voice, and on entering the room he saw Mr. Turkes standing at his desk and gripping it with strained knuckles and looking as if his last hour had come, thought Bob, so staring and tense and bothered he seemed. When he saw Bob he sank back in his chair and said, "My dear boy, you quite startled me. I'm afraid I was having forty winks; I find royalty accounts the perfect insomnia cure. But I'd rather you'd always knock."

Bob apologised profusely, but found the incident vaguely odd. He had been rather surprised to find that Mr. Turkes had his dwelling place on that small top floor. Besides his workroom there were a tiny bedroom and bathroom and one that was always kept locked. The charwoman looked after him to the extent of making his bed and cleaning up. Bob thought it a beastly uncomfortable way of living and quite unnecessary, for Mr. Turkes was quite nicely off, and had no one to spend his money on but himself. Bob wouldn't have slept there for many shekels; it was such a sombre, dark, lonely, little top floor, utterly lacking in any kind of cheer, and it couldn't be

very good for a person with nerves. His own were staunch enough, but even he felt a bit fidgety sometimes when he stayed late and all the others had gone. For one thing, he often felt mysteriously oppressed for no reason whatsoever. He hadn't a real care in the world and his health was perfect. Yet something seemed to come and sit on his back, as it were, and while, of course, there was no one else in the room he sometimes involuntarily glanced round to make quite sure, and then he swore at himself. Again, there were those sounds from the room above his, the locked one. He had discovered it to be so one day when Mr. Turkes had gone to Manchester, and he guiltily explored the top floor. Those sounds were oddly like footfalls. In fact, he almost found it impossible to argue away the fact that someone was moving about up there, every now and again. One night when they were very distinct he tiptoed up, wondering if Mr. Turkes, who was still working, had caused them. But he heard him cough in his own room, so it wasn't he.

Then one evening he'd come out from his room to go up to consult the publisher about something when he'd seen the back of someone at the top of the stairs ahead of him, and supposing that person had an appointment with Mr. Turkes, he had gone back to his room. A moment later the manager, Mr. Beales, brought him in some papers. "Just glance at these, would you, sir?" he said. "I'm taking them up to Mr. Turkes."

"He's got someone with him," said Bob.

"No, sir."

"But I saw him go up!"

"Well, no one's come in, sir."

"But I saw him. He was very tall and I thought he limped a little."

The manager was silent for a moment, apparently not quite sure what to say. "Oh, well, sir, if that's so I'll wait till he's disengaged." He spoke rather hurriedly. "But perhaps I'll leave it till tomorrow. It's a bit late for him to tackle this stuff tonight."

"Yes, it is," agreed Bob. "And I think I've done enough for today, so I'll be off. Good night."

Just before leaving he went into the clerks' room on the ground floor to look at the day's orders. As he entered the two clerks had their backs to him and one was vehemently addressing the other, "I *did* see him, I tell you. I could swear to it!"

“Take more water with it,” replied the other, and then, becoming aware of Bob’s presence, they turned round and looked uncomfortable—the vehement one gave the impression of having experienced a shock of some kind. Bob wondered what it was all about, but the incident left no impression on him.

On one occasion when Mr. Turkes was away for the day and there was a general relaxation of the commercial muscle in the office, a jocund damping of productive fire, young Bob took the opportunity of asking Mr. Beales, that most invaluable of managers, concerning the “Talbot” who helped to supply the title of the firm.

“Well, sir,” replied Mr. Beales, “he went abroad suddenly last Guy Fawkes day and never came back again.”

“But why did he do that?”

“Well, sir, I believe it was this way,” replied the manager in those slightly hushed tones in which the best type of Englishman refers to sexual and matrimonial unpleasantness, “he was a married man and he took a fancy to another lady, and just before he went he told Mr. Turkes he was going away for good with her.”

“What was he like?”

“Oh, a genial gentleman, sir, but he had a pretty quick temper. And he didn’t do much work; came late, left early, took two hours for lunch and a lot of holidays. But he was a very clever publisher in spite of that; many of our authors were found by him. He had what they call a ‘flair,’ sir.”

“Did he hit it off with Mr. Turkes?”

“Oh, I think so, sir.”

“And he’s gone for good?”

“So he told Mr. Turkes.”

“It’s a funny thing to do, give up one’s job and go abroad forever. He must have money of his own.”

“I suppose so, sir; he was a pretty quick spender from all accounts.”

“And this was his room?”

“Yes, sir.”

Bob pondered this information and it made him feel sympathetic towards Mr. Turkes, for it must have been a pretty dirty shock suddenly to have to do

the whole of another man's work as well as his own. No wonder he had to swot as he did. No wonder he seemed so nervy. He was a conscientious youth and he determined to fit himself for the job of relieving Mr. Turkes' shoulders as quickly as possible. Yet, though he was already certain he wanted to be a publisher, he frankly confessed to himself that he was not absolutely sure whether the prospect of working with Mr. Turkes for possibly many years was entirely pleasing. He was affable enough, almost too much so for Bob's British horror of effusiveness. He was a very clever and hard-working expert at his job and he seemed honest. But, somehow or other, one couldn't really imagine oneself really getting to know him well, nor, in any way, wanting to, Bob candidly decided.

That same evening those footsteps began again and, the coast being clear, Bob resolved to investigate. He went up to the top landing and listened intently outside the locked door, the keyhole of which, he noticed, was plugged up with some dark substance. He could hear nothing, save for one sharp creaking sound which might have been almost anything, he thought. He went downstairs again and tried to read a heavy work on foreign affairs, but he kept on listening for those footsteps again, and once more that sense of depression came to him, and twice he glanced round quickly and cursed his lack of "guts." He was successfully fighting these feelings down when there came from above, beyond any possibility of doubt or dispute, four quick steps. He looked at his watch, decided it was late enough for him to leave with a clear conscience, and did so.

A few days later he invited his chief, somewhat diffidently, to luncheon at a club to which he had just been elected. The invitation was most gratefully accepted. When they were seated in the dining-room young Bob gave his guest the menu and asked him to choose his own meal. Mr. Turkes examined it with gusto. "As you know, my boy," he said, "I'm not, as a rule, much of a lunch eater, but this morning I feel quite sharp set. Perhaps it's the nip in the air. Let me see, I think a little soup, yes, tomato, would be just the thing and after that. . . ." And after that, to young Bob's carefully concealed surprise he ordered three substantial courses which he gobbled down with celerity and obvious appreciation. Also, he quite eschewed his water-wagon luncheon habits and drank the best part of a bottle of Chablis. It is not quite accurate to say he gobbled down four courses, it should be three and a half, for when he had put away about fifty per cent of a Welsh rarebit, young Bob jokingly referred to the problem of the sounds he heard from the ceiling of his room. Mr. Turkes put down his knife and fork, and the rather permanent smile which had remained on his face during the meal seemed to roll up

from his chin through his mouth, eyes, forehead, and disappear in his hair. At least, that was the fanciful picture which occurred to young Bob.

“My dear boy,” Mr. Turkes said at length, “why didn’t you speak of it before? I hope it hasn’t been a nuisance to you. That room above yours is full of a lot of old rubbish I’ve accumulated, and probably there are rats—or there may be some other cause. Anyhow, I’ll see to it once.” His appetite seemed to be satisfied, for he didn’t eat another mouthful and, after looking at his watch, apologetically said he must get back to the office. “Many thanks for a delicious lunch,” he said. They drove back to Great Lewisham Street together.

Mr. Turkes came down to Bob’s room the next afternoon. He seemed quite pleased with himself and was rubbing his hands together. “It *was* the rats, Fanning,” he said. “There was quite a colony up there, but I’ve taken steps to evict them, and I hope you won’t be bothered again.”

“Thanks very much, sir,” replied young Bob, “but they don’t really bother me; it was just that I wondered what the cause was.” (Some rats! he added to himself incredulously.) This happened on November the first.

Bob caught a slight chill that evening and was away from the office till the afternoon of the fourth. When he reported to Mr. Turkes, he thought the latter looked a bit “on edge.” He was fidgety and staccato. (He works too hard, thought Bob, unless he’s ill.)

Bob didn’t stay very long as he still felt a bit shaky, but collected a couple of typescripts and went home. At dinner he said to his father, “I wish you’d talk to old Turkes, Dad; I’m sure he overdoes it and, apart from everything else, it would be an awful jar for me if he cracked up now.”

“I will have a word with him if you get finally fixed up, but I can’t see that he works harder than thousands of other men, though I grant you he doesn’t look quite right. He’s not a good colour and his eyes have that curious glitter which usually means strain. I shouldn’t be surprised to learn that he was an insomnia case.”

Bob’s illness had put him back with his work and, feeling much recovered the next morning, he resolved to make a long day of it. He worked from nine-thirty till six, with a hurried half-hour for lunch, but still found himself with considerable leeway to make up. Tired though he was, he determined to come back after dinner, a decision which revealed his inherited itch to finish a job and maintain that “clean desk” which leads to fortune, as it eventually and inevitably did in his case. So he took a taxi back

to Great Lewisham Street about nine-fifteen. He had his own latchkey to the street door and let himself in. By Jove! it was dark and grim and silent and damned chilly! The ticking of the clock in the clerks' room sounded almost menacing in its sharp rhythmic insistence. He didn't want to disturb Mr. Turkes, who was possibly in bed; so he tiptoed up the stairs by the light of a match and when he reached his room, opened and closed the door as quietly as possible.

Mr. Beales had left some estimates on his desk for examination. He glanced over them and with his precociously commercial eye queried a binding figure in the margin. Then he set himself to correct the galley proofs of a novel, a very loathsome occupation. He found he couldn't concentrate properly. On re-reading a slip for experiment, he found he had missed three obvious mistakes. That wouldn't do one little bit. But it was so fearfully quiet and lonely, and the muffled bangs from outside, which revealed the fact that the youth of Britain still cherished the memory of ill-inspired Guy, made him start and suddenly glance behind him. And then there were other disturbing sounds. For one thing, there was that sharp, almost ringing, creak which came from somewhere in the room, probably from the filing cabinet. And sure enough, the "rats" were back in the room above. Those sudden heavy footfalls—for why pretend they could be anything else?—never had they been so steady and urgent, as it were.

"Good Lord!" thought young Bob, "am I getting the wind up? Oh rot!" But all the same, a death-cold wind ran down his spine and he wished he were away. Then he thought he heard the door of the room above open, and those steps seemed to move out into the corridor. He got up and opened his door with the utmost quiet caution and listened through the crack. Yes, they were in the corridor, and suddenly he heard the voice of Mr. Turkes, though it was strange and high-pitched, and only just recognisable. "You! You! What do you want?" and then there was a scream, a horrible, doleful sound, a crash, and then—utter silence.

Young Bob stood perfectly still for a moment while he rallied all his "guts" to go out and mount that flight of stairs. The battle won, he flung open the door, and looking extraordinarily like old Bob at moments of crisis, he dashed upstairs. As he reached the top he noticed, in a casual flash, that the door of the locked room was open. Facing him was Mr. Turkes' bedroom, with its door open, too. The light was on. Mr. Turkes was lying in his night-shirt on the floor by the bed and he was rocking gently on his shoulder blades. His hands were at his throat and his tongue—well, young Bob had never realised before what a quite large thing was the human

tongue. And then something went past him and flung him back. There was no actual contact, but some harsh force flung him aside. Young Bob knelt down by Mr. Turkes' side. As he did so, the publisher ceased to rock gently on his shoulder blades and his hands fell from his throat to the floor—and Bob knew that he was looking on a dead man for the first time in his life—and there were ten scarlet patches on the dead man's throat, which faded and passed almost as he saw them.

He dashed down and out into the street and got hold of a weary copper, round whose massive person many squibs had flamed that evening. "Go up to the top floor," exclaimed Bob. "I'll get the doctor in Streatham Street."

When he and the physician reached the top floor, the constable was in the locked room and pulling out from a big wooden coal-bin a broken scarecrow of corruption which once had housed the spirit of Mr. James Talbot who, so it subsequently transpired, had perished prematurely by the agency of a bullet through his brain because he had made a contract with Mr. Turkes, the dominating clauses of which laid down that he and the said Mr. Turkes should contribute 6,000 pounds each for the purpose of founding and conducting a publishing business, and that, in the event of one of them dying or retiring, the other should have the whole twelve thousand pounds under his control. The wording of these clauses was so adroit and calculated that it applied precisely to such a contingency as the disappearance of Mr. Talbot on a Certain Guy Fawkes Day.

These events necessitated two inquests. The demise of Mr. Turkes was found to have been due to natural causes—cardiac degeneration. The jury decided that Mr. Talbot had been wilfully murdered by Mr. Turkes.

Young Bob is now a partner in the firm of Fanning and Beales, which took over the staff, stock, and goodwill of Turkes and Talbot. The firm is prospering, for they are a hard-working, mutually complementary team. The scene of their activities is not, however, 43 Great Lewisham Street, premises which, to the embarrassment of the Duke of Rutford's agent, no one seems at all anxious to occupy.

Some years later Fanning and Beales published a monumental work on psychic phenomena by a famous French savant who came to London to discuss the details with Bob. The latter, on reading through the translation, was rather startled to come upon a case, perfectly established and documented, which bore a very strong resemblance to that one in which he had once played a small part. The professor took a fancy to Bob, to his personality, probity, and thoroughness; and spent no little time with him, a

great honour, as Bob realised. One day he summoned up courage and told of the events of the evening of November the fifth, 192-. The professor listened intently, and said when Bob had finished:

“A case of great interest. I am much obliged to you. A bad experience for you, without doubt.”

“It was rather,” replied Bob. “Now I expect it’s a silly question, but is there any explanation of things like that?”

The professor shrugged his heavy shoulders.

“Explanation? No. The people always want the explanation. If we cannot give them one, they say, ‘Just a Christmas fairy tale. How,’ they say, ‘can one hear the footsteps of the dead? How can one see the dead man walk up the stairs? How can the dead man kill for revenge? Pouf!’ they say, ‘a romance. And a year after to the day! Too exact. You cannot convince me with your bogey-men.’ But, my friend Bobbie, such things are *not* romances, and in many, many cases about which I have inquired, the anniversary has—to use a too vague word—a mystic significance. Some force storing itself up finds then its moment of release, is permitted operation, on the anniversary. ‘Tell us why,’ say the people. ‘The explanation, if you please.’ But I say, ‘*The thing happened*. The explanation, the law may be found out some day, perhaps. But *these things happen*. If you don’t believe so, read my book!’ That, my good friend Bobbie, is what I tell the people who say such things don’t happen. I say, ‘Very well, then, read my book.’” And he laughed his enormous laugh.

“Immortal Bird”

I have known for some time an unrelieved and heavy foreboding that my life is near its end, though I’m uncertain how that end will come, and I’m writing down this record of what I’m convinced will prove to be the final months of my existence on earth because I think I shall feel less *lonely* through this act of communicating. That may sound very odd and “metaphysical”, but it is simply that I have been excessively *isolated* of late; and, though somewhat a solitary by nature, I’m no Beast or God, in Aristotle’s phrase. Then I’m a scientist, and I’ve experienced things which may—I’m not sure—be of interest to some of my more open-minded scientific brethren. So I’ll give them the data, which they must exploit if they can and care to. But I do most urgently ask them to believe that I’m telling the truth to the best of my power, and that I don’t *think* I’m simply and solely a maniac, hag-ridden by subjective, Bedlam hallucinations. I ask them to take as their first assumption that I’m *sane*. If they have eventually to discard it, then *that* will be *that*. Lastly, I’ve been the target for much slander, obloquy, and calumny; and though I don’t think I’ve anything to excuse, I have much to explain.

Now I regard it as only fair and candid—for obvious reasons—to state that this—this—what word best applies? *visitation*, shall we say, is not the first of its kind that I have known. A word about my parents and upbringing. My father was a man of many—too many—competing talents: he might have been a success in half-a-dozen careers. Having large private means, he could afford to choose his favourite medium, architecture; yet he chose wrongly, I feel, for as a designer he was derivative and really no more than highly competent; so that his bubble repute burst, quite rightly, very soon after his death. He was, however, a very fine mathematician and so, too, potentially, was my mother a natural analyser and manipulator of symbols. Therefore, I could hardly help but inherit some gift for that science. In fact, I made pure mathematics my life’s work and I have achieved some considerable international distinction thereby. (Those about to die may salute *themselves* a little, perhaps, without reproach.) Mathematics has been my one, and only, and flawless, love.

We lived for many years in a multi-roomed, hideous, but supremely comfortable mansion near Gloucester Road, and it was there I spent my youth. I was an only child and a very independent one; so by the time I was

eight I used to take many walks on my own. To this day I can re-visualize almost every street in the South Kensington maze. That great Brompton cemetery was at once a lodestone and a place of dread; and my feet, almost it seemed subduing my will, oftentimes bore me there. The northern frontier of the cemetery runs with the Old Brompton Road, then a far less populous traffic artery, and at night quiet and dim-lit. Only some massive iron railings separated the living from the dead.

On one occasion I noticed grave-diggers at work only a yard or two from the palings, and they seemed to be preparing quite a *small* grave. I returned there a few days later on a blustering, sour November evening, when it was already deep dusk and the huge death-place looked most forbidding, and, in a way, menacing—at least to one small boy. I waited awhile to pull up courage, and then, with “Zero at the bone,” tiptoed over to where I knew that little new grave was cut and strained my eyes through the gloom. I had never been so brave, so *frightened*, and so brave, before! Yes, there it was, filled in now and wreath-spread. And there was someone standing beside it. A cemetery warden? No, far too small. And then that someone sprang ever so quietly and quickly to the palings and put its face within an inch of mine. All I can clearly remember about that face is that it had neither lips nor eyelids, and that its hair was matted and soaking wet.

I started to run away in terror, then was forced to stop and be terribly sick; after which I walked home very slowly, for I knew if I hadn’t composed myself (as I should *now* put it) by the time my mother saw me, I should be asked questions which I shouldn’t know how to answer. I managed to pass muster for the time being, but I didn’t escape *all* the consequences. After a series of shocking nightmares, which I can still vividly *re-dream*, and in which I saw again and *smelled* again, that broken young face, I sustained a most precocious nervous breakdown which temporarily deranged my schooling. However no permanent lesion *seemed* to have been inflicted, and a talent like mine cannot be gainsaid. I was somewhat of a prodigy at Eton, and rounded off the first stage of my career by being Senior Wrangler at Cambridge, which demonstrated I was already a competent elementary mathematician.

So much for that first *visitation*. Soon after “coming-down” from the University I had another somewhat distressing experience at Chamonix, the day my great friend, Carston, that most brilliant young physicist, fell to his death on the Grépon. I’ll say no more about it, save that it obviously and strongly supports the view that I am subject to such—*visitations*.

My ambition in life was simplicity itself, to be a mathematician. Born mathematicians cannot conceivably have any other ambition. I was passionately resolved to do original, creative research work into *metamathematics*, that frontier region between logic and pure mathematics, which the devotees of both those disciplines can legitimately claim and fruitfully explore. And, secondly, to train a number of pupils—disciples—who would carry on my work and disseminate my ideas. I wanted those disciples to rule the theoretical roost. Therefore, the post I above all coveted was that of Regius Professor of Pure Mathematics at the Metropolitan University in London; for that academy had long been attracting the most brilliant young men in the country. If I could convert them, in large numbers and send them out to evangelize my gospel, I deemed my life's work, my destiny, would have been accomplished. In *one sense* this goal of my ambitions, after thirty years unremitting, but not unrewarded toil, beloved toil, was almost attained. Needless to say others had an identical ambition, but my published papers and my Fellowship of the Royal Society kept me well to the fore as a candidate. But we were all thwarted and exasperated by the fact that the then Regius Professor, Canopy, refused to resign, though he had attained the age of seventy and was far past his once, admittedly, admirable best.

Nothing is more indecorous than to outstay one's welcome, and this is as true of an aged stick-fast professor of mathematics as of the tactless guest of a yawning hostess. The cause is almost invariably vanity and coarseness of fibre. This was, I think, so in Canopy's case, for he was always rather blandly self-satisfied; and, unfortunately, the statute governing the Chair, having been framed in an era more tolerant of gerontion adhesiveness, had set the age-limit at seventy-five. Canopy, I felt sure, would hang on till the last, if his health permitted, and I was, still am, for that matter, fifty-three. In a sense I was his obvious successor, but, owing, I think, to my private income, there were some influential people who were both jealous of, and hostile to, me. These would be only too pleased to suggest—and not without justification, that at *fifty-eight* I was too old for the post. Mathematicians age young. Let me emphasise that, while Canopy had been in his prime a very distinguished pedagogue, that day was long past, and much of the great theoretical and philosophical advances made in recent times had almost passed him by. Consequently the reputation of the Mathematical Institute had begun to slump.

When Canopy's seventieth birthday came and went with no sign of him doing his duty, I felt so profoundly depressed and frustrated that I knew only action of some kind could relieve the tension. So I wrote to him and asked if

I could come to see him, as I had to spend a couple of days in London. He prided himself on his hospitality and, as I'd hoped, invited me to stay at St. Magnus's Lodge. Somewhere in this narrative I must describe the Lodge, so let it be here. I must explain that the Metropolitan is what I'll call a "dispersed" University. Its administrative offices are centrally housed in a vast building in Central London, but its "Colleges" and "Institutes" are dotted about in the West and North West. The Mathematical Institute had been exceedingly fortunate in securing St. Magnus's Lodge, one of the most beautifully situated old houses in London. It is in the "Inner Ring", as it's called, of Hanover Park. Centuries ago it was a Royal Hunting Lodge, then the London home of a famous nobleman, and, after various vicissitudes, it was bought by the Metropolitan.

