

elms to a very old-fashioned brick house, darkened by the foliage of these trees, which overtopped, and nearly surrounded it. It was a perverse choice, for nothing could be imagined more triste and silent. The house, I found, belonged to him. He had stayed for a day or two in town, and, finding it for some cause insupportable, had come out here, probably because being furnished and his own, he was relieved of the thought and delay of selection, by coming here.

The sun had already set, and the red reflected light of the western sky illuminated the scene with the peculiar effect with which we are all familiar. The hall seemed very dark, but, getting to the back drawing-room, whose windows command the west, I was again in the same dusky light.

I sat down, looking out upon the richly-wooded landscape that glowed in the grand and melancholy light which was every moment fading. The corners of the room were already dark ; all was growing dim, and the gloom was insensibly toning my mind, already prepared for what was sinister. I was waiting alone for his arrival, which soon took place. The door communicating with the front room opened, and the tall figure of Mr. Jennings, faintly seen in the ruddy twilight, came, with quiet stealthy steps, into the room.

We shook hands, and, taking a chair to the window, where there was still light enough to enable us to see each other's faces, he sat down beside me, and, placing his hand upon my arm, with scarcely a word of preface began his narrative.

CHAPTER VI

HOW MR. JENNINGS MET HIS COMPANION

The faint glow of the west, the pomp of the then lonely woods of Richmond, were before us, behind and about us the darkening room, and on the stony face of the sufferer—for the character of his face, though still gentle and sweet, was changed—rested that dim, odd glow which seems to descend and produce, where it touches, lights, sudden though faint, which are lost, almost without gradation, in darkness. The silence, too, was utter ; not a distant wheel, or bark, or whistle from without ; and within the depressing stillness of an invalid bachelor's house.

I guessed well the nature, though not even vaguely the

particulars of the revelations I was about to receive, from that fixed face of suffering that so oddly flushed stood out, like a portrait of Schalken's, before its background of darkness.

"It began," he said, "on the 15th of October, three years and eleven weeks ago, and two days—I keep very accurate count, for every day is torment. If I leave anywhere a chasm in my narrative tell me.

"About four years ago I began a work, which had cost me very much thought and reading. It was upon the religious metaphysics of the ancients."

"I know," said I, "the actual religion of educated and thinking paganism, quite apart from symbolic worship? A wide and very interesting field."

"Yes; but not good for the mind—the Christian mind, I mean. Paganism is all bound together in essential unity, and, with evil sympathy, their religion involves their art, and both their manners, and the subject is a degrading fascination and the Nemesis sure. God forgive me!

"I wrote a great deal; I wrote late at night. I was always thinking on the subject, walking about, wherever I was, everywhere. It thoroughly infected me. You are to remember that all the material ideas connected with it were more or less of the beautiful, the subject itself delightfully interesting, and I, then, without a care."

He sighed heavily.

"I believe that every one who sets about writing in earnest does his work, as a friend of mine phrased it, *on* something—tea, or coffee, or tobacco. I suppose there is a material waste that must be hourly supplied in such occupations, or that we should grow too abstracted, and the mind, as it were, pass out of the body, unless it were reminded often of the connection by actual sensation. At all events, I felt the want, and I supplied it. Tea was my companion—at first the ordinary black tea, made in the usual way, not too strong; but I drank a good deal, and increased its strength as I went on. I never experienced an uncomfortable symptom from it. I began to take a little green tea. I found the effect pleasanter, it cleared and intensified the power of thought so. I had come to take it frequently, but not stronger than one might take it for pleasure. I wrote a great deal out here, it was so quiet, and in this room. I used to sit up very late, and it became a habit with me to sip my tea—green tea—every now and then as

my work proceeded. I had a little kettle on my table, that swung over a lamp, and made tea two or three times between eleven o'clock and two or three in the morning, my hours of going to bed. I used to go into town every day. I was not a monk, and, although I spent an hour or two in a library hunting up authorities and looking out lights upon my theme, I was in no morbid state as far as I can judge. I met my friends pretty much as usual and enjoyed their society, and, on the whole, existence had never been, I think, so pleasant before.

“ I had met with a man who had some odd old books, German editions in mediæval Latin, and I was only too happy to be permitted access to them. This obliging person's books were in the City, a very out-of-the-way part of it. I had rather out-stayed my intended hour, and, on coming out, seeing no cab near, I was tempted to get into the omnibus which used to drive past this house. It was darker than this by the time the 'bus had reached an old house, you may have remarked, with four poplars at each side of the door, and there the last passenger but myself got out. We drove along rather faster. It was twilight now. I leaned back in my corner next the door ruminating pleasantly.

“ The interior of the omnibus was nearly dark. I had observed in the corner opposite to me at the other side, and at the end next the horses, two small circular reflections, as it seemed to me of a reddish light. They were about two inches apart, and about the size of those small brass buttons that yachting men used to put upon their jackets. I began to speculate, as listless men will, upon this trifle, as it seemed. From what centre did that faint but deep red light come, and from what—glass beads, buttons, toy decorations—was it reflected? We were lumbering along gently, having nearly a mile still to go. I had not solved the puzzle, and it became in another minute more odd, for these two luminous points, with a sudden jerk, descended nearer the floor, keeping still their relative distance and horizontal position, and then, as suddenly, they rose to the level of the seat on which I was sitting and I saw them no more.

“ My curiosity was now really excited, and, before I had time to think, I saw again these two dull lamps, again together near the floor; again they disappeared, and again in their old corner I saw them.

“ So, keeping my eyes upon them, I edged quietly up my own side, towards the end at which I still saw these tiny discs of red.

“There was very little light in the ’bus. It was nearly dark. I leaned forward to aid my endeavour to discover what these little circles really were. They shifted their position a little as I did so. I began now to perceive an outline of something black, and I soon saw, with tolerable distinctness, the outline of a small black monkey, pushing its face forward in mimicry to meet mine ; those were its eyes, and I now dimly saw its teeth grinning at me.

“I drew back, not knowing whether it might not meditate a spring. I fancied that one of the passengers had forgot this ugly pet, and wishing to ascertain something of its temper, though not caring to trust my fingers to it, I poked my umbrella softly towards it. It remained immovable—up to it—*through* it. For through it, and back and forward it passed, without the slightest resistance.

“I can’t, in the least, convey to you the kind of horror that I felt. When I had ascertained that the thing was an illusion, as I then supposed, there came a misgiving about myself and a terror that fascinated me in impotence to remove my gaze from the eyes of the brute for some moments. As I looked, it made a little skip back, quite into the corner, and I, in a panic, found myself at the door, having put my head out, drawing deep breaths of the outer air, and staring at the lights and trees we were passing, too glad to reassure myself of reality.

“I stopped the ’bus and got out. I perceived the man look oddly at me as I paid him. I daresay there was something unusual in my looks and manner, for I had never felt so strangely before.”

CHAPTER VII

THE JOURNEY: FIRST STAGE

“When the omnibus drove on, and I was alone upon the road, I looked carefully round to ascertain whether the monkey had followed me. To my indescribable relief I saw it nowhere. I can’t describe easily what a shock I had received, and my sense of genuine gratitude on finding myself, as I supposed, quite rid of it.

“I had got out a little before we reached this house, two or three hundred steps. A brick wall runs along the footpath, and inside the wall is a hedge of yew, or some dark evergreen of that kind, and within that again the row of fine trees which you may have remarked as you came.

"This brick wall is about as high as my shoulder, and happening to raise my eyes I saw the monkey, with that stooping gait, on all fours, walking or creeping, close beside me on top of the wall. I stopped, looking at it with a feeling of loathing and horror. As I stopped so did it. It sat up on the wall with its long hands on its knees looking at me. There was not light enough to see it much more than in outline, nor was it dark enough to bring the peculiar light of its eyes into strong relief. I still saw, however, that red foggy light plainly enough. It did not show its teeth, nor exhibit any sign of irritation, but seemed jaded and sulky, and was observing me steadily.

"I drew back into the middle of the road. It was an unconscious recoil, and there I stood, still looking at it. It did not move.

"With an instinctive determination to try something—anything, I turned about and walked briskly towards town with askance look, all the time, watching the movements of the beast. It crept swiftly along the wall, at exactly my pace.

"Where the wall ends, near the turn of the road, it came down, and with a wiry spring or two brought itself close to my feet, and continued to keep up with me, as I quickened my pace. It was at my left side, so close to my leg that I felt every moment as if I should tread upon it.

"The road was quite deserted and silent, and it was darker every moment. I stopped dismayed and bewildered, turning as I did so, the other way—I mean, towards this house, away from which I had been walking. When I stood still, the monkey drew back to a distance of, I suppose, about five or six yards, and remained stationary, watching me.

"I had been more agitated than I have said. I had read, of course, as every one has, something about 'spectral illusions,' as you physicians term the phenomena of such cases. I considered my situation, and looked my misfortune in the face.

"These affections, I had read, are sometimes transitory and sometimes obstinate. I had read of cases in which the appearance, at first harmless, had, step by step, degenerated into something direful and insupportable, and ended by wearing its victim out. Still as I stood there, but for my bestial companion, quite alone, I tried to comfort myself by repeating again and again the assurance, 'the thing is purely disease, a well-known physical affection, as distinctly as small-pox or neuralgia. Doctors are all agreed on that, philosophy demonstrates it. I must not be a fool. I've been

sitting up too late, and I daresay my digestion is quite wrong, and, with God's help, I shall be all right, and this is but a symptom of nervous dyspepsia.' Did I believe all this? Not one word of it, no more than any other miserable being ever did who is once seized and riveted in this satanic captivity. Against my convictions, I might say my knowledge, I was simply bullying myself into a false courage.

"I now walked homeward. I had only a few hundred yards to go. I had forced myself into a sort of resignation, but I had not got over the sickening shock and the flurry of the first certainty of my misfortune.

"I made up my mind to pass the night at home. The brute moved close beside me, and I fancied there was the sort of anxious drawing towards the house, which one sees in tired horses or dogs sometimes as they come toward home.

"I was afraid to go into town, I was afraid of any one's seeing and recognizing me. I was conscious of an irrepressible agitation in my manner. Also, I was afraid of any violent change in my habits, such as going to a place of amusement, or walking from home in order to fatigue myself. At the hall door it waited till I mounted the steps, and when the door was opened entered with me.

"I drank no tea that night. I got cigars and some brandy and water. My idea was that I should act upon my material system, and by living for a while in sensation apart from thought, send myself forcibly, as it were, into a new groove. I came up here to this drawing-room. I sat just here. The monkey then got upon a small table that then stood *there*. It looked dazed and languid. An irrepressible uneasiness as to its movements kept my eyes always upon it. Its eyes were half closed, but I could see them glow. It was looking steadily at me. In all situations, at all hours, it is awake and looking at me. That never changes.

"I shall not continue in detail my narrative of this particular night. I shall describe, rather, the phenomena of the first year, which never varied, essentially. I shall describe the monkey as it appeared in daylight. In the dark, as you shall presently hear, there are peculiarities. It is a small monkey, perfectly black. It had only one peculiarity—a character of malignity—unfathomable malignity. During the first year it looked sullen and sick. But this character of intense malice and vigilance was always underlying that surly languor. During all that time it acted as if on a plan of giving me as little trouble as was consistent with watching

me. Its eyes were never off me. I have never lost sight of it, except in my sleep, light or dark, day or night, since it came here, excepting when it withdraws for some weeks at a time, unaccountably.

"In total dark it is visible as in daylight. I do not mean merely its eyes. It is *all* visible distinctly in a halo that resembles a glow of red embers, and which accompanies it in all its movements.

"When it leaves me for a time, it is always at night, in the dark, and in the same way. It grows at first uneasy, and then furious, and then advances towards me, grinning and shaking, its paws clenched, and, at the same time, there comes the appearance of fire in the grate. I never have any fire. I can't sleep in the room where there is any, and it draws nearer and nearer to the chimney, quivering, it seems, with rage, and when its fury rises to the highest pitch, it springs into the grate, and up the chimney, and I see it no more.

"When first this happened, I thought I was released. I was now a new man. A day passed—a night—and no return, and a blessed week—a week—another week. I was always on my knees, Dr. Hesselius, always, thanking God and praying. A whole month passed of liberty, but on a sudden, it was with me again."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECOND STAGE

"It was with me, and the malice which before was torpid under a sullen exterior, was now active. It was perfectly unchanged in every other respect. This new energy was apparent in its activity and its looks, and soon in other ways.

"For a time, you will understand, the change was shown only in an increased vivacity, and an air of menace, as if it was always brooding over some atrocious plan. Its eyes, as before, were never off me."

"Is it here now?" I asked.

"No," he replied, "it has been absent exactly a fortnight and a day—fifteen days. It has sometimes been away so long as nearly two months, once for three. Its absence always exceeds a fortnight, although it may be but by a single day. Fifteen days having passed since I saw it last, it may return now at any moment."

"Is its return," I asked, "accompanied by any peculiar manifestation?"

"Nothing—no," he said. "It is simply with me again. On lifting my eyes from a book, or turning my head, I see it, as usual, looking at me, and then it remains, as before, for its appointed time. I have never told so much and so minutely before to any one."

I perceived that he was agitated, and looking like death, and he repeatedly applied his handkerchief to his forehead; I suggested that he might be tired, and told him that I would call, with pleasure, in the morning, but he said:

"No, if you don't mind hearing it all now. I have got so far, and I should prefer making one effort of it. When I spoke to Dr. Harley, I had nothing like so much to tell. You are a philosophic physician. You give spirit its proper rank. If this thing is real——"

He paused, looking at me with agitated inquiry.

"We can discuss it by-and-by, and very fully. I will give you all I think," I answered, after an interval.

"Well—very well. If it is anything real, I say, it is prevailing, little by little, and drawing me more interiorly into hell. Optic nerves, he talked of. Ah! well—there are other nerves of communication. May God Almighty help me! You shall hear.

"Its power of action, I tell you, had increased. Its malice became, in a way, aggressive. About two years ago, some questions that were pending between me and the bishop having been settled, I went down to my parish in Warwickshire, anxious to find occupation in my profession. I was not prepared for what happened, although I have since thought I might have apprehended something like it. The reason of my saying so is this——"

He was beginning to speak with a great deal more effort and reluctance, and sighed often, and seemed at times nearly overcome. But at this time his manner was not agitated. It was more like that of a sinking patient, who has given himself up.

"Yes, but I will first tell you about Kenlis, my parish.

"It was with me when I left this place for Dawlbridge. It was my silent travelling companion, and it remained with me at the vicarage. When I entered on the discharge of my duties, another change took place. The thing exhibited an atrocious determination to thwart me. It was with me in the church—in the reading-desk—in the pulpit—within the communion rails. At last, it reached this extremity, that while I was reading to the congregation, it would spring upon the open book and squat there, so that I was unable to see the page. This happened more than once.

"I left Dawlbridge for a time. I placed myself in Dr. Harley's hands. I did everything he told me. He gave my case a great deal of thought. It interested him, I think. He seemed successful. For nearly three months I was perfectly free from a return. I began to think I was safe. With his full assent I returned to Dawlbridge.

"I travelled in a chaise. I was in good spirits. I was more—I was happy and grateful. I was returning, as I thought, delivered from a dreadful hallucination, to the scene of duties which I longed to enter upon. It was a beautiful sunny evening, everything looked serene and cheerful, and I was delighted. I remember looking out of the window to see the spire of my church at Kenlis among the trees, at the point where one has the earliest view of it. It is exactly where the little stream that bounds the parish passes under the road by a culvert, and where it emerges at the road-side, a stone with an old inscription is placed. As we passed this point, I drew my head in and sat down, and in the corner of the chaise was the monkey.

"For a moment I felt faint, and then quite wild with despair and horror. I called to the driver, and got out, and sat down at the road-side, and prayed to God silently for mercy. A despairing resignation supervened. My companion was with me as I re-entered the vicarage. The same persecution followed. After a short struggle I submitted, and soon left the place.

"I told you," he said, "that the beast had before this become in certain ways aggressive. I will explain a little. It seemed to be actuated by intense and increasing fury, whenever I said my prayers, or even meditated prayer. It amounted at last to a dreadful interruption. You will ask, how could a silent immaterial phantom effect that? It was thus, whenever I meditated praying; it was always before me, and nearer and nearer.

"It used to spring on a table, on the back of a chair, on the chimney-piece, and slowly to swing itself from side to side, looking at me all the time. There is in its motion an indefinable power to dissipate thought, and to contract one's attention to that monotony, till the ideas shrink, as it were, to a point, and at last to nothing—and unless I had started up, and shook off the catalepsy, I have felt as if my mind were on the point of losing itself. There are other ways," he sighed heavily; "thus, for instance, while I pray with my eyes closed, it comes closer and closer, and I see it. I know it is not to be accounted for physically, but I do actually see it, though my lids are closed, and so it rocks my mind, as it

were, and overpowers me, and I am obliged to rise from my knees. If you had ever yourself known this, you would be acquainted with desperation."

CHAPTER IX

THE THIRD STAGE

"I see, Dr. Hesselius, that you don't lose one word of my statement. I need not ask you to listen specially to what I am now going to tell you. They talk of the optic nerves, and of spectral illusions, as if the organ of sight was the only point assailable by the influences that have fastened upon me—I know better. For two years in my direful case that limitation prevailed. But as food is taken in softly at the lips, and then brought under the teeth, as the tip of the little finger caught in a mill crank will draw in the hand, and the arm, and the whole body, so the miserable mortal who has been once caught firmly by the end of the finest fibre of his nerve, is drawn in and in, by the enormous machinery of hell, until he is as I am. Yes, Doctor, as *I* am, for while I talk to you, and implore relief, I feel that my prayer is for the impossible, and my pleading with the inexorable."

