BEST SHORT STORIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME
by Richard Connell
Trapped on a remote and desolate island, Rainsford must match wits against a cruel and dangerous hunter who hunts men for sport.

THE MONKEY’S PAW
by W.W. Jacobs
The classic story of a monkey’s paw that grants three wishes & demonstrates you should be careful what you wish for.

THE BLACK CAT
by Edgar Allan Poe
A man descends into madness as he believes himself haunted by a demonic black cat that he once loved and then killed.

THE VELDT
by Ray Bradbury
In the future, children immerse themselves in technology so powerful that it can almost replace reality. But when Mother and Father threaten to turn that technology off, the children are not pleased.
THE LOTTERY
by Shirley Jackson
What begins as an innocent local tradition -- a lottery held each year in a tiny village -- quickly becomes a scene of horror when the real purpose of the lottery becomes clear.

LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER
by Roald Dahl
A wicked murder mystery in which the criminal finds a unique way of disposing of all evidence of the crime.

THE HITCHHIKER
by Lucille Fletcher
A haunting radio play about a man driving the lonely highways across America, & the disturbing hitchhiker he spots along the road time and again, always just ahead, and always calling to him.

THE 9 BILLION NAMES OF GOD
by Arthur C Clarke
A trek high up into the mountains to deliver a sequencing computer to a group of monks who believe that once they have transcribed all nine billion names of God everything in existence will end leads to one of the great twist endings in literature.
Finn and Jamie are spending the summer with relatives they've never met. Uncle Silas and Aunt Ida live in the middle of nowhere. Next to a cemetery. They drive a hearse. And run a funeral home. And sleep in coffins.

But the real horrors are just beginning. Not everyone is resting peacefully in Eldorado Cemetery. Graves are being dug up. The sound of crying is coming from crypts closed for centuries. Someone is stalking the graveyard at night.

But don't worry. The dead can't really come back to life. Can they?

The last car Danny Ferry's dad worked on before he died was a sleek black taxi cab. It's still sitting in his dad's garage. The owner dropped it off and never came back.

One day Danny finds the keys and turns on the radio. But it isn't music he picks up on the dial. It's voices. Dead voices. Voices that call his name...and want a ride.

Now Danny's got a new gig: taxi driver for the recently deceased. Except not everybody's happy now that Danny's behind the wheel.

And when the dead get angry, they really come to life.

Horacio and Karina just moved into the Gold Bug Apartments in Nevermore. Seems nice. People there are friendly. There's even an old school elevator originally from a famous Chicago hotel with buttons for fifty different floors.

But not one for 13. Too unlucky. Not that it matters. The Gold Bug only has four floors anyway. Or so Horacio thinks. Until he follows Karina one night while she's sleepwalking and discovers a button for 13 after all.

Karina already pushed it. And now the elevator's going up. And up. And where it stops, nobody knows.

“Mom was super excited. Duke hardly ever reads and she couldn't believe he had finally found a book he couldn't/wasn't put down.”

— Mrs. Banksen, 7th Grade Teacher
THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

by Richard Connell

Off there to the right—somewhere—is a large island,” said Whitney.

“It’s rather a mystery—”

“What island is it?” Rainsford asked.

“The old charts call it Ship-Trap Island,” Whitney replied. “Sailors have a curious dread of the place. The place has a reputation—a bad one.”

“Cannibals?” suggested Rainsford. 

Hardly. Even cannibals wouldn’t live in such a Godforsaken place. But it’s gotten into sailor lore, somehow. Didn’t you notice that the crew’s nerves seemed a bit jumpy today? Even Captain Nielsen, that tough-minded old Swede, who’d go up to the devil himself and ask him for a light. Those fishy blue eyes held a look I never saw there before. All I could get out of him was: “This place has an evil name among seafaring men, sir.”

“Pure imagination,” said Rainsford, an expert hunter, who knew no fear. “One superstitious sailor can taint the whole ship’s company with his fear.”

“Anyhow, I’m glad we’re getting out of this zone. Well, I think I’ll turn in now, Rainsford.”

“I’m not sleepy,” said Rainsford. “I’m going to smoke another pipe on the afterdeck. Good night, Whitney.”

Through the soundless night, Rainsford heard three gunshots off to the right.


He struggled up to the surface and tried to cry out, but the waves from the speeding yacht slapped him in the face and salt water filled his open mouth. Desperately he tried to swim after the receding lights of the yacht, but he stopped before he had swum fifty feet. There was little chance that his cries could be heard by someone aboard the yacht. Rainsford remembered the shots. They had come from the right, and he swam in that direction until he heard another sound.