In its modern guise it is a great sprawling brick-stucco oddity, externally most endearing with its bits and pieces added at various times: glass-houses, stoeps, garages and for some reason, a lofty tower. It has actually *nine* different doors and French windows opening into the garden. It is full of small, dark flights of stairs leading to short, echoing corridors where its twenty-five bedrooms are situated, and there are eleven reception apartments, some of which do well for lecture rooms. It is easy to lose oneself therein and *internally* it is not so endearing, especially as it is supposed to be liberally "haunted". It stands on a slight eminence overlooking a wide and delectable stretch of the park and its lake. Furthermore, it possesses one of the most exquisite and famous *tiny* gardens in England. This is cut off from the park by dense quick- and lime-hedges, with many trees and thick undergrowth. It is on three different levels and shaped like an hour-glass. Its pride, the rose-garden, is only some one hundred yards long by forty across, but its turf is superb and its flowers to match. Two big porphyry goldfish bowls form the bases to disarmingly naive specimens of academic Victorian sculpture, a Daphnae and a Hylas. This place has for some weeks in the spring and early summer an antique, visionary, finger-to-lip air and aura, as though seen in some past existence, or in one to come.

In its glowing perfection it is surpassingly quiet, coloured, and radiant, though in winter it can look most drab, dejected, and lowering to the spirit. It is always psychically kinetic, whether for joy or sadness. Just when one supposes one has reached its eastern limit, one sees a narrow gap between high lime-hedges and, passing through it, there is a most secluded circular arbour, about ten yards in diameter, with a garden seat at its further end, and just one superb bed of "Peace" roses. It is always dim in there and, perhaps, a shade sinister. It is disliked by the park gardeners, I know, and, also, the

Lodge staff; and there is a legend that at least one of its noble owners died shockingly there many, many years ago. Several times as I've approached it I could have sworn there was someone sitting on the seat, a rather tenuous someone, but each time I've been wrong. In the winter when the lime boughs are but "Ruined Choirs", it looks wild and spectral, but when the leaves grow glossily again, the sharply *furtive* atmosphere it distils, returns. Altogether this little garden, which is visited in its odorous summer prime by many distinguished persons, merits the highest praise. I know I have dwelt on it at what must seem inordinate length, but let that be a tribute to its classic miniature perfection and the heavy forbidding psychic effect it has always had on me. In that way it suggests far more than it states, if I may so put it; for me it always suggests *fear*, *peril*, and *death*!

Canopy received me effusively—and falsely—guessing my errand. Snobbery has a bad name, but I maintain it is no crime to dislike the solecisms of one's social inferiors. I claim it is right and natural to prefer pleasant speech, good manners, "easy" attitudes, and the higher cultural refinements to their teeth-edging opposites. I can trace my pedigree back six hundred years. Canopy's grandfather was a blacksmith, or something of the kind. All the more credit to him, of course, and when the worms have finished with us we shall be indistinguishable, no doubt. Still he *was* rather uncouth, nervously pretentious and crude—like many successful plebeians—and he always got on my nerves—and *stayed* there.

Let me, in self-defence, give a tiny, maddening example of what I mean. He always made a great fuss about the quite undistinguished *wines* he served. "I'm giving you something rather special tonight", he'd gush, but in reality it turned out to be nothing very remarkable, and I'm convinced he possessed so little palate that he couldn't have told the difference between British "Sherry" and Imperial Tokay. And then he "plugged" the names of his aristocratic acquaintances (there weren't many of them) with shaming persistence. All very harmless—such *minuscule* vices—but, well, you know what I mean!

Term had just begun and there was a full gathering of resident undergraduates at dinner. I noted they turned to me with deference, and delicately and tactfully shewed their dissatisfaction with Canopy. So far as possible in the circumstances, I revealed to them a glimpse of what they were missing. After dinner Canopy took me to his study and, though keeping the buttons on our foils, we came to grips. He made it perfectly plain that he had no intention of retiring. ("I'm very happy in this beautiful place with all these splendid lads to teach"). I made it equally plain that I

deemed it his bounden duty to make way for a younger man, a more “modern” man. I emphasised the immense gap between his *schema* and that of the contemporary one, whereupon he had the crass, the unbelievable idiocy to quote Collingwood’s hysterical attack on *Principia Mathematica*. Collingwood was always a feeble logician and when he penned that piffle, a very sick, indeed *dying*, man. Though I realise their deficiencies, the world of the mind has seen few finer explorers than Whitehead and Russell. (How well a shade more humility would have become them!)

Presently, to end the soaring squabble, he took me up to the top of the tower, where I found he’d installed a small refractor, and, typically enough, I discovered he was a bands of Jupiter enthusiast. Now this is surely one of the most meagre and drab of all minor modes of celestial research, though its infatuated devotees are numbered in myriads, I believe. To reach the summit we had to tackle a pretty stiff spiral iron staircase, and I thought the old man made rather heavy weather of it. I remember surmising that it was quite on the cards—the Tarot—that he might have trouble there some day, especially as I’d noticed he’d attacked some vintage port rather enthusiastically after dinner.

I had a brief stare at the spacious firmament, the glaring *monkey eyes* of heaven. I had examined it before, that wearisome and debilitating display. The visible universe at closer range seems everything a man of taste and humour should deride and detest. If some god arrayed it, his twilight should long ago have had its final curtain, his temples long been levelled with the ground.

To suppose those futile welters of hydrogen could affect one’s destiny! “The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars, but in *ourselves*, that we are underlings.” A superbly uncompromising, Voluntarist dictum!

Was I an underling? Was it my fault if that selfish, senile old man leeches to his post and his salary, and cheated many young men of their intellectual birthright? Was it? . . .

“You see, my friend,” he said, as we parted for the night, “I shouldn’t have installed that glass if I’d been meaning to retire.” And he said it with a superior smile, as if to imply, “I know what you want so badly, but it’s not going to happen!” I slept vilely, and my anger and near despair brought me a sequence of brutal nightmares. In the morning I had a mind to make an excuse and leave the place, but for no very good reason I decided to stop on another day. I think it was because I could not bear to accept defeat one moment before it was inflexibly enforced.

Canopy lectured in the morning and I was present at the performance. It was the first of a series on non-Euclidean geometries and devoted to Gauss. It was pretty poor stuff, “off the peg” and superficial, and, to my astonishment, he did not seem to have grasped the profounder difficulties even of the parallel axion problem. He could discuss it in such a way as to fool all but the extremely expert, but he could *not* deceive *me*!

After luncheon we strolled out into the rose-garden. Canopy had a stuffed paper-bag in his hand, and he led the way to that enclosed arbour at the end of it. I noticed with some surprise that, the moment we left the porch, and were clearly visible outside, a number of birds began coming in towards us and, some flying, some hopping or running, keeping pace with us. Once in the arbour, we sat down on the seat, and Canopy opened the bag and cried out, “Come then!” Immediately a pure white blackbird planed down and perched on the arm of the seat by his side. This was an exquisite, gleaming creature, somehow heraldic, Yeatsian, winging in, almost it seemed, from another world. Glancing away from it, I saw the whole small grass circle, concentric with the rose-bed, was almost dense with birds; sparrows, thrushes, blackbirds, a robin, blue tit, indeed most of the common park species. And then Canopy and I began feeding them with the contents of the bag. The behaviour of these creatures did not seem quite natural or characteristic. The sparrows didn’t brawl and scream. Timid birds, such as thrush and dunnock, came unconcernedly to hand,—at least to Canopy’s hand—and all their round, eager eyes seemed fixed unswervingly on his face. They really behaved *unnaturally well*, in too disciplined, almost *moral* a way. They didn’t grab from, or fight amongst, each other; even, as I’ve said, those “rough-neck” sparrows being subdued little ladies and gentlemen. Even a starling politely took his turn! It was an impressive, a freakish performance, and that white blackbird was beyond all telling lovely (at least I thought so then!) There wasn’t the slightest doubt Canopy had a most extraordinary way with these creatures. Of course it is easy to commit the pathetic fallacy with all dumb creatures, and particularly hard to analyse the emotions of such “remote” beings as birds. But it was impossible to resist the conclusion that the members of this primitive throng, as they perched on his knee and fed from his hand, cherished a genuine affection for him and that he loved them in return. It is true he characteristically spoiled it a little by being a shade too effusive and fulsome, but, nonetheless, there was clearly a strange and powerful affinity between him and these feathered enigmas. It is easy to sneer, “Oh, cupboard-love!” All I can say is, it impressed me as something much deeper, more occult, than that. And I say this, though it was most unwelcome to me. I wanted to think *evilly* of him,

I'm ashamed to say, and now I was compelled to admire him and to accept the fact that, in this respect at least, he was greatly my superior. His was a complex character, integrity and charlatanism being subtly combined in him.

It happened again to be a brilliantly clear night, and because, I suppose, he feared I should re-open the subject of his retirement, Canopy proposed, soon after dinner, that we should revisit the glimpses from the tower, making the excuse that Jupiter was well placed for scrutiny. When I agreed, I made, unwittingly, the most crucial and lethal decision of my life. I signed, I'm pretty sure, my death-warrant.

This, so far as I can recall, is precisely what happened. We peered for about an hour and then started to descend. As we were circling the spiral, Canopy in the lead, my right foot slipped, only just a few inches, and, though I at once recovered my balance, it was enough for me to touch Canopy's left leg! Somehow this must have caught him off his guard, for he fell spinning head first to the bottom, and was instantly killed.

I'm going to skim quickly over the happenings between this shocking fatality and my taking up residence at the Lodge as Canopy's successor. There was, of course, an inquest, at which I described exactly what had occurred. The coroner treated me with the utmost consideration and went out of his way to emphasise the danger a man of Canopy's age inevitably ran in negotiating in a poor light such an awkward stairway. In the ordinary way my slight touch would have done no harm. The verdict was, of course, death by misadventure.

Human nature being the spotted thing it is, it was natural, I suppose, that certain people should treat me very differently from that coroner, and it indisputably was, I admit, an enormously unlucky coincidence that I should be, however innocently, a contributing agent to Canopy's death and at the same time the chief benefactor from it. Fortunately the affair attracted little popular attention; pure mathematicians being by nature thin providers of publicity material and notoriously ill-equipped with sex-appeal. So I received only a few anonymous letters describing me as a vicious assassin, and those of no literary merit whatsoever. Very luckily—at least I thought it was lucky at the time—I had no rival, with comparable claims, to the Chair, and so my enemies could not mobilise against me to much purpose. Suffice it to say that on December 21st I was appointed Regius Professor, and I went into residence at the Lodge on February 1st. From then, from that day, my doom, I have no doubt, was inexorably sealed.

For several days there had prevailed a false spring with a bland southwesterly set and pale cloudless skies; and many birds began piping their melodious menaces. It was premature indeed, for all this deceptive felicity was literally blown sky-high when the wind swung with a roar to the northeast and increased to a gale. I spent the morning settling-in, and after lunch decided to take a stroll in the rose-garden, *my* rose-garden now. But the elements decided otherwise. As I left the porch I glanced casually to the north across the wide, bare stretch of emerald park-land, and *there* was a tremendous wall of ebony cloud racing wickedly in, so low it seemed to lash the grass, and that polar wind shrieked up to hurricane force. A moment later a thick flurry of snow sent me in under the shelter of the porch, whence I stared out, awed by the massive assault. Behind me I could hear the old house chanting like a huge Aeolian Harp from the onslaught. Presently the squall ran by, leaving the ground thinly surfaced. I was about to go back into the house when my eye was caught by the movement of a number of birds. Some were circling around, others had come down on to the snow and were huddled in a ring, which was advancing slowly towards me. There was a flash of white—that albino blackbird perched on a rose tree and seemingly watching the moving ring. I was greatly puzzled by this spectacle. Those birds seemed to be staring intently towards the centre of the circle they had formed. As they neared the verge, where the grass gave way to the gravel of the drive, I suddenly recalled when I had witnessed something very like this before: so I went to my study and for some vague reason locked the door. I was, I admit, considerably perturbed. Not frightened, no, but rather baffled and troubled. Presently I went to the window and looked out. The birds had disappeared. I couldn't settle down; so I sought the garden again. I found, of course, a diffused succession of circular markings in the snow. Inside them were some other marks, such odd marks that never to this day have I been able to explain them. They were the first of a series of inexplicable happenings.

I had four days almost alone in the house before term began, and, certainly at night, the Lodge, considering its situation within a mile of two of the busiest streets in the world, was amazingly secluded. Only from the south came the muted murmurous rumble of incessant passing traffic and there was little of that after midnight. There were other sporadic sounds: an occasional high exotic cry from some creature within the Zoological Gardens away to the north—at least I suppose that was their origin. Then, again, in my huge bedroom on the second floor, starlings, so it seemed, roosted in the wide, square chimney, and there was much rustling and vague, irritating noise, and other unlocatable, indefinable sounds, characteristic, I

take it, of all old houses. It was not a *sweet-tempered*, if I may so phrase it, an *easy* dwelling place, and I could well understand its ghostly reputation. I never enjoyed a really good night's sleep there: others said they were plagued in the same way.

The afternoon of the day before term began was again very bland and spring-like; so after luncheon I put a couple of slices of bread in my pocket and strolled out to the arbour. A young park-gardener was working on a rose-bed, and as I approached he made a quick, stealthy movement, which *might* have been the sign of the Cross. This struck me as extremely strange; so I went up to him and watchingly passed the time of day. He was as Irish as he looked, and he seemed a gauche, unfriendly lout. He made no response, but looked, I fancy, *afraid*. I was well muffled up and risked sitting down on the seat. Then I broke up a slice of bread and threw down the pieces. Nothing happened for a minute or so, and then I became aware that a number of birds had come and perched on the topmost lime branches. They were murmuring together, and, as it were, *whispering* to each other in an urgent, incessant sort of way. Not one, to my considerable surprise, came down to feed. Of a sudden, they all flew off in the direction of the house. I began to feel very ill-at-ease, for some inexplicable reason. I made an effort to conquer this sensation. I remember that at this period I was writing a light paper for the philosophical periodical *Mind on Personality and the Specious Present*, and I tried to concentrate on that. Suddenly the Irish youth threw down his fork, ran to the quick hedge, and disappeared. I rose slowly to my feet, seeking the cause of this queer behaviour. As I've said, the garden was on three levels, so that I could look slightly downwards to the drive. I was disconcerted to observe the birds had formed a circle on the lowest level and were steadily moving up towards me. I saw, too, the flash of a snow-white wing. I cannot write excitingly and "dramatically", very few scientists can. Therefore I am unable to convey my feelings as I watched that—I nearly wrote "cortege"—and then I nearly wrote "ceremony" (a fact which would, I think, have interested my old and dear friend, Freud), that *company* of birds approaching; knowing that in about four minutes they would have reached me. If I cannot write vividly I can at least do so candidly, and thus I will confess, though with shame, that I had the strongest possible temptation to dive through the hedge after that Irish boy. How ludicrous! How disgraceful! Ludicrous to those who have never known the fearful grip of the fangs of panic! I conquered that beastly frailty, but I behaved cravenly nonetheless: for I stayed there, semi-paralysed with fear and sweating filthily; my eyes strained on that nearing feathered ring, like a rabbit in a stoat's stare. As that ring came very near the visual scene wavered before my eyes, wavered and

half-steadied, and there, four yards to my right, the circle halted. That strange garden was always an unnaturally quiet place and now, just for those moments, there was not the slightest, faintest stir of sound. The scene was *crystallized*. Those birds were staring inwards to the centre of that circle with round, expectant eyes. I stared too. What was there? Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! I could see *nothing*! What could there be to see! I could see nothing! Could *they* see something? And then suddenly there was a sharp pulse of air and a stench, an indescribably foul stench, which brought the vomit to my mouth. Flashes streaked before my eyes—and I found myself gasping in the hall of the Lodge.

“Anything I can do for you, sir?” said the insinuating voice of the butler, a man named Hagen, whom I learnt cordially to mistrust and dislike. He was a protégé of Canopy’s and had no use for me—I went to my study to recover, for I had experienced a considerable shock, and, curiously enough, the memory of that incident in the cemetery surged back with extreme clarity. From then on I was bothered at times by echoes of that furtive, insistent twittering on the lime boughs, re-hearing it over and over again as recurs and resonates some foolish tune to the exasperated inner ear. I know *now* that my mounting, inexorable ordeal had brutally begun.

Next day, my three lecturers and the score of resident undergraduates arrived. I was very curious and somewhat apprehensive as to the attitude those men would adopt towards me. I found the youngsters reasonably amicable, highly respectful, and very keen to receive up-to-date tuition. My lecturers were fully behind me academically, but shewed considerable reserve in their personal relationship. (In one case it was worse than that, I sensed and eventually experienced, actual hostility, veiled but palpable.) The undergraduates were all picked men, far above the average in intelligence, industry, and natural mathematical ability. One, indeed—I will refer to him as “X”—was of superlative quality, and if he lives (so often these prodigies die young), is clearly destined for the highest honours. Not merely did he command that intense visualising clarity of mind which characterises all genius, not only did he see at once and piercingly into the heart of a problem, but he was unfailingly *creative* and *original*. So, as I had done in my twenties, he ever saw old concepts in new ways, and his analytical powers were adept and tireless. He had still much to learn, but he had already far more to teach.

In calling these most rare and marvellous creatures “prodigies” and “precocious”, there is liable to be misconception. *Time* is simply *change*, as mathematical philosophers are more and more coming to realize; and these

tremendous children have encompassed in their few years a fantastic and inordinate amount of change. (If they die at thirty, they are “old men”.) “X”, for example, had completely mastered the calculus, so he told me, by his tenth birthday, and Tensor Calculus by sixteen. Well, time had gone incredibly fast for him!

Now that digression was, in a way, the child of cowardice, and fear of the future, for there is something else to be said of “X”, I *am afraid of him*. He has a most penetrating glance or *stare*, and when first I encountered it I felt as though he were seeing straight into my mind and making my secrets his own. That sounds absurd and melodramatic, but I think most mature and *aware* men have encountered during their lives at least one person who similarly daunted and, potentially, dominated them. I could see, too, he was gifted and endowed with great ruthlessness and a fierce, uncompromising spirit, those most valuable of all the prizes in Pandora’s Raffle. It is shameful to confess, but I am actually afraid of this boy who might almost be my grandson. I shall continue this record by extracts from my diary, at least for a time.

Feb. 12th. Bitterly cold. Some snow lying. Ramsden (one of my lecturers) said a queer thing at breakfast. “Curious the number of birds flying around the house at night. I woke up at three, as my blind was flapping. I glanced out of the window and there seemed to be a whole flock circling round the roof.”

“Probably migrants,” suggested somebody.

“I suppose so,” replied Ramsden doubtfully. And then, after what seemed an uneasy silence, another topic was discussed.

Feb. 13th. I gave my first lecture this morning to thirty advanced students. Subject? *Theory of Equations*. I took the big lecture-room on the ground floor, a fine, though rather dark and gloomy room, formerly the nobleman’s library, I understand. The part of the garden it looks out upon is a gently sloping lawn, reclaimed originally from the park, of course, from which it is cut off by a low brick wall. Directly opposite the French windows are two Japanese cherry trees. I had been talking for about ten minutes when the white blackbird came and perched on a branch of one of these trees and stared in at us.

A little later a number of other birds followed it and formed *that ring* on the ground beside the tree. Then the white blackbird transferred its gaze, so it seemed, to the interior of that ring. All the birds remained absolutely quiet and motionless. I had foolishly paused in my discourse to observe this, and the class naturally noticed it and glanced out of the window too: so for a time I lost their attention. That freakish creature was just a pleasing rarity to them, that ring, merely a rather puzzling oddity, though some of them, I daresay, might have idly wondered if there were something the bright eyes of those birds could observe within the circle. I don't know. But these interrogates worried me, because the spectacle which aroused them was already only too familiar, I must confess.

A man who had once been seized with microphone panic told me of the agonizing effort it cost him to regain control and coherence. It was so with me. A shocking spasm of nerves pulsed through me from brow to loins. Then I managed to rally and carry on. Fortunately, I have always commanded to a considerable extent the poker-face; that is to say I can prevent my emotional state from being betrayed by my facial expression. I did so now, but the evil question remains: What stimulus is moving, motivating these birds against me?

Feb. 20th. I have decided to shoot the white blackbird; it is imperilling my sanity. Each morning it disturbs my lectures. It follows me whenever I go out. I have seen it at night. I dream of it incessantly. I am convinced that it is the ringleader, as it were, of these birds. I have always one eye open for it, and an obsession like that wreaks havoc on a temperament like mine. So it must be done. *I must stop those birds forming that circle, and I'm certain it is this accursed freak which instigates them!* This afternoon I went to a shop in a Bloomsbury bye-street and bought a powerful air-pistol. No one can have seen me, and I shall throw it into the lake when I have done with it.

I was a good revolver shot in my youth, and tonight, before writing this, I did some aiming practice. Tomorrow morning I'll rid myself of that devilish creature.