I endeavoured to calm this visibly increasing agitation, and told him that he must not despair.

While we talked the night had overtaken us. The filmy moonlight was wide over the scene which the window commanded, and I said :

"Perhaps you would prefer having candles. This light, you know, is odd. I should wish you, as much as possible, under your usual conditions while I make my diagnosis, shall I call it—otherwise I don't care."

"All lights are the same to me," he said ; "except when I read or write, I care not if night were perpetual. I am going to tell you what happened about a year ago. The thing began to speak to me."

"Speak ! How do you mean—speak as a man does, do you mean ?"

"Yes ; speak in words and consecutive sentences, with perfect coherence and articulation ; but there is a peculiarity. It is not like the tone of a human voice. It is not by my ears it reaches me—it comes like a singing through my head.

"This faculty, the power of speaking to me, will be my undoing.

It won't let me pray, it interrupts me with dreadful blasphemies. I dare not go on, I could not. Oh! Doctor, can the skill, and thought, and prayers of man avail me nothing!"

"You must promise me, my dear sir, not to trouble yourself with unnecessarily exciting thoughts; confine yourself strictly to the narrative of *facts*; and recollect, above all, that even if the thing that infests you be, as you seem to suppose, a reality with an actual independent life and will, yet it can have no power to hurt you, unless it be given from above: its access to your senses depends mainly upon your physical condition—this is, under God, your comfort and reliance: we are all alike environed. It is only that in your case, the '*paries*,' the veil of the flesh, the screen, is a little out of repair, and sights and sounds are transmitted. We must enter on a new course, sir—be encouraged. I'll give to-night to the careful consideration of the whole case."

"You are very good, sir; you think it worth trying, you don't give me quite up; but, sir, you don't know, it is gaining such an influence over me: it orders me about, it is such a tyrant, and I'm growing so helpless. May God deliver me!"

"It orders you about—of course you mean by speech?"

"Yes, yes; it is always urging me to crimes, to injure others, or myself. You see, Doctor, the situation is urgent, it is indeed. When I was in Shropshire, a few weeks ago" (Mr. Jennings was speaking rapidly and trembling now, holding my arm with one hand, and looking in my face), "I went out one day with a party of friends for a walk: my persecutor, I tell you, was with me at the time. I lagged behind the rest: the country near the Dee, you know, is beautiful. Our path happened to lie near a coal mine, and at the verge of the wood is a perpendicular shaft, they say, a hundred and fifty feet deep. My niece had remained behind with me—she knows, of course, nothing of the nature of my sufferings. She knew, however, that I had been ill, and was low, and she remained to prevent my being quite alone. As we loitered slowly on together, the brute that accompanied me was urging me to throw myself down the shaft. I tell you now—oh, sir, think of it!—the one consideration that saved me from that hideous death was the fear lest the shock of witnessing the occurrence should be too much for the poor girl. I asked her to go on and take her walk with her friends, saying that I could go no further. She made excuses, and the more I urged her the firmer she became. She looked doubtful and frightened. I suppose there was something

in my looks or manner that alarmed her ; but she would not go, and that literally saved me. You had no idea, sir, that a living man could be made so abject a slave of Satan," he said, with a ghastly groan and a shudder.

There was a pause here, and I said, " You *were* preserved nevertheless. It was the act of God. You are in His hands and in the power of no other being : be therefore confident for the future."

CHAPTER X

HOME

I made him have candles lighted, and saw the room looking cheery and inhabited before I left him. I told him that he must regard his illness strictly as one dependent on physical, though *subtle* physical causes. I told him that he had evidence of God's care and love in the deliverance which he had just described, and that I had perceived with pain that he seemed to regard its peculiar features as indicating that he had been delivered over to spiritual reprobation. Than such a conclusion nothing could be, I insisted, less warranted ; and not only so, but more contrary to facts, as disclosed in his mysterious deliverance from that murderous influence during his Shropshire excursion. First, his niece had been retained by his side without his intending to keep her near him ; and, secondly, there had been infused into his mind an irresistible repugnance to execute the dreadful suggestion in her presence.

As I reasoned this point with him, Mr. Jennings wept. He seemed comforted. One promise I exacted, which was that should the monkey at any time return, I should be sent for immediately ; and, repeating my assurance that I would give neither time nor thought to any other subject until I had thoroughly investigated his case, and that to-morrow he should hear the result, I took my leave.

Before getting into the carriage I told the servant that his master was far from well, and that he should make a point of frequently going into his room.

My own arrangements I made with a view to being quite secure from interruption.

I merely called at my lodgings, and with a travelling-desk and carpet-bag, set off in a hackney carriage for an inn about two

miles out of town, called "The Horns," a very quiet and comfortable house, with good thick walls. And there I resolved, without the possibility of intrusion or distraction, to devote some hours of the night, in my comfortable sitting-room, to Mr. Jennings' case, and so much of the morning as it might require.

(There occurs here a careful note of Dr. Hesselius' opinion upon the case, and of the habits, dietary, and medicines which he prescribed. It is curious—some persons would say mystical. But, on the whole, I doubt whether it would sufficiently interest a reader of the kind I am likely to meet with, to warrant its being here reprinted. The whole letter was plainly written at the inn where he had hid himself for the occasion. The next letter is dated from his town lodgings.)

I left town for the inn where I slept last night at half-past nine, and did not arrive at my room in town until one o'clock this afternoon. I found a letter in Mr. Jennings' hand upon my table. It had not come by post, and, on inquiry, I learned that Mr. Jennings' servant had brought it, and on learning that I was not to return until to-day, and that no one could tell him my address, he seemed very uncomfortable, and said that his orders from his master were that he was not to return without an answer.

I opened the letter and read :

"DEAR DR. HESSELIUS.—It is here. You had not been an hour gone when it returned. It is speaking. It knows all that has happened. It knows everything—it knows you, and is frantic and atrocious. It reviles. I send you this. It knows every word I have written—I write. This I promised, and I therefore write, but I fear very confused, very incoherently. I am so interrupted, disturbed.

"Ever yours, sincerely yours,
"ROBERT LYNDER JENNINGS."

"When did this come?" I asked.

"About eleven last night: the man was here again, and has been here three times to-day. The last time is about an hour since."

Thus answered, and with the notes I had made upon his case in my pocket, I was in a few minutes driving towards Richmond, to see Mr. Jennings.

I by no means, as you perceive, despaired of Mr. Jennings' case. He had himself remembered and applied, though quite in a

mistaken way, the principle which I lay down in my *Metaphysical Medicine*, and which governs all such cases. I was about to apply it in earnest. I was profoundly interested, and very anxious to see and examine him while the "enemy" was actually present.

I drove up to the sombre house, and ran up the steps, and knocked. The door, in a little time, was opened by a tall woman in black silk. She looked ill, and as if she had been crying. She curtseyed, and heard my question, but she did not answer. She turned her face away, extending her hand towards two men who were coming down-stairs; and thus having, as it were, tacitly made me over to them, she passed through a side-door hastily and shut it.

The man who was nearest the hall, I at once accosted, but being now close to him, I was shocked to see that both his hands were covered with blood.

I drew back a little, and the man, passing down-stairs, merely said in a low tone, "Here's the servant, sir."

The servant had stopped on the stairs, confounded and dumb at seeing me. He was rubbing his hands in a handkerchief, and it was steeped in blood.

"Jones, what is it? what has happened?" I asked, while a sickening suspicion overpowered me.

The man asked me to come up to the lobby. I was beside him in a moment, and, frowning and pallid, with contracted eyes, he told me the horror which I already half guessed.

His master had made away with himself.

I went upstairs with him to the room—what I saw there I won't tell you. He had cut his throat with his razor. It was a frightful gash. The two men had laid him on the bed, and composed his limbs. It had happened, as the immense pool of blood on the floor declared, at some distance between the bed and the window. There was carpet round his bed, and a carpet under his dressing-table, but none on the rest of the floor, for the man said he did not like a carpet on his bedroom. In this sombre and now terrible room, one of the great elms that darkened the house was slowly moving the shadow of one of its great boughs upon this dreadful floor.

I beckoned to the servant, and we went downstairs together. I turned off the hall into an old-fashioned panelled room, and there standing, I heard all the servant had to tell. It was not a great deal.

“ I concluded, sir, from your words, and looks, sir, as you left last night, that you thought my master seriously ill. I thought it might be that you were afraid of a fit, or something. So I attended very close to your directions. He sat up late, till past three o'clock. He was not writing or reading. He was talking a great deal to himself, but that was nothing unusual. At about that hour I assisted him to undress, and left him in his slippers and dressing-gown. I went back softly in about half-an-hour. He was in his bed, quite undressed, and a pair of candles lighted on the table beside his bed. He was leaning on his elbow, and looking out at the other side of the bed when I came in. I asked him if he wanted anything, and he said ‘ No.’

“ I don't know whether it was what you said to me, sir, or something a little unusual about him, but I was uneasy, uncommon uneasy about him last night.

“ In another half hour, or it might be a little more, I went up again. I did not hear him talking as before. I opened the door a little. The candles were both out, which was not usual. I had a bedroom candle, and I let the light in, a little bit, looking softly round. I saw him sitting in that chair beside the dressing-table with his clothes on again. He turned round and looked at me. I thought it strange he should get up and dress, and put out the candles to sit in the dark, that way. But I only asked him again if I could do anything for him. He said, ‘ No,’ rather sharp, I thought. I asked if I might light the candles, and he said, ‘ Do as you like, Jones.’ So I lighted them, and I lingered about the room, and he said, ‘ Tell me truth, Jones ; why did you come again—you did not hear anyone cursing ? ’ ‘ No, sir,’ I said, wondering what he could mean.

“ ‘ No,’ said he, after me, ‘ of course, no ’ ; and I said to him, ‘ Wouldn't it be well, sir, if you went to bed ? It's just five o'clock ’ ; and he said nothing but, ‘ Very likely ; good-night, Jones.’ So I went, sir, but in less than an hour I came again. The door was fast, and he heard me, and called as I thought from the bed to know what I wanted, and he desired me not to disturb him again. I lay down and slept for a little. It must have been between six and seven when I went up again. The door was still fast, and he made no answer, so I did not like to disturb him, and thinking he was asleep, I left him till nine. It was his custom to ring when he wished me to come, and I had no particular hour for calling him. I tapped very gently, and getting no answer, I stayed away a

good while, supposing he was getting some rest then. It was not till eleven o'clock I grew really uncomfortable about him—for at the latest he was never, that I could remember, later than half-past ten. I got no answer. I knocked and called, and still no answer. So not being able to force the door, I called Thomas from the stables, and together we forced it, and found him in the shocking way you saw."

Jones had no more to tell. Poor Mr. Jennings was very gentle, and very kind. All his people were fond of him. I could see that the servant was very much moved.

So, dejected and agitated, I passed from that terrible house, and its dark canopy of elms, and I hope I shall never see it more. While I write to you I feel like a man who has but half waked from a frightful and monotonous dream. My memory rejects the picture with incredulity and horror. Yet I know it is true. It is the story of the process of a poison, a poison which excites the reciprocal action of spirit and nerve, and paralyses the tissue that separates those cognate functions of the senses, the external and the interior. Thus we find strange bed-fellows, and the mortal and immortal prematurely make acquaintance.

CONCLUSION

A WORD FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER

My dear Van L——, you have suffered from an affection similar to that which I have just described. You twice complained of a return of it.

Who, under God, cured you? Your humble servant, Martin Hesselius. Let me rather adopt the more emphasised piety of a certain good old French surgeon of three hundred years ago: "I treated, and God cured you."

Come, my friend, you are not to be hippish. Let me tell you a fact.

I have met with, and treated, as my book shows, fifty-seven cases of this kind of vision, which I term indifferently "sublimated," "precocious," and "interior."

There is another class of affections which are truly termed—though commonly confounded with those which I describe—spectral illusions. These latter I look upon as being no less simply curable than a cold in the head or a trifling dyspepsia.

It is those which rank in the first category that test our promptitude of thought. Fifty-seven such cases have I encountered, neither more nor less. And in how many of these have I failed? In no one single instance.

There is no one affliction of mortality more easily and certainly reducible, with a little patience, and a rational confidence in the physician. With these simple conditions, I look upon the cure as absolutely certain.

You are to remember that I had not even commenced to treat Mr. Jennings' case. I have not any doubt that I should have cured him perfectly in eighteen months, or possibly it might have extended to two years. Some cases are very rapidly curable, others extremely tedious. Every intelligent physician who will give thought and diligence to the task will effect a cure.

You know my tract on "The Cardinal Functions of the Brain." I there, by the evidence of innumerable facts, prove, as I think, the high probability of a circulation arterial and venous in its mechanism, through the nerves. Of this system, thus considered, the brain is the heart. The fluid, which is propagated hence through one class of nerves, returns in an altered state through another, and the nature of that fluid is spiritual, though not immaterial, any more than, as I before remarked, light or electricity are so.

By various abuses, among which the habitual use of such agents as green tea is one, this fluid may be affected as to its quality, but it is more frequently disturbed as to equilibrium. This fluid being that which we have in common with spirits, a congestion found upon the masses of brain or nerve, connected with the interior sense, forms a surface unduly exposed, on which disembodied spirits may operate : communication is thus more or less effectually established. Between this brain circulation and the heart circulation there is an intimate sympathy. The seat, or rather the instrument of exterior vision, is the eye. The seat of interior vision is the nervous tissue and brain, immediately about and above the eyebrow. You remember how effectually I dissipated your pictures by the simple application of iced eau-de-cologne. Few cases, however, can be treated exactly alike with anything like rapid success. Cold acts powerfully as a repellant of the nervous fluid. Long enough continued it will even produce that permanent insensibility which we call numbness, and a little longer, muscular as well as sensational paralysis.

I have not, I repeat, the slightest doubt that I should have first dimmed and ultimately sealed that inner eye which Mr. Jennings had inadvertently opened. The same senses are opened in delirium tremens, and entirely shut up again when the over-action of the cerebral heart, and the prodigious nervous congestions that attend it, are terminated by a decided change in the state of the body. It is by acting steadily upon the body, by a simple process, that this result is produced—and inevitably produced—I have never yet failed.

Poor Mr. Jennings made away with himself. But that catastrophe was the result of a totally different malady, which, as it were, projected itself upon that disease which was established. His case was in the distinctive manner a complication, and the complaint under which he really succumbed was hereditary suicidal mania. Poor Mr. Jennings I cannot call a patient of mine, for I had not even begun to treat his case, and he had not yet given me, I am convinced, his full and unreserved confidence. If the patient do not array himself on the side of the disease, his cure is certain.

J. D. Beresford

THE MISANTHROPE

from NINETEEN IMPRESSIONS

Sidgwick & Jackson, 1918

I

Since I have returned from the rock and discussed the story in all its bearings, I have begun to wonder if the man made a fool of me. In the deeps of my consciousness I feel that he did not. Nevertheless, I cannot resist the effect of all the laughter that has been evoked by my narrative. Here on the mainland the whole thing seems unlikely, grotesque, foolish. On the rock the man's confession carried absolute conviction. The setting is everything; and I am, perhaps, thankful that my present circumstances are so beautifully conducive to sanity. No one appreciates the mystery of life more than I do; but when the mystery involves such a doubt of oneself, I find it pleasanter to forget. Naturally, I do not

want to believe the story. If I did I should know myself to be some kind of human horror. And the terror of it all lies in the fact that I may never know precisely what kind. . . .

Before I went we had eliminated the facile and banal explanation that the man was mad, and had fallen back upon the two inevitable alternatives : Crime and Disappointed Love. We were human and romantic, and we tried desperately hard not to be too obvious.

Once before a man had made the same attempt and had built or tried to build a house on the Gulland rock ; but he had been defeated within a fortnight, and what was left of his building was taken off the Island and turned into a tin church. It is there still. We all went to Trevone and ruminated over and round it, perhaps with some faint hope that one of us might, all-unknowing, have the abilities of a psychometrist.

Nothing came of that visit but a slight intensification of those theories that were already becoming a little stale. We compared the early failure of thirty years ago, the attempt that was baffled, with the present success. For this new misanthrope had lived on the Gulland through the whole winter—and still lived. Indeed, the fact of his presence on that awful lump of rock was now accepted by the country people ; to them he was scarcely a shade madder than the other visitors ; that remunerative, recurrent host that this year broke their journey to Bedruthan in order to stand on Trevone beach and stare foolishly at the just visible hut that stuck like a cubical gall on the landward face of that humped, desolate island.

We all did that ; stared at nothing in particular and meditated enormously ; but in what I felt at the time was a wild spirit of adventure, I went out one night to the point of Gunver Head and saw an actual light within that distant hut ; a patch of golden lichen on the mother parasite.

Some aspect of humanity I found in that light it was that finally decided me ; that and some quality of sympathy, perhaps with the hermit—mad, criminal, or lovelorn ?—who had found sanctuary from the pestilent touch of the encroaching crowd. It was, in fact, a wildish night, and I stayed until the little yellow speck went out, and all I could see through the murk was an occasional canopy of curving spray when the elbow of the Trevoise Light touched a bare corner of that black Gulland.