Feb. 21st. A ghastly, hellish day. I crept out of the house at dawn and went to the arbour. I knew it would follow me there. It always knows my movements. It was so. It perched on a rowan tree, which overlooked the lime-hedge, and peered down at me. I took careful aim—and heard the slug strike home. I saw the bird make some convulsive wing-beats and then it

seemed to fall. At once a horde of birds came sweeping into my face, one and all were screaming frenziedly! I put my hands over my head and ran for the house. As I did so, I felt them tearing at my hair and stabbing my head with their beaks. I reached my room panting and sweating, and suddenly realised the enormity of what I had done. That pure, rare, innocent creature must now be a soiled little heap of bloody feathers! I'd pierced it, agonized it, slain it! *The Ancient Mariner* is much disparaged today, but let me say this: I have not read it for, perhaps, thirty years; yet now the passage telling of the narrator's horror after murdering the albatross recurred to me with fearful pungency and significance. His pangs are mine. Coleridge could never have experienced anything remotely resembling the event, yet such is the power of imaginative genius, and the high and true and tragic works it breeds, that they are instantly recognized as flawlessly true by those who have suffered, in dire actuality, their fictional agonies. And something else came ranging ruthlessly through my brain, some lines from an old nursery rhyme—"And the birds of the air were a-sighing and a-sobbing, when they heard of the death of poor cock robin." I knew the most bitter self-reproach. I have always been a severe self-critic. I have repeatedly warned myself against a course of conduct I was proposing to follow and knew was indecorous, or injudicious, or wrong. Yet I have almost always disregarded these admonitions; a curious dualism which is probably much commoner than one supposes. Men keep a veil over such humiliating frailties. And yet I possess the tiny virtue always to feel intense disgust at my failure. That still further weakens and demoralises me and, indeed, I often feel a man is hampered and hamstrung far more by his virtues than his vices. (Women, luckily for themselves, being ethically anarchic, possess neither.)

I was due to lecture this morning, but almost cried off, pleading indisposition. Instead, disastrously, I attempted the ordeal. Almost as soon as I began speaking, the white blackbird came to its usual perch and on its snow-white breast was a crimson stain. It stared at me, seemingly unconcerned. I stopped in the middle of a sentence, while the class gazed at me nervously. Actually, I was in a state of fearful uncertainty. Was that a phantom that I saw before me?

Suddenly "X" said in a loud laughing way, "Where's the white blackbird this morning, sir—*C'est fait de lui, peut-etre*. You were discussing, sir, the discriminant of the cubic." What he said temporarily rallied, saved me. As ever he saw into my very brain. I pretended to chide him in a forcible-feeble way, while he continued to regard me in that extraordinarily alert, penetrating, and yet *sympathetic*, way. Sweat burst out from every pore in my body, as though I'd been sprayed under a shower. But I was saved, and

somehow I got through the lecture, rigidly keeping my eyes on my notes and away from the window. The moment I'd finished I went to my study and locked the door.

Now I deem it indisputably true that the most significant and dreadful moment in a man's life is when he realises, starkly and beyond hope or solace, that he must shortly die and pass into oblivion, all his *selfness* doomed to the worm or to the fire. Some learn the fatal tidings, glimpse the umbria of their eternal eclipse, on a fine spring morning in some dingy consulting-room. And death is never the same again. Or there is a sudden flash of pain in an old man's heart, and I doubt not that millions of young men have known their little tale was told as they awoke to nightmare on zero day. Well, I knew it that afternoon, and my summons was brought me by a dead white bird. That sounds, and I fully realise it, like the burble from a deranged mind; and it may be so—madmen, presumably, cannot analyse and dilate upon their own lunacies. Their illusions are wild facts to themselves, and it may be so with me. As for death, "Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose, but *old* men think it is", as Housman might have written just as truly. I don't want to die. I have what I deem to be some fairly important work to do. I lack the bedlam solace of a belief in immortality. In any case, I think, haunted men must die; their death has been decreed.

It is natural that those of a scientific cast of intellect should experience a peculiarly vivid horror of, and revulsion from, all modes of the supernatural. Their working life is spent in the defense of the rational, and they are living symbols of revolt against the irrational and the *unexplained exception to the rule*. If, for example, the whole calculus were at the mercy of some intruding, phenomenal freak, then the mathematician's rôle would become risible, merely ornamental, and comprehensively suspect.

Now I can fully appreciate that if any well-witted person reads this some day, he will be utterly baffled and bewildered, and, no doubt, greatly irritated. What *is* he talking about? he'll wonder. What *began* all this? The man seems sane most of the time; What is all this rigmarole *about*? That is just what I ask myself. Now this must be believed; what ever I did was done from unselfish motives. What *did* I do? Well, in some sense I was the cause of Canopy's death. But in *what* sense? Now this must be believed—I am trying so hard to tell the precise truth. Certainly, if I had not touched him, he would, presumably have been alive to this day, though one cannot be sure; for if I hadn't touched him, he wouldn't have fallen. How did I come to touch him? Now it is a very queer and *maddening* thing that I can lead my memory back so far and no further. I can lead it back to the moment when

we were both launched on the descent of the stairway. I can re-visualise Canopy clambering clumsily down just ahead of me, and then. . . no, I *cannot* recall any more, save a certain orgasm of nerves—no, I’m not even *sure* of *that*. Sly, malicious persons would suggest it is Freud’s “censor” at work, *but there’s no proof of that*. What moves these birds to persecute me? What is inside that circle they always form? I have a horrid feeling that I *know*. In any case I am compelled to recognise that, *at the best*, I have a new and intolerable assailant, hallucination, that “dagger of the mind”, to contend with; and I think every perceptive person must agree that there is no more psychically demoralising ordeal than to find one’s “sense-data”, to use a most controversial term, the things one sees and hears and feels and smells, accursedly *peculiar to oneself*. There is a white blackbird with a bloody breast on a cherry bough to *me*. To everyone else *in the world* that *bough* is *untenanted*. One cannot live long, I fancy, on those terms, half sane, half crazy. How far will this horror spread? That is the dread question I keep asking myself.

Feb. 22nd. It seemed some sound woke me in the early hours of the morning. It was as if something had been spoken in the room and I’d just caught its last lingering overtones. I noticed quick alternations of light and shade on my window-blind, and so I went and peered out into the night, which was faintly moonlit. The air, I saw, was full of silent wings, wings of birds big and small, circling past my window. They came swooping down, then planed up and circled, and were back again. Once more their ordered motions suggested a *ceremony*, and that I was, in some mode, the *raison d’être* of it. Again at that moment I felt the pressure of my approaching doom. These feathered fiends will, I know, pursue me with all the endless venom of all such mindless beings. Just as vultures haunt the terror-huge eyes of the dying beast, as flies crowd running sores, as termites kill and clean to the bone all they encounter; so these implacable bundles of verminous fluff have but one intent, to destroy me, and they have a white ghost to lead them! Lead them to what? To *avenge Canopy*. Mad! Mad! Mad! Mad! Yet there it is! (I’ll keep my windows tight locked at night. But will that help? Will they hold out that gleaming thing painted primly on the whirling canvas of the air!)

This afternoon I made an experiment. I went down to the delicate place where the lake dies away in reeds and bullrushes, which are sluiced and resonated by tiny brisk waves when a sou-wester gets behind them. There’s an island near lake-end, housing many waterfowl. I took a bag of bread with

me, and those duck, coot, moorhen and Chinese geese came eagerly and tamely to feed thereon. I was much pleased and relieved to find them so friendly and trustful. Man is the foul foe of all nature and it is charming to help in establishing such brief armistices. It amused me to watch their naive mating and fighting, almost to the death, for the spring sap was beginning to course fiercely through their veins; and stealing shamelessly from one another, the weaker flung remorselessly to the wall; in fact revealing all those stark egoisms, those “tooth-and-claw” decisions, for which man finds, in his own hideous and depraved case, such flattering unction and suave pulpit hypocrisies.

Suddenly, with one accord, every bird dashed away in frantic dispersal; running, flying, swimming; and screaming out their specific cries of alarm. At first I supposed a rat had come amongst them, but then my eye was caught by a flicker of white in a hornbeam on the island; so I knew what was the matter. In a few seconds I was left absolutely alone, save for that dread glacial gleam, bull’s-eyed with crimson. I hurried home, but that malignant thing was there to greet me, and that dappled ring kept pace with me, as I ran hard for the front door. *He* and they are intent on my destruction!

As I entered the ante-room where we assembled before dinner, I heard that lecturer who hates me, saying, “Well, I prefer it *locked*, anyway!”

“Prefer *what* locked?” I asked.

He looked at me with furtive, calculating animosity for a moment, and then replied slowly, “I was referring to the door leading to the tower staircase, which is very near my room.”

“Well, what about it?”

“Oh, nothing, sir. It is just that out of curiosity, I wanted to see where Professor Canopy—*died*; so I started to climb the spiral. And then, well, I changed my mind.”

“Why?”

“My imagination played, I suppose, sir, a trick on me.”

“Imaginations don’t play tricks, surely? One’s *eyes* may. Was that it?”

He regarded me with veiled insolence—he had been a favourite pupil of Canopy’s. “Well, sir, if you really want to know, I thought I saw something come hurtling down that staircase. But it was almost dark and over in a flash.”

There was a moment's sparking silence and I could feel "X's" eyes on me all the time.

Then "X" said, his gaze hard on that man who hated me, "Can you guarantee, sir, that if I visit that stairway at night, I can see that damned old fool meeting a belated well-merited end?"

And dinner was announced.

That was *good* of "X", coming to my rescue like that! I wonder if that malicious fellow invented that story? I wouldn't put it past him. I feel I *must* make sure. (I shall now cease quoting from my diary—I can write in it no more—and return to narrative form.)

The next morning "X" came to my study after breakfast. He was obviously nervous, but resolute. "Sir," he said, "you're not well, are you? I know it's great impertinence on my part to say this, but I'm sure you should have a rest."

"Rather soon for that, isn't it?" I asked sardonically.

"I don't know how to answer that", he replied, "but I don't think you've quite recovered yet from the *shock*. You don't realise it yourself, sir, but I'm sure that is so. I hope I haven't offended you, sir; I have the greatest possible admiration for you, and I've been so terribly sorry to see you like this."

"And that admiration is fully reciprocated my dear boy," I said. "Take care of yourself; you have a great future before you if you do. As for myself, I'll ponder your kind words." Actually, tears came to my eyes at that moment. The paternal instinct stirs, I suppose, once or twice a lifetime in the heart of the most dedicated celibate.

A body hurtling down! If there is haunting in that tower, I want to know—I must know—what form it takes. Or whether that sly, malignant fellow concocted it to torture me. I must make sure. I mentioned at dinner, as casually as I could manage, that I proposed to revisit the tower that evening, do a little ghost-hunting. There was the usual strained silence and tiny, thunderous clatter of cutlery. These men were beginning to fear and mistrust me, I knew it. Soon I shall be ostracised, relegated, complained of, compelled to resign. That's why "X" came to *warn* me!

At ten o'clock I betook myself to that secluded door which opened upon the spiral stairway. As I shut it again and switched on the dim, shadow-procreant light, a memory pierced back and in, and I had to rally my spirit. I

hadn't set foot there since *that* night, though sometimes, from the outside, had stared upon the door. I found the telescope room thick with dust, so I wrote my name in it repeatedly, "Brandley" "Brandley," "Brandley", as a hint to a negligent, and, perhaps, timorous staff. It was quiet enough up there. For a little while I stared out to the south, to where the aurora glare of central London was dawning the sky. Then I went to the glass and tried its mechanism, which was stiff, but functioned. I put my eyes to it and swung it to where I knew Sirius *should* have glared brilliantly back.

At first all I got was an amorphous white blur, which perplexed me greatly—I supposed the lens had "gone". But a little later I found this was not so, for the blur thinned and shaped, and there was my winged enemy, its hazel eyes staring aloofly into mine, the stain on its breast oozing scarlet drops. There was a furious, hideous sparking and—I was gazing into the rose-garden, and those birds were forming a circle, a circle round a figure, and the face of that figure came up—and up—and up, closer—and closer—and closer, and I saw it was the rotting face of Canopy! And the stench brought the vomit to my throat. And then the birds flew up at me, the room was hideous with their screams, their wings were beating on my eyes. I ran for the stairway, crashing my head against the doorway as I did so. As I started to go down I could see a shadowy back descending slowly before me. A fearful flash clanged through my brain, and I hurled myself down, flung open the door at the bottom—and there was that lecturer, watching me through his near-closed bedroom door. *Consummatum est!*, for I know that Canopy and he will have their revenge. I know that certain confidential reports will be sent in about me, saying that I am mad!, mad!, mad! Am I? Has my brain gone?

I went to my study and made certain tests. I first ran through in my head Gödel's proof that no formal system can exhibit its own consistency. This is rather long and by no means elementary. I visualised it with extreme clarity and ease, and even found, I thought, a trace of redundancy in one sequence. Then I did the same with a simple, but long and inelegant Keynes' demonstration of the falsity of a Boole theorem. I improved it, and so shewed myself to be in quite good mental form. Not so *very* many people in the world could have done what I had just done. I was still sane in some ways; in *some!*.

I have come to a desperate resolve. The four days since I visited the tower have been intolerable. I can detect that all my staff and pupils believe I am mad, and are acutely ill-at-ease and longing to be rid of me. This can't go on. Any moment I expect to be suspended. Those devilish birds pursue

me night and day. Last night I drank far too much whisky for my good—just to dull my senses—and went to sleep, soddenly, at once.

I awoke some time later—to see the white blackbird perched on the rail at the end of my bed, the thin beam of the moon countering and half obscuring its radiance. It was preening its feathers and sliding its beak along its claws. Its crimson stain showed darkly—and *wetly*. I knew it to be just a “false creation”, a regurgitation, as it were, from my memory, though an odiously realistic one,—and then that creature raised its head and stared at me penetratingly. Then, to my horror, it flew off into the darkness of the great room. I could hear its wing-beats and was overwhelmed by fear, *for I could hear its wing-beats*—and it was dead! Where would it perch next?—on my pillow! Shameless with terror, I pulled the bedclothes over my head. And then I felt something land lightly on the blanket above my face.

In a kind of paroxysm, a fearful crisis of fear, I hurled the bedclothes from me and stared out. There was nothing to be seen. I switched on the light. *There was nothing to be seen*; and, I suppose, there never had been. I *suppose*, but I cannot be sure, cannot be sure. So I have come to that resolve; *I will shoot every bird in the garden*. I will blast and slay them. It is my only chance! Tomorrow I’ll go again to that gunsmith and buy a shot gun, and I’ll rid the place of every one of my tormentors At dawn on Thursday they shall die! It is my only chance!

A Note

I am the person referred to as “X” in Professor Brandley’s narrative. There is not the remotest necessity to conceal my identity and name, which is Neil Tentley, and I am now Professor of Pure Mathematics at Clifton University. As the Professor states, he had a strong presentiment of his death, and he left a letter on his desk addressed to me in which he stated he wished me to undertake the task of arranging what he had written for publication, and he left ample funds for a large and sumptuous edition. In this I think he was extremely unwise, but it was my duty to carry out his wishes. He made the stipulation, however, that it should not be published while his mother was alive. She died six months ago, five years after her son, so, very reluctantly, I now and here carry out his instructions.

Firstly, I will say something about his death, which occurred shortly after dawn on March first, six years ago. There was an inquest upon it, and here is a passage from the proceedings in which I describe the circumstances of his passing.

The Coroner (to me): You found the body in the garden, I understand?

N.T. Yes, sir, I did.

Coroner: Inform the jury and myself how that came about.

N.T.: I usually wake early, and last Thursday I did so at dawn; and was at once startled by a succession of gun-shots. They were loud and quite close at hand. I went to my window and looked out over the rose-garden. The light was still dim, and though I could discern a figure running about near the farther end of the garden, I could not be sure who it was. Then there were two more shots and a very piercing and prolonged scream. I put on a dressing-gown and ran down and out into the garden. As I drew near the arbour at the end of the garden I passed a number of dead and injured birds. On reaching the arbour I found the Professor's body. His gun was lying some distance away. He was lying on his back, and at first I could not make out what had happened to his face. Then I saw it was densely covered, blanketed, by birds, which were beating down at it.

They flew away as I drew near, disclosing that his face was completely destroyed.

"Birds!" echoed the Coroner, who seemed, excusably enough, several fathoms out of his depth, "Birds!" And there was a short, pregnant silence in the court, only broken by a sob—or a giggle. The Coroner then asked a number of silly questions about the Professor's health. I replied that to me it seemed as if recently he had been shewing signs of the tremendous strain of thirty years' unremitting, most onerous, creative work. The Coroner then, in the manner of his kind, became impudent, asking, foxily and eagerly, if the Professor had been a sober man—or perhaps—?

Actually, I've no explanation of this atrocious tragedy, and shall attempt no futile, foolish guesses.

I earlier used the adverb "reluctantly" when referring to the fact that I arranged the publication of this record. I used it, because it reveals the Professor in the most grossly unfair, unflattering, and untypical light. No fragment of autobiography ever did its author less justice. But his superb brain was at last failing him. He was the greatest mathematician of his era, and the most modest, charming, and original, absolutely dedicated to that superb art-science he so resplendently adorned. When he died, something died in me, too, so I have decided to devote my life to propagating his ideas.

As to that white blackbird, I'm sure he was in error in thinking he'd killed it, because, as I approached his body that morning, I saw a flash of white fly up into a tree in the park just outside the alcove, and then came the

sound of a blackbird singing passionately. All the same one cannot be *quite* sure about that.

Recently, I was dining with the present Regius Professor at the Lodge and he happened to mention that the garden was rather spoilt for him because it seemed to be entirely shunned by birds.

The Caretaker

Mr. John Smith had been for a very long walk over the North Downs. A “hike”? You would not have made that suggestion *twice* to Mr. Smith. He had done sixteen miles on a very hot day, he was middle-aged, in none too good condition, and he was very tired. So he plumped himself down on a seat at the northern edge of Merrow Dale Heath with almost a groan of relief. There was three-quarters of an hour before his train home was due, the station was only a few hundred yards away and this seemed an admirable spot in which to pass the interval.

He certainly had it to himself. He’d been across the heath twice before on a Sunday evening, and each time it had been well thronged with young and old from the village nearby. But now it seemed utterly deserted, not an elder paced, not a child played. It was strangely quiet; even the birds seemed to have gone elsewhere. Not a breeze stirred, all was absolutely motionless and still. The great red sun had just flung up a deep-green flash and sunk below the horizon. Dusk was slowly falling.

Mr. Smith yawned, closed his eyes, and presently, on opening them again, realised that the exodus had not been complete, for someone had joined him on the seat. Mr. Smith was both short-sighted and astigmatic, so that all he could certainly discern about this person was that he was male and garbed in a very old and deeply-stained battledress. He had his elbows on his knees, his hands to his ears, his eyes on the ground.

Mr. Smith glanced at him uncertainly once or twice. If he had a weakness it was that he often failed to realise that the human mouth is far better kept shut than open; so he remarked that it was a lovely evening.

“It is that,” said the man in battledress retaining his pose. “Just the evening I’d have chosen.”

“Not many people about, though,” continued Mr. Smith relentlessly.

“Maybe that’s becós they know I’m ’ere,” said the man in battledress. “They guessed I’d be back sometime, guv.”

An odd remark, thought Mr. Smith, and a very odd voice, toneless and lacking all resonance.

“Soon be getting demobbed now, I suppose,” said Mr. Smith.

“Oh, I’ve been out two years, guv,” said the other.

“Still wearing the uniform, though.” Mr. Smith’s voice revealed some surprise.

“In a way, guv. I’ve just got one more job to do afore I take it orf for ever and go back to where I comes from.”

“You don’t live in these parts?”

“Not *now*, I don’t, guv.”

“Do you live far off?”

“Far enough, guv. It’s a tidy trip from there to ’ere.”

“How did you manage to get out so soon?” asked Mr. Smith.

“Something burst two feet from me, guv.”

“A shell?”

“Maybe!”

“You were wounded?”

“Oh no, I weren’t, guv!” chuckled the man in battledress.

“You must have had a very narrow escape!”

“No guv; no, I didn’t.”

“Where was this?”

“On the Hostia Road, guv, just outside the walls of Rome. That’s where I got my ticket.”

Mr. Smith did some mental arithmetic.

“But that would be *three* years ago,” he said.

“No, guv, only two.”

Queer customer this, thought Mr. Smith, not quite at ease. Peculiar how he never looks up, but always stares down at the ground.

“And what’s this job you’ve got to do?” he asked.

The man in battledress paused a moment before replying. “You see that little ’ouse there across the road?” Still keeping his head down he slowly creaked up his right arm and pointed.

It seemed to Mr. Smith's dim vision that the hand at the end of this arm was strangely white and thin. There were two great stains on the sleeve above it.

"Yes," he said, "I see it."

"A gal lives there," said the man in battledress. "She ran orf with a friend of mine when I went overseas."

"Your wife?"

"Not now, guv," chuckled the man in battledress. "So I've one more job to do."

"Why not leave her alone," said Mr. Smith uneasily. "She can't be worth bothering about."

"I'm not going to hurt 'er, guv. She'd got a right to choose. Everyone's got that, ain't they?"

"I suppose so," said Mr. Smith. "But you've left her alone all these years; why are you seeing her again?"

"Well, I want to see 'er kid, guv. Not mine, of course. She 'ad 'im last night. I've been waiting for that."

"But surely your sudden appearance will upset her, be bad for her at such a time. The shock might almost be fatal."

"Why should it, guv? We spent ten year together."

"Is that *just* the job you've got to do? I mean is that all? Is it?"

"Well, *almost* all, guv."

"What else have you got to do?" asked Mr. Smith anxiously.

"Just show 'er something, guv."

"Show her what?"

"This," chuckled the man in battledress. He leaned back on the seat and turned his body toward Mr. Smith. His head followed rigidly as though he had no neck. Then he leaned forward and thrust his face almost into Mr. Smith's, to whose weak eyes it seemed just a dead, white, fleshless blur in which two points of fire were blazing. The man in battledress got clumsily to his feet, as Mr. Smith recoiled in deepest horror, and began shuffling across the heath. It was a stiff, jerky shuffle. His chin was still down on his chest.

Mr. Smith was rather a timid little man. What should he do! That dreadful mutilated thing meant mischief; he'd felt it vaguely all the time. In fearful indecision he watched the man in battledress cross the road, enter the garden of the little house and disappear. What might happen in that little house! He must be brave! He must go to see. He rubbed his eyes, got up, and began to run. He reached the road, and suddenly stopped dead in his tracks, pulled out and put on his glasses. Yes it *was* a "For Sale or To Let" board, with weather-beaten lettering leaning at an angle across the gate. The tiny garden was overgrown and unkempt, some of the windows in the little house were broken, the torn blinds of all of them were down. The place was utterly deserted; there was no sign of life.

Mr. Smith, very, very puzzled but somewhat relieved, went through the gate, hanging by one rusty hinge, and up the ten yards of grass-grown path to where a porch covered the front door. The light was failing fast and it was almost dark inside the porch. "Could that awful man have been fooling me?" he said to himself, "Or can it really be possible that I actually. . . ." Suddenly the front door began slowly to open and something began to frame itself between the lintel and its rim. Mr. Smith craned his head to see what that something might be. "Is anyone there?" he said. "Who is that?" He peered forward a little more and then he uttered a clipped cry, turned on his heel and ran headlong down the road, wild panic lashing him on. The pattering of his feet grew fainter and fainter and presently there was unbroken quiet over the darkening heath.

“Four-Eyes”

“I’ve left my glasses in my office-coat,” Mr. Thornhill said irritably to his wife, Bella. “It’s a great nuisance having only one pair since I lost my others. I shall have to get some more, I suppose.”

“I found an old pair of Jim’s the other day,” said Bella.

“Oh, did you! Where?”

“In the middle drawer of the writing-desk.”

“Funny! I never noticed them there.”

“Well, that’s where I found them. Would you like to try them?”

“Well, I will, but I don’t suppose for a moment they’ll suit me,” said Mr. Thornhill.

Bella went to the desk and returned with a leather case which sprang open in Mr. Thornhill’s hand as he took it, revealing a pair of horn-rimmed glasses. Feeling a shade squeamish, he put them on and picked up the evening paper.

“Fancy that!” he exclaimed. “I shouldn’t know they weren’t my own, and they fit perfectly, too. Curious, because I should have said Jim’s head was quite a different shape from mine. What a stroke of luck. That has saved me about fifteen pounds! I suppose,” he added in a would-be jocular vein, “some people wouldn’t care so much about wearing a dead man’s specs.”

“How utterly ridiculous!” said Bella tartly. “When you’re dead, you’re dead. What are you supposed to do with them? Bury them in the coffin with the body! That ’ud be a stupid waste of money.” Bella didn’t believe in wasting money.

“Oh, yes, of course it’s all nonsense,” agreed her husband. “I was only joking. I’m sure poor old Jim would be glad to know I was making good use of them.” The case which was on the table by his side, shut with a snap, making him jump a little. He examined the spring which seemed in perfect order. Old Tarzan, the Sealyham, was tapping his tail against his master’s shin. When Mr. Thornhill bent down to stroke him, the old boy looked up at him—and then his tail drooped, and he gave a sharp, nervous bark.

“What’s the matter with you?” said Mr. Thornhill, “Come here!” But old Tarzan slunk off and lay down on the hearth with his head facing away from his master.

Mr. Thornhill took off the specs and put them back in the case. “Well, Bella,” he said, “It’s all fixed up about the house. I suggest we move in a couple of months’ time, say the second week in August, when I take my holiday. How thankful I shall be to get away from Wimblesham and all its horrible memories.”

Those memories had reference to the following events. A year and a half before, Bella’s first husband, James Curry, had been the star salesman of a big firm of radio manufacturers, earning very good money and earmarked for far higher things. He had possessed a touch of commercial genius and might well have become a business mogul of the highest eminence—if he’d had his luck with him. He had possessed great character, energy, initiative and a courageous power of decision, and that almost magic something—flawless intuition might be a synonym for it—which, other omens being propitious, ensures fame and fortune to its owner. His ardent and super-charged temperament had revealed itself also in his matrimonial affairs. He was passionately in love with Bella and furiously jealous of her. Most impressionable males more or less fell for her. She liked that; Jim loathed it. He only once caught her in a palpable indiscretion where he hit the man concerned for six and then removed Bella’s garments and gave her an almost brutal beating. She made no sound or protest, merely remarking as she resumed her raiment, “You’ll be sorry for that one day.”

On a Thursday afternoon soon after that incident, Jim was shockingly smashed up in a car accident and left a helpless, shattered invalid. The firm gave him a small pension, but as he was adjudged to blame for the crash, he got no further compensation. So he and Bella, who hadn’t a penny of her own, had a very hard struggle in their little Lewesham flat.

Mr. Thornhill was the head of the firm of solicitors who had acted for Jim in the accident case and he had fallen hopelessly in love with Bella at first sight. He was a bachelor fourteen years her senior—she was twenty-six. He had got to know them both well and had eventually moved them into his own house at Wimblesham out of sheer benevolence.

And then, three months later, Jim had died suddenly while Mr. Thornhill was up North on a case. His death had been rather unexpected and the doctors had considered a post-mortem at first, but eventually decided it wasn’t necessary. That *should* have settled it, but with their horrible lust for

believing the worst, the neighbours had gossiped shamelessly. The fact that Bella was living in Mr. Thornhill's house had been partly responsible for it, he admitted, though his pre-marital relationship with her had been discretion itself. Then Bella had quarrelled with his maid whom he'd sacked; and she'd tried to get her own back for it. Again, Bella was very strong-willed and outspoken, and she'd high-hatted the neighbours a bit, but it was sheer feminine jealousy, he felt sure, which had been at the bottom of the wicked cruel talk; for with her marvellous dark copper hair, strange tilted violet eyes and flawless figure, Bella had made all the other Wimblesham females resemble drab and insipid nonentities. They'd been simply venomous—it still heated Mr. Thornhill's blood when he thought of it. There'd been anonymous letters and deliberately spread rumours of an exhumation. These had even reached the insurance company's ears, and they'd been a bit sticky about paying up on Jim's life policy. But all that was fixed up now, and soon they'd be settled in a far better house at Surbiton and quit of all these odious tongues. Bella had nothing whatever with which to reproach herself, he told himself; she'd nursed Jim devotedly. She wasn't really hard, he knew, merely strong, controlled and undemonstrative. If she hadn't grieved greatly over Jim's death, was that anything to be shocked at! Nursing him had been a terrible strain, for the inaction had been torture to his vigorous and ardent spirit. His jealousy had never dimmed, and he hardly could bear her out of his sight.

Mr. Thornhill had proposed to her as soon as a decent interval had elapsed, and they'd been married at once. She was expecting a baby in six months, and that, he was sure, would soften her. She was making him an excellent wife, competent, very economical and industrious. The only thing that worried Mr. Thornhill was that she so seldom smiled.

After dinner he sat down, took the glasses from their case, picked up the evening paper and dallied with the cross-word puzzle for a while. Bella was sitting three yards away reading a novel. "A horrid result of dearth." Six letters. An anagram obviously. Could it be "thread"? But why was that "horrid"? He yawned and glanced at the clock. Nine-twenty-five. He was tired; he'd had a hard day. Why not a few well-earned winks! The paper slipped from his knee, his head nodded and fell back. He *was* tired; quite an effort to move! An odd sensation, not too pleasant somehow. It was a hot evening and the sitting-room door was open, so that he could see along the passage to the kitchen. He shut his eyes for a moment, yawned again and opened them; and there was Bella doing something at the kitchen dresser. What was she doing? He felt a keen anxiety to know. The glasses slipped

from his nose. Old Tarzan on the hearth heard them fall, and considered some retrieving was indicated.

“Look out!” exclaimed Bella. “Tarzan’s after your glasses.” Mr. Thornhill woke fully up and did the retrieving.

“What were you doing in the kitchen, dear?” he asked with a yawn.

“What are you talking about?” replied Bella sharply. “I haven’t been near the kitchen since dinner.”

“How queer!” he said. “I must have had a very vivid dream. Yes, I remember now, you were wearing a green dress.”

“I never wear green,” said Bella. “I used to have a green apron. You must have dreamed of that.” And she returned to her book.

Mr. Thornhill dropped the pointless topic and took a stroll in the garden till bed-time. He was just a shade disturbed in mind. He realised that during the very brief period of his dream he had known some physical and mental distress. His body had felt constricted and helpless, his spirit had been a prey to anxiety and foreboding. This mental malaise still lingered on in the shape of a vague formless depression. Mr. Thornhill was a firm adherent of the orthodox, the clear-cut, and the regular. Anything at all out of the ordinary, “not in the book,” was highly unwelcome to him. However, after a night’s sleep he felt quite himself again and ready to ridicule the whole episode.

It was another three weeks before he had occasion to wear Jim’s specs again, when, once more, he left his own in his office-coat. As a matter of fact he realised he’d done so before he was halfway across Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and could easily have gone back and fetched them. He’d actually turned on his heel, when he experienced an odd sensation. It seemed to him that a voice somewhere in his head was insistently and imperiously saying, “Try Jim’s again! Try Jim’s again!” This reiteration was quite maddening and had, somehow, to be obeyed. The moment he surrendered to it, it ceased. It’s very queer, he thought, what tricks one’s mind gets up to sometimes. One almost feels as if it were an independent something, an interloper, only in a sense part of one. But what is “one”? Oh well, I’m no psychologist or philosopher even if they could really explain these subtle little freaks of the brain.

As soon as he got home he opened the drawer and at once found the case in his hand, as if, he thought to himself in a half-amused way, they’d been waiting for me to get them. The moment he put them on the table the case sprang open.

Just for a little experiment, he put them on and called Tarzan. That veritable worthy glanced up at him, and at once his expression changed most ludicrously from gay to gloomy; and he slunk off and hid beneath a chair. “Who says dogs haven’t got intelligence, Bella,” he said. “The old blighter can actually see these aren’t my glasses.”

Bella looked at him and then looked again, the expression on her face changing slightly. “You look exactly the same,” she said shortly.

“O course I do, but he doesn’t think so! He’s a very clever old man and always has been.”

After dinner he settled down in his chair. He had to be in court next day and decided to run through some papers. Bella was knitting a baby garment. After some little while that strange lethargy came over him, that numbing of body and drowsiness of mind. He closed his eyes for a while, opened them—there was Bella on her feet. She glanced sharply at him and then went swiftly down the passage to the kitchen. She took a cup from the cupboard above the dresser, poured something into it and stirred it. What was she doing? Again he felt that most urgent desire to find out. Presently she came back towards the sitting-room and on her face was a very displeasing smile. She was wearing a green apron. With an effort he got his hand to his eyes, ripped off the glasses—and there was Bella quietly knitting away. His abrupt action caught her eye.

“What’s the matter?” she said.

“Nothing,” he muttered. “Woke up with a bit of a start, that’s all.”

As before he went out into the garden to think things over. He wasn’t exactly frightened now, but he knew he had been; the echo of that fear remained. But he was very very puzzled. He stretched out his arms. That weird feeling of being bound and helpless! “Let me try to find,” he said to himself, “a feasible explanation.

“Well, obviously these glasses don’t suit me after all. Better face that. Reading with them wearies me and sends me into a sort of coma, well, sends me to sleep, that’s simpler. Bella is the last thing I see before I drop off; her impression sort of carries over into my dream. So far, so good. I’m wearing Jim’s specs and that reminds me of *him* and how I used to see Bella fetching him things from the kitchen. No doubt she had a green apron on in those days which I subconsciously recall. So I get that particular dream. But why do I feel so—well, apprehensive during that dream? Dreams are funny things. I suppose it’s all natural, logical, enough.” This causal chain seemed

reasonably coherent though it was a bit ad hoc. “Anyway it will have to do,” he thought, “until I can find a better one. Better still, I won’t wear those specs again, and then I shan’t need to worry any more.”

But he reversed this decision the next morning by taking the specs to the office with him. He was intensely curious about them, though he attempted to disguise it even from himself. He wore them all day and they behaved perfectly and there were no more of those peculiar symptoms and sensations. One thing he noticed about them, they never needed polishing being always quite clear and unstained. He wondered if the lenses had been treated in some way. Back they went into the drawer that evening and there they remained till the following Saturday week. On that day Mr. Thornhill got back for lunch and sat down in the garden afterwards. Bella had gone to a movie with one of her very few friends in the neighbourhood. Suddenly he felt an overpowering desire to put on Jim’s glasses again and see what happened. Not so much desire as sheer impulsion. He became extremely restless and troubled in mind. He stopped trying to read and, to distract his thoughts mowed the lawn and watered the flowers till dinner-time.

Then his will surrendered. He went straight to the drawer, opened it, and the case seemed to leap into his hand. He put it on the table and it at once sprang open. He felt his scalp crawl. Bella, home by now, watched him curiously.

“Why have you got those out?” she asked.

“Just thought I’d try them again,” he said hurriedly.

“Why? You know they’re all right—or aren’t they?”

“Well, I wasn’t quite sure.”

She looked at him sharply but said no more. During dinner he talked a lot and rather incoherently. He saw Bella was surprised. He was always a man of few and measured words, and he despised himself for this flow of clotted gab, but it bubbled out of him irresistibly. Directly after the meal, eagerly yet tingling with nerves, he put on the glasses and waited. Once again it came, and he realised it resembled the first clutch of an anaesthetic, that sense of drugged lassitude and confusion of mind. As before he saw Bella flick that quick glance at him, go down the passage, take down the cup, fill it, stir it and come back. He strove to move but could not. Once again she wore that horrid smile. She had almost reached him when he just managed to wrench the glasses from his ears—and there was Bella looking up at him sharply from her pattern.

“Why do you do that!” she exclaimed. “Jumping about like that. You startled me!”

“Sorry,” he muttered. “Had a nightmare, I think.”

He *was* frightened now. There are three kinds of fear; physical, moral and ghostly. It was the last which had seized him. It is the quietest, most insinuating terror. He felt as though under some spell, involved in something willy nilly, no longer his own master, a destined man. His mind was in a turmoil; one part seemed to be telling him, “Hurl away those accursed things. They are showing you what you dread to see, things you have pressed back and stifled up till now, those dread doubts you have always just kept at bay.” But the other part was telling him, “You must see it through, you’ll know no peace till you are sure.”

The next morning at breakfast Bella said, “D’you know what day this is?”

“How d’you mean?”

“It’s the anniversary of Jim’s death.” She had one of her rare, odd smiles on her face.

Mr. Thornhill’s heart gave a jump. “So it is,” he said, and then he found himself adding, “Tell me, Bella, just how he died.”

“Good gracious! Why? You’ve heard it all before.”

“Tell me again.”

“Why? How funny you are!”

“Tell me again.”

“Well,” began Bella irritably, “he’d been poorly all day—Oh, why d’you want to hear all this again?”

“I was fond of Jim. Go on.”

“Just after I’d had my supper, he asked for some beef-tea.”

“Was he reading then?”

“Yes. Why ask that?”

“Go on.”

“I gave him some; he went to sleep and never woke up.”

“What time did he go to sleep?”

“About half-past nine. Now look here, Arthur, don’t ever ask me anything about it again. I shall never say another word about it. It upsets me to think about it.”

“I promise I won’t ask you again,” said Mr. Thornhill. He worked in the garden all the morning very rigidly forcing his mind off the forbidden topic. At lunch he drank far more than his modest wont. Then he went back to the garden again and picked a lovely nosegay and showed it to Bella.

“I’m going to put these on Jim’s grave,” he said.

“Why?”

“To show him he’s not quite forgotten.”

“But he’s dead; he’ll never know.”

“That’s what we’ll never know till *we’re* dead.”

Bella hesitated for a moment. “All right,” she said reluctantly. “Fetch the car.”

For a few moments they stood by Jim’s grave, hemmed in by all the other dead, the last syllables of their earthly tale already fading as time and the weather corroded the lettering on their tottering headstones.

“There must be some strange secrets buried here,” said Mr. Thornhill.

“Where d’you mean?” asked Bella sharply.

“In this quiet slum of mortality.”

“Let’s get away,” said Bella. “I think you’re a little mad today. Don’t let’s ever do this again, it’s morbid. The doctor said I’m to be as cheerful as possible while I’m like this.”

“We’ll never come here again,” he said.

Mr. Thornhill again exceeded his temperate ration at supper. His nerves were hunting him hard. Just after nine they returned to the sitting-room. Those gleaming lenses were open in the case. The earpieces seemed to cling to his fingers as he put them on with trembling hands. He pretended to read, but his eyes were always on the clock. Bella seemed restless too as she quickly turned the pages of a novel. And then suddenly he became another man, he knew it, and seeing with another’s eyes. He became rigid as if lashed to his chair. He watched Bella rise, flash him that glance, slip down the passage, fill the cup, stir it and return. She gave him that cruel, killer’s look, her lower lip thrust forward. Her eyes were blazing. He tried to cry

out, but no sound came. He tried to raise his arm to keep her away, but he could not move. She put out her left hand, curved like a claw and lifted the cup in her right. He knew what she would do, put that strong ruthless hand to his throat, choke open his mouth, and pour death down into him. Suddenly that left hand struck hard at him.

Mr. Thornhill leaped to his feet and hurled the glasses from him. Bella sprang up and faced him.

“What’s the matter with you!” she cried. “Why did you do that?”

“Bella,” he said hoarsely, “what was in that cup?” For a moment they stared into each other’s eyes.

“I think you must be insane,” said Bella slowly. “What are you talking about? What cup?”

But he knew that she knew what cup! She kept her hard, indomitable eyes on him. “Don’t upset me like this again, Arthur,” she said. There was complete authority in her voice. “It’s very bad for me when I’m bearing your child.”

There was a short and horrid silence. Then he wilted; she’d got him body and soul.

“Very well, Bella,” he said, “I’m very sorry; it will not happen again.”

Something touched him. Old Tarzan had fetched the glasses and laid them at his feet. He picked them up.

“Give me those,” said Bella. “I am quite sure they don’t suit you. I’ll throw them in the dustbin now at once. Then we shan’t be bothered again like this. Never—you understand!” Her eyes had narrowed.

She went out of the room leaving him standing there. And then it was as if some soundless, piercing power poured through the house. He reeled as it passed him. He heard Bella utter a high, thin scream. He dashed from the room and out into the little backyard. Bella was lying on her face; her arms outstretched.

“Bella!” he cried. But there was no reply. He bent over and gently turned her body. And then he dropped her and jerked back, for her face was a mask of blood and splinters of glass driven hard into it. She had no eyes.

Old Tarzan, who had followed his master out, moved forward with dragging tail and sniffed at her uncertainly.

The Sepulchre of Jasper Sarasen

Sir Reginald Ramley was by temperament and inclination no frequenter of cemeteries. Such dormitories depressed him mildly, not so much because they reminded him of Man's mortality, against which he cherished no grudge, but because they provided even further proof, if such were needed, of Man's inanity, vulgarity and sentimentality. Why, for example, spend good and often ill-spared money on headstones and plinths, or even artistically execrable emblematic figures and designs, when a few quick years would weather their inscriptions into illegibility and—a little later—level the pious metal with the ground? And the asininity of those optimistic mottoes which usually figured thereon! "Till we meet again." "Till a brighter dawn," and so on. Never satisfied! How much better the incomparable reality, a dreamless sleep!

It was, therefore, by mere chance that he entered the vast Death Field near his new West London home. He was strolling past it one Sunday morning in May when he heard coming from one of its trees, now proudly preening themselves in their new livery, the liquid tinkle of a willow warbler. To so keen, if intermittent, an ornithologist this was a matter of import, a willow warbler within four and a half miles of Hyde Park Corner! He hurried through the gates between the wardens' lodges toward the clump of hawthorns in which, he judged, the singer was hidden, but when he reached it the little tune was already coming from a lime forty yards away, and soon it was a case of "Adieu, Adieu, the plaintive anthem fades." The intrepid little visitor to town was returning a-quiver to his proper habitat.

However, it had served the purpose of introducing Sir Reginald to that many-acred morgue. Having given up the hunt, he found himself in a secluded corner of the place, hemmed in by a dense ring of distasteful yews and, somewhat to his astonishment, glancing into a small stone hut where some coffins could be dimly discerned through a gap at the top of a much rusted iron door. He approached nearer and found there were six of those boxes resting on two tiers of shelves. Two were full-sized, the other four smaller. This seemed odd. He glanced up and there over the door were engraved the words, *The Sepulchre of Jasper Sarasen*. Quite; but why was it so indecorously open to the eye? He looked around him and there were headstones chipped and broken, some lying on their backs, and a half-dozen other small sheds in varying degrees unclosed to the view. So then he

realised what had happened in this place, a bomb had dropped there, probably early in the war just ended, and its effects, though muted by time, were still plain to see. Jasper Sarasen's abode had suffered severely. It was constructed of limestone with speckled granite panel insets in one side wall. It was about fifteen feet long by nine broad and twelve high. It could never have been a thing of any beauty or distinction. Now the triangular ornament over the door was down in the grass beside it, one of the rather risible angel pinnacles was missing, and bomb splinters had gouged out lumps of stone here and there. Originally, he noticed, the gap over the door had been filled by a rectangle of dark purple glass, "teeth" of which were still lodged in the stone. Some of the other mausoleums were in even worse shape, and on investigation he found their contents had been removed.