The making of a decision was no difficult matter, but while I

waited for the necessary calm that would permit the occasional boat to land provisions on the island two miles out from the mainland, I suffered qualms of doubt and nervousness. And I suffered them alone, for I had determined that no hint of my adventure should be given to anyone of our party until the voyage had been made. They might think that I had gone fishing, an excuse which had all the air of probability given to it by the coming of the boatman to say that the tide and wind would serve that morning. I had warned—and bribed—him to give no clue to my friends of the goal of my proposed excursion.

My nervousness suffered no decrease as we approached the rock and saw the authentic figure of its single inhabitant awaiting our arrival. I had some consolation in the thought that he would be in some way prepared by the sight of our surprisingly passengered boat; but my mind shuddered at the necessity for using some conventional form of address if I would make at once my introduction and excuse. The civilised opening was so hopelessly incapable of expressing my sympathy, presenting instead so unmistakably, it seemed to me, the single solution of common curiosity. I wondered that he had not—as the boatman so clearly assured me was the case—had other prying visitors before me.

My self-consciousness increased as we came nearer to the single opening among the spiked rocks, that served as a miniature harbour at half-tide. I felt that I was being watched by the man who now stood awaiting us at the water's edge. And suddenly my spirit broke, I decided that I could not force myself upon him, that I would remain in the boat while its cargo was delivered, and then return with the boatmen to Trevone. So resolute was I in this plan that when we had pulled in to the tiny landing-place, I kept my gaze steadfastly averted from the man I had come to see, and stared solemnly out at the humped back of Trevoise, seen now in an entirely new aspect.

The sound of the hermit's voice startled me from a perfectly genuine abstraction.

“Fairly decent weather to-day,” he remarked with, I thought, a touch of nervousness. He had, I remembered, addressed the same remark to the boatmen, who were now conveying their cargo up to the hut.

I looked up and met his stare. He was, indeed, regarding me with a curious effect of concentration, as if he were eager to note every detail of my expression.

"Jolly," I replied. "Been pretty beastly the last day or two. Kept you rather short, hasn't it?"

"I make allowances for that," he said. "Keep a reserve, you know. Are you staying over there?" He nodded towards the bay.

"For a week or two," I told him, and we began to discuss the country around Harlyn with the eagerness of two strangers who find a common topic at a dull reception.

"Never been on the Gulland before, I suppose?" he ventured at last, when the boatmen had discharged their load and were evidently ready to be off.

"No, no, I haven't," I said, and hesitated. I felt that the invitation must come from him.

He boggled over it by saying, "Dashed awkward place to get to, and nothing to see, of course. I don't know if you're at all keen on fishing?"

"Rather," I said with enthusiasm.

"There's deep water on the other side of the rock," he went on. "In the right weather you get splendid bass there." He stopped and then added, "It'll be absolutely top hole for 'em, this afternoon."

"Perhaps I could come back . . ." I began; but the boatman interrupted me at once.

"Yew can coom back to-morrow, sure 'nough," he said. "Tide only serves wance avery twalve hours."

"If you'd care to stay, now . . ." began the hermit.

"Thanks! it's awfully good of you. I should like to of all things," I said.

I stayed on the clear understanding that the boatmen were to fetch me the next morning.

II

At first there was really very little that seemed in any way strange about the man on the Gulland. His name, he told me, was William Copley, but it appeared that he was no relation to the Copleys I knew. And if he had shaved he would have looked a very ordinary type of Englishman roughing it on a holiday. His age I judged to be between thirty and forty.

Only two things about him struck me as a little queer during our very successful afternoon's fishing. The first was that intense appraising stare of his, as if he tried to fathom the very depths of

one's being. The second was an inexplicable devotion to one particular form of ceremony. As our intimacy grew, he dropped the ordinary formal politeness of a host ; but he insisted always on one observance that I supposed at first to be the merely conventional business of giving precedence.

Nothing would induce him to go in front of me. He sent me ahead even as we explored the little purlieus of his rock—the only level square yard on the whole island was in the floor of the hut. But presently I noticed that this peculiarity went still further, and that he would not turn his back on me for a single moment.

That discovery intrigued me. I still excluded the explanation of madness—Copley's manner and conversation were so convincingly sane. But I reverted to and elaborated those other two suggestions that had been made. I could not avoid the inference that the man must in some strange way be afraid of me ; and I hesitated as to whether he were flying from some form of justice or from revenge, perhaps a vendetta. Either theory seemed to account for his intense, appraising stare. I inferred that his longing for companionship had grown so strong that he had determined to risk the possibility of my being an emissary, sent by some—to me—exquisitely romantic person or persons who desired Copley's death. I recalled, and wallowed in, some of the marvellous imaginings of the novelist. I wondered if I could make Copley speak by convincing him of my innocent identity. How I thrilled at the prospect !

But the explanation of it all came without any effort on my part. He sent me out of the hut while he prepared our supper—quite a magnificent meal, by the way. I saw his reason at once ; he could not manage all that business of cooking and laying the table without turning his back on me. One thing, however, puzzled me a little ; he drew down the blind of the little square window as soon as I had gone outside.

Naturally, I made no demur. I climbed down to the edge of the sea—it was a glorious evening—and waited until he called me. He stood at the door of the hut until I was within a few feet of him, and then retreated into the room and sat down with his back to the wall.

We discussed our afternoon's sport as we had supper, but when we had finished and our pipes were going, he said, suddenly :

"I don't see why I shouldn't tell you."

Like a fool, I agreed eagerly, when I might so easily have stopped him. . . .

"It began when I was quite a kid," he said. "My mother found me crying in the garden; and all I could tell her was that Claude, my elder brother, looked 'horrid.' I couldn't bear the sight of him for days afterwards, either; but I was such a perfectly normal child that they weren't seriously perturbed about this one idiosyncrasy of mine. They thought that Claude had 'made a face' at me, and frightened me. My father whacked me for it eventually.

"Perhaps that whacking stuck in my mind. Anyway, I didn't confide my peculiarity to anyone until I was nearly seventeen. I was ashamed of it, of course. I am still—in a way."

He stopped and looked down, pushed his plate away from him, and folded his arms on the table. I was pining to ask a question, but I was afraid to interrupt. And after a moment's hesitation he looked up and held my gaze again, but now without that inquiring look of his. Rather, he seemed to be looking for sympathy.

"I told my house-master," he said. "He was a splendid chap, and he was very decent about it; took it all quite seriously and advised me to consult an oculist, which I did. I went in the holidays with the pater—I had given him a more reasonable account of my trouble—and he took me to the best man in London. He was tremendously interested, and it proves that there must be something in it, that it can't be imagination, because he really found a defect in my eyes, something quite new to him, he said. He called it a new form of astigmatism; but, of course, as he pointed out, no glasses would be any use to me."

"But what . . . ?" I began, unable to keep down my curiosity any longer.

Copley hesitated, and dropped his eyes. "Astigmatism, you know," he said, "is a defect—I quote the dictionary, I learned that definition by heart; I often puzzle over it still—'causing images of lines having a certain direction to be indistinctly seen, while those of lines transverse to the former are distinctly seen.' Only mine is peculiar in the fact that my sight is perfectly normal except when I look back at anyone over my shoulder." He looked up, almost pathetically. I could see that he hoped I might understand without further explanation.

I had to confess myself utterly mystified. What had this trifling

defect of vision to do with his coming to live on the Gulland, I wondered.

I frowned my perplexity. "But I don't see . . ." I said.

He knocked out his pipe and began to scrape the bowl with his pocket-knife. "Well, mine is a kind of moral astigmatism, too," he said. "At least, it gives me a kind of moral insight. I'm afraid I must call it insight. I've proved in some cases that . . ." He dropped his voice. He was apparently deeply engrossed in the scraping out of his pipe. He kept his eyes on it as he continued.

"Normally, you understand, when I look at people straight in the face, I see them as anybody else sees them. But when I look back at them over my shoulder I see . . . oh ! I see all their vices and defects. Their faces remain, in a sense, the same, perfectly recognisable, I mean, but distorted—beastly. . . . There was my brother Claude—good-looking chap, he was—but when I saw him . . . that way . . . he had a nose like a parrot, and he looked sort of weakly voracious . . . and vicious." He stopped and shuddered slightly, and then added : "And one knows, now, that he is like that, too. He's just been hammered on the Stock Exchange. Rotten sort of failure it was. . . ."

"And then Denison, my house-master, you know ; such a decent chap. I never looked at him, that way, until the end of my last term at school. I had got into the habit, more or less, of never looking over my shoulder, you see. But I was always getting caught. That was an instance. I was playing for the School against the Old Boys. Denison called out, 'Good luck, old chap,' just as I was going in, and I forgot and looked back at him. . . ."

I waited, breathless, and as he did not go on, I prompted him with "Was he . . . 'wrong,' too ?"

Copley nodded. "Weak, poor devil. His eyes were all right, but they were fighting his mouth, if you know what I mean. There would have been an awful scandal at the school there, four years after I left, if they hadn't hushed it up and got Denison out of the country.

"Then, if you want any more instances, there was the oculist—big, fine chap, he was. Of course, he made me look at him over my shoulder, to test me. He asked me what I saw, and I told, more or less. He was simply livid for a moment. He was a sensualist, you see ; and when I saw him that way he looked like some filthy old hog.

"The thing that really finished me," he went on, after a long

interval, "was the breaking off of my engagement to Helen. We were frightfully in love with one another, and I told her about my trouble. She was very sympathetic, and I suppose rather sentimentally romantic, too. She believed it was some sort of spell that had been put on me. I think, anyway, she had a theory that if I once saw anybody truly and ordinarily over my shoulder, I should never have any more trouble—the spell-would-be-broken sort of thing. And, of course, *she* wanted to be the person. I didn't resist her much. I was infatuated, I suppose. Anyway, I thought she was perfection and that it was simply impossible that I could find any defect in her. So I agreed, and looked—that way. . . ."

His voice had fallen to an even note of despondency, as though the telling of this final tragedy in his life had brought him to the indifference of despair. "I looked," he continued, "and saw a creature with no chin and watery, doting eyes; a faithful, slobbery thing—eugh! I can't. . . . I never spoke to her again. . . ."

"That broke me, you know," he said presently. "After that I didn't care. I used to look at everyone that way, until I had to get away from humanity. I was living in a world of beasts. Most of them looked like some beast or bird or other. The strong were vicious and criminal; and the weak were loathsome. I couldn't stick it. In the end—I had to come here away from them all."

A thought occurred to me. "Have you ever looked at yourself in the glass?" I asked.

He nodded. "I'm no better than the rest of them," he said. "That's why I grew this rotten beard. I hadn't got a looking-glass here."

"And you can't keep a stiff neck, as it were," I asked, "going about looking humanity straight in the face?"

"The temptation is too strong," Copley said. "And it gets stronger. Curiosity, partly, I suppose; but partly it's the momentary sense of superiority it gives you. You see them like that, you know, and forget how you look yourself. And then after a bit it sickens you."

"You haven't. . . ." I said, and hesitated. I wanted to know, and yet I was horribly afraid. "You haven't," I began again, "er—you haven't—er—looked at me yet. . . . that way?"

"Not yet," he said.

"Do you suppose. . . .?"

"Probably. You look all right, of course. But then so did heaps of the others."

"You've no idea *how* I should look to you, that way?"

"Absolutely none. I've been trying to guess, but I can't."

"You wouldn't care . . . ?"

"Not now," he said sharply. "Perhaps, just before you go."

"You feel fairly certain, then . . . ?"

He nodded with disgusting conviction.

I went to bed, wondering whether Helen's theory wasn't a true one ; and if I might not break the spell for poor Copley.

III

The boatmen came for me soon after eleven next morning.

I had shaken off some of the feeling of superstitious horror that had held me overnight, and I had not repeated my request to Copley ; nor had he offered to look into the dark places of my soul.

He came down after me to the landing-place and we shook hands warmly, but he said nothing about my revisiting him.

And then, just as we were putting off, he turned back towards the hut and looked at me over his shoulder—just one quick glance.

"Wait," I commanded the boatmen, and I stood up and called to him.

"I say, Copley," I shouted.

He turned and looked at me, and I saw that his face was transfigured. He wore an expression of foolish disgust and loathing, I had seen something like it on the face of an idiot child who was just going to be sick.

I dropped down into the boat and turned my back on him.

I wondered then if that was how he had seen himself in the glass.

But since I have only wondered what it was he saw in me. . . .

And I can never go back to ask him.

John Metcalfe

THE BAD LANDS

from THE SMOKING LEG AND OTHER STORIES

Jarrolds, 1925

It is now perhaps fifteen years ago that Brent Ormerod, seeking the rest and change of scene that should help him to slay the demon neurosis, arrived in Todd towards the close of a mid-October day. A decrepit fly bore him to the one hotel, where his rooms were duly engaged, and it is this vision of himself sitting in the appalling vehicle that makes him think it was October or thereabouts, for he distinctly remembers the determined settling down of the dusk that forced him to drive when he would have preferred to follow his luggage on foot.

He decided immediately that five o'clock was an unsuitable time to arrive in Todd. The atmosphere, as it were, was not receptive. There was a certain repellent quality about the frore autumn air, and something peculiarly shocking in the way in which desultory little winds would spring up in darkening streets to send the fallen leaves scurrying about in hateful, furtive whirlpools.

Dinner, too, at the hotel hardly brought the consolation he had counted on. The meal itself was unexceptionable, and the room cheerful and sufficiently well filled for that time of year, yet one trivial circumstance was enough to send him upstairs with his temper ruffled and his nerves on edge. They had put him to a table with a one-eyed man, and that night the blank eye haunted all his dreams.

But for the first eight or nine days at Todd things went fairly well with him. He took frequent cold baths and regular exercise and made a point of coming back to the hotel so physically tired that to get into bed was usually to drop immediately into sleep. He wrote back to his sister Joan, at Kensington, that his nerves were already much improved and that only another fortnight seemed needed to complete the cure. "Altogether a highly satisfactory week."

Those who have been to Todd remember it as a quiet, secretive watering-place, couched watchfully in a fold of a long range of low hills along the Norfolk coast. It has been pronounced "restful" by those in high authority, for time there has a way of passing

dreamily as if the days, too, were being blown past like the lazy clouds on the wings of wandering breezes. At the back, the look of the land is somehow strangely forbidding, and it is wiser to keep to the shore and the more neighbouring villages. Salterton, for instance, has been found quite safe and normal.

There are long stretches of sand dunes to the west, and by their side a nine-hole golf-course. Here, at the time of Brent's visit, stood an old and crumbling tower, an enigmatic structure which he found interesting from its sheer futility. Behind it an inexplicable road seemed to lead with great decision most uncomfortably to nowhere. . . . Todd, he thought, was in many ways a nice spot, but he detected in it a tendency to grow on one unpleasantly.

He came to this conclusion at the end of the ninth day, for it was then that he became aware of a peculiar uneasiness, an indescribable *malaise*.

This feeling of disquiet he at first found himself quite unable to explain or analyse. His nerves he had thought greatly improved since he had left Kensington, and his general health was good. He decided, however, that perhaps yet more exercise was necessary, and so he walked along the links and the sand dunes to the queer tower and the inexplicable road that lay behind it three times a day instead of twice.

His discomfort rapidly increased. He would become conscious, as he set out for his walk, of a strange sinking at his heart and of a peculiar moral disturbance which was very difficult to describe. These sensations attained their maximum when he had reached his goal upon the dunes, and he suffered then what something seemed to tell him was very near the pangs of spiritual dissolution.

It was on the eleventh day that some faint hint of the meaning of these peculiar symptoms crossed his mind. For the first time he asked himself why it was that of all the many rambles he had taken in Todd since his arrival each one seemed inevitably to bring him to the same place—the yellow sand dunes with the mysterious looking tower in the background. Something in the bland foolishness of the structure seemed to have magnetised him, and in the unaccountable excitement which the sight of it invariably produced, he had found himself endowing it with almost human characteristics.

With its white nightcap dome and its sides of pale yellow stucco it might seem at one moment to be something extravagantly ridiculous, a figure of fun at which one should laugh and point.

Then, as likely as not, its character would change a little, and it would take on the abashed and crestfallen look of a jester whose best joke has fallen deadly flat, while finally, perhaps, it would develop with startling rapidity into a jovial old gentleman laughing madly at Ormerod from the middle distance out of infinite funds of merriment.

Now Brent was well aware of the dangers of an obsession such as this, and he immediately resolved to rob the tower of its unwholesome fascination by simply walking straight up to it, past it, and onwards along the road that stretched behind it.

It was on the morning of one of the last October days that he set out from the hotel with this intention in his mind. He reached the dunes at about ten, and plodded with some difficulty across them in the direction of the tower. As he neared it his accustomed sensations became painfully apparent, and presently increased to such a pitch that it was all he could do to continue on his way.

He remembered being struck again with the peculiar character of the winding road that stretched before him into a hazy distance where everything seemed to melt and swim in shadowy vagueness. On his left the gate stood open, to his right the grotesque form of the tower threatened. . . .

Now he had reached it, and its shadow fell straight across his path. He did not halt to examine it, but strode forward through the open gate and entered upon the winding road. At the same moment he was astonished to notice that the painful clutch at his heart was immediately lifted, and that with it, too, all the indescribable uneasiness which he had characterised to himself as "moral" had utterly disappeared.