He strolled back to the sepulchre of Jasper Sarasen. For some utterly inexplicable reason he was experiencing a sharp sense of tension and a tiny shiver ran down his flanks. Not only tension but a very odd feeling of curiosity about and interest in this battered little death-shed. He went right up to it this time and peered in through the gap. Just before he had been contrasting in his mind the wild jocund winging and songs of the birds with the motionless residents in grass and tomb, and now, as he looked into the sepulchre, a bird flashed out of it and past him and was gone. What sort of bird? The ornithologist was baffled. It was raven-black and about the size of a starling, but its extreme speed of flight was what had startled him. Luckily it had not hit him in the face! It could not have missed him by more than an inch. Yet he had felt no air-stir from its wings.

Could it be nesting in this foetid little cabin? For foetid it certainly was: quite a potent reek, its base just fustiness and mustiness, but mingling with that and dominating it was a kind of *sour spiciness*. One noseful was enough and Sir Reginald withdrew his head a bit. It was fairly dark inside even on this flaming spring morning, but he could pick out details. Perhaps that *was* the beginning of a nest, that untidy, leafy mess on the far cross-beam. Otherwise there were just the six coffins, all of light yellow oak with discoloured brass handles. One of them on the top shelf was skewed aside and looked none too secure on its ledge. Certainly the bomb had done some macabre work, and maybe stirred some sleepers in their eternal drowse. There on the floor, which somewhat to his surprise was soaking wet, was a small toy rowing-boat; no doubt some child had pushed it through the aperture. He then turned his attention to the gold inscribed granite panels on one of the side walls. They commemorated the following persons: Paula Mary Sarasen, who died on November 19th, 1892, aged thirty-eight, Lucy Elizabeth Sarasen, who died on November 19th, 1892, aged sixteen, John

Jasper Sarasen, who died on November 19th, 1892, aged fourteen. Sir Reginald glanced quickly at the other two panels. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed, "they all died on the same day!" And it was so, for that date had also seen the passing of Sarah Margaret, aged ten, and Robert William, aged eight. Railway accident, perhaps, or acute food poisoning, more common in those days, or something.

There was one other puzzle; this was Jasper's sepulchre, but there was no mention of him. The sixth panel was uninscribed. Yet there were six coffins inside; so, presumably, one was his. Of course there might be a hundred explanations of that immeasurably unimportant matter. What affair was it of his! "And I don't suppose you worry, Jasper," he said in a jocular sotto voce manner. "You're sleeping soundly enough." He thought he heard a slight sound coming from inside the hut. Perhaps that odd bird had slipped back. He glanced through the gap once more. No sign of the bird, but he spotted something he had not noticed before—the lid of the askewed coffin was very slightly raised from its box.

He started to saunter back down the path to the entrance. He glanced over his shoulder for a moment and realised what a very isolated enclave was occupied by those shattered and neglected little chalets, remote and dispiriting within its barrier of joyless yews even on a morning like this. What would it be like on a foul November night with an evil gusty wind whining through those melancholy trees and whimpering past those oaken shells? Perhaps, he thought, paradoxically, somehow *less* sinister. The contrast intensified the impression. How that spicy reek stuck in one's gullet! He spat vigorously several times, something he had not done in a public place since he was an ill-mannered urchin. An elderly female of forbidding aspect passing by gave him a look of extreme revulsion and contempt. He hurried home to his lunch.

Sir Reginald was within two months of his fiftieth birthday and came from a middle-class family with a reputation for intellectualism. He had been true to his line, having taken one of the most unarguable Double-Firsts at Oxford and becoming a distinguished mathematician into the scholastic bargain. He had then spread-eagled all comers in the civil service exam and chosen the Treasury. During the war he had been abroad on various important missions and collected to his reluctant shame a Knighthood of the Order of the British Empire, a Companionship of the Order of the Bath, and many rainbow foreign orders. He had now returned to his department and taken a service flat in Kensington. He was a bachelor, presumably confirmed, a near-recluse by temperament. For exercise he fenced with the

foil, for amusement went alone to concerts of music. He was tall, slim, perfectly “preserved”, and the habitual expression in his face was one of good-natured tolerance and scepticism.

As he walked home, his mind playfully considered the exercise of composing a Greek epitaph in the elegiac mode of the family of Sarasen and those others whose rest had been so violently and vulgarly interrupted by low grade high explosive. By the time he reached Redcliffe Court the task was done. (Very roughly translated the somewhat flippant couplet went as follows:

“He who so rudely disturbed your repose
Oh strollers in Hades,
Recently joined your brigade,
See that he knows he’s in Hell!”)

Over lunch he found his mind reverting to the Sarasen menage and what had caused that simultaneous taking off, except for Jasper himself. What had happened to him? Really, he complained to himself irritably, why *am* I worrying about those long dead worthies, this petty and ancient history? What a waste of time and energy! Curious how the mind selected, as it were, what one should think about irrespective of what one would choose and prefer. And who was one? What a charming piece of metaphysical nonsense! History, Man’s composite mind, did the same thing, selecting capriciously what should be recorded on its tablets. Guy Fawkes, for instance. His mind went on a meandering stroll through several topics and then returned to the Sarasens. One cause of this was doubtless that very displeasing taste in his mouth. After lunch he gargled zealously without much result.

Indeed the next morning he found himself with a sore throat and a slight feeling of malaise, but he did a hard day’s work as usual. In the evening after dinner he suddenly felt a strong, uncontrollable impulse to go out. As he went through the front door his brain was apparently busy with an office problem, a question of high level policy. Apparently, because this topic had a competitor. He was a mighty concentrator and this sensation of, as it were, dual occupation of his mind was quite maddening. In fact he realised that certain kinds of insanity must consist of just such dual sway of the mind, such uncontrollable simultaneous tenure.

His fretful reverie was abruptly interrupted by a bass baritone voice exclaiming, “Sorry, sir, the cemetery’s shut. Shuts at eight,” and he found himself opposite the entrance gates which faced him and barred his way.

Also facing him and barring his way was a large person in a blue uniform, a cemetery warden.

Sir Reginald smiled, "I just came out for a stroll," said he, "and let my mind take charge. I've no wish to go in there, I assure you. Must be getting old and vague and absent-minded, I suppose."

The man smiled amiably back, "Same with me at times, sir."

"You live in the lodge here?" asked Sir Reginald.

"Yes, sir."

"Comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you, sir. Very cushy job all round."

"That's good," said Sir Reginald, and then to his surprise and disgust he said something else, something which a moment before he'd had no intention of saying, something singularly inept and a lie into the bargain. "Oh, by the way, there is a sepulchre belonging to a family named Sarasen over there on the left-hand side of the cemetery. I think it just possible they may have been distant cousins of my father. I don't suppose you know anything about them?"

Could anything have been more inane! As if a cemetery warden, apparently in his early sixties, could possibly be expected to know one of the thousands and thousands of dead under his charge. Dead, in this case, for fifty-four years. Yet oddly enough, the warden looked at him in a slightly startled, wary way and then said slowly, "Well, it's a bit funny you should ask me that, sir. Thank you, sir!" This last remark was in acknowledgment of a brace of half-crowns which Sir Reginald had slipped into his hand. This was also out of character, for Sir Reginald was not in the habit of such riotous tipping, especially in advance of services rendered.

"Yes," continued the warden, "there's a story about that lot; so I don't think they can be any relations of yours, otherwise you'd 'ave 'eard about it, I suppose."

"How did *you* hear about it?" asked Sir Reginald.

"Well, sir, it was like this 'ere. One morning, 'bout a year ago, a gent rang my bell and asked me if I could tell him where the Sarasen tomb was, and as I was going along with 'im to show 'im, we got talkin', and 'e told me 'is father 'ad been a well-known lawyer who 'ad defended this Jasper Sarasen when 'e was tried for murder, and got 'im orf, as a matter of fact, and 'e'd 'eard the family was buried 'ere and 'ad come along to 'ave a look

for old times sake, if you gets me, sort of sentimental, becous 'e'd 'eard 'is father talk so much about the business, if you understand."

"I quite understand," replied Sir Reginald, looking down at his fingers and coughing and clearing his throat. "Murdering whom?"

"'Is wife and four kids, sir. Took 'em out for a row on the river, it seems. Never let 'em learn to swim. Then 'e tips the boat over and swims ashore 'isself. This gent I'm telling you of said 'is old man was sure Sarasen was guilty, dead to rights. He had good reasons to do it, to marry a very rich woman. 'Owsoever they couldn't quite pin it on 'im, and as I said, 'e got away with it. But it didn't do 'im much good, it seems, for very soon after 'e was found dead 'isself in 'is 'ouse, though this gent said it was a bit of a mystery what 'e died of. Well, that's what this gent told me, but 'e talked so fast it was 'ard to follow 'im."

"I see," said Sir Reginald slowly. "Nasty little story. And is his the sixth coffin in that sepulchre?"

"Yes, sir, but as you may 'ave noticed, there ain't no tablet up to him. This gent said that was probably because none of 'is relatives 'ad any use for 'im, knowing 'e was a wrong 'un, and wanted no more to do with 'im, so they just shoved 'im in 'is 'ut and left 'im there. That's what 'e surmised anyway. This gent said too that this Sarasen was in business in a big way, but 'ard up at the time. This gent said 'e was very cunning and sly, a real bad 'un, as wicked as they made 'em. I'm putting it in my own language you understand, sir."

"Oh, well," said Sir Reginald, some shame in his heart, "they obviously weren't the cousins I was thinking of. A strange tale. This place must be full of such queer histories—enough plots buried here to keep all the writers in the world busy for years."

"Yes, sir," agreed the warden. "I'll tell you something, sir, but don't say I told you because I ain't supposed to talk about the job, but when the bomb dropped, I mean the one out in the open there, some of the coffins was blown right to the surface and opened up, and in one there weren't no body at all, just some wooden blocks. And in another was a woman without no 'ead, and in another there was something very funny shaped indeed, not nice to see."

Sir Reginald emitted a not very hearty laugh. "Yes," he said, "I can imagine there are some ugly secrets hidden here; some persons, like the Sarasens, murdered, but not avenged, unless they *were* avenged," he added

vaguely. “Do you ever walk about here after dark? Oh, well, I’m sure that’s a very silly question; of course you chaps are quite hardened to that.”

“Not so silly,” smiled the warden. “I guarantee this place ’ud give anyone the Willies, what you calls the creeps, sir, when there’s just a little moon on a winter’s night, just enough to make you fancy you can see things, especially in that dark corner where the Sarasens are. To be honest, I don’t go down that path more than I can help, not since the bomb dropped, anyway.”

“Why?” asked Sir Reginald.

“Dunno, sir, got a feeling about it ever since that bomb dropped. That’s all I can say. Could you tell me something, sir,” added the warden, rocking slightly on his mighty boots and clasping and unclasping his hands behind his back, “did you ever ’ear of blue lights being seen in cemeteries?”

“Blue lights?” repeated Sir Reginald. “Well, yes, as a matter of fact I did once read of something of the sort happening—in Rome, I fancy. Why? Have you seen anything of the kind?”

“No, sir,” replied the warden quickly, “but my mate said something about it once.”

Sir Reginald saw that he was not being strictly truthful—for rather obvious reasons. “Well,” he said, “I must be getting along. Thank you for a very interesting little talk. I hope we’ll have another some day. Good night.”

“Good night, sir,” said the warden.

A murderer eh!, he thought as he walked home. Well, Jasper; so you were worthy of your conventionally sinister praenomen! You evil old spider! He coughed. Curse this throat! It did not seem to be getting any better.

Nor was it any better the next morning. Swallowing was beginning to be an ordeal and that cough frequent and harassing. It remained so for the rest of a very busy week. However, it is possible that he would have completely evacuated the Sarasens from his mind and forever had he not been made the victim of a rather sour dream. On the other hand the dream might have been evidence that their affair had already deeply penetrated his subconscious and taken up its abode there. It was on the Friday night. Suddenly out of the depths of sleep he found himself standing not far from that battered little chalet dimly lit by a dying moon. He was very tense and watchful. He dropped to his hands and knees and crept round to the door and listened. After a moment, he heard a spasmodic creaking sound which he knew was being made by the raising of a coffin lid. Suddenly there was a clatter, a

fearful stench filled his nostrils and he heard something moving inside the sepulchre. And then he awoke, his heart banging wildly and sweat bursting out on him, and the trace of that reek in his nose. This was one of those rare and unrefreshing dreams which do not fade. It remained perfectly and hauntingly vivid in his memory. Why?, he irritably and a shade urgently asked himself. There was no rhyme or reason for it, no rational strand of thought linking him to this business. It was only by the purest fluke that he had ever seen that infernal little Death Ark. The gloomy brood of Sarasens were less than nothing to him. But the human mind, one's own emphatically included, was a cypher to which no key was known. Sporadically it erupted these baffling and apparently causeless enigmas, and one had to make the best of them and laugh them off as well as one could.

He took Saturday morning off. Now, he said to himself, I am going to challenge and defeat this thing, this petty but tiresome obsession. So, not long after breakfast, with a firm step and stride, he made his way to the cemetery, turned to the left at the cross-paths, passed through the yew curtain, and a quarter of a minute later found himself observing that stark legend, *The Sepulchre of Jasper Sarasen*.

A moment before he had been feeling somewhat self-conscious, conscious he was behaving with some fatuity. Now that feeling went and at once. There was no doubting the displeasing fact that this place "got" him a little. It was "kinetic". What did he mean by that? Well, that it held for him a kind of reluctant fascination. Rather more than "reluctant" and "fascination" wasn't quite the word, but he could not put his tongue to a better one. That "obsession" was stronger than he had hoped. It was partly, no doubt, its seclusion.

Outside that sable ring there were lilacs, hawthorns and laburnums blooming in their hey-day, and tireless wings rustling their boughs. In here was no colour and no bird sang. And in that dismal little stone cave were lying the corpses of six persons, the Slayer and the Slain. The man who'd lain with the woman and begotten those children, then mercilessly destroyed them all. All six of them were lying there together night and day, year after year. And their souls? Sir Reginald was sceptical about souls, but on the hypothesis that he was wrong, what about those souls? They might all be lodging there in that repulsive little cabin, too. A pleasant family gathering! Really! thought Sir Reginald, what ideas! I seem to have suffered some kind of cenotaphic change into something morbidly responsive to the stir of worms here in this place where all these thousands are repaying their debt to earth, that silent intermingling metabolism.

The trees rustled nonchalantly over them, the birds played amorously, but even for those their turn would come. Well, these are not the type of thoughts I wish to think. No more cemeteries for me! And then he said out loud, "But first I'll just have a last peep at you, Jasper." He said it with a nervous facetiousness which disgusted him.

As he cautiously put his face to the opening, something ebony-black flashed past his ear. That strange bird again! Jet-propelled, apparently! he told himself. That odd stink again too! No good enquiring into *its* origin. And there were those six sleepers, if they slept. Which was Jasper? Well, which was he? Certainly one of the two full-sized coffins on the top shelf with the slightly raised lid. "Is that you, Jasper?" he muttered. Why couldn't he control that fatuous babbling! That was odd! The gap between the lid and case was certainly wider than it had been the first time, and as he asked that puerile question it seemed to him as if something had fluttered across that gap. An illusion due, no doubt, to the fact that the sun had just at that moment swung from behind a cloud.

He tried to change the subject of his thoughts. How absurd that the dead should have the right to clutter up the earth like this! Those six bundles of corruption were taking up quite a sizeable piece of London. Burnt and their ashes scattered, they would have gone sweetly and cleanly back to their elements—even Jasper's! How much better than that that baleful old assassin should rot away there with his victims round him. Sir Reginald could not get that sardonic conception out of his mind. Now that's enough, he told himself. I'll come here no more. It's becoming a foolish nuisance. Perhaps as men grow older, especially rather lonely men, they become subject to such follies at times. They have to be fought. Now I've seen all there is to see and that is precious little. I'm in no way concerned with this tragic little group. No more cemeteries, or sepulchral speculations for me! No more trafficking mentally with the dead! Firm, resolute, uncompromising words, yet somehow not bringing confidence and certainty with them.

He walked off and then, when he reached the fence of yews, glanced back. And then his gaze became fixed and his brow furrowed. He turned right round and still stared as though much puzzled. He seemed to be hesitating, but then with an effort turned round again and walked quickly back to the entrance gates. Of course his eyes must have deceived him!

On the way out he passed his friend, the warden, who enquired after his health. He replied that his throat was giving him some trouble.

“You sound a bit ’oarse, sir,” said the warden. “You ain’t been putting your ’ead into any of them tombs, ’ave you?”

“Why?” asked Sir Reginald.

“Well, it ain’t considered ’ealthy, so my doc says. ’E thinks they should all be emptied and pulled down.”

“I’ll remember that,” said Sir Reginald with a faint smile, “but I don’t think I’ll be coming here again.”

“Don’t blame you!” said the man in blue. “It ain’t exactly a Fun Fair!”

As he walked back to his flat, Sir Reginald wondered if there could be anything in that doctor’s contention. It was a depressing possibility, especially as his throat was really painful and clearly not yielding to home treatment. In fact it had got very much worse during the last hour. He would see a doctor himself on Monday, if it was not a great deal better.

He managed to swallow a little lunch and then went to lie down on the sofa in his sitting-room. To his intense irritation he found his mind again and again reverting to that accursed Sarasen shed. If he had been feeling fit enough he would have gone to the Athenaeum Club, membership of which was his sole concession to sociability, but his temperature was rising, and he became slightly light-headed, sufficiently so to permit the entry of distasteful fantasies. When he fell into an uneasy doze, there he was at once in the vicinity of that hut, the prey to an urgent, fearful curiosity as to what was happening inside it. For that something was happening he felt horribly sure. He would crouch on his hands and knees like a beast and put his ear to the stone. And then with an effort drag his mind back to sanity and coherence. But the moment he relaxed his guard, there he was back again at that reeking little shed. Once he found himself peeping slyly in, that stench strong in his throat. Out flew that foul bird on lightning wing. And there was that ochre coffin with its raised lid!—rising lid!

With a stifled cry he sprang from his coma. It was really rather bestial, undermining, he had to confess, ghostly, necrophilic, inexplicable. Inexplicable, because as he told himself for the hundredth time, he was in no way connected with this malign set. There was no tie or bond of any sort between them. Why then! Why! It was as if he had carelessly, unwittingly strayed within the ambit of some potent, vicious instrument for evil.

The conception was not entirely new to him. Sir Reginald, like so many baffled and disillusioned persons of our time when confronted inexorably and bloodily with the human dilemma, had played—the word is apt—with

the concept of diabolism. One looks in the glass and sees a tolerably humane, honest, peaceful member of a constructive society. One glances out of the window and sees a howling mob, rifles at the ready, bombs at the belt; and unless one is very lucky, one only too soon sees oneself stamping and shouting in their crazed and suicidal ranks. At one moment one observes a delicate-handed devotee of pure knowledge inscribing a page of equations. At the next one hurls oneself desperately to the ground as a handful of plutonium precisely and exquisitely fissions its nuclei to incinerate and pulverise the self-destructive ground apes who found out how to do it. And so on and on. How to account for it?

Was it possible that men left to themselves were good, in the sense that they were sane, social and capable of ameliorating their lot, however slowly, but that they were forever thwarted and opposed and partially overcome by the powers of cosmic evil? That God was the Devil? Not one and indivisible, but many and splintered? That these powers were as mindless as they were deadly, and that to strike they had to have an opening given them, an invitation, as it were? That just as a moth hurls itself blindly, tropismically, at a light, so these powers blindly hurled themselves at Man's happiness and integrity, but that Man had first to provide the opportunity and proffer the invitation? This theory, though he had worked it out fully and plausibly, had been little more than a bitter *ad hoc* pleasantry, but could it be, he asked himself now, that after all he had been right, and was being given dreadful proof that he, however unwittingly, had strayed within the field of force of some such focus of malignancy and given it the chance, the invitation, to assail him? How utterly insane it sounded! He had said he would see a doctor, but could he minister to a mind diseased? Of course he was ill, in high fever, that was all!

He began to feel intolerably restless and in great mental distress. He could not bear to be alone in this room a moment longer. Ill though he was, he must go out. He got his hat and stick and walked slowly along, dizzy with fever and not far from delirium. Presently he found himself entering the cemetery and walking vaguely and unsteadily down the main avenue. The few persons he passed glanced at him casually, and then more sharply. They looked back at him over their shoulders. "Been drinking," was their verdict. "Why am I here?" he asked himself. "Why am I here?" He plodded painfully on, turned to the left, passed through the barrier of yews, and reached the sepulchre of Jasper Sarasen. Then he could go no further and flung himself down in the long grass which faced the tomb across the path.

After a while the bells rang for closing-time; the dark came slowly down and the thin curve of the new moon lifted over the horizon. It was death-quiet save for the distant muted murmur of the traffic. Sometime later Sir Reginald stirred from his fever sleep and, his eyes wide and staring, began crawling like a beast toward the sepulchre. He slunk across the path and, breathing convulsively, reached the stone against which he put his ear. For a moment he heard nothing, and then there came a small sharp “creak”, then another, and something clattered down within the tomb. He crawled round to the entrance and jerkily, gaspingly, raised himself till his eyes were level with the opening—and he found himself staring straight into something which had the ghastly semblance of a face, livid with patches of corrupted skin, eyes, glazed yet fiery, deep sunken in their sockets, and foul, matted hair drooping past its fleshless chin. The iron door began slowly opening. He staggered to his feet and began running in wild terror; and something he knew, was running just behind him on silent foot. Thin blue flames sprang up around him, a dark bird hurled itself again and again into his face. And then he could go no farther. Something touched him on the neck, he screamed twice, loud and high, and fell.

The cemetery warden leapt from his bed, threw his overcoat on and ran toward those screams. He saw a movement in the grass and dashed toward it. Sir Reginald was lying on his back and thrusting, thrusting desperately with his arms. His eyes were vilely wide and pupilless. His breath came in great convulsive gasps. He raised himself once, fell back and ceased to breathe. A thin blue flame coiled out from under him, ran up to his breast and shone there straight and unflickering like a flower. The warden cried out, ripped off his coat and beat at the flame in a crazed way, again and again, crying out all the while.

And when others hearing the cries came running, that is how they found them.

The Middle Drawer

“A gentleman to see you,” said the maid. Her tone was rather too familiar and she omitted the “sir”. There were several reasons for this. She was young, buxom, desirable, a combination that her employer, Mr. Skelt, had found irresistible on one occasion. That occasion was the night after his wife’s funeral, when he’d been moved by conflicting emotions and was somewhat in his cups. This had cost him ten pounds and Molly’s respect. Again, she was leaving at the end of the month, being very, very scared. Also, she’d heard rumours. She looked at him appraisingly, wondering if those rumours could be true.

“Who is he?” asked Skelt.

“Mr. Brill. He’s from the papers.”

“Show him in,” said Skelt irritably.

He was a physically small and meagre, almost tiny person, in his middle forties. His thin, sandy hair had receded evenly to half way across his scalp, but the brows over his round, black eyes were gross and bristling. His nose was beaked, and very white, his fat lips very red. A thick, untidy moustache sprawled over the upper one. His chin was square and massive. He was dressed in an old check golf-coat, flannel trousers and an incongruous stiff white collar and “boot-lace” tie. The small-town solicitor, *en deshabelle*, to the life.

In came a pert, alert young man, who at once wrinkled his nose in evident distaste (“Stinks like a morgue!”, he told himself).

“Good morning, Mr. Skelt,” he said, “I’m from the *Courier*.” He had but recently arrived in Hayley, and this was his first view of Skelt. He was a sharp, if superficial, judge of character, and he gave Skelt one of those lightning sum-ups on which he prided himself. (“Displeasing appearance, looks tough and none too scrupulous, vain, humourless, and his nerves are bitching him a bit.”)

“Oh, yes. Sit down. What can I do for you?” said Skelt with a rather abortive attempt at geniality.

“I wondered,” Brill, “if you had any comments to make on the exhumation?”

“The what!” exclaimed Skelt, gripping the arms of his chair, his round eyes wide and staring. (My God, thought Brill, he hasn’t heard!) “Oh, didn’t you know,” he replied slowly, “your wife’s body was dug up this morning?” Then for a moment he watched Skelt rallying his soul. (“He’s got ‘guts’ ” thought Brill, “and I guess he’ll need ’em. Does he look more shocked than surprised?”) The spectacle was embarrassing, and Brill glanced to his right out of the window. Though it was high summer, a full sour gale was ripping in from the northeast. Dense, low cloud was racing, wreathing past, the heavy-laden boughs were groaning as they took the strain, the leaves were hissing shrilly on their twigs. The great wind went crying past the grey walls.

“No,” said Skelt slowly, after the long pause, “it is news to me. You mean the police, I suppose?”

“Yes,” said Brill dryly, “with some local assistance, of course. Can you suggest why they should have taken this course?”

“I haven’t the remotest idea,” said Skelt.

“Presumably it has some connection with the cause of her death?” suggested Brill.

“She died of heart failure,” said Skelt harshly, “following acute enteritis.” (“He’s got that pat,” thought Brill.) “Dr. Fawkes signed the certificate to that effect.”

“Well, there must be some pretty good reason,” smiled Brill. “You’ve no notion whatsoever what it can be?”

“Well, I can hazard a guess,” replied Skelt roughly, “but you must on no account quote me as putting it forward. If you do, I shall deny ever saying it.”

“I understand,” said Brill.

“The fact is I have an enemy in the town, my professional rival here. I exposed his highly unprofessional conduct in Court on two occasions and subsequently acquired much of his practice. I know he has been determined to get his revenge.”

“I see,” said Brill. “I daresay there isn’t really room for you both in a place this size. I might say—well, you attribute it to *local jealousy*?”

“I don’t mind that,” said Skelt.

“There’ll be a post-mortem, of course,” said Brill. “I can say you have no fear of the outcome?”

“How d’you mean, fear?”

Brill shrugged his shoulders. “Oh, well, I suppose that answers my question.”

“Have you heard any rumours?” asked Skelt.

“We’ve had quite a few anonymous letters.”

“To what effect?”

“Not a very nice question to have to answer,” smiled Brill, who was enjoying himself; envisaging fame and fortune, perhaps, out of this little man’s ordeal, for it looked like developing into a front page “splash”.

“Tell me just the same,” said Skelt, pulling at his moustache.

“Their tenor is that you were responsible for your wife’s death.” (“This stench is simply nauseating,” thought Brill, “what the hades is it?”)

“There’s no need for me to deny that infamous insinuation!” exclaimed Skelt hotly.

At that moment, the house seemed to shake itself. The windows rattled and the middle drawer of Skelt’s bureau was thrown forward on its socket.

“What’s that?” asked Brill in astonishment.

“Heavy lorry passing, I suppose,” replied Skelt, getting up hurriedly and closing the drawer.

“Heavy lorry!” said Brill incredulously. “Oh well, may be.” He suddenly seemed less flamboyantly at his ease and glanced out of the window again. It opened on the garden, but the view was obstructed by two high laurel bushes framing it, which made the room dim and sombre. Something appeared to catch and hold his attention for some moments. He frowned as though perplexed. “Have you a picture of your wife?” he asked.

“No,” said Skelt; “at least not one taken for many years. She intensely disliked being photographed. Did these foul letters say anything else? Anything more precise?”

“It is now your turn to be discreet,” said Brill. “They suggested Dr. Fawkes had been talking.”

“But he signed the certificate,” said Skelt.

“Oh yes, I merely answered your question. It amounts to this, then; the exhumation is, in your opinion, simply the outcome of malicious gossip and you face its aftermath with complete confidence. That sort of obvious stuff?”

“Exactly,” said Skelt, half-rising from his chair as though to terminate the interview. But Brill hadn’t finished with him.

“Of course,” he remarked slowly, “the Home Office do not, I believe, sanction an exhumation unless they have very strong reasons for it.”

“Quite untrue,” said Skelt forcibly. “There have been many cases where such action has been taken merely to satisfy local gossip, which has been found entirely groundless.”

“My editor doesn’t quite agree with you,” smiled Brill again. “He thinks there must be a strong *prima facie* case before it is ordered.” And he kept silent, knowing Skelt would not be able to.

“When did it take place?” he asked.

“They began at dawn—about four.”

“Where is my wife’s body now?”

“At Dr. Fawkes’ surgery, I understand.”

“It is shocking,” said Skelt, “to have disturbed her rest in this way.”

The windows rattled sharply again.

“Extraordinary lot of traffic this morning,” said Brill frowning.

“Yes,” said Skelt, his eye on the drawer, which had shot forward again.

Brill glanced out of the window again, leaning forward a little. Skelt, watching him, tugged at his moustache.

Brill seemed to make an effort and pull himself together. But he seemed vaguely troubled. “There is one other question I have to ask you,” he said. “You may think it both absurd and impertinent, but I am acting under orders, you understand. The question is this. Is your house—or the grounds—haunted in any way?” He was watching Skelt covertly but closely, and he detected a lightning contortion flash across his face. It was as though he had been seized with a spasm of acute pain gone as soon as come. (“*Touché*,” thought Brill.)

“It certainly is a strange question,” replied Skelt. “The answer is, Not so far as I’m aware. More filthy rumours, I suppose.”

“Yes, and a very great many of them.”

“Possibly I’m not psychic,” smiled Skelt. “And if I were, no ghost could worry me any more than it could harm me. What ghosts are said to be seen?”

“The apparition of your wife, to be candid,” replied Brill, with a forced laugh. “In the cemetery, your garden here; and rumour says your servants are leaving. Is that so?”

“I am getting rid of them, is the more accurate way of putting it,” said Skelt sharply. “But I deprecate these enquiries into my private affairs. You can tell your editor, and through him the malignant, scandal-mongering people of Hayley, that I have seen no ghost and shouldn’t care tuppence if I had.”

(Brill was inclined to believe, at least the last sentence in that period. Skelt struck him as the lone-wolf type which, defiant of Earth, Heaven and Hell, goes down snarling and biting to the last.)

“Well, thanks very much,” he said. “I won’t take up any more of your time and will faithfully reproduce your views. I must warn you there will probably be many of my fraternity assembling here from London and elsewhere, and I should be very careful what you say to them.”

“I shall grant no more interviews,” said Skelt. “Good morning.”

“Good morning to you,” replied Brill, taking up his hat. In spite of some elation at Skelt’s decision, he vaguely wanted to kick himself. He had meant to probe and grill him longer and harder, but something in the atmosphere of that room, that house, “fluffed” his concentration and rasped his central nervous system. (“I just longed to find myself in the street again,” he told himself.)

The moment he’d disappeared, Skelt hurried to that middle drawer. He’d barely reached it when he heard the door open behind him. He slammed it in and turned to face a woman. She was in her late thirties, and her appearance suggested youth was just beginning to yield to the pull of middle-age. But she was still fresh and appetising, and her figure holding its own with the enemy. She was “pretty” in what the English term a rather “common” way, and Don Juan would have marked her down as “easy”, for she was clearly one who would both fall a ready prey to her passions and go to most lengths to force any man she desired to fall a prey to them too. Quite a few men had done so, and then had decisive second thoughts. This had soured her and

made her all the more determined that Arthur Skelt should not slip the noose.

“What is it, Dulcie?” asked that person irritably.

“Is it true?” she asked breathlessly. “I mean have they dug up Mary?”

“Yes, so I’m told—”

“But why? Why?” Anger always came with fear in her case.

“Control yourself. I haven’t the remotest idea.”

“Are you *sure*, Arthur?”

“Sure what?”

“That it’s a complete mystery? Don’t lie to me!”

“Of course. What are you insinuating?”

“Look here, Arthur, we were lovers before she died. She died very soon after. . . . There’s a most foul smell in here!”

“Smell? What sort of smell?”

“Of rottenness, mould and death, death! Oh, I hate this house, it terrifies me! I could never live in it!”

“Don’t be hysterical. You won’t have to live in it. I’ll move when we’re married. It oppresses me, too.”

“You never show it.”

“I am master of myself. This room always smells a bit damp.”

“But not like this.” Her voice rose hysterically. “Oh, Arthur, why have they dug her up? Will you swear you did nothing to her—ever?”

“It’s a disgusting question,” said Skelt angrily. “Of course I swear it.”

The house quivered, the windows hammered, the drawer shot forward.

“God! What was that?” exclaimed Dulcie.

“Something passing in the street, I suppose.”

“I’ve never known it happen before like that,” said Dulcie frowning. “What are you going to do?”

“Just close that drawer,” said Skelt.

“But why? Why? Why d’you want to close it?”

“Dulcie, are you losing your senses? Pull yourself together,” said Skelt raspily.

“It’s this awful shock. It’s all over the town!”

“Where did you hear it?”

“Mr. Rogers, the chemist, told me. They’ve been to his shop.”

“The police?”

“Yes. Going through his books.”

“Let them,” said Skelt roughly. “They’ll find nothing there.”

Dulcie suddenly screamed, and put her hands to her face. “Mary!” she cried. “I saw her at the window—in her shroud!”

Skelt rushed at her and struck her across the face. “Be quiet, you cursed little fool!” he said with quiet viciousness. “Listen to me, you’re in this, too!”

“In what?” said Dulcie, startled out of her hysteria.

“This trouble. The police may try to frame me. D’you know what that means? Pretend they’ve found something in Mary’s body. They’re sure to try and involve you as well. They’ll question you and try to trap you into saying dangerous things. They’ll ask if you’re engaged to me. You must swear you’re not. Remember if anything *does* go wrong, it’ll be far worse for you than me!”

“What d’ you mean?”

“That I’ll never let them try me. I always carry something with me to save me from that. If I escape them, they’ll be all the keener to get you.”

“Try you for what?”

“I said they might attempt to frame me. I don’t suppose they will, but it’s possible. I’m perfectly innocent, but I’m at their mercy, in a way.”

“I believe you did it, Arthur,” said Dulcie, staring hard at him.

Skelt hit her again—and again.

“Don’t, you brute!” cried Dulcie, springing to her feet. “I’m leaving Hayley today.”

“You’ll stay here and see this thing through,” said Skelt. “And when it’s all over, we’ll get married.”

“I’ll never marry you—now!”

“I thought you loved me.”

“So did I. But now I know what you’ve done, I’m terrified of you.”

“I’ve done nothing.”

“Then how did it get into Mary’s body?”

“There isn’t anything in her body! I said they might pretend there was.”

“They’d never do that,” said Dulcie, staring hard at him again.

“Listen,” said Skelt harshly, “Mary was always taking medicines of all kinds. Some of them may have remained in her body. I don’t know. But if they can’t prove I ever bought anything, and had no motive, it’ll be all right. Now *you* look like a motive. You must convince them you weren’t. See?”

“Arthur, why does Mary’s ghost walk?”

“It doesn’t!” said Skelt furiously. “You weren’t listening to what I was saying.”

“It does walk, and you know it. Why are the servants leaving?”

“It’s these rumours.”

“No, they’ve seen it and they’re terrified.” The house shook again and the drawer crashed forward.

“What *can* that be?” cried Dulcie, her eyes wild. “It’s all part of it. I know it! Mary’s ghost. This awful smell. The whole house reeks of death and sin and horror!” Skelt was forcing back the drawer. “What have you got in there? What are you hiding?” cried Dulcie. “Why don’t you lock it?”

“I can’t find the key,” said Skelt.

“Mary’s got it!” said Dulcie, her voice rising again.

“For God’s sake, Dulcie,” said Skelt desperately, “control yourself! Go home and lie down. I can’t make you out. Up till now you’ve been so cool and collected. You’ve been a great help to me. Such a pal—besides everything else.”

“Yes, I’ve slept with you,” said Dulcie sullenly, “sneaked in and out. Shall I tell the police that! Don’t hit me again!” But Skelt smacked her face brutally.

“Yes,” he said, “and your eyes sparkled when Mary died!”

“Don’t say that!” cried Dulcie. “She’s listening to every word we say! Smell my hand! My clothes! They reek of *her*, her corpse! I daren’t look up at that window! She’s always there, staring in!”

Skelt seized her by the shoulders and thrust her towards the door. “Go home,” he said, “and recover yourself. You know what to say to the police. We’re just old friends. When my wife died you took pity on my loneliness. Of course you’re *not* in love with me. Actually you dislike all men. Say that and stick to it, and we’ll both be all right.”

“I’ll say it,” said Dulcie, “but I’ll never come to you again. You’ve had *that* for the last time.”

“Wait till all this blows over,” said Skelt.

“It never, never will!” replied Dulcie, and went her way.

Once more Skelt ran to the drawer. Once again, as he reached it, the door opened behind him.

His face was distorted with fury as he turned and faced Molly.

“A gentleman to see you,” she said. She regarded him with a certain gloating insolence. She saw he was greatly upset by something, and now she could “hot it up” for him nicely. He’d been a beast to her that night, and now she was getting her revenge.

“Who?” asked Skelt, forcing that look off his face.

“He’s from the *Police*,” said Molly impudently, as if to imply, “*Now* you’re for it!”

“Show him in.”

A short burly person in plain clothes entered and held out his hand. The expression on his face was lacking in cordiality, for he had passed Dulcie in the hall and his observant eye had noted the incipient bruises on her cheek bones, and he rather disapproved of beating women. Also a long red scar on his right cheek, the souvenir of a Bavarian sniper, greatly enhanced the forbidding impression this person made on Skelt.

“Good morning, Mr. Skelt,” he said. “I’m Chief Detective Inspector Marlon of Scotland Yard.”

“Oh yes,” said Skelt indifferently. “Sit down and tell me what I can do for you.” He yawned ostentatiously.

“Thanks. You know, of course, your wife’s body was exhumed this morning?” Oddly enough he himself was being displeasingly reminded of it by the atrocious stench in the room. He had been present at that repulsive and sinister ceremony, and had helped to raise the coffin-lid. Was he a “carrier” for that stench? Had that dejected bundle of mortality impregnated him with its carrion reek? He surreptitiously sniffed his right sleeve. He couldn’t be sure, and still felt polluted, and discomforted in spirit.

“Of course I know it,” said Skelt sharply, “but I am at a loss to account for such desecration.”

“Matter of routine, really,” said Marlon.

“*Really*,” echoed Skelt sardonically. “As a lawyer I can hardly accept *that* explanation.” (“Tough guy, eh,” thought Marlon. “I’ll give him a jab.”)

“We had our orders,” he said coldly, “and carried them out. I may say your wife’s body was remarkably well preserved.”

“She’d only been dead five months,” said Skelt, tugging at his moustache.

“Even so.”

“Are you going to caution me?” asked Skelt.

“No, no, nothing of the kind,” answered Marlon quickly. “Just want to ask you a few questions. See if you can help us at all.” His tone was suave, but he was not at his ease. He had Cornish blood in him, and behind a hard-boiled exterior was a “sensitive”, his spirit open to perilous thoughts and inroads. It was this heightened awareness, backed by sterner qualities, which made him so good at his job. But at the moment it was suggesting to him there was a third person in the room, that he was being observed by unseen eyes. Had this little killer concealed someone to overhear the conversation? Most improbable, yet—He glanced slowly round the big room till his gaze reached the window. Then he said sharply, “Who is that in the garden?” He noticed to his astonishment Skelt flinched slightly at the question. However he replied coolly enough, “Probably one of the maids. What has been done with my wife’s body?” he added.

“Certain organs have been removed for examination by Sir Andrew Melsbury. It will be re-interred this afternoon.”

“It is all a great waste of time,” said Skelt. “My wife died from natural causes.”

“Well,” said Marlon, with a wintry smile, “that is, of course, what we have to make quite sure of.”

“Dr. Fawkes was sure.”

“Was sure, yes.”

“What do you imply,” asked Skelt uneasily, “that he has changed his mind?”

“I’m afraid I can’t be more explicit at the moment,” replied Marlon. “Were any poisons kept on the premises?”

“Not by me,” said Skelt.

“By your wife?”

“I can merely say this,” replied Skelt, shifting in his chair, “that she was always taking medicines, trying different cures. There may have been poison in some of them.”

“Where did she buy them?”

Skelt shrugged his little shoulders. “It was nothing to do with me. Some locally, I suppose. She bought and paid for them herself.”

Marlon repressed a smile. Skelt’s intense parsimony was proverbial in Hayley, he’d discovered. Murderers were nearly always “tight-wads”, he knew. “We find,” he said, “she bought some Callows Syrup.”

“Yes,” said Skelt, “she took far too much of it. I warned her about it. It contains arsenic.”

(“Cunning little lizard!” thought Marlon). “Yes,” he said, “in most minute quantities.”

“It has ‘Poison’ on the label,” said Skelt, “that is what I went by.”

“That woman peered in at the window again,” said Marlon. “Would you ask her not to do so, it distracts me.”

Skelt got up, hesitated, and seemed about to leave the room. Then his eye flicked to the bureau and he pressed the bell by the fireplace. Molly appeared. “Were you in the garden just now, Molly?” asked Skelt.

“No,” she replied abruptly.

“Then it must have been Cook. Tell her to keep away from the windows.”

“Cook’s never left the kitchen.”

“Don’t argue! The Inspector saw one of you at the window.”

“No, he didn’t,” said Molly tartly. “Maybe it was Miss Skinner,” she said meaningly, “or *someone else*,” and she crossed herself ostentatiously.

“That’ll do,” said Skelt sharply. “You can go.”

“Has Miss Skinner been here this morning?” asked Marlon. “I want to see her.”

“She came round when she heard the news,” said Skelt.

“She’s the daughter of the garage proprietor?”

“That is so.”

“The gossip in the town,” smiled Marlon, “is that you’re going to marry her.”

“Quite untrue,” said Skelt sharply. “I have no intention of marrying again. I think you’ve been listening to too much gossip.”

The room shook, the windows clattered, the drawer fell forward.

“Cripes!” exclaimed Marlon. “What’s that?”

“Passing traffic,” said Skelt, his eye on the drawer. Marlon, who had his eye on Skelt, came to a sudden conclusion. “Felt more like an earth tremor,” he said. “You bought no poisons, you say?”

“None.”

“The condition of your wife’s body suggests she had absorbed a very heavy dose of some preservative metallic poison,” said Marlon slowly, “arsenic or antimony. Don’t bother to shut that drawer. I shall be having a little look round presently.”

“You are going to search the house?” asked Skelt sharply.

“You don’t object, do you,” said Marlon.

“Not in the least, provided you have a warrant.”

“I have it,” said Marlon. “About that metallic poison, you’ve no idea how it could have entered her body?”

“I wasn’t aware it had been discovered yet,” said Skelt sardonically. “I know she must have absorbed some in the Callows Syrup, that is all.”