He had walked on for some little distance before another rather remarkable fact struck his attention. The country was no longer vague; rather, it was peculiarly distinct, and he was able to see for long distances over what seemed considerable stretches of park-like land, grey, indeed, in tone and somehow sad with a most poignant melancholy, yet superficially, at least, well cultivated and in some parts richly timbered. He looked behind him to catch a glimpse of Todd and of the sea, but was surprised to find that in that direction the whole landscape was become astonishingly indistinct and shadowy.

It was not long before the mournful aspect of the country about him began so to depress him and work upon his nerves that he

debated with himself the advisability of returning at once to the hotel. He found that the ordinary, insignificant things about him were becoming charged with sinister suggestion and that the scenery on all sides was rapidly developing an unpleasant tendency to the *macabre*. Moreover his watch told him that it was now half-past eleven—and lunch was at one. Almost hastily he turned about and began to descend the winding road.

It was about an hour later that he again reached the tower and saw the familiar dunes stretching once more before him. For some reason or other he seemed to have found the way back much longer and more difficult than the outward journey, and it was with a feeling of distinct relief that he actually passed through the gate and set his face towards Todd.

He did not go out again that afternoon, but sat smoking and thinking in the hotel. In the lounge he spoke to a man who sat in a chair beside him.

“What a queer place that is all at the back there behind the dunes!”

His companion's only comment was a somewhat drowsy grunt.

“Behind the tower,” pursued Ormerod, “the funny tower at the other end of the links. The most God-forsaken, dismal place you can imagine. And simply miles of it!”

The other, roused to coherence much against his will, turned slowly round.

“Don't know it,” he said. “There's a large farm where you say, and the other side of that is a river, and then you come to Harkaby or somewhere.”

He closed his eyes and Ormerod was left to ponder the many difficulties of his remarks.

At dinner he found a more sympathetic listener. Mr. Stanton-Boyle had been in Todd a week when Brent arrived, and his sensitive, young-old face with the eager eyes and the quick, nervous contraction of the brows had caught the newcomer's attention from the first. Up to now, indeed, they had only exchanged commonplaces, but to-night each seemed more disposed towards intimacy. Ormerod began.

“I suppose you've walked around the country at the back here a good deal?” he said.

“No,” replied the other. “I never go there now. I went there once or twice and that was enough.”

“Why?”

"Oh, it gets on my nerves, that's all. Do you get any golf here? . . ."

The conversation passed to other subjects, and it was not until both were smoking together over liqueur brandies in the lounge that it returned to the same theme. And then they came to a remarkable conclusion.

"The country at the back of this place," said Brent's companion, "is somehow abominable. It ought to be blown up or something. I don't say it was always like that. Last year, for instance, I don't remember noticing it at all. I fancy it may have been depressing enough, but it was not—not abominable. It's gone abominable since then, particularly to the south-west!"

They said good-night after agreeing to compare notes on Todd, S.W., and Ormerod had a most desolating dream wherein he walked up and up into a strange dim country, full of sighs and whisperings and crowding, sombre trees, where hollow breezes blew fitfully, and a queer house set with lofty pine shone out white against a lurid sky. . . .

On the next day he walked again past the tower and through the gate and along the winding road. As he left Todd behind him and began the slow ascent among the hills he became conscious of some strange influence that hung over the country like a brooding spirit. The clearness of the preceding day was absent; instead, all seemed nebulous and indistinct, and the sad landscape dropped behind and below him in the numb, unreal recession of a dream.

It was about four o'clock, and as he slowly ascended into the mournful tracts the greyness of the late autumn day was deepening into dusk. All the morning, clouds had been gathering in the west, and now the dull ache of the damp sky gave the uneasy sense of impending rain. Here a fitful wind blew the gold flame of a sear leaf athwart the November gloom, and out along the horizon great leaden masses were marching out to sea.

A terrible sense of loneliness fell upon the solitary walker trudging up into the sighing country, and even the sight of scattered habitations, visible here and there among the shadows, seemed only to intensify his feeling of dream and unreality. Everywhere the uplands strained in the moist wind, and the lines of gaunt firs that marched against the horizon gloom pointed ever out to sea. The wan crowding on of the weeping heavens, the settled pack of those leaning firs, and the fitful scurry of the leaves

in the chill blast down the lane smote upon his spirit as something unutterably sad and terrible. On his right a skinny blackthorn shot up hard and wiry towards the dull, grey sky; there ahead trees in a wood fluttered ragged, yellow flags against the dimness.

A human figure appeared before him, and presently he saw that it was a man, apparently a labourer. He carried tools upon his shoulders, and his head was bent so that it was only when Ormerod addressed him that he looked up and showed a withered countenance. "What is the name of all this place?" said Brent, with a wide sweep of his arm.

"This," said the labourer, in a voice so thin and tired that it seemed almost like the cold breath of the wind that drove beside them, "is Hayes-in-the-Up. Of course, though, it'll be a mile further on for you before you get to Fennington." He pointed in the direction from which he had just come, turned his sunken eyes again for a moment upon Ormerod, and then quickly faded down the descending path.

Brent looked after him wondering, but as he swept his gaze about him much of his wonder vanished. All around, the wan country seemed to rock giddily beneath those lowering skies, so heavy with the rain that never fell; all around, the sailing uplands seemed to heave and yearn under the sad tooting of the damp November wind. Oh, he could well imagine that the men of this weary, twilight region would be worn and old before their time, with its sinister stare in their eyes and its haggard gloom abroad in their pinched faces!

Thinking thus, he walked on steadily, and it was not long before certain words of the man he had met rose with uneasy suggestion to the surface of his mind. What, he asked himself, was Fennington? Somehow he did not think that the name stood for another village; rather, the word seemed to connect itself ominously with the dream he had had some little time ago. He shuddered, and had not walked many paces further before he found that his instinct was correct.

Opposite him, across a shallow valley, stood that white house, dimly set in giant pine. Here the winds seemed almost visible as they strove in those lofty trees and the constant rush by of the weeping sky behind made all the view seem to tear giddily through some unreal, watery medium. A striking resemblance of the pines to palm-trees and a queer effect of light which brought the white

façade shaking bright against the sailing cloud-banks gave the whole a strangely exotic look.

Gazing at it across the little valley, Ormerod felt somehow that this, indeed, was the centre and hub of the wicked country, the very kernel and essence of this sad, unwholesome land that he saw flung wide in weariness about him. This abomination was it that magnetised him, that attracted him from afar with fatal fascination, and threatened him with untold disaster. Almost sobbing, he descended his side of the valley and then rose again to meet the house.

Park-like land surrounded the building, and from the smooth turf arose the pines and some clusters of shrubs. Amongst these Ormerod walked carefully till he was suddenly so near that he could look into a small room through its open window whilst he sheltered in a large yew whose dusky skirts swept the ground.

The room seemed strangely bare and deserted. A small table was pushed to one side, and dust lay thick upon it. Nearer Ormerod a chair or two appeared, and, opposite, a great black mantelpiece glowered in much gloom. In the centre of the floor was set the object that seemed to dominate the whole.

This was a large and cumbrous spinning-wheel of forbidding mien. It glistened foully in the dim light, and its many moulded points pricked the air in very awful fashion. Waiting there in the close stillness, the watcher fancied he could see the treadle stir. Quickly, with beating heart, beset by sudden dread, he turned away, retraced his steps among the sheltering shrubs, and descended to the valley bottom.

He climbed up the other side, and was glad to walk rapidly away down the winding path till, on turning his head, it was no longer possible to see the evil house he had just left.

It must have been near six o'clock when, on approaching the gate and tower, weary from his walk and anxious to reach the familiar and reassuring atmosphere of the hotel, he came suddenly upon a man walking through the darkness in the same direction as himself. It was Stanton-Boyle.

Ormerod quickly overtook him and spoke. "You have no idea," he said, "how glad I am to see you. We can walk back together now."

As they strolled to the hotel Brent described his walk, and he saw the other trembling. Presently Stanton-Boyle looked at him earnestly and spoke. "I've been there too," he said, "and I feel

just as you do about it. I feel that that place Fennington is the centre of the rottenness. I looked through the window, too, and saw the spinning-wheel and——” He stopped suddenly. “No,” he went on quietly a moment later, “I won’t tell you what else I saw!”

“It ought to be destroyed!” shouted Ormerod. A curious excitement tingled in his blood. His voice was loud, so that people passing them in the street turned and gazed after them. His eyes were very bright. He went on, pulling Stanton-Boyle’s arm impressively. “I shall destroy it!” he said. “I shall burn it and I shall most assuredly smash that old spinning-wheel and break off its horrid spiky points!” He had a vague sense of saying curious and unusual things, but this increased rather than moderated his unaccountable elation.

Stanton-Boyle seemed somewhat abnormal too. He seemed to be gliding along the pavement with altogether unexampled smoothness and nobility as he turned his glowing eyes on Brent. “Destroy it!” he said. “Burn it! Before it is too late and it destroys you. Do this and you will be an unutterably brave man!”

When they reached the hotel Ormerod found a telegram awaiting him from Joan. He had not written to her for some time and she had grown anxious and was coming down herself on the following day. He must act quickly, before she came, for her mind in this matter would be unsympathetic. That night as he parted from Stanton-Boyle his eyes blazed in a high resolve. “Tomorrow,” he said, as he shook the other’s hand, “I shall attempt it.”

The following morning found the neurotic as good as his word. He carried matches and a tin of oil. His usually pale cheeks were flushed and his eyes sparkled strangely. Those who saw him leave the hotel remembered afterwards how his limbs had trembled and his speech halted. Stanton-Boyle, who was to see him off at the tower, reflected these symptoms in a less degree. Both men were observed to set out arm-in-arm engaged in earnest conversation.

At about noon Stanton-Boyle returned. He had walked with Ormerod to the sand dunes, and there left him to continue on his strange mission alone. He had seen him pass the tower, strike the fatal gate in the slanting morning sun, and then dwindle up the winding path till he was no more than an intense, pathetic dot along that way of mystery.

As he returned he was aware of companionship along the street. He looked round and noticed a policeman strolling in much abstraction some fifty yards behind him. Again at the hotel-entrance he turned about. The same figure in blue uniform was visible, admiring the houses opposite from the shade of an adjacent lamp-post. Stanton-Boyle frowned and withdrew to lunch.

At half-past two Joan arrived. She inquired nervously for Ormerod, and was at once addressed by Stanton-Boyle, who had waited for her in the entrance hall as desired by Brent. "Mr. Ormerod," he told her, "is out. He is very sorry. Will you allow me the impropriety of introducing myself? My name is Stanton-Boyle. . . ."

Joan tore open the note which had been left for her by Ormerod. She seemed to find the contents unsatisfactory, for she proceeded to catechise Stanton-Boyle upon her brother's health and general habit of life at Todd. Following this she left the hotel hastily after ascertaining the direction from which Ormerod might be expected to return.

Stanton-Boyle waited. The moments passed, heavy, anxious, weighted with the sense of coming trouble. He sat and smoked. Discreet and muffled noises from within the hotel seemed full somehow of uneasy suggestion and foreboding. Outside, the street looked very gloomy in the November darkness. Something, assuredly, would happen directly.

It came, suddenly. A sound of tramping feet and excited cries that grew rapidly in volume and woke strange echoes in the reserved autumnal roads. Presently the tumult lessened abruptly, and only broken, fitful shouts and staccato ejaculations stabbed the silence. Stanton-Boyle jumped to his feet and walked hurriedly to the entrance hall.

Here there were cries and hustlings and presently strong odours and much suppressed excitement. He saw Joan talking very quickly to the manager of the hotel. She seemed to be developing a Point-of-View, and it was evident that it was not the manager's. For some time the press of people prevented him from discovering the cause of the commotion, but here and there he could make out detached sentences: "Tried to set old Hackney's farm on fire——" "But they'd seen him before and another man too, so——" "Asleep in the barn several times."

Before long, all but the hotel residents had dispersed, and in the centre of the considerable confusion which still remained it was

now possible to see Ormerod supported by two policemen. A third hovered in the background with a large notebook. As Stanton-Boyle gazed, Brent lifted his bowed head so that their eyes met. "I have done it," he said. "I smashed it up. I brought back one of its points in my pocket . . . Overcoat, left hand . . . as a proof." Having pronounced which words Mr. Ormerod fainted very quietly.

For some time there was much disturbance. The necessary arrangements for the temporary pacification of the Law and of the Hotel had to be carried through, and after that Ormerod had to be got to bed. It was only after the initial excitement had in large measure abated that Stanton-Boyle ventured to discuss the matter over the after-dinner coffee. He had recognised one of the three policemen as the man whom he had noticed in the morning, and had found it well to retire from observation until he and his companions had left the hotel. Now, however, he felt at liberty to explain his theories of the situation to such as chose to listen.

He held forth with peculiar vehemence and with appropriate gestures. He spoke of a new kind of *terre-mauvaise*, of strange regions, connected, indeed, with definite geographical limits upon the earth, yet somehow apart from them and beyond them. "The relation," he said, "is rather one of parallelism and correspondence than of actual connection. I honestly believe that these regions do exist, and are quite as 'real' in their way as the ordinary world we know. We might say they consist in a special and separated set of stimuli to which only certain minds in certain conditions are able to respond. Such a district seems to be superimposed upon the country to the south-west of this place."

A laugh arose. "You won't get the magistrate to believe that," said someone. "Why, all where you speak of past that gate by the dunes is just old Hackney's farm and nothing else."

"Of course," said another. "It was one of old Hackney's barns he was setting alight, I understand. I was speaking to one of the policemen about it. He said that fellow Ormerod had always been fossicking around there, and had gone to sleep in the barn twice. I expect it's all bad dreams."

A third spoke derisively. "Surely," he said, "you don't really expect us to believe in your Bad Lands. It's like Jack-in-the-Beanstalk."

"All right!" said Stanton-Boyle. "Have it your own way! I know my use of the term 'Bad Lands' may be called incorrect,

because it usually means that bit in the States, you know—but that's a detail. I tell you I've run up against things like this before. There was the case of Dolly Wishart, but no, I won't say anything about that—you wouldn't believe it."

The group around looked at him oddly. Suddenly there was a stir, and a man appeared in the doorway. He carried Ormerod's overcoat.

"This may settle the matter," he said. "I heard him say he'd put something in the pocket. He said——"

Stanton-Boyle interrupted him excitedly. "Why, yes," he said. "I'd forgotten that. What I was telling you about—the spinning-wheel. It will be interesting to see if——" He stopped and fumbled in the pockets. In another moment he brought out something which he held in his extended hand for all to see.

It was part of the handle of a patent separator—an object familiar enough to any who held even meagre acquaintance with the life of farms, and upon it could still be discerned the branded letters G. P. H.

"George Philip Hackney," interpreted the unbelievers with many smiles.

A. M. Burrage

NOBODY'S HOUSE

from SOME GHOST STORIES

Cecil Palmer, 1927

They faced each other across the threshold of the great door in the dimness of two meagre lights. It was just dusk on a windy autumn evening, and Mrs. Park, the caretaker, had brought a candle with her to answer the summons at the door. Behind the stranger the last grey light of the day filtered through veils of dingy, low-flying clouds. Between them the candle flame fluttered in the draught like a yellow pennon, the cavernous darkness of the hall advancing and retreating like some monster at once curious and shy.

The man was tall and broad and seemingly in the early fifties. He wore a grey moustache and beard, both closely trimmed, and his black velour hat was pulled low down over a high forehead.

His overcoat was cut to an old-fashioned pattern, having a cape to it, and it was perhaps this which lent him an air of—even at his years—having outlived his age.

He was fumbling in an inside pocket when the door was opened, and he said nothing until he had produced an envelope.

“ I have an order from Messrs. Flake and Limpenny to see the house.” Here he offered Mrs. Park the envelope. “ I am afraid I have called at an inopportune time, but I missed one train and the next arrived late. Perhaps, however, you won't mind showing me over ? ”

He spoke slowly and a little nervously, as if he were repeating a speech which he had previously prepared. His voice was very low and mellowed and gentle. Mrs. Park stood back from the threshold.

“ Will you come in, sir ? ” she said. “ I am afraid you won't be seeing the house at its best. I shall have to show you over by candle ; there is no gas or electric light.”

He stepped inside and scrutinized her. She was a tall, gaunt, middle-aged woman of the kind which is generally described as “ superior.” Nature had intended her to become matron of an institute. Fate and widowhood had forced her a rung or two down the ladder. She looked what she was—honest, hard-working, and almost devoid of sympathy.

“ I'm afraid,” she added in her hard, toneless voice, “ you'll find everything just anyhow. I wasn't expecting anybody. Very few people come here nowadays. And a place of this size takes more than one pair of hands to keep it clean.”

“ It has been empty a long time, then ? ” he hazarded.

“ Ever since——” She checked herself suddenly. “ For more than twenty years, I should think.” She turned her shoulder upon him, lifting the candle above her head. “ This is supposed to be a fine hall, and everybody admires the staircase. If the house doesn't find a tenant or a purchaser soon, I hear they intend removing the staircase and selling it separately. There is a lot of fine oak panelling, too. The library——”

Turning to see if he were listening, she saw him start and shiver and rub his long, thin hands together.