A certain tension seemed to have been relaxed in him, as though a weight had been taken off his mind. Marlon was astonished and

disconcerted by this. Could he be on the wrong track? Why this sudden inflow of confidence? He himself was by no means at heart's ease. That filthy reek was more pungent than ever. And though he had only the corner of his eye on the window, yet out of that corner he could detect something white between the laurel bushes, something that remained still while they writhed in the gale which went moaning round the walls, lashing at the trees. The room seemed charged with suspense, as if two poles of potential were building up for a stroke. And there was that little rogue looking as imperturbable and smiling as aloofly as an effigy of the Buddha! He rallied his spirit and remarked, "Sir Andrew was immensely impressed by the state of your wife's body, from which no two conclusions could be drawn. Your wife had been ill for some time, had she not?"

"About six weeks," replied Skelt casually.

"She recovered several times and then relapsed?"

"No doubt," said Skelt smiling, "Dr. Fawkes kept a careful note of the course of the illness and he can inform you better than I." He yawned again and seemed genuinely bored with the interrogation.

"Who gave her her food?" asked Marlon. He was completely at a loss and mentally off-balance for the moment.

"We took it in turns," said Skelt.

"*You* fed her at times?"

"Frequently. Wouldn't you have expected it? May I ask why the authorities decided on this absurd action?"

"I suppose the answer would be 'Information Received'," replied Marlon. Sweat was bursting out all over his body. He passed his hand across his soaking brow. "There was some funny information, too," he continued, his voice rising. "It was said the ghost of your wife had been seen around here!"

Skelt smiled again, put his right hand in his pocket and withdrew it. Then he put his left hand in his pocket, and brought out a packet of cigarettes.

"That's perfectly true," he said, bursting out laughing. "She's standing just behind you now!"

Marlon swung his head round, and for a moment seemed to be enveloped in a stenching mist. As he did so, Skelt passed his right hand across his mouth. The room shook violently, the windows drummed, the

drawer was flung clear and fell to the floor, over which it hurled its contents. Skelt gave a clipped cry and flung his hand to his throat as the cyanide struck him, and crashed to the floor. As Marlon went stumbling towards him he trod on a small packet that burst and scattered a white, gritty powder, which Skelt's incurable parsimony had prevented him throwing away.

Monstrous Regiment

The first time my pendulum swung from the zero line—I wonder if that is a strained analogy? I am a practised writer on many subjects, but I have never attempted anything of this kind before, anything about myself. I can feel the difficulties, the spiritual resistance, to such humiliating self-exposure. This is no doubt an appropriate time, but an odd place, in which to cultivate the autobiographical art. His Majesty has some peculiar ideas of *pleasure*, though this place must be an Isle of the Blest compared with Broadmoor or the common or garden bug-house. Yet the fact remains I can't get out! I dislike the ordeal intensely. There is not a trace of Rousseauian exhibitionism or self-pity about me. I am doing this simply because Sir Eustace advised me to try and purge myself of my memories by bringing them to the surface. They may be anærobic; this exercise may prove cathartic. That is why.

Well, that first time was when I was seven years old. I know it was when we were having a holiday at Weston-super-Mare. My father took a house for six weeks every summer at or near some seaside place. His hobby was architecture, his business a huge iron foundry near Mansfield in Nottinghamshire. We lived in the heart of the country in a very big house ten miles away. How hard it is to write “against the pricks!” My repugnance to it seems to foul and “stutter” every sentence. All digression so far! I'm going to get the horrors for a while. . . that's better! Extraordinary how they come and go! They have to be rough with me when I get them. They hurt me, so my temper is slowly but surely rotting. Jenkins will get the benefit of it before long!

My father's hobby took us on motoring trips to examine local objects of architectural interest, village churches predominating in most areas. My father used to make copious notes and take photographs, occasionally recording the fruits of his researches in archaeological and architectural periodicals and in letters to the press. Well, we were in one of those Somerset churches one afternoon and I wandered off on my own. I found myself staring at an alcove-tomb. In it was an effigy of a man lying on his back. He had some armour on, breast-plate and greaves, I think, but he was wearing a high ruffed collar on which his square black beard was resting. His coat-of-arms was on the wall at the back of this tiny mausoleum. There were some people carved in relief on the plinth of the slab on which this

knight was resting, men on one side, women on the other. They were on their knees praying, with their hands raised, finger-tips touching. The colour scheme was simple; black and white—magpie. While I was looking at the effigy it slowly turned its head and opened its black eyes in which there seemed to be a look of warning and foreboding. I was badly frightened and ran back to my father and Connie, and told them what I'd seen. *It was Connie's first day with us.*

My father pretended to be angry and said, "Now you know that's not true, Claud. You saw nothing of the sort, did you?"

"I did, Daddy, I promise," I replied.

"Very well, then, Miss Courtney will have to punish you. It's a pity she should have to so soon, but you must learn above all things to be truthful."

"Certainly, Mr. Mardon," said Connie, smiling, "I'll give his little bottom a really good spanking." She seemed very pleased, and I vaguely wondered why.

When we got home my father said, "Now Claud, I'll give you one more chance. You did *not* see that head turn and those eyes open, did you?"

I nodded.

"Very well, then, you will now be punished. I think Miss Courtney looks strong enough to make you remember that punishment and a better boy in the future." And he was looking at her admiringly.

Connie took me to our bedroom and undressed herself and me. Then she took me on her knees and fondled and kissed me. She held me tight to her and I could feel how strong she was. "You're a very naughty little boy, aren't you, Claud, but you're also a very beautiful little boy and I adore you already. You're going to be *my* little boy entirely, d'you see? I'm not going to slap you because your daddy told me to, but I *shall* slap you, and very hard, when I think you deserve it, and that'll be whenever you disobey *me*. If your daddy asks you, you'll say I hurt you a lot, won't you?" Her tone was sharp and commanding.

"Yes, Miss Courtney," I said, much relieved.

"You're to call me *Connie*. When we're alone, *Connie, darling*. D'you understand?"

"Yes, Connie, darling," I said.

“That’s right. You’re a clever little boy,” and she strained me to her again. “Are you going to love me, Claud?” she asked, bringing her lips to mine.

“Yes, Connie, darling,” I said, and in a sense it was already beginning to be true.

This incident taught me “plenty”, as the slangsters have it, and suggested more, as may well be imagined. It taught me to be secretive and wary. It taught me Connie was to be boss and arbiter for the future. That if I disobeyed her I should get hurt. It taught me she was quite prepared to disobey my father. Then I realised vaguely that Connie loved me in a way I had never been loved before; differently from the way my mother loved me; that she was interested in me in a way I didn’t understand. This pleased me greatly, though I didn’t know why. She told me afterwards that she became obsessed with me the moment she set eyes on me, and that there was a strong sexual element in her love from the start. Anyway I was never out of her thoughts again. (More of this later.)

I was quite ill with a violent headache for three days. Sir Eustace thinks this illness was entirely “pathological”. But I rather mistrust these facile subtleties.

I will now try to describe my parents and family life. I will also attempt a description of Connie; it will be utterly inadequate. Some people—historians are compelled to recognise this platitude—have to be seen and watched to be known and understood. The eye realises things the tongue can never speak, the pen write. Connie was in the fullest sense indescribable.

My father at this time was a man of forty-three, ten years older than my mother. He was a big, powerful person, handsome in a not very distinguished way. Though he had inherited his business, he ran it very well. He had an inventive bent, considerable aesthetic sensitivity, and he was a mathematician by right of birth. I inherited much from him. He was a big eater, a connoisseur of wine, and possessed of abnormally strong animal passions. Connie assured me of this and no one was in a better position to say. Connie never lied unnecessarily. Never told the truth unnecessarily either! Well, till my mother became ill he was a greatly respected man, far above the average mentally and physically. Once Connie came he began to degenerate in every way and before his death was almost ostracised by his many former friends. All of them had the greatest respect and admiration for my mother and resented Connie bitterly.

Well, the fact remains, continuous and intimate cohabitation with a woman was as necessary to him as their breakfasts to his critics. It was largely their implied censure which reconciled him to his “spiritual” decline and fall; and after all he was in no way responsible for my mother’s illness. Before that they were a perfectly happy pair and would, I am convinced, have remained so. That was a brutal blow to both of them.

My mother was a very intelligent woman with the soul of an artist. I got my music and much else from her. Physically she was a great beauty and splendidly strong, fearless and energetic. She was an aristocrat by birth and perfectly looked and lived the part. She was fully as passionate as my father, so I was a love child if ever there was one; much felicity went to my making. I was not born till my parents had been married five years, and three years later they had just decided to have another child when my mother got rheumatic fever which seriously damaged her heart and left her a crippled invalid for as long as that heart held out. I adored her, but after she got so ill it made me miserable to see her lying there, her beauty killed by pain, her fine body distorted, her spirit largely broken. She was a person for whom illness brought no compensations whatever. Something died in me then. It was this that gave Connie her chance.

This enforced celibacy made my father irritable and nervous. This also gave Connie her opening. It became an unhappy menage and I wilted under its influence. We had everything money could buy, but nothing money couldn’t.

Connie’s father was a business associate of my father’s who lost his whole fortune through the rascality of his partner and shot himself and his wife. No doubt he would have included Connie in the battue, had she not been staying with friends, in which case my career would have been less melodramatic. She was left quite penniless. My father had already met her and I have no doubt experienced premonitory stirrings of the pulse. Anyway, inclination and altruism for once combining, he offered her the job of nurse to me, no doubt with other possibilities in view. She made one stipulation, she must see me first before deciding. The moment she did so she accepted. She told me she was paid a starting salary of five hundred a year! That, she perfectly realised, told its own tale, the job had almost unlimited prospects! As I have said, her psychic life changed abruptly and decisively from that moment. It must be understood, easily understood, I imagine, I have no vanity. I never had, as a matter of fact. In any case it wouldn’t have survived my fate, but I believe I was a pretty kid; Connie said I was the loveliest she had ever seen or imagined, and she always admired my looks in an insane

sort of way. I have no doubt—nor has Sir Eustace—that she was subtly unbalanced—disorientated, with a powerful inherited taint. Her father, it may be supposed, was mentally stained.

She said I was already a little *man* at seven, precociously masculine, and that I already attracted her sexually in a strange way. She was just eighteen when she came to us. She was a very tall girl, five foot ten, and very strongly and perfectly made. (She told me my father was attracted only by big powerful women, women whose muscles, as well as their desires, were as strong as his own.) Her body was quite flawless, I think, very long-legged, small-waisted, full breasted, with perfect feet and ankles. Her hands were well modelled but without character. Her hair was a dark chestnut with red glints, very long and thick. As for her face, apart from her eyes, she was just an ordinary regular-featured girl, with a fine skin, but those eyes would have been the making of most faces. They were almost fantastically narrow. You know how the eyes of some orientals appear almost habitually closed. (It may be an evolved characteristic due to strong glare.) Hers were like that. It wasn't a deliberate, calculated trick; they were made that way. They were a light green, when you could see them. Naturally the upper lids were very long and so were her eye-lashes. This made her look highly enigmatic, subtle and intense. They were the eyes of a fanatical concentrator. Actually she was not particularly intelligent and she was completely incapable of, and disinterested in, the finer facilities of the human mind. She had no artistic flair whatever. Her general knowledge was ludicrously meagre. But she was extremely cunning for her own ends. She knew exactly how to snare the sensual side of men; she understood that side of them absolutely. She was ruthlessly self-centred without a trace of altruism or kindness—those saving graces in—her make-up. The born courtesan, and yet she was in no way promiscuous, rather, as I say, the born concentrator. Again she always radiated a certain sense of gaiety and well-being. I'm no expert on women, but I believe these superb amoral animals often have that paradoxical effect or aura. That intense vitality is one of the most cherished attributes of man; its compensatory value is very high. She took the greatest care of her body. She was very careful what she ate and drank, never smoked, and was massaged three times a week. She taught me to do it. I never knew her to have the slightest indisposition, not even a headache or cold; her machine functioned with effortless precision. It was this odd being, this highly skilled, controlled sensualist, this tainted goddess, who fell in love with me when I was seven and made up her mind to live only for the gratifications I could give her; who determined to dominate and control me and train me to the utmost of her power; to “break-me-in” and condition me till I was hers

and hers alone. An insane project? Perhaps. But how would you have fared under such a regime? You wouldn't like to say, would you!

The horrors!. . . A very bad attack, I have not been able to write a line for three days.

My mother mistrusted Connie from the very moment she saw her. No doubt to begin with she rated her merely as a typical specimen of the Becky Sharp genus, the conventional penniless adventuress with mercenary, if not matrimonial, designs on a susceptible employer. Connie was a highly subtle variant on that venerable theme. I think my mother soon spotted something of that. Connie was determined to make herself physically essential to my father, but only on my account. I have watched her ingeniously, if obviously, tantalising and stimulating my father. She dressed very simply, but always in such a way as to reveal and conceal her splendid young body. She used no scent or make-up, everything was designed to contrast her health, youth, strength, and naturalness with my mother's sickness, frailty and premature age. "See what you've got and what you might and can have!" was her unspoken proclamation. She struck unerringly at his weak spot which, as usual, was his blind spot. He *had* to have her. The result was inevitable. *Her* character meant nothing to him, *his* character meant nothing to him in balance with that irrepressible animal desire. I don't think my mother would have minded her being his mistress if she had been nothing more. She knew him and sympathised. She had well known such passions herself. But she understood intuitively Connie's perverted infatuation for me and was terrified as to my fate. And in the slang of today: how right she was!

My arm hurts. I shall "liquidate" that "attendant", Jenkins, one fine day. Win his confidence, get behind him, put my left arm round his neck and swing his chin with my right.

Of course Sir Eustace will see this and we'll talk it over. That's our bargain. I'll try not to drag my present discontents into this story; my business is with the past.

I now come to a very difficult part of that story. Sir Eustace tells me if it is ever published in the wider sense it will be bowdlerized. At present he wants me to cleanse my spirit absolutely, and that can only be done by complete, shameless candour. He says it is my duty to allow my shame to be published for its scientific and monitory value. He says that far too few such experiences ever see the light or are ever read by parents, educationalists and sociologists. There are far too few blazing a trail through this dark forest. He says countless lives are ruined in the nursery, at the nurses' hands and in the

nurses' beds. That even perverted parents are horribly common. In his practice he realises shockingly often the fruits of perverted adult power over the young, from which it is almost impossible for the victim properly to recover. That not merely madmen and "eccentrics" are created in this way, but that there is a horrid host of apparently normal persons under high pressure from a seething subconscious. Regard this, therefore, as a cautionary tale. Regard me as a sacrificial victim, taking to my body the arrows which might have slain another. For, believe me, by nature and temperament I am introverted, reticent, a passionate ascetic; by that I mean one possessed of masterful appetites, flooding secretions, a potent link in the life-chain, a tireless lover, but if it had not been for Connie I could and should have perfectly controlled those clamorous natural calls, for I could have directed and forced that intense vitality into the service of my brain. There is only one passion I could never have controlled, the passions for learning, for art and for thought.

Well, I will try to explain. Connie said to me once almost in these exact crude words.

"I adore men, everything about them fascinates me. But I must concentrate on one. It would not amuse me to keep on being loved by different men at the same time. They fascinate me physically, but only if they appeal to me in other ways. I suppose if I hadn't known you, I should have had lovers, but only one at a time and for a long time. It would have taken me a long time to tire of him. I should have wanted to find out everything about him, study him, monopolise him, make him wicked when he wanted to be good, make him different from what he wanted to be, simply because of me. I should have had to be his master as well as his mistress. I should have chosen them very carefully. They would always have been physically splendid and with fascination for me, yet able to deny me nothing. When I'd finished with them I should have liked to have killed them, so that no one else could have them. I should have liked them very clever, so that I could conquer their brains with my body."

Well, she went on trying to develop and elaborate this theme, this vampire philosophy, with a vocabulary quite inadequate to its expression, but, in its way, starkly precise enough; and it only shows you what odd ideas some young girls have as they day-dream at their ease. Well, then she came down to the brass tacks of Claud Mardon.

"And then I saw you, already a little *man*. It gave me the most extraordinary sensation and I thought I was going to faint or scream out. I trembled all over. For you were what I came in the world for; you that quite

perfect little *man*. I'd have killed anyone who'd tried to keep me away from you. I fell absolutely in love with you at once and I knew exactly what I'd make you do and be. I'd have sole control of you. I could bring you up; I'd be more your mother at first. I'd train you, break you in. I could watch you grow just as I wanted you to. I could watch sex growing in you, make it grow, watch the way your eyes changed when I'd taught you what a woman was, what a woman was for and what *I'd* be to you. You'd change from my son to my lover. I'd change from your mother to your mistress and your master. All that you'd know about women would be learned from me and only for me. I would train you up to give me that intense pleasure, ceaseless pleasure, only you could give me and only I would ever give you." And so on and on.

Well, up to a point she did the job. It is horrible to confess it, but I still adore her in a very strange way. Sometimes I miss her intolerably. If she came into this room now, she could do what she liked with me. I *think* that is true. Anyway it is inconceivable to me that I could ever look at another woman with any trace of desire. She conditioned me in that mode absolutely. I still feel utterly incomplete without her. If she called, I should run to her. I make this foul confession as a harsh, peremptory warning to others. The human ego can be intolerably complex. No novelist or dramatist, not even Shakespeare, has done more than skim the surface. The depths completely elude analysis. It is impossible to make the *contradictory* plausible or even interesting; that is why Dostoievsky is such hard reading. One seems to be swimming under a summer sun and a winter sky, with no guide to, or control over, the causeless counter-currents which drift one here and there, but never to a friendly shore.

There was only one way to break these chains of love and hate. I had to—but we will come to that at the appointed place. It must be remembered I am only just nineteen now. Time might have changed me in almost every way. Well, she deliberately forced me sexually. She knew exactly how to do that, to make me rely on her alone for a new and peculiar type of pleasure. She did it slowly and surely, not forcing me too far, or fast, but very subtly. By the time I was thirteen I was a precociously developed adolescent. She was big and an accomplished teacher. I was a small and avid learner. (A long passage omitted. A.S.)

I have already said I completely lack vanity. For one thing, you have to be easy-minded to be vain. You have to enjoy mental leisure to gaze into the brook. That I have never experienced. So I can say, and expect you to believe, that I grew up to be a fine physical specimen and with a certain kind

of good looks. I grew till I was six foot three. Jenkins and his colleagues—it takes five of them to hold me—could inform you of my strength, and I was far stronger while I was “alive”. Women always seem attracted by me. The few I have known have shown me I could have them for the asking and I shouldn’t have to ask twice. Not once have I ever put the expected, darling question! I have wanted no woman but Connie. Strong strain of masochism? If so, far more conditioned than innate.

Sir Eustace tells me that women like Connie are a recognised type, though she was the most extreme case he has known. Again they seldom get such a perfect victim as myself, so lonely, friendless and unchampioned. He is inclined to believe they represent a confusion of instincts—like a hound sucking a fox cub!—a mother-mistress discord they cannot resolve. The result is a perverted passion for the young male whom they regard as both son and lover and long to treat as both. I told him Connie had already said that, so it wasn’t very clever of him, and that there is a sharp distinction between Post and Propter. Anyway, if this complex has not yet been nicknamed, the “Connie Courtney Complex” would be pleasantly alliterative and accurate to a fault!

“You,” said Sir Eustace, “were ideally designed by nature to obsess such a type. You radiate something women can’t resist; several of them have told me so. When you’re well again, you must remember that. Remember Pandora sadistically bestowed on you the most deadly gift in her box, the seven most deadly gifts, I might say.”

The caution is unnecessary. I shall not get well, I know it, and don’t really want to. Compared with Connie all other women are insipid, graceless hags. There I’ve said it! I love to say it sometimes. I’m in better spirits at the moment; this part of my tale is gentler on my spirit because it reminds me how I adored her when I was very young. No one ever even remotely compared with her. When I think of her like that I feel a little boy again.

When I was eight-and-a-half my mother died suddenly and my father married Connie six months later. She actually rather disliked him. She’d have much preferred him out of the way. She determined to get him out of the way. Once she’d secured him she made not the slightest effort to pretend she cared for him. She wanted his money and me. She got both. She said if it had been possible she would have waited for me, kept her virginity for me. My father’s embraces gave her no pleasure, merely exacerbated her longing for me. She resolved to have her revenge. He had developed blood-pressure. A young wife can be bad for that. The whole thing was soaked in morbidity and perversion. That’s why I’m here.

My father had had a horrible school-life; he always declared the public schools of England were merely moulds for the cultivation of vice. On no account would he allow me to run the risk of repeating his sufferings. That was another bit of bad luck for me. I cannot believe even the corruptive resources of Eton or Winchester would have brought me here! So I was educated at home. Till I was ten I had just one general tutor. After that I had no less than four, all picked men most highly paid. I had one for classics and philosophy, one for math, one for history and kindred subjects, one for music. My father even built a house on the estate especially for them. This grandiose pedagogic scheme was, I think, partly the issue of a guilty conscience; my father instituted it as a counterpoise to Connie. If he couldn't get me quit of her thrall—and there was not the remotest chance of that—he'd do the next best thing, provide a potent antidote. Two of my tutors "fell" hopelessly for Connie. The other two detested her, partly in self defence, partly on my account. She treated them with extreme disdain and fought their influence over me with implacable consistency, once she realised what that influence implied.

Another go of the horrors, totally unexpected! I can hardly write now, but it was well worth it. I put the whole of my thirteen stone behind a right to that historic member, Jenkin's ear. Yet it didn't travel a foot. Sir Eustace says they have to be tough with me to save me from injuring myself. Well, I have to be a little tough, too. If I ever get Jenkins in just the right position again he'll join his ancestors, some brand of dung-eating cave-types, I imagine. I hear he has just recovered consciousness, but is still vague as to what hit him and things in general!