“ Excuse me,” he said. “ I have been a long time in the train, and I am very cold. I wonder if it would be troubling you too much to get me a cup of tea.”

“ Yes, I could do that,” she answered. “ The kettle is on, for I

intended having one myself. Will you come this way? Perhaps you would like a warm by the fire?"

She led the way across the hall and through a baize-covered door at the end. Turning once to see if she were giving him sufficient light, Mrs. Park noticed that he walked with a slight limp. He followed her down a short passage, through a great kitchen ruddy with firelight, down another passage, and into a small room intended to be used as a housekeeper's parlour. Here there was warmth, even stuffiness. A paraffin lamp stood burning on a flaming red table-cloth. The room was full of hideous modern cottage furniture, and decorated largely with the portraits of people who ought to have known better than to be photographed. He saw at a glance Mrs. Park in some kind of uniform, Mrs. Park's mother wearing bustles, Mrs. Park's father in stiff Sunday attire and side-whiskers. But a fire burned brightly in the grate, and a kettle on a brass trivet murmured and rattled its lid. This commonplace room, lighted and hot and over-furnished was at least a relief from the dark passage and the draughty, gloom-ridden hall.

"I'll give you your tea in here, sir, and take mine in the kitchen," the caretaker said.

"Nonsense. Why should you? Besides, I want to talk. Oh, here's the order to view. You see . . . Mr. Stephen Royds—that's my name . . . to view . . ."

He was running his thumbnail along the sheet of heavily headed office notepaper. Mrs. Park glanced perfunctorily at the type-writing. So far as she was concerned, an order to view was a superfluous formality. She was more interested in this Mr. Royds, who, having removed his hat, disclosed a head of sparse iron-grey hair. He spoke like a gentleman, but there was nothing opulent in his appearance. He looked an unlikely purchaser or tenant; but for that matter she had never been able to visualize the sort of person whom the house would suit.

"I'll remove my greatcoat if you don't mind," he said, while Mrs. Park went to a cupboard for another cup and saucer. "The room is warm." He laid the coat across the back of a chair. "Do you live here entirely alone?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you—nervous?"

She looked up sharply.

"Nervous? What is there to be nervous about?"

"I didn't know. Some people cannot bear loneliness. Can you tell me why the house has been on the market all these years?"

Mrs. Park smiled grimly.

"That's easy enough," she said. "It's nobody's house."

"What do you mean—nobody's house?"

"People who can afford to keep up a great house like this generally want land along with it. There isn't any land. People who don't want land can't afford to keep up a house like this. The estate was sold to Major Skirting. He's a house of his own. He's let the land and he's been trying to let or sell the house ever since. I've shown hundreds over but nobody's ever thought twice about taking it."

"Strange. It's a good house. But the land . . . yes, I quite follow you. Whom used it to belong to?"

Mrs. Park set the cup and saucer down upon the table with a rattle.

"A gentleman named Harboys," she said; and suddenly stood rigid, her head a little on one side, in an attitude of listening.

"Do you hear anything?" he asked sharply.

"No. I'll make the tea."

"I suppose you sometimes fancy you hear things?"

She bent over the kettle, giving him no answer. He waited until the teapot was full and then gently repeated the question.

"Hear things?" she repeated with some show of asperity. "No. Why should I?"

"I didn't know. These empty old houses . . ."

"I'm not one of the fanciful sort, sir. . . . Will you help yourself to milk and sugar?"

She let him see that the talk had veered in a direction contrary to her liking. There was veiled fear in her eyes, and, watching her intently, he could see that she was not impervious to loneliness. Here was a woman who suffered more than she knew. She could bluff her nerves by sheer will-power, but this will-power was steadily losing in the long battle. Mrs. Park was afraid of something, and always, in her inner consciousness, fighting against that fear.

"Thank you," the stranger said, taking the cup and saucer. "Who was this Harboys? Is he still alive?"

"I couldn't say."

"Isn't there some story about the house? Didn't something happen here?"

"I don't know."

"Forgive me. I think you do."

"There are stories . . . You don't need to listen . . ."

She spoke jerkily. Once more he remarked that look in her eyes.

"Tell me," he said gently.

"I can't, sir. If Major Skirting knew I told people I should lose my job. He'd think I was trying to prevent people from taking the house."

"It wouldn't prevent me. Wasn't this Harboys supposed to have shot——"

"Ah!" She set cup and saucer down with a rattle. "Then you've heard something already, sir!"

"A little. You had better tell me all. It will not affect me as a prospective purchaser."

Mrs. Park passed a hand across her forehead.

"I don't like talking about it, sir. You see, I live here all alone. . . ."

She checked herself suddenly, finding herself about to admit to a second person something which she never confessed even to herself.

"Just so," Royds said sympathetically. "And you sometimes hear noises? What noises?"

"Oh, it's imagination," she said. "Or the wind. Sometimes the wind sounds like footsteps and voices, and sometimes I seem to hear . . . It may be a loose door somewhere that bangs."

He leaned forward, his eyes shining with the excitement of some strange fascination.

"You mean you hear a shot fired?" he asked, scarcely above a whisper.

Her one hand resting on the table-cloth contracted nervously.

"I've known it sound like a shot. Oh, I don't believe. . . ."

"They say the house is haunted?" he asked eagerly.

"They say. . . . Oh, when there's been a tragedy happen in a house people will always——"

"Never mind what people say. What do *you* say?" The timbre of his voice had changed; under excitement it had hardened,

grown louder. "Is the house haunted?"

There was something compelling in Royd's gaze, in the new tone of his voice. She answered him sullenly, helplessly.

"I don't know. I've heard things. I tell myself they're nothing."

She groped for a handkerchief. "I've got to tell myself they're nothing."

"You haven't—*seen* anything?" he asked in a low, strained voice.

"No, thank God! I never go near the library after dark."

"The library? So it was there. Tell me."

Mrs. Park gulped some tea and replenished her cup with a shaking hand.

"It must have been about twenty years ago," she said in a low and curiously unwilling tone. "The place belonged to a Mr. Gerald Harboys. He was quite young—not much more than thirty, and very well liked. Some said he was a bit queer, but there was a strain of queerness in all the Harboys. Mad on hunting he was, and one of the best riders in these parts. You'll be surprised at the size of the stables when you see them. He had them built.

"He'd married a young wife, one of the Miss Greys from Hornfield Manor, and some say he thought more of her than he did of his horses. She used to ride too, and the pair of them, and Mr. Peter Marsh from Brinkchurch were always together. Harboys and Marsh had known each other since they were in the cradle. Whether there was really anything between Marsh and Mrs. Harboys, I don't know. There's been arguments about that for years, but they're both dead and gone now, and nobody will ever know."

"About one Christmastime Harboys took a fall in the hunting-field and broke his leg, and it was during his convalescence that he got into one of his queer moods. I daresay it was being kept out of the hunting-field which brought it on. His leg mended slowly, and right at the end of January he could only just get about with a stick. Mrs. Harboys followed the hounds every time there was a meet in the neighbourhood and, with her husband unable to get about, she saw more of Peter Marsh than usual. But nobody seemed to know that Mr. Harboys was jealous or that he suspected anything wrong.

"Well, one day at the end of January, Mrs. Harboys went out hunting, and her husband brooded all day over the library fire. During the afternoon he amused himself by cleaning a revolver, which he afterwards laid aside on the mantelpiece within reach. Mrs. Harboys came in just after dark. Peter Marsh had been piloting her, and she brought him with her. While she was ordering tea and poached eggs to be sent up to the morning-room,

she sent Peter Marsh into the library to get himself a whisky and tell Mr. Harboys about the day's hunting. He had not been in the library a minute when angry voices were heard and then a shot. The butler then burst into the room and found Peter Marsh lying dead, and Mr. Harboys, still in his chair before the fire, staring wildly at the body, with the revolver in his hand."

She paused, and in the silence she heard Royds breathing heavily. His head was bent and his gaze lowered to the near edge of the table, so that she could scarcely see his face.

"Mr. Harboys," she resumed, "pleaded Not Guilty at the trial and said that his mind was a blank at the time when the shot was fired. He couldn't remember anything that had happened between Marsh coming into the room and then the butler bending over the dead body. His counsel put in a plea for insanity, but the jury would not have it. They found him Guilty and added a recommendation to mercy. The death penalty was changed to penal servitude for life."

She broke off and began to muse, knitting her brows.

"That must be twenty years ago. . . . They let them out after twenty years. He's out already, or soon will be, if he's alive."

Slowly Royds lifted his head and turned burning eyes upon her face.

"And do you think Harboys did it?" he demanded.

The question took Mrs. Park aback.

"Of course! Why! How else could it have happened? There was only those two in the room. It couldn't have happened any other way."

Royds got upon his legs. His pale face was shining with little drops of moisture, his eyes aflame with a strange passion.

"I swear to you," he cried, "that I don't believe Harboys did it. I knew the man——"

Mrs. Park's stare intensified and she uttered a smothered exclamation.

"——I knew him well as child and boy and man. I was at school with Harboys. I tell you he was incapable of murder! All the circumstantial evidence in the world would not weigh an atom with me against my knowledge of his character. They say he had fits of madness. Another lie! But mad or sane he couldn't have done it. He loved his wife—and old Peter Marsh. He knew that they were two of God's best and whitest people. I tell you——"

He broke off suddenly and lowered his voice.

"I'm frightening you," he said. "I didn't mean to. Oh, but think! There's Harboys been rotting in prison these twenty years, remembering nothing of those few dreadful moments. To this day he doesn't know if he's innocent or guilty. Think of it."

Mrs. Park lifted her white face and twitching lips. One hand had stolen to the region of her heart. Each rapid stroke of her pulses seemed to shake her.

"Why have you come here?" she cried in a voice which rose high and querulous with a nameless dread. "You don't want the house! You never intended——"

"No," said Royds, "I came here to find out."

"What?"

"They say strange things happen in the library. I have heard stories. You tell me you have heard footfalls, voices, the sound of a shot. Don't you understand, woman? What happened in the library that evening twenty years ago is known only to God! The man who lives remembers nothing. If it be true that Peter Marsh returns . . . Oh, don't you understand? It is the only way of learning . . . the only way. . . ."

Mrs. Park stood up; her slim body made a barrier between him and the door.

"I can't let you go to the library," she cried, sharply.

"I must. I'm going to spend the night there. I'm going to wait until Peter——"

"I can't let you," she said again.

"But you must. Don't you understand? This means life or death to a man."

She backed almost to the door.

"It's madness!" she cried. "Nobody has ever endured that room after nightfall."

"I will!"

"I shall be sent away if it is found out."

"It won't be found out. I'll recompense you if it is. Here, I came prepared to pay for the privilege." He tugged a bundle of bank notes roughly out of his breast pocket and flung them on the table. "How much do you want? Five pounds? Ten? Twenty?"

Mrs. Park's gaze lingered on the roll of notes. She knew the value of money. Besides, she was alone in the great house with a man it might be dangerous to thwart.

"Come," said Royds, "here are five five-pound notes. Take

them and act like a sensible woman. Then I shall go to the library, and you will make me a fire. Is there any furniture there?"

"No," muttered the woman, her gaze still on the roll of bank notes.

"Then, if you will permit me, I will take a chair."

He picked up the notes again and transferred all of them but five to his breast pocket. With these five he advanced and pressed them into the woman's hand. Her fingers closed over them.

"I'm doing wrong," she muttered.

"You're doing right. I'll get the truth to-night if I have to summon the devil himself. Now come and help me make a fire in the library."

She turned heavily away without a word and went to a cupboard, from the bottom of which she took a bundle of firewood and an old sheet of newspaper, which she dropped on top of the contents of the half-filled scuttle. Then she lit a candle in a brass stick and motioned him towards the door. He picked up a chair as he followed her.

The house was very still as they passed through the kitchen and passages leading to the hall. Their footfalls on the uncarpeted floors rang out sonorously through the hollow shell of the house. To the woman this shattering of a silence which seemed almost sacred was a new weapon put into the hands of Terror. Her overstrained nerves cried out in protest at each of the man's heavy steps. Around her, in the shifting penumbra beyond reach of the candle light, above her in the empty upper chambers of the house, all manner of sleeping horrors, shapeless abominations of the night-world, seemed to waken and listen and draw near. The silent house seemed full of stealthy movement, and each blotch of darkness was an ambush, peopled by the lewd phantasms of her mind. The man walking behind her seemed to be without nerves, or he had so stimulated them as to bring them entirely under his control.

Evidently he knew the house, for he passed her in the hall taking the lead in the procession of two, and went straight to the library door, which he flung open and passed on the crest of the following candle-light.

The library was a long room in an angle of the house. A long row of windows fronted the hearth, and two more faced the door. The walls were of oak panels stained a mahogany colour, but in that dim light they looked black, as if they were hung with funereal trappings.

The man lingered between the door and the first of the windows while Mrs. Park, half closing her eyes, hurried across to the fireplace with the scuttle. He seemed to be searching for something. Presently he found it.

"There's a hole in one of these panels," he announced.

Mrs. Park's heart gave a leap.

"Yes," she stammered. "It's a—a bullet hole. The shot lodged there after—after——"

"Yes," he said, quietly, "I understand." He crossed the room with a chair and set it down at that corner of the hearth which faced the door and the damaged panel. "And that afternoon, over twenty years ago, I was sitting here——"

There was a crash as the scuttle fell from the woman's hands. All her horror and amazement expressed itself in one thin, muffled scream.

"*You* were sitting there! *You!* Gerald Harboys! Gerald Harboys, the murderer!"

He answered quietly: "Gerald Harboys or Stephen Royds—God help me, what does it matter? Murderer or not—only God knows! But I shall learn to-night. Light that fire, woman, and then leave me."

She left him and stumbled blindly back to the little vulgar room behind the kitchen. But a fascination stronger than terror drew her back to the outside of the library door, there tremblingly to wait and to listen. . . .

Harboys, to give him his real name at the last, settled himself on the chair, and at first busied himself with the building up of the fire. Then he took a revolver from his coat pocket, and placed it upon the mantelpiece within his reach. This done he looked out across the room with a steady gaze.

The firelight wrought strange patterns among the shadows, but in the swiftly changing measures of this shadow-dance he found nothing of what he sought. Presently he began to speak aloud, quietly but very distinctly, so that the shivering woman outside the door brought her hands to her tightening throat.

"Peter, Peter." The tone was almost wheedling. "Can you hear me? I'm sitting in just the same place that I sat that evening, with my bad leg resting on a stool. Here am I, and here's that damned revolver. Now, Peter, won't you come? They say you're always here—that you can't rest because your best friend shot

you. Did I shoot you, Peter? My mind's a blank—a blank! For twenty years I have been trying to remember. I have not known peace day and night for twenty years, Peter. Oh, come and tell me! I want to know—to *know*. There's something wrong, Peter. I couldn't have done it. How could I have shot you, boy?"

He relapsed into silence, his gaze never leaving the space between the door and the first window. After a long minute his voice broke out again, choked and almost tearful.

"Is it because you hate me that you won't show yourself, Peter? Was I mad? and did I do it after all? Don't hate me, Peter. I've suffered! Have pity! One way or another I want to end this agony to-night. Oh, God, make him merciful to me! Peter, we'd been friends so long. School . . . don't you remember Wryvern, and those long talks under the lime-trees in the Close on summer nights? And study teas? And going up to Lord's?"

He babbled on, while kaleidoscopic pictures passed before the eyes of his memory. Cool, dewy morning, and the cricket eleven tumbling out of houses for fielding practice; rows of languid boys in dim classrooms and a scratching of pens; bright sunlight, and white shapes moving on a green sward; crowded touch-lines, and the scrum forming, and goal-posts standing up stark against a grey November sky. In each and all of them he caught a wavering, vanishing glimpse of Peter Marsh.

"Peter!" he cried out again. "Can't you hear me? Won't you come to me? You *do* come back. They all say so. That woman hears you. You—in your scarlet coat, as you came in that evening. I remember . . . when I saw you lying there . . . the blood scarcely showed. I was sitting here waiting for Muriel. I heard you both come up the drive. Muriel was laughing at something. You were both talking to the groom outside. Then I heard you in the hall, and Muriel ordered tea and went upstairs. And I thought: 'She doesn't come in to see me. I'm nothing to her now I'm crooked. It's all Peter, Peter, Peter. By God!' I said, 'I've been blind as well as lame. The things I've seen which they pretended were nothing. . . . The things I haven't seen, but heard of in whispers and hints.' All in a moment my brain caught fire. 'Damn you!' I said, 'I'll teach you to make a cuckold of a lame man!' Then . . . you came in."

The trembling woman outside heard him utter a hoarse cry.

"Peter! Peter! Oh, God, I'm beginning to remember! You

stood where you're standing now, touching the handle of the door. That's right! And you said—I remember now—'Give us a peg, Jerry. I'm frozen. There's a devil of an east wind.' Peter! Peter! Don't look like that! I'm remembering . . . remembering. Oh, God, have mercy . . . have mercy!"

A hoarse scream echoed through the room, a chair reeled over with a crash, and then followed a frenzied shouting.

"I remember . . . I remember . . . damn you! when you turned your back on me . . . like that . . ."

A shot rang out; then another. Then silence enfolded Nobody's House, and its one living inmate, a swooning woman, who clung to the oak balustrade.

It was half-an-hour later when Mrs. Park forced herself into the library. The red glow of the fire was still dancing on the walls and floor. For a moment one ruddy gleam seemed to take a fantastic shape—like the prostrate figure of a man in hunting pink.

Harboys lay crumpled and face downwards across the hearth, the revolver still in his hand, the ugly wound in his temple mercifully hidden. To that end had he remembered.

Where there had been a bullet hole in one of the panels, the police next morning found two. They were side by side and scarcely an inch apart.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

THE SEVENTH MAN

from OLD FIRES AND PROFITABLE GHOSTS

Cassell, 1900

Dent (Duchy Edition), 1928

In a one-roomed hut, high within the Arctic Circle, and only a little south of the eightieth parallel, six men were sitting—much as they had sat, evening after evening, for months. They had a clock, and by it they divided the hours into day and night. As a matter of fact, it was always night. But the clock said half-past eight, and they called the time evening.

The hut was built of logs, with an inner skin of rough matchboarding, daubed with pitch. It measured seventeen feet by fourteen; but opposite the door four bunks—two above and two below—took a yard off the length, and this made the interior exactly square. Each of these bunks had two doors, with brass latches on the inner side; so that the owner, if he chose, could shut himself up and go to sleep in a sort of cupboard. But as a rule, he closed one of them only—that by his feet. The other swung back, with its brass latch showing. The men kept these latches in a high state of polish.

Across the angle of the wall, to the left of the door, and behind it when it opened, three hammocks were slung, one above another. No one slept in the uppermost.

But the feature of the hut was its fireplace; and this was merely a square hearth-stone, raised slightly above the floor, in the middle of the room. Upon it, and upon a growing mountain of soft grey ash, the fire burned always. It had no chimney, and so the men lost none of its warmth. The smoke ascended steadily and spread itself under the blackened beams and roof-boards in dense blue layers. But about eighteen inches beneath the spring of the roof there ran a line of small trap-doors with sliding panels, to admit the cold air, and below these the room was almost clear of smoke. A newcomer's eyes might have smarted, but these men stitched their clothes and read in comfort. To keep the up-draught steady they had plugged every chink and crevice in the matchboarding below the trap-doors with moss, and payed the seams with pitch. The fire they fed from a stack of drift and wreck-wood piled to the right of the door, and fuel for the fetching strewed the frozen beach outside—whole trees notched into lengths by lumberers' axes and washed thither from they knew not what continent. But the wreck-wood came from their own ship, the *J. R. MacNeill*, which had brought them from Dundee.

They were Alexander Williamson, of Dundee, better known as the Gaffer; David Faed, also of Dundee; George Lashman, of Cardiff; Long Ede, of Hayle, in Cornwall; Charles Silchester, otherwise the Snipe, of Ratcliff Highway or thereabouts; and Daniel Cooney, shipped at Tromsö six weeks before the wreck, an Irish-American by birth and of no known address.

The Gaffer reclined in his bunk, reading by the light of a smoky and evil-smelling lamp. He had been mate of the *J. R. MacNeill*, and was now captain as well as patriarch of the party.

He possessed three books—the Bible, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and an odd volume of *The Turkish Spy*. Just now he was reading *The Turkish Spy*. The lamplight glinted on the rim of his spectacles and on the silvery hairs in his beard, the slack of which he had tucked under the edge of his blanket. His lips moved as he read, and now and then he broke off to glance mildly at Faed and the Snipe, who were busy beside the fire with a greasy pack of cards ; or to listen to the peevish grumbling of Lashman in the bunk below him. Lashman had taken to his bed six weeks before with scurvy, and complained incessantly ; and, though they hardly knew it, these complaints were wearing his comrades' nerves to fiddle-strings—doing the mischief that cold and bitter hard work and the cruel loneliness had hitherto failed to do. Long Ede lay stretched by the fire in a bundle of skins, reading in his only book, the Bible, open now at the Song of Solomon. Cooney had finished patching a pair of trousers, and rolled himself in his hammock, whence he stared at the roof and the moonlight streaming up there through the little trap-doors and chivying the layers of smoke. Whenever Lashman broke out into fresh quaverings of self-pity, Cooney's hands opened and shut again, till the nails dug hard into the palm. He groaned at length, exasperated beyond endurance.

“ Oh, stow it, George ! Hang it all, man ! . . . ”

He checked himself, sharp and short : repentant, and rebuked by the silence of the others. They were good seamen all, and tender dealing with a sick shipmate was part of their code.

Lashman's voice, more querulous than ever, cut into the silence like a knife :

“ That's it. You've thought it for weeks, and now you say it. I've knowed it all along. I'm just an encumbrance, and the sooner you're shut of me the better, says you. You needn't to fret. I'll be soon out of it ; out of it—out there, alongside of Bill——”

“ Easy there, matey.” The Snipe glanced over his shoulder and laid his cards face downward. “ Here, let me give the bed a shake up. It'll ease yer.”

“ It'll make me quiet, you mean. Plucky deal you care about easin' me, any of yer ! ”

“ Get out with yer nonsense ! Dan didn' mean it.” The Snipe slipped an arm under the invalid's head and rearranged the pillow of skins and gunnybags.

“ He didn't, didn't he ? Let him say it then . . . ”

The Gaffer read on, his lips moving silently. Heaven knows how he had acquired this strayed and stained and filthy little demi-octavo with the arms of Saumarez on its book-plate—"The Sixth Volume of Letters writ by a Turkish Spy, who liv'd Five-and-Forty Years Undiscovered at Paris: Giving an Impartial Account to the *Divan* at *Constantinople* of the most remarkable Transactions of Europe, And discovering several *Intrigues* and *Secrets* of the *Christian* Courts (especially of that of *France*)," etc., etc. "Written originally in *Arabick*. Translated into *Italian*, and from thence into *English* by the Translator of the First Volume. The Eleventh Edition, London: Printed for G. Strahan, S. Ballard"—and a score of booksellers—"MDCCXLI." Heaven knows why he read it, since he understood about one-half, and admired less than one-tenth. The Oriental reflections struck him as mainly blasphemous. But the Gaffer's religious belief marked down nine-tenths of mankind for perdition: which perhaps made him tolerant. At any rate, he read on gravely between the puffs of his short clay—

"On the 19th of this Moon, the King and the whole Court were present at a Ballet, representing the grandeur of the French monarchy. About the Middle of the Entertainment, there was an Antique Dance perform'd by twelve Masqueraders, in the suppos'd form of Dæmons. But before they advanc'd far in their Dance, they found an Interloper amongst 'em, who by encreasing the Number to thirteen, put them quite out of their Measure: For they practise every Step and Motion beforehand, till they are perfect. Being abash'd therefore at the unavoidable Blunders the thirteenth Antique made them commit they stood still like Fools, gazing at one another: None daring to unmask, or speak a Word; for that would have put all the Spectators into a Disorder and Confusion. Cardinal Mazarini (who was the chief Contriver of these Entertainments, to divert the King from more serious Thoughts) stood close by the young Monarch, with the Scheme of the Ballet in his Hand. Knowing therefore that this Dance was to consist but of twelve Antiques, and taking notice that there were actually thirteen, he at first imputed it to some Mistake. But, afterwards, when he perceived the Confusion of the Dancers, he made a more narrow Enquiry into the Cause of this Disorder. To be brief, they convinced the Cardinal that it could be no Error of theirs, by a kind of Demonstration, in that they had but twelve Antique Dresses of that sort, which were made on purpose for this particular Ballet. That which made it seem the greater Mystery was, that when they came behind the Scenes to uncase, and examine the Matter, they found but twelve Antiques, whereas on the Stage there were thirteen . . ."

“ Let him say it. Let him say he didn't mean it, the rotten Irishman ! ”

Cooney flung a leg wearily over the side of his hammock, jerked himself out, and shuffled across to the sick man's berth.

“ Av coorse I didn' mane it. It just took me, ye see, lyin' up yondher and huggin' me thoughts in this —wilderness. I swear to ye, George : and ye'll just wet your throat to show there's no bad blood, and that ye belave me.” He took up a pannikin from the floor beside the bunk, pulled a hot iron from the fire, and stirred the frozen drink. The invalid turned his shoulder pettishly. “ I didn't mane it,” Cooney repeated. He set down the pannikin, and shuffled wearily back to his hammock.

The Gaffer blew a long cloud and stared at the fire ; at the smoke mounting and the grey ash dropping ; at David Faed dealing the cards and licking his thumb between each. Long Ede shifted from one cramped elbow to another and pushed his Bible near the blaze, murmuring, “ Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil our vines.”

“ Full hand,” the Snipe announced.

“ Ay.” David Faed rolled the quid in his cheek. The cards were so thumbbed and tattered that by the backs of them each player guessed pretty shrewdly what the other held. Yet they went on playing night after night ; the Snipe shrilly blessing or cursing his luck, the Scotsman phlegmatic as a bolster.

“ Play away, man. What ails ye ? ” he asked.

The Snipe had dropped both hands to his thighs and sat up, stiff and listening.

“ Whist ! Outside the door . . . ”

All listened. “ I hear nothing,” said David, after ten seconds.

“ Hush, man—listen ! There, again . . . ”

They heard now. Cooney slipped down from his hammock, stole to the door and listened, crouching, with his ear close to the jamb. The sound resembled breathing—or so he thought for a moment. Then it seemed rather as if some creature were softly feeling about the door—fumbling its coating of ice and frozen snow.

Cooney listened. They all listened. Usually, as soon as they stirred from the scorching circle of the fire, their breath came from them in clouds. It trickled from them now in thin wisps of vapour. They could almost hear the soft grey ash dropping on the hearth.

A log spluttered. Then the invalid's voice clattered in :

"It's the bears—the bears! They've come after Bill, and next it'll be my turn. I warned you—I told you he wasn't deep enough. O Lord, have mercy . . . mercy . . . !" He pattered off into a prayer, his voice and teeth chattering.

"Hush!" commanded the Gaffer gently; and Lashman choked on a sob.

"It ain't bears," Cooney reported, still with his ear to the door. "Leastways . . . we've had bears before. The foxes, maybe . . . let me listen."

Long Ede murmured: "Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . ."

"I believe you're right," the Gaffer announced cheerfully. "A bear would sniff louder—though there's no telling. The snow was falling an hour back, and I dessay 'tis pretty thick outside. If 'tis a bear, we don't want him fooling on the roof, and I misdoubt the drift by the north corner is pretty tall by this time. Is he there still?"

"I felt something then . . . through the chink, here . . . like a warm breath. It's gone now. Come here, Snipe, and listen."

"'Breath,' eh? Did it *smell* like bear?"

"I don't know . . . I didn't smell nothing, to notice. Here, put your head down, close."

The Snipe bent his head. And at that moment the door shook gently. All stared; and saw the latch move up, up . . . and falteringly descend on the staple. They heard the click of it.

The door was secured within by two stout bars. Against these there had been no pressure. The men waited in a silence that ached. But the latch was not lifted again.

The Snipe, kneeling, looked up at Cooney. Cooney shivered and looked at David Faed. Long Ede, with his back to the fire, softly shook his feet free of the rugs. His eyes searched for the Gaffer's face. But the old man had drawn back into the gloom of his bunk, and the lamplight shone only on a grey fringe of beard. He saw Long Ede's look, though, and answered it quietly as ever.

"Take a brace of guns aloft, and fetch us a look round. Wait, if there's a chance of a shot. The trap works. I tried it this afternoon with the small chisel."

Long Ede lit his pipe, tied down the ear-pieces of his cap, lifted a light ladder off its staples, and set it against a roof-beam: then, with the guns under his arm, quietly mounted. His head and

shoulders wavered and grew vague to sight in the smoke-wreaths. "Heard anything more?" he asked. "Nothing since," answered the Snipe. With his shoulder Long Ede pushed up the trap. They saw his head framed in a panel of moonlight, with one frosty star above it. He was wriggling through. "Pitch him up a sleeping-bag, somebody," the Gaffer ordered, and Cooney ran with one. "Thank 'ee, mate," said Long Ede, and closed the trap.

They heard his feet stealthily crunching the frozen stuff across the roof. He was working towards the eaves over-lapping the door. Their breath tightened. They waited for the explosion of his gun. None came. The crunching began again: it was heard down by the very edge of the eaves. It mounted to the blunt ridge overhead; then it ceased.

"He will not have seen aught," David Faed muttered.

"Listen, you. Listen by the door again." They talked in whispers. Nothing; there was nothing to be heard. They crept back to the fire, and stood there warming themselves, keeping their eyes on the latch. It did not move. After a while Cooney slipped off to his hammock; Faed to his bunk, alongside Lashman's. The Gaffer had picked up his book again. The Snipe laid a couple of logs on the blaze, and remained beside it, cowering with his arms stretched out as if to embrace it. His shapeless shadow wavered up and down on the bunks behind him; and, across the fire, he still stared at the latch.

Suddenly the sick man's voice quavered out:

"It's not him they want—it's Bill! They're after Bill, out there! That was Bill trying to get in. . . . Why didn't yer open? It was Bill, I tell yer!"

At the first word the Snipe had wheeled right-about-face, and stood now, pointing, and shaking like a man with ague.

"Matey . . . for the love of God . . ."

"I won't hush. There's something wrong here to-night. I can't sleep. It's Bill, I tell yer. See his poor hammock up there shaking. . . ."

Cooney tumbled out with an oath and a thud. "Hush it, you white-livered swine! Hush it, or by——" His hand went behind him to his knife-sheath.

"Dan Cooney"—the Gaffer closed his book and leaned out—"go back to your bed."

"I won't, Sir. Not unless——"

"Go back."

“Flesh and blood——”

“Go back.” And for the third time that night Cooney went back. The Gaffer leaned a little farther over the ledge, and addressed the sick man.

“George, I went to Bill’s grave not six hours ago. The snow on it wasn’t even disturbed. Neither beast nor man, but only God, can break up the hard earth he lies under. I tell you that, and you may lay to it. Now go to sleep.”

.

Long Ede crouched on the frozen ridge of the hut, with his feet in the sleeping-bag, his knees drawn up, and the two guns laid across them. The creature, whatever its name, that had tried the door, was nowhere to be seen; but he decided to wait a few minutes on the chance of a shot; that is, until the cold should drive him below. For the moment the clear tingling air was doing him good. The truth was Long Ede had begun to be afraid of himself, and the way his mind had been running for the last forty-eight hours upon green fields and visions of spring. As he put it to himself, something inside his head was melting. Biblical texts chattered within him like running brooks, and as they fled he could almost smell the blown meadow-scent. “Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . . for our vines have tender grapes. . . . A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon . . . Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south . . . blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. . . .” He was light-headed, and he knew it. He must hold out. They were all going mad; were, in fact, three parts crazed already, all except the Gaffer. And the Gaffer relied on him as his right-hand man. One glimpse of the returning sun—one glimpse only—might save them yet.

He gazed out over the frozen hills, and northward across the ice-pack. A few streaks of pale violet—the ghost of the Aurora—fronted the moon. He could see for miles. Bear or fox, no living creature was in sight. But who could tell what might be hiding behind any one of a thousand hummocks? He listened. He heard the slow grinding of the ice-pack off the beach: only that. “Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . .”

This would never do. He must climb down and walk briskly, or return to the hut. Maybe there was a bear, after all, behind one of the hummocks, and a shot, or the chance of one, would scatter

his head clear of these tom-fooling notions. He would have a search round.

What was that, moving . . . on a hummock, not five hundred yards away? He leaned forward to gaze.

Nothing now : but he had seen something. He lowered himself to the eaves by the north corner, and from the eaves to the drift piled there. The drift was frozen solid, but for a treacherous crust of fresh snow. His foot slipped upon this, and down he slid of a heap.

Luckily he had been careful to sling the guns tightly at his back. He picked himself up, and unstrapping one, took a step into the bright moonlight to examine the nipples ; took two steps : and stood stock-still.

There, before him, on the frozen coat of snow, was a footprint. No : two, three, four—many footprints : prints of a naked human foot : right foot, left foot, both naked, and blood in each print—a little smear.

It had come, then. He was mad for certain. He saw them : he put his fingers in them ; touched the frozen blood. The snow before the door was trodden thick with them—some going, some returning.

“ The latch . . . lifted” Suddenly he recalled the figure he had seen moving upon the hummock, and with a groan he set his face northward and gave chase. Oh, he was mad for certain ! He ran like a madman—floundering, slipping, plunging in his clumsy moccasins. “ Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . . My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him . . . I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem . . . I charge you . . . I charge you . . .”

He ran thus for three hundred yards maybe, and then stopped as suddenly as he had started.

His mates—they must not see these footprints, or they would go mad too : mad as he. No, he must cover them up, all within sight of the hut. And to-morrow he would come alone, and cover those farther afield. Slowly he retraced his steps. The footprints—those which pointed towards the hut and those which pointed away from it—lay close together ; and he knelt before each, breaking fresh snow over the hollows and carefully hiding the blood. And now a great happiness filled his heart ; interrupted once or twice as he worked by a feeling that someone was following and watching him. Once he turned northwards and gazed, making

a telescope of his hands. He saw nothing, and fell again to his long task.

Within the hut the sick man cried softly to himself. Faee, the Snipe, and Cooney slept uneasily, and muttered in their dreams. The Gaffer lay awake, thinking. After Bill, George Lashman; and after George . . . ? Who next? And who would be the last—the unburied one? The men were weakening fast; their wits and courage coming down at the end with a rush. Faed and Long Ede were the only two to be depended on for a day. The Gaffer liked Long Ede, who was a religious man. Indeed he had a growing suspicion that Long Ede, in spite of some amiable laxities of belief, was numbered among the Elect: or might be, if interceded for. The Gaffer began to intercede for him silently; but experience had taught him that such “wrestlings,” to be effective, must be noisy, and he dropped off to sleep with a sense of failure. . . .