I was a very apt learner in all these subjects. I seemed to have come into this world a fairly proficient mathematician and musician, trailing clouds of symbols as it were, for the language of these arts seemed perfectly familiar at first sight. Again the classic tongues gave me no real trouble. Philosophy metaphysics worried me at first because it took me some time to grasp that it was a purely subjective exercise having no reference to—well, what shall I call it? Reality? Each system being based on a purely arbitrary choice of axioms by the philosopher concerned. That choice being entirely a question of temperament. The ludicrous solemnity, the unbridled verbosity of these brilliantly subtle minds! History is largely subjective too. I do not mean merely fact-selection based on the particular questions the historian asks himself, but on his visualising peculiarities. Before I attempt to understand an historical situation—say the crowning of Charlemagne—I have to *see* it, *watch* the very changes of expression on the faces of the dead, observe them

when they are alone, watch the shadows on the arras. A highly *personal* recreation in both senses of the word.

It seems to me that there are only two modes by which we get an insight into that inexhaustible enigma, the cosmos, mathematics and music. For the dictated clodhoppery of “revealed” religions I have always felt the most complete contempt. Mathematics gives us some dim indication of its structure, music some faint echo of its essence. Now ninety-nine-point-nine per cent of music is merely a pleasing or displeasing jingle, sound and rhythm, signifying nothing. Brahms and his near-peers, for he is the greatest, just occasionally bridge a great gulf with a strand of unearthly insight. I said “signifying nothing”. Such compositions, the stock-in-trade of even the greatest composers, who only reach the great deeps once in a while, can be exquisitely pleasing and are true creations in petto but the great ones never rate them higher. Minor modern composers, like minor modern poets, strive to be profound all the time and not at moments of highest inspiration—if any. This accounts for the angularity and subjectiveness of most of their work. True inspiration is never subjective; it is intercommunicative; it is the flash which links and relieves two potencies; it is both broadcaster and receiver. The inspired person achieves that passionate union and publishes it in his selected symbols. It is somewhat the same with mathematics. There is engineers’ mathematics, all mathematics applied to the solution of practical problems. My father never bettered that, though he had it in him to do so. Mathematics as an art only begins where that sort ends. Before you can have great art, its symbols must become “detached” and neutral and unsubjective, employed simultaneously and in precisely the same sense by those in communion together. To take a crude analogy, sometimes in the greatest songs—there aren’t a dozen—the competing symbols so match themselves and fuse. Excuse this loose and nebulous digression. Such intermezzos relieve my mental burden; make it possible for me to go through with this.

I have asked Sir Eustace if the horrors will ever get less. He tells me they will, and that I’m getting something out of my system. They are the symptoms of enormous delayed psychic shock, resurges of subconscious memory. “You are the most complex being I have ever known,” he said, “and quite the most naturally endowed. I’ll get you out of here and well again, if I never do anything else. You’ve been most brutally misused.” (I shall never get out of here.)

I asked him (dusty answer!) also about my—well, what? Supernatural experiences? Where does the prefix begin to be justified in this phantasmagoria? Does it govern the symphonies of Brahms?

I had my second *major* one soon after Connie married my father. It was when my bull-terrier, Jasper, was run over and killed. We buried him in a far corner of the garden under a willow at the edge of the lake. I woke up that night and heard him scratching in his grave, scratching to get out. At first I was just puzzled, then glad he wasn't dead, then bone-cold because I knew he was. I heard him climb out of the hole, shake himself, and start to trot towards the house. I heard him whine, strike the front door with his paws, and then begin to climb the stairs. He had been a bleeding, broken, dishevelled thing when my father brought him in from the road and I'd no wish to see him again. I reached the limit of terror, being unable to move a muscle. He came to my door and began whining and scratching it. And then Connie came from my father's bed to me; she always knew when I was in any sort of trouble. I told her what I'd heard.

"Darling," she said, "supposing I told Daddy that? He'd be very angry, wouldn't he? Well, of course, I won't, but I'm going to punish you." She was laughing. She bent me over the edge of the bed and slapped me very hard. Whether she knew it or not—I think she did—the pain was an antidote to terror. Besides I adored anything like that she did to me. She got into bed with me and fondled me till I slept.

In the morning she said, "I'll just say you had a bad nightmare. You are all mine, aren't you?"

"Yes, Connie, darling."

"This is our secret," she said, "no one else will ever know." Then she held me so tightly we seemed one body.

She dug up Jasper that morning, but I don't know what she did with him.

I have already said Sir Eustace gave me a dim reply. He knows I'm trying to tell the truth, but he can't be sure whether they are creations of my own mind formed since that mind "went". I am *quite* sure, but it's natural he should doubt. I told him he should inscribe, "Canst thou minister to a mind diseased?" on the wall of his bedroom, so that he should see it each morning as he woke. The alienist is surely the most enforcedly empirical of all wise-men!

My one-ness with Connie—such words as *love*, *obsession* and so on are ludicrously inadequate—I was grafted on to her—became absolute. I don't believe I was ever out of her thoughts for half an hour. I was her work. She told me she longed to have born me. She was entranced with the way my body grew. My tutor's reports to my father told an unarguable tale, and at

first she was proud of my intelligence, until she realised it was her deadliest foe. She continued to take the utmost care of her health and looks which grew finer with the years; her body, tauter and stronger, filled out superbly.

And so those years went by till I was fifteen, when, unable to control her passion longer, she seduced me. I was no stranger to the idea. *She* had been my clever tutor in that and I had absorbed her teaching with my accustomed facility.

One day my father said he would have to be away for a couple of nights on business in London during the following week. I saw at once—I knew her so well—that my initiation was at hand. I saw she was in a state of high, just-controlled and disguised excitement. The moment he left the house she took me in her arms. She was shaking with anticipation; I felt her hands vibrating against my sides. “Darling,” she said, “tonight I take you. I have waited for it eight long years. You will be mine absolutely and for ever.” And it was so. She nearly killed me in those terrible, exquisite, half-incestuous embraces. She was insatiable, impelled by years of storing and frustration. I matched her to the end, enjoying her as she enjoyed me. But she tried me too high. It was her first great mistake, miscalculation, the first bouleversement of her iron control. I was older than my age in every way, but she would have exhausted a sexual athlete in the prime of his virility. I was really ill for some days, and I learnt there are two sides to such ecstasy and that one of them wears black. She was a fool to teach me that. I was frightened, for I felt she might kill me indeed. I was glad to see my father back. If she had held herself in that wouldn’t have happened, but such ruthless ravaging of even the strongest boy of fifteen was bound to scare and warn him. I was still her slave in a way. I still wanted her and adored giving her pleasure, but I realised it could make me ill. I had never been really ill before, and I loathed it.

Unluckily, when she saw what she’d done she brought all her self-control back into play. Unluckily, because otherwise she would have killed me and then I should have missed all this. She nursed me devotedly, was hardly ever out of my room. She saw I had the best of everything, but being mindless herself, that is to say profoundly disinterested in anything abstract, anything that did not at least indirectly impinge upon herself, she was completely blind to that urge in others, especially a precociously lively-minded boy. When she ravished me I was making an exhaustive study of Beethoven’s last two sonatas. I don’t mean learning to play the notes and memorising them, that never presented the least difficulty to me. I mean learning to see what Beethoven was experiencing when he was composing

them. I once learnt to play *Opus III* precisely as Busoni recorded it. I was profoundly dissatisfied; I sweated with malaise. Busoni was, perhaps, the greatest pianist who ever lived, but he didn't repeat what Beethoven had said. Then I had just completed my first month's study of Cantor, always a great moment, I suppose, in a mathematician's life. Mathematically I was beginning to think for myself. I had just translated thirty of Yeats' poems into Greek and Latin verse. I presented these to my classic tutor and they were subsequently published in, I think, the *Journal of Classical Studies*. I was painting little, but learning to *see*, studying in particular superficially banal landscape. I realised that all great art, or even tolerable art, is the result of personal vision, making the thing one's own. You must make the thing yours, become one with it, before you can accomplish anything worth seeing, listening to, or reading. My object has always been to exclude and eliminate the derivative element.

I know all this is highly debatable, an insoluble aesthetic problem. I had also as a side-line just defeated my four tutors simultaneously at "blindfold" chess. I solved a rather difficult cross-word puzzle at the same time. (I may say none of them was better than Beta Minus at this pastime.) But it shows my brain was nicely compartmented at the time. I could summon or dismiss just the picture I wanted. Odd that! It's all gone now, of course. I had already decided with charming hubris to devote my life to writing a history of civilisation emphasising, almost based on, its artifacts, particularly music, mathematics and architecture, the fundamental inventions of man. *Of a very few men*. The majority are always moaning over their fate and discontents. That dreary destiny is inevitable so long as it is based on ignorance. They lie beside their vomit and the bolts are hurled far above them on the heights. My tutors were no longer exactly my teachers. I was ahead of them in some respects. They were my advisers and stimulants. So there I was dedicated to a life of unremitting work of the most comprehensive and universal kind. And here was this fearful, beguiling lust of Connie's laying the fragile edifice low.

My tutors knew what was the matter. I overheard them discussing it. "Curse that lustful cat!" said one, my music tutor "She's half-killed the father, now she has started on Claud. A blow-fly on an eagle!"

"I wish she'd picked me instead," said my little history tutor, who hungered for her in vain.

"She'd finish you in a week," said another contemptuously. "If I didn't think I could help Claud, I'd resign tonight. Women like that should be painfully exterminated."

“Shall we warn him?” said one.

“Useless,” said another. “But next time papa goes away and she drains him to a pulp, let’s grab everything he does and ask him what on earth’s the matter. We must leave him to put two and two together.” And so it was agreed.

If I’d been twenty-one, when I should have come into £1,000 a year left me by my mother, I think I might have gone off, disappeared and refused to see Connie again. Yet I might have rushed wildly back by the next train! In any case I couldn’t attempt such a gesture, and I was never away from her for long. Once I was in her presence I could refuse her nothing.

She left me alone till my father was called away again, this time for three days; and then she harried me again and as before after two nights of it I collapsed and refused to sleep with her for the third. I was strong but she was stronger. Let me describe one of those nights. (Long passage omitted. A. S.)

She would have reduced me to temporary paralysis, and wild surmise, a relay team consisting of Casanova, King Solomon, Don Juan and Pope Alexander the Fourth. You see I am lighter-hearted again! I can feel myself again in Connie’s arms, feel her heart beating fast and strong against my own. She concentrated every molecule of her body into this death-ecstasy. I would not have missed one second of it. These women, the Cleopatras, Helens, Cressidas and Connies may be ruthless egoists, selfish, cruel—multiply the denegrating epithets—but they are superb and irresistible and essential to the imaginative man. For he has a woman in his brain. He is inevitably heterosexed. Such women materialise his own femininity. He looks in his mirror and sees half himself; he looks at his mistress and sees the rest. I have read naive wonderings as to why, even in times when women were in a sense despised, socially and economically almost slaves, the great creative minds labelled their masterpieces with women’s names, from Alcestis and Antigone to Anna Karenina and Madame Bovary. I have explained why: in each and every case the genius was materialising his feminine soul, and he takes as his vehicle the woman who best complements himself. And she is nearly always a burner of topless towers, destructive, smiling, dangerous to life, insatiably avid of man whom peradventure she dooms, because she is their ideal complement. There are worthy females, members of Parliament, dehydrated virgins, busy, intelligent, members of the Victorian Order. Would one of them send a dinghy down the shingle? Do they not crackle thinly like dead, dried, rotting leaves? You see the fickle, swaying, unfocussed instability of a tainted brain like mine! Sir Eustace says

what I write gives valuable insight into the repressions of quite normal minds. That I write what they often dare not think. That is just my apparent instability of mood which makes him understand my feelings towards Connie.

It was during that third night my mother first clearly appeared to me, but I had felt she was near me many times, seen her out of the corner of my eye now and again. I told Connie she was killing me. "I will kill you," she said, "if you ever try to get away from me. You know that, don't you? You're getting stronger every day. Soon you won't notice it." I said I'd have to tell my father. I was feeling very ill at the time. "If you do," she said menacingly, "I'll blame you for it all. I've already thought out what I'll say. He loves me far more than he loves you. He'll do anything to keep me. You'll be the one to suffer. No more tutors! I'll see to that." I was too young to realise the futility of this threat. My father would have known it was a lie. If I'd gone to him, the shock might well have flung him out of his voluptuous trance. Then both of us would have been saved, for she was killing him. Did we want to be saved? I doubt if I'd ever have gone to him; anyway her bluff worked. Very soon she got more reckless, her libido riddled her self-control. We started doing it during the day when my father was at the foundry, and when I was supposed to be resting between five and six. She took me to her boudoir and we did it there.

Now I must try to make this plain. I have told how she conditioned me for years. She was a highly practised and intuitive sensualist. She had instructed me in her art till I was perfect. She could have stirred the loins of a mummy. She gave me the highest purely carnal pleasure possible, and I adored pleasing her. My surrender was automatic, an immediate, unquestioning tropism to her stimulus. As long as I was alone with her it never occurred to me to resist, if it were physically possible for me to comply. But when I was alone with myself, especially at night, alone except for my mother, then I was in a state of hopeless, helpless revolt, my mind and body at violent odds. My tutors did their best. They criticised my feeble work acidly, but Connie was too strong for them. This couldn't endure, both my body and brain were being taxed far beyond the resources of even the most potent adolescent boy. So, racked by anxiety, disordered by a sense of guilt, drained by a sexual prodigy, I collapsed with brain fever and total nervous exhaustion and was on the point of death for weeks. As soon as I was convalescent my mother was with me all the time.

The recollection of this crisis resulted in a severe and prolonged attack of the horrors. That clown, Jenkins, danced about just out of range for some

time, but I eventually reached and dropped him with a lovely left to his Pithecanthropic jaw. He promptly resigned! I am more or less conscious all through these affrays, and Sir Eustace bids me be of good cheer, such purging of my memory is altogether salutary—Jenkins demurring. The process is bound to be slow and painful—Jenkins concurring—but essential for my recovery. Most incurable non-organically sick minds cannot bring their neuroses to the surface and so rid themselves of their mental sepses. Some jargon! I don't think he is deliberately deceiving me, though he *may* be. He is very interested in what I am writing and so would be tempted to over-console me. Anyway suspicion and distrust are endemic conditions inevitably existent to my trouble.

I have just written about my mother being always with me from then on. If this is published, ninety-nine-point-nine per cent of those who read it will merely shrug their shoulders and say, "Just another symptom of the old complaint!" I can't help that, but it is false. I have said my mother always detested Connie. What is called feminine intuition is merely the intelligent and experienced woman's understanding of her own sex. It usually fails lamentably with men. My mother recognised Connie's type and her designs for me, because she was versatily feminine. Her mind was a mobilisation area for all the monstrous regiments. She was not one but all womankind's epitome. She knew what Connie meant to do, she knew what Connie'd done. She stood before my bed and gazed into my eyes. I knew her first command was, "Fight! Resist! I am fighting for you. I shall never leave you till we've won!" My mother knew there was only one solution. I was Connie's slave, we were one. I might dread her, in a sense detest her, but never resist her. I still adore her and would storm hell's gate to see her again. If you can understand this odious complexity, this psychic chaos, you will see there was only one thing I could do to be free. *Kill* her! That was what my mother taught me. Of course, when I was so ill my tutors went. That, when I was half-well again, well enough to realise it, was a brutal blow. I was alone, entirely at Connie's mercy. You must understand I couldn't buy a revolver and shoot her, or anything like that. For one thing I could do nothing when I was in her presence. Anyone who has been dominated by another will understand why. Again, I should have been ruined, at least imprisoned for years.

I had a good brain, half-brained already. I had great plans for the future of that brain. I had done no wrong. I had merely been seduced and debauched by a vampire. I hadn't a friend in the world. No one to turn to. Even my father died while I was convalescent. Connie wore him down and out. Like me, he was powerless to resist her. All this my mother forced into

my consciousness as she faced me across the bottom of my bed. Sir Eustace rather tentatively suggests I should rid myself of this idea. I can see he has been taken right “out of the book” as we say at chess. He says I am still lying to myself, transferring my sense of guilt, taking refuge in a phantasy. Well, what can I say to that, save that I know no sense of guilt, only an agonising sense of loss, and that I am telling the truth as best I can? Without my mother’s detailed prompting I should never have thought of doing, much less done, what I did. She always had her will bearing hard on mine. Even when I was in Connie’s arms again, and that was as soon as I’d recovered enough strength to couple, she was there watching, working on my will. I was, as it were, suspended between these two imperious women, fluctuating between their fields of force.

One day I was reading the paper. My mother was there. As my eyes overran the print I suddenly paused at a small paragraph and could not move my eyes on from it. It told of a girl who was killed by an electric stove falling into her bath. I read this during a bitter December spell. (Before a man goes to the electric chair the executioner damps the sponges inside the electrodes. I was to be Connie’s executioner. “Each man kills the thing he loves.” The bow of Ulysses should have hung for Penelope!) The horrors! . . . (That was a fierce and terrible attack.)

There was just such a heater in my and Connie’s bathroom. I put on a scientific air and told her it would give out more heat if it were placed on a bracket above the bath. My mother put this accursed speech into my mouth. Connie took no interest, but always humouring me in small things, told me to make such a bracket and fix it up. I went to my workshop and made that bracket, painted and fixed it in place above the bath. My mother never left me for a moment. All this devilry was hers. Under her direction, I bought a length of the finest white silk thread. Our bathroom was white-tiled all over. I managed to have a bath just before Connie one evening. After my bath, with my mother’s baleful eyes on me, I tied the thread to the base of the heater, and, as I left the room, trailed the thread along the floor, leaving the other end four yards outside the door. When Connie went in, I listened outside till I heard her enter the bath. It was so hot she gave a little cry. I grasped the other end of the thread. But I could not pull it. Something was roaring in my head, huge flashes burst before my eyes. My mother was at my side, her blazing gaze upon me—and then—I pulled the thread. I heard the heater splash into the bath and Connie gave a louder cry. I staggered into the room, switched off the current, lifted out the heater, untied the thread, put it in my pocket and then looked at Connie. She was lying on her back and staring up at me. She was dead. Did she know I killed her? I cannot bear

it if she did! I staggered to the door again. My mother was standing there, her face convulsed with some emotion. I was overwhelmed with a deadly sense of loss. I stood and cursed my mother, screaming abuse and insults at her. She refused to make way for me. I thrust past her, broken by nausea, horror and despair. I flung myself down on my bed. When I came to I was in the hospital and a policeman was sitting by my bed. (I had forgotten to switch on the current again.) There was never anyone in the world who could remotely compare with Connie. To be in her arms again—the only ecstasy! I die confessing it! The hor.

A postscript and epitaph by Sir Anstruther Sawbridge, Bart. D.S.C.

The foregoing narrative was sent me by my old, valued, but occasionally unpercipiently sceptical friend, Sir Eustace Lander, the world famous alienist. It is extracted from my book, *Modern Metaphysics*. As well-informed persons will be aware, Sir Eustace has his own *Home*, which is also his laboratory, in London, where certain highly complex cases of mental disorder are housed, examined, treated, and occasionally cured by him. Sometimes one of these seems to come within my province as psychicist and occultist and he sends me particulars of these. This is one such.

He informs me that its author was charged with murder at the Assizes, found unfit to plead, and ordered to be detained at His Majesty's pleasure. Since he was a minor, the Home Secretary for once, and I mean *once*, a humane and enlightened person, and the circumstances clearly abnormal and obscure, he was allowed to be treated in Sir Eustace's clinic. Sir Eustace informs me he was beyond argument the most brilliantly endowed youth he has ever known. His brain was of hyper-excellence and encyclopaedic capacity. Mathematically he was a genius of the highest order, getting his results with such lightning insight and certainty that certain savants of that art-science who examined him were unanimous in stating he possessed, like a few rare geniuses of his type, inexplicable innate powers. He was in the mystical sense a *born* mathematician. His tutors, also interviewed by Sir Eustace, were at one in describing his intellectual gifts, artistic, absorptive and creative as *prodigious*. They were one and all devoted to him. As classicist, musician and painter he was superlatively endowed. (Such brains are as vulnerable as rare.) Physically he was a superb specimen. I have seen a photograph of him and his face was of unearthly beauty and subtlety.

Sir Eustace believes this narrative is true in all essentials. The woman "Connie" was no doubt a lethal vampire and/or the victim of an

overpowering infatuation. Sir Eustace says he was irresistibly attractive. So, according to the tutors, was she. Even the one who detested her most agreed that in a sense they seemed made for one another, and to see them together was the most jocund sight a man could wish for. No type could have been more fatal to Claud with his hypersensitive artist-genius soul; perhaps, too, no other type could have aroused in him that undying passion. A formidable thought.

He appeared to be recovering slowly, though he was still very ill, when he died instantly from cerebral-haemorrhage immediately after penning the half-word “hor.” These horrors were most violent paroxysms or nerve hurricanes.

Sir Eustace is inclined to believe the psychic experiences to which Claud alludes, were projections. He loves that wooden word. To use it is, as I’ve told him thousands of times, merely darkening counsel, as useful as rolling up the blind on a pitch-black night. Those who wish to know my views can write to me at Sawbridge Hall, Sussex, and I will send them a prospectus and order form of my book, *Modern Metapsychics*, which I have recently published at my own (enormous) expense. They will find this case and many others equally exotic and complex, treated at considerable length, and, I hope, scientifically, in its pages.

A. S.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

[The end of *Strayers from Sheol* by Herbert Russell Wakefield]