The Snipe stretched himself, yawned, and awoke. It was seven in the morning: time to prepare a cup of tea. He tossed an armful of logs on the fire, and the noise awoke the Gaffer, who at once inquired for Long Ede. He had not returned. “Go you up to the roof. The lad must be frozen.” The Snipe climbed the ladder, pushed open the trap, and came back, reporting that Long Ede was nowhere to be seen. The old man slipped a jumper over his suits of clothing—already three deep—reached for a gun, and moved to the door. “Take a cup of something warm to fortify,” the Snipe advised. “The kettle won’t be five minutes boiling.” But the Gaffer pushed up the heavy bolts and dragged the door open.

“What in the . . . ! Here, bear a hand, lads !”

Long Ede lay prone before the threshold, his outstretched hands almost touching it, his moccasins already covered out of sight by the powdery snow which ran and trickled incessantly—trickled between his long, dishevelled locks, and over the back of his gloves, and ran in a thin stream past the Gaffer’s feet.

They carried him in and laid him on a heap of skins by the fire. They forced rum between his clenched teeth and beat his hands and feet, and kneaded and rubbed him. A sigh fluttered on his lips: something between a sigh and a smile, half seen, half heard. His eyes opened, and his comrades saw that it was really a smile.

“Wot cheer, mate?” It was the Snipe who asked.

“ I—I seen . . . ” The voice broke off, but he was smiling still. What had he seen? Not the sun, surely! By the Gaffer’s reckoning the sun would not be due for a week or two yet: how many weeks he could not say precisely, and sometimes he was glad enough that he did not know.

They forced him to drink a couple of spoonfuls of rum, and wrapped him up warmly. Each man contributed some of his own bedding. Then the Gaffer called to morning prayers, and the three sound men dropped on their knees with him. Now, whether by reason of their joy at Long Ede’s recovery, or because the old man was in splendid voice, they felt their hearts uplifted that morning with a cheerfulness they had not known for months. Long Ede lay and listened dreamily while the passion of the Gaffer’s thanksgiving shook the hut. His gaze wandered over their bowed forms—“ The Gaffer, David Faed, Dan Cooney, the Snipe, and—and George Lashman in his bunk, of course—and me.” But, then, *who was the seventh?* He began to count. “ There’s myself—Lashman, in his bunk—David Faed, the Gaffer, the Snipe, Dan Cooney . . . One, two, three, four—well but that made seven. Then who was the seventh? Was it George who had crawled out of bed and was kneeling there? Decidedly there were five kneeling. No: there was George, plain enough, in his berth, and not able to move. Then who was the stranger? Wrong again: there was no stranger. He knew all these men—they were his mates. Was it—Bill? No, Bill was dead and buried: none of these was Bill, or like Bill. Try again—One, two, three, four, five—and us two sick men, seven. The Gaffer, David Faed, Dan Cooney—have I counted Dan twice? No, that’s Dan, yonder to the right, and only one of him. Five men kneeling, and two on their backs: that makes seven every time. Dear God—suppose——”

The Gaffer ceased, and, in the act of rising from his knees, caught sight of Long Ede’s face. While the others fetched their breakfast-cans, he stepped over, and bent and whispered:

“ Tell me. Ye’ve seen what? ”

“ Seen? ” Long Ede echoed.

“ Ay, seen what? Speak low—was it the sun? ”

“ The s—— ” But this time the echo died on his lips, and his face grew full of awe uncomprehending. It frightened the Gaffer.

“ Ye’ll be the better of a snatch of sleep,” said he; and was turning to go, when Long Ede stirred a hand under the edge of his rugs.

“Seven . . . count . . .” he whispered.

“Lord have mercy upon us !” the Gaffer muttered to his beard as he moved away. “Long Ede ; gone crazed !”

And yet, though an hour or two ago this had been the worst that could befall, the Gaffer felt unusually cheerful. As for the others, they were like different men, all that day and through the three days that followed. Even Lashman ceased to complain, and, unless their eyes played them a trick, had taken a turn for the better. “I declare, if I don’t feel like pitching to sing !” the Snipe announced on the second evening, as much to his own wonder as to theirs. “Then why in thunder don’t you strike up ?” answered Dan Cooney, and fetched his concertina. The Snipe struck up, then and there—“Villikins and his Dinah !” What is more, the Gaffer looked up from his *Paradise Lost*, and joined in the chorus.

By the end of the second day, Long Ede was up and active again. He went about with a dazed look in his eyes. He was counting, counting to himself, always counting. The Gaffer watched him furtively.

Since his recovery, though his lips moved frequently, Long Ede had scarcely uttered a word. But towards noon on the fourth day he said an extraordinary thing :

“There’s that sleeping-bag I took with me the other night. I wonder if ’tis on the roof still. It will be froze pretty stiff by this. You might nip up and see, Snipe, and”—he paused—“if you find it, stow it up yonder on Bill’s hammock.”

The Gaffer opened his mouth, but shut it again without speaking. The Snipe went up the ladder.

A minute passed ; and then they heard a cry from the roof—a cry that fetched them all trembling, choking, weeping, cheering, to the foot of the ladder.

“Boys ! boys !—the Sun !”

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Months later—it was June, and even George Lashman had recovered his strength—the Snipe came running with news of the whaling fleet. And on the beach, as they watched the vessels come to anchor, Long Ede told the Gaffer his story : “It was a hall—a hallu—what d’ye call it, I reckon. I was crazed, eh ?” The Gaffer’s eyes wandered from a brambling hopping about the lichen covered boulders, and away to the sea-fowl wheeling above the

ships : and then came into his mind a tale he had read once in *The Turkish Spy*. "I wouldn't say just that," he answered slowly.

"Anyway," said Long Ede, "I believe the Lord sent a miracle to save us all."

"I wouldn't say just that, either," the Gaffer objected. "I doubt it was meant just for you and me, and the rest were pre-sairved, as you might say incidentally."

Naomi Royde-Smith

PROOF

from LAND AND WATER

1919

Nobody ever wondered why the Blundells came to marry each other, because Agnes Blundell, who had a little surface charm and no reticences, told new acquaintances all about it in the first half-hour. This habit of hers was recognised as a joke among their acquaintances. As Blundell's reputation grew, some of his friends took it rather more seriously.

In the summer of 1914 young George Poyster and little Benfleet, who had never met the Blundells before, were asked to Ranmore for the same week-end, and each bet the other five pounds that he would evade Mrs. Blundell's famous recital. Hugh Ormsby held the stakes. He had just got his private secretaryship and was working with Blundell on the administration of the Home Secretary's new Bill. He was drawn into the affair before he'd quite realised what it was all about, and Sunday afternoon found him feeling like the worst kind of traitor.

Most of the house party had joined in the betting, and there was a great deal of money on Benfleet, of whom Agnes Blundell was taking no notice. Ormsby always believed that Lady Denham guessed how her party was amusing itself. If she did she certainly disapproved. Anyway, she sent Agnes and Benfleet off together after tea to church at Pinfolds. It is a seven-mile drive to Pinfolds, and the effect of evensong, sunset, and "The day Thou gavest" on Agnes made assurance doubly sure. Benfleet told us afterwards that he had kept it off till the return journey.

George Poyster, rich and relieved, for he had not in the least wanted to be told, asked what the story was, and he was given it in chorus and antiphone.

"By George!" said little Benfleet as the phrases rattled round him, "That's just what she did say, called him her dear old bear, said she was fastidious to a fault. That's why she'd never married before. Does she always tell it that way?"

Ormsby was glad to escape into the garden with his shame, under cover of the uproar that answered Benfleet.

Mr. and Mrs. Blundell were walking together on the terrace. As Ormsby joined them—he couldn't have avoided it, coming as he did straight through the library window—Agnes Blundell's plaintive voice was reiterating an acrimonious note:

"... and, after all, Graham, I *am* your wife." His reply: "But, my dear girl, that has nothing to do with it. I am not allowed to tell *any* one," reached Hugh before they saw him. But Agnes drew no veil.

"Graham is *so* secretive, Mr. Ormsby. I know he knows what the Home Secretary is going to do with that fascinating de Lorges; I expect you do too," and the horrified young man, shaken, wounded even, to the quick of his earnest, self-conscious discretion, almost admitted that he did.

It was probably from the dizzy moment when he might have told (a weakness she must have divined, though she never actually profited by it) that Hugh began to hate Agnes Blundell. Till then he had only disliked and avoided her. We all knew that he worshipped Graham. Some of us were grateful to the boy for the passionate correctness of the atmosphere with which he surrounded his chief. It seemed to compensate, not too belatedly we might hope, for that long tale of small annoying leakages which had clouded Blundell's career. Until that night on the terrace at Rammore Hugh had shared the general belief that Graham could and habitually did withstand her inquisitive and loquacious egoism. There had only been one occasion when it was clear that he must have talked. It happened during the second year of their marriage. The matter was hushed up, the leakage was indeed only of minor importance, but it cost Blundell the promotion which was then due to him. That was ten years before Hugh came down from Oxford and passed brilliantly into the Civil Service as Blundell had done before him.

But that evening Hugh thought he had heard a note of defeat

in Blundell's patient voice. "My dear girl," it sighed in his drowsy ears as he lay awake through the green twilight of the mid-summer small hours, "that has nothing to do with it—nothing to do with it," and then desperately, ashamedly, "I am not allowed to tell *any* one." He had said it; he must have said it so often before—"hundreds of times," shivered poor Hugh, turning on his pillow.

At breakfast next morning Agnes was coquettish.

"Oh, Mr. Ormsby," she rolled her fine eyes at him, "you *were* discreet last night! Wait till you are married!" She developed the theme on the journey back to town, having announced to Ormsby's mute dismay that he was to see her safely home. "Part of your official duty. Graham is motoring up with Sir Edward Denham, so you will have to look after poor little me. Graham wouldn't be happy if he didn't know how well you do it. He *cares* so, still, after all these years. Isn't it odd?"

When he put her into the taxi at Victoria, Mrs. Blundell gave him the address of a fashionable sorcerer. "No, no, *not* a palmist, a psychometrist. He holds things—letters, handkerchiefs, buttons, anything—and tells me the most *wonderful* things about them. I always go straight to him when I've been staying away or am in any difficulty. Mr. Ormsby"—and she leant over the closed door—"would you get me a letter—an envelope even—of de Lorges'? You must have crowds of them in his dossier."

"And that woman must be forty if she's an hour," thought Hugh as he reeled away. He was still in those early twenties when it seems that age ought to bring wisdom. But he was wrong. Agnes was only six months older than her husband, and Blundell would be thirty-eight that July.

It was, as a matter of fact, on his birthday a few weeks later that Graham Blundell met Edie Pitland. She was half-sister of that mysterious little beauty whom Sir James Holsworthy married so suddenly, and who certainly ought to have been in musical comedy, though no one had ever seen her on any stage. All that was known of Lady Holsworthy's past was uncertain, even her maiden name. It might, of course, have been Pitland, but Edie was only her half-sister, and Edie was only seen occasionally during her holidays, which were always spent at Holsworthy House. The girl stayed there generally alone, for the Holsworthys only went to Devonshire in August.

It was not easy to question Edie. It wasn't that she wouldn't

answer questions, but her answers never seemed to lead to any definite story, and no one was allowed to talk with her for long. Lady Holsworthy needed the undivided attention of all her guests, if only to pick up the "h's" she dropped so softly and unexpectedly from her pretty, careful speech. Edie's "h's" were quite safe. Indeed, her quiet poise; the queer radiance of her absorption in a world of her own; the unresentful dignity of her "Good night, Madeleine," when she was sent to bed—or at any rate to a solitary schoolroom dinner, she a tall nineteen with her hair up—only made the puzzle harder. Madeleine Holsworthy was so like a canary that it was possible to believe she really had forgotten who and where and what she was five years ago: but Edie's candour was not without shrewdness, and her silences were as intelligent as her speech was easy and graceful. It is difficult to suppose that she did not tell Blundell all she knew of herself and of the sister by whose beauty she was so visibly dazzled, before they parted, but she certainly confided in no other friend.

Blundell did not know the Holsworthys, and they were still in London when he went down to Hunter's Inn for a fortnight's golf in the first week of July. Agnes was doing her annual rest-and-beauty cure in the seclusion of a fashionable and very expensive toilet specialist's After-Season Retreat. As she explained loud and wide every year, "I owe it to Graham to keep my complexion and figure *perfect*; but he does miss me so dreadfully. He writes every day, sometimes twice a day, like Cyrano de Bergerac. I wire if there is no letter from him on my breakfast tray."

Graham used this yearly liberty to make notes and photographs for his studies of wild-bird life which appeared occasionally in *Scribner's*.

On the morning of his birthday he woke rather earlier than usual after a very vivid dream. As a rule he slept soundly and had no memory of dreaming that outlasted his bath. Agnes's voluble records of astounding visions and prophetic warnings given to her in sleep had bred in him an active avoidance of the whole subject of dreams, an evasion which extended to his thought of his own rare experiences. But this particular dream was pleasant and clear. He remembered it with interest as he shaved. The cliff path which he had followed in his dreams till it brought him to a ledge where a sea gull was standing beside a nest screamingly full of newly-hatched youngsters was, in its beginning, the track he had noticed above Watermouth three days before. It wanted two hours to

breakfast-time when he was dressed, and the morning light was perfect for photography on the north cliff. It amused him to go out to the place he had seen so clearly in sleep.

He reached the place and found the nest and the parent bird so exactly as he had dreamed them that his mind went wondering beneath his careful attention, absorbed in manipulating lens and shutter, to know whether he were not dreaming still.

The click of the exposure sent the great black-back wheeling down to the water in slow, narrowing planes between the walls of cliff that held the little bay. When he had watched the gull settle beyond the wash of the incoming tide, Graham turned and saw Edie Pitland at his elbow, watching too.

"I've just dreamt that someone was photographing Blackie's third family," she said.

Afterwards, when he told Hugh (and it was eventually imperative to tell someone), Graham confessed that for one moment he had revolted against the miasmatic suggestion that he too had participated in some abhorred occult prevision. It was like an echo of Agnes. "I'm so terribly psychic, you know. I seem to feel everything that's going to happen to me." He felt that she was poisoning the truth of the clear morning for him with the mendacities of her scented curtained sleep.

But Edie's magic was a swift antidote. After her first smiling acknowledgment of the dream as an introduction to this stranger, her interest was all for his business. They climbed together to a place secure and reasonably hidden, where they watched for the appearance of the errant mother.

"I made this frock myself," she told him, "because all my other morning ones are pink or white, and of course that frightens them away. I found this stuff at a little draper's by the bridge at Barnstaple. Wasn't it luck!"

There are among Blundell's papers photographs of hawks' nests, of gulls asleep and on the wing; of many birds busied about their private lives, marked "Culborne" and "Oare," "Shallowford" and "Woolhanger" in Edie's round, unformed writing, and two snapshots of Edie herself, tall and wind-blown in the home-made, neutral-coloured frock, taken, one at Desolate, the other on Ilker-ton Bridge, and dated by Blundell, "St. James's Day, 1914." Other records of that fortnight there are none. Blundell burned all her letters before he went with his regiment to Flanders in 1917.

St. James's Day fell on the last Saturday of July in the year of the War, and in the late afternoon of that day Blundell was telegraphed for to return to Whitehall. He drove to Minehead in the early hours of Sunday morning to get the London train. Edie went with him as far as Porlock Weir, where they changed horses and had breakfast together. She probably walked back to Lynmouth alone. She was young and strong and a great walker.

A month later she was doing V.A.D. work at the Exeter hospital, and early in November, 1916, she died of Mediterranean fever in Malta. Hugh Ormsby, who saw her in London before she left, thought her the loveliest thing alive, but the photograph Lady Holsworthy sent to all the papers with a little account of her work and death shows a rather severe young face unbecomingly surrounded by the hat and uniform coat of a Red Cross official. Blundell's snapshots give nothing more definite than the grace of the girl's pose in an arrested movement.

It was because of the letters that Hugh had to be told. What exactly Blundell said to Edie to persuade her to secrecy Hugh never heard. Possibly he laid the excuse on his long hours (in those early weeks he often slept at the Home Office) and on the possible confusion between private and official correspondence. But whatever he said, it was successful, and Edie's few letters were addressed to him under cover to his private secretary.

Hugh took a deep though smothered pleasure in the knowledge that here was something he could hide from Agnes. His love for Graham and the one sight he had had of Edie had been enough to vanquish any flickering doubt or possible scruple about serving him in this un-official direction.

So, when the news came from Malta it was to Hugh that the envelope containing Edie's last faintly pencilled message to Blundell was addressed by the nurse, who enclosed it in a kind, discreet official note.

"I don't quite know for whom she meant this," wrote the good woman, "but as it seems to be a quotation from the classics, I send it to you and not to Lady Holsworthy."

Hugh, setting his teeth, had offered to take Agnes to the Russian Ballet that night, and had by his assiduity during the next few days in providing amusement and distraction for her at Graham's free hours, aroused an only too readily kindled relief.

"That ridiculous boy is falling in love with me," she proclaimed,

“and my dear old bear is too sure of me to be jealous, but I’m afraid I may really have to tell him in self-protection. Caesar’s wife, you know.”

At the end of a week she confided to Hugh that Graham was sleeping badly.

“I am so sensitive I lie awake in the next room and *feel* him awake, too. I go in several times during the night to see how he is getting on, just as if he were indeed my—little—baby.” It was in this way—softly and with a pause between each word—that Agnes had lately begun referring to the fact that she had for years refused to have a child.

“I am afraid he’s keeping something from me,” she said a day or two later. “I wish I knew what it was,” and Hugh went blind for a moment with the vision of Edie’s pale face and eyes as she came to him after saying good-bye to Graham the day she crossed to France.

“After all,” Agnes went on in the voice he had heard at Ranmore, “I am his wife. I ought to know. But I’m sure to find out.”

Then she had an idea. “I think he must be grieving for some one who’s been killed in this horrible war. But he’s grown very secretive. It would do him so much *good* to talk about it. I shall persuade him to go to one of dear Mrs. Bartram’s séances. She has been almost miraculously successful in recalling the souls of those who have passed over to console their dear ones. Indeed, dear Hugh, one of the lessons of this awful time is—don’t you feel it?—that there is, there *can* be no death.”

After this Hugh spoke to Graham. He had all the conventional young man’s contempt for such experiments as were beginning to make Mrs. Bartram’s Sunday evenings notorious; but there was no doubt that some queer things did happen in her drawing-room, and, if any of the tales which the most unexpected people told were true, there was ground for believing that it was possible, at any rate for the quite recently dead, to make some sign to the living who demanded it. Hugh did not like the idea, and he wouldn’t have had anything to do with it for himself: but he was afraid of what might happen if Agnes, who certainly was a bit odd with her dreams and intuitions, were to put her suggestion into practice. Graham’s state, too, was causing him deep anxiety, and Hugh privately agreed with Agnes that it might do him good to be made to talk.

After the first heartbreaking attempts at opening the subject had been accomplished, Graham gave way. Hugh, dumb with pity and apprehension, listened to Blundell's hungering thoughts as his desires drove him towards the very dangers against which it had been his hope to warn him. For the first time there was open speech from Graham. Hugh had done what he was asked to do and known no more than he couldn't help seeing. Now he heard all, even the tale of the gull's nest and Edie's grey-brown frock.

"I expect it was a hideous thing really, badly made and an unbecoming colour; but wasn't it a lovely child that wore it, and for a lovely reason? She'd meet me sometimes on the moors and lie curled up in the bracken close to the path, so that I'd almost tread on her as I came, the colour hid her so. How can she be dead? She was so near to Life, not hidden away from it by herself and all the gossip and furniture that our women crowd among. You'd think nothing could quench her, she was so clear and strong. And I never told her that I'd have given her the whole world. I told her nothing. We just were together, and now I feel that I cheated her by not saying what it was her right to know. She was so—no, it isn't humble, so much interested away from herself she couldn't have guessed what she was to me—what she must have been to any man who knew her as I did. I'd spent so many years appeasing Agnes with words that meant nothing, that I wouldn't say what I was meaning, for the first time in my life, even when we said good-bye. It wasn't that I felt I had no right to tell her. I had as much right to tell her as she had to know what she was to me. If I could tell her now I would. I'd even go to that witches' kitchen in Marlborough Road if I thought it would give her one minute's joy. But she'd not come there of her own free will. And if I had the power I'd not drag her back from whatever place she is making holy now. She'd not have died if she couldn't have done without me. I've thought of it again and again. Suppose I did go? And suppose my going again let Agnes in? She'd question God, or the devil, if she thought they knew a secret that she could spread broadcast. I'm so mad I looked up the story of Saul and the witch. What do you think was the first thing the poor old spook said when she had raised him? 'Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?' Edie might say that. . . . There'd be no hope in Death if it were sure that we could be made to give answers out of our graves."

That night Hugh took Agnes to *The Boy* for the second time. "I simply scream at Berry," she said. "Thank Heaven I have a sense of humour."

When Blundell had at last freed himself from Whitehall and gone to France, and, after the fashion of desperate men, was coming untouched through the worst fighting, Hugh began to realise that there were others beside himself who took a grave view of the case. Sir Edward Denham, missing his astute and competent aid, muttered, "Poor fellow! Poor fellow! He will be much happier away."

When the news that Blundell had been killed during an air-raid came through it provoked references to the celibacy of the blessed from the most unexpected people. It seemed to Hugh that those who really cared for Blundell were glad he was dead.

Agnes was really overcome with grief for a week. But by the time Graham's kit reached London she was exacting daily sympathy from Hugh, and quoting the condolences he hated himself for giving to anyone who had time to listen to her. Graham had carried a pocketbook containing her photograph, and a rather large piece of white heather she had bought for him in Bond Street. In another pocket, so wrote the chaplain who was with him when he died, they found a small photograph of a gull's nest on a ledge of rock above the sea. Graham had asked for it and had scrawled some words on it when he could speak no longer: "*Hieme et aestate, et prope et procul, usque dum vivam et ultra.*"

"This seems to be poetry," said Agnes. "Can you explain it to me?"

"It isn't verse," said Hugh. "I expect he was delirious."

But Agnes persisted and when Hugh had translated it she was satisfied that she had Graham's dying message to herself.

"*Et ultra,*" she said, "an injunction I *dare* not ignore." And then, "I cannot remember when he took that photograph, but I am sure Graham had some association with it I ought to treasure now. I shall have it psychometrised and find out."

A fortnight later she telephoned to Hugh.

"I have something too wonderful to show you. You must come to me this evening."

In the blue-and-purple room she called her den, Agnes was sitting, pale among her gold-fringed cushions. She swept to welcome

Hugh, dizzying him with a whirl of silken scarves heavy with odours.

"Dear Graham," she said. "It has been so like him to make difficulties. We have had no end of delay in getting through to him. But last night a new medium, who is perfectly marvellous with planchette, secured a control as soon as I asked for Graham. 'I am his wife,' I kept saying. 'Tell him I *must* know all about the sea gulls and the Latin message.' And at last I have proof that my darling has heard and is answering me. Look!"

To Hugh the wavering, serrated line that hurried down the paper she drew from her bosom seemed the very register of anguished resistance. Half-way down the page it steadied, and in a clear and legible script, a hand which he could not deny to be as nearly Graham's as any pencilled note of his he had ever seen, stood out the words:

But I am not allowed to tell anyone.

"That's what he always said just before he did tell me things," Agnes cooed. "Now I know I shall find out so much. We are having a special private sitting here to-morrow. It is so *wonderful* to have this proof that my love can reach him still."

Walter de la Mare

SEATON'S AUNT

from THE RIDDLE

Selwyn & Blount, 1923

I had heard rumours of Seaton's Aunt long before I actually encountered her. Seaton, in the hush of confidence, or at any little show of toleration on our part, would remark, "My aunt," or "My old aunt, you know," as if his relative might be a kind of cement to an *entente cordiale*.

He had an unusual quantity of pocket-money; or, at any rate, it was bestowed on him in unusually large amounts; and he spent it freely, though none of us would have described him as an "awfully generous chap." "Hullo, Seaton," we would say, "the old Begum?" At the beginning of term, too, he used to bring back surprising and exotic dainties in a box with a trick padlock

that accompanied him from his first appearance at Gummidge's in a billy-cock hat to the rather abrupt conclusion of his schooldays.

From a boy's point of view he looked distastefully foreign, with his yellow skin, and slow chocolate-coloured eyes, and lean weak figure. Merely for his looks he was treated by most of us true-blue Englishmen with condescension, hostility, or contempt. We used to call him "Pongo," but without any much better excuse for the nickname than his skin. He was, that is, in one sense of the term what he assuredly was not in the other sense—a sport.

Seaton and I, as I may say, were never in any sense intimate at school; our orbits only intersected in class. I kept deliberately aloof from him. I felt vaguely he was a sneak, and remained quite unmollified by advances on his side, which, in a boy's barbarous fashion, unless it suited me to be magnanimous, I haughtily ignored.

We were both of us quick-footed, and at Prisoner's Base used occasionally to hide together. And so I best remember Seaton—his narrow watchful face in the dusk of a summer evening; his peculiar crouch, and his inarticulate whisperings and mumblings. Otherwise he played all games slackly and limply; used to stand and feed at his locker with a crony or two until his "tuck" gave out; or waste his money on some outlandish fancy or other. He bought, for instance, a silver bangle, which he wore above his left elbow, until some of the fellows showed their masterly contempt of the practice by dropping it nearly red-hot down his neck.

It needed, therefore, a rather peculiar taste, a rather rare kind of schoolboy courage and indifference to criticism, to be much associated with him. And I had neither the taste nor, perhaps, the courage. None the less, he did make advances, and on one memorable occasion went to the length of bestowing on me a whole pot of some outlandish mulberry-coloured jelly that had been duplicated in his term's supplies. In the exuberance of my gratitude I promised to spend the next half-term holiday with him at his aunt's house.

I had clean forgotten my promise when, two or three days before the holiday, he came up and triumphantly reminded me of it.

"Well, to tell you the honest truth, Seaton, old chap—" I began graciously; but he cut me short.

"My aunt expects you," he said; "she is very glad you are coming. She's sure to be quite decent to *you*, Withers."

I looked at him in sheer astonishment; the emphasis was so

uncalled for. It seemed to suggest an aunt not hitherto hinted at, and a friendly feeling on Seaton's side that was far more disconcerting than welcome.

We reached his home partly by train, partly by a lift in an empty farm-cart, and partly by walking. It was a whole-day holiday, and we were to sleep the night; he lent me extraordinary night-gear, I remember. The village street was unusually wide, and was fed from a green by two converging roads, with an inn, and a high green sign at the corner. About a hundred yards down the street was a chemist's shop—a Mr. Tanner's. We descended the two steps into his dusky and odorous interior to buy, I remember, some rat poison. A little beyond the chemist's was the forge. You then walked along a very narrow path, under a fairly high wall, nodding here and there with weeds and tufts of grass, and so came to the iron garden-gates, and saw the high, flat house behind its huge sycamore. A coach-house stood on the left of the house, and on the right a gate led into a kind of rambling orchard. The lawn lay away over to the left again, and at the bottom (for the whole garden sloped gently to a sluggish and rushy pond-like stream) was a meadow.

We arrived at noon, and entered the gates out of the hot dust beneath the glitter of the dark-curtained windows. Seaton led me at once through the little garden-gate to show me his tadpole pond, swarming with what (being myself not in the least interested in low life) I considered the most horrible creatures—of all shapes, consistencies and sizes, but with whom Seaton seemed to be on the most intimate of terms. I can see his absorbed face now as he sat on his heels and fished the slimy things out in his sallow palms. Wearying at last of these pets, we loitered about awhile in an aimless fashion. Seaton seemed to be listening, or at any rate waiting, for something to happen or for someone to come. But nothing did happen and no one came.

That was just like Seaton. Anyhow, the first view I got of his aunt was when, at the summons of a distant gong, we turned from the garden, very hungry and thirsty, to go into luncheon. We were approaching the house when Seaton suddenly came to a standstill. Indeed, I have always had the impression that he plucked at my sleeve. Something, at least, seemed to catch me back, as it were, as he cried, "Look out, there she is!"

She was standing at an upper window which opened wide on a

hinge, and at first sight she looked an excessively tall and overwhelming figure. This, however, was mainly because the window reached all but to the floor of the bedroom. She was in reality rather an under-sized woman, in spite of her long face and big head. She must have stood, I think, unusually still, with eyes fixed on us, though this impression may be due to Seaton's sudden warning and to my consciousness of the cautious and subdued air that had fallen on him at sight of her. I know that, without the least reason in the world, I felt a kind of guiltiness, as if I had been "caught." There was a silvery star pattern sprinkled on her black silk dress, and even from the ground I could see the immense coils of her hair and the rings on her left hand which was held fingering the small jet buttons of her bodice. She watched our united advance without stirring, until, imperceptibly, her eyes raised and lost themselves in the distance, so that it was out of an assumed reverie that she appeared suddenly to awaken to our presence beneath her when we drew close to the house.

"So this is your friend Mr. Smithers, I suppose?" she said, bobbing to me.

"Withers, aunt," said Seaton.

"It's much the same," she said, with eyes fixed on me. "Come in, Mr. Withers, and bring him along with you."

She continued to gaze at me—at least, I think she did so. I know that the fixity of her scrutiny and her ironical "Mr." made me feel peculiarly uncomfortable. None the less she was extremely kind and attentive to me, though, no doubt, her kindness and attention showed up more vividly against her complete neglect of Seaton. Only one remark that I have any recollection of she made to him: "When I look on my nephew, Mr. Smithers, I realise that dust we are, and dust shall become. You are hot, dirty, and incorrigible, Arthur."

She sat at the head of the table, Seaton at the foot, and I, before a wide waste of damask tablecloth, between them. It was an old and rather close dining-room, with windows thrown wide to the green garden and a wonderful cascade of fading roses. Miss Seaton's great chair faced this window, so that its rose-reflected light shone full on her yellowish face, and on just such chocolate eyes as my schoolfellow's, except that hers were more than half-covered by unusually long and heavy lids.

There she sat, steadily eating, with those sluggish eyes fixed for the most part on my face; above them stood the deep-lined fork

between her eyebrows ; and above that the wide expanse of a remarkable brow beneath its strange steep bank of hair. The lunch was copious, and consisted, I remember, of all such dishes as are generally considered too rich and too good for the schoolboy digestion—lobster mayonnaise, cold game sausages, an immense veal and ham pie farced with eggs, truffles, and numberless delicious flavours ; besides kickshaws, creams, and sweetmeats. We even had wine, a half-glass of old darkish sherry each.

Miss Seaton enjoyed and indulged an enormous appetite. Her example and a natural schoolboy voracity soon overcame my nervousness of her, even to the extent of allowing me to enjoy to the best of my bent so rare a spread. Seaton was singularly modest ; the greater part of his meal consisted of almonds and raisins, which he nibbled surreptitiously and as if he found difficulty in swallowing them.

I don't mean that Miss Seaton " conversed " with me. She merely scattered trenchant remarks and now and then twinkled a baited question over my head. But her face was like a dense and involved accompaniment to her talk. She presently dropped the " Mr.," to my intense relief, and called me now Withers, or Wither, now Smithers, and even once towards the close of the meal distinctly Johnson, though how on earth my name suggested it, or whose face mine had reanimated in memory, I cannot conceive.

" And is Arthur a good boy at school, Mr. Wither ? " was one of her many questions. " Does he please his masters ? Is he first in his class ? What does the reverend Dr. Gummidge think of him, eh ? "

I knew she was jeering at him, but her face was adamant against the least flicker of sarcasm or facetiousness. I gazed fixedly at a blushing crescent of lobster.

" I think you're eighth, aren't you, Seaton ? "

Seaton moved his small pupils towards his aunt. But she continued to gaze with a kind of concentrated detachment at me.

" Arthur will never make a brilliant scholar, I fear," she said, lifting a dexterously-burdened fork to her wide mouth. . . .

After luncheon she preceded me up to my bedroom. It was a jolly little bedroom, with a brass fender and rugs and a polished floor, on which it was possible, I afterwards found, to play " snowshoes." Over the washstand was a little black-framed water-colour drawing, depicting a large eye with an extremely fishlike

intensity in the spark of light on the dark pupil ; and in " illuminated " lettering beneath was printed very minutely, " Thou God, Seest ME," followed by a long looped monogram, " S.S.," in the corner. The other pictures were all of the sea : brigs on blue water ; a schooner overtopping chalk cliffs ; a rocky island of prodigious steepness, with two tiny sailors dragging a monstrous boat up a shelf of beach.

" This is the room, Withers, my brother William died in when a boy. Admire the view ! "

I looked out of the window across the tree-tops. It was a day hot with sunshine over the green fields, and the cattle were standing swishing their tails in the shallow water. But the view at the moment was only exaggeratedly vivid because I was horribly dreading that she would presently enquire after my luggage, and I had not brought even a toothbrush. I need have had no fear. Hers was not that highly-civilised type of mind that is stuffed with sharp, material details. Nor could her ample presence be described as in the least motherly.

" I would never consent to question a schoolfellow behind my nephew's back," she said, standing in the middle of the room, " but tell me, Smithers, why is Arthur so unpopular ? You, I understand, are his only close friend." She stood in a dazzle of sun, and out of it her eyes regarded me with such leaden penetration beneath their thick lids that I doubt if my face concealed the least thought from her. " But there, there," she added very suavely, stooping her head a little, " don't trouble to answer me. I never extort an answer. Boys are queer fish. Brains might perhaps have suggested his washing his hands before luncheon ; but—not my choice, Smithers. God forbid ! And now, perhaps, you would like to go into the garden again. I cannot actually see from here, but I should not be surprised if Arthur is now skulking behind that hedge."

He was. I saw his head come out and take a rapid glance at the windows.

" Join him, Mr. Smithers ; we shall meet again, I hope, at the tea-table. The afternoon I spend in retirement."

Whether or not, Seaton and I had not been long engaged with the aid of two green switches in riding round and round a lumbering old grey horse we found in the meadow, before a rather bunched-up figure appeared, walking along the field-path on the other side of the water, with a magenta parasol studiously lowered