A high screaming sound, the sound of an animal in an extremity of anguish and terror. He did not recognize the animal that made the sound; but swam toward it. He heard it again; then it was cut short by another pistol shot. Finally, Rainsford heard the sound of the sea breaking on a rocky shore. He dragged himself from the swirling waters, flung himself down at the jungle edge and fell into the deepest sleep of his life.

When he opened his eyes, it was already afternoon and he felt a sharp hunger. He looked about almost cheerfully. “Where there are pistol shots, there are men. Where there are men, there is food,” he thought. But what kind of men, he wondered, in so forbidding a place?

He examined the ground closely and found the print of hunting boots. Eagerly he hurried along; night was beginning to settle down on the island. Bleak darkness was blacking out the sea and jungle when Rainsford sighted lights. To his great astonishment, it was not a village, but one enormous building—a lofty structure with pointed towers plunging upward into the gloom.

At first Rainsford thought it could not be real, but the stone steps were real enough, the massive door was real enough, and the creak of the knocker as he lifted it was also real enough. The knocker startled him with its booming loudness. The door opened suddenly and Rainsford was face to face with the largest man he had ever seen. In his hand the man held a long-barreled revolver, and he was pointing it straight at Rainsford’s heart.

“Don’t be alarmed,” said Rainsford, with a smile which he hoped was disarming. “I’m no robber. My name is Sanger Rainsford of New York City. I fell off a yacht. I am hungry.”

The man’s only answer was to raise with his thumb the hammer of his revolver. Then the man’s free hand went to his forehead in a military salute, he clicked his heels together and stood at attention. Another man was coming down the broad marble steps. He advanced to Rainsford and held out his hand.

“It is a very great pleasure and honor to welcome you Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home.”

Automatically Rainsford shook the man’s hand. “I’ve read your book about hunting snow leopards in Tibet, you see,” explained the man. “I am General Zaroff.” At this, the giant put away his pistol, saluted, and withdrew.

“Ivan is an incredibly strong fellow,” remarked the general, “but he has the misfortune to be deaf and dumb. A simple fellow, but I’m afraid, a bit of a savage. Come, we can talk later. Now you want clothes, food, rest. You shall have them. This is a most restful spot.”

Ivan reappeared. Follow Ivan, if you please, Mr. Rainsford,” said the general. “I was about to have my dinner, but I’ll wait for you.”

After changing, Rainsford returned downstairs to a magnificent dining room. About the hall were the mounted heads of many animals—lions, tigers, elephants, moose, bears; larger or more perfect specimens Rainsford had never seen. At the great table the general was sitting, alone.

“Perhaps,” said General Zaroff, “you were surprised that I recognized your name. You see, I read all books on hunting. I have but one passion in my life, Mr. Rainsford, and it is the hunt. Here in my preserve on this island,” he said in a slow tone, “I hunt more dangerous game.”

Rainsford expressed his surprise. “Is there big game on this island?”

The general nodded. “The biggest.”

“Really?”

“Oh, it isn’t here naturally, of course. I have to stock the island. I have hunted every kind of game in every land. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many animals I have killed. But when I too easily surmounted each new animal I hunted, I had to invent a new animal to hunt,” he said.

“A new animal? You’re joking.”
“Not at all,” said the general. “I never joke about hunting. I needed a new animal. I found one. So I bought this island, built this house, and here I do my hunting. The island is perfect for my purposes—there are jungles with a maze of trails in them, hills, swamps—"

“But the animal, General Zaroff?”

“I wanted the ideal animal to hunt,” explained the general. “So I said: ‘What are the attributes of an ideal quarry?’ And the answer was, of course: ‘It must have courage, cunning, and, above all, it must be able to reason.’

“But no animal can reason,” objected Rainsford.

“My dear fellow,” said the general, “there is one that can.”

“I can’t believe you are serious, General Zaroff,” gasped Rainsford. “This is a grisly joke.”

“Why should I not be serious? I never joke about hunting.”

“Hunting? Good God, General Zaroff, what you speak of is murder. They are men!”

The general laughed with entire good nature and quite unruffled. “That is why I use them. It gives me pleasure. They can reason, after a fashion. So they are dangerous.” The General went on to explain how many ships were dashed on the rocks surrounding the island. “And the survivors, I treat these visitors with every consideration. They get plenty of good food and exercise. It’s a game, you see. I suggest to one of them that we go hunting. I give him supplies and a three hours’ start. I am to follow, armed only with a pistol of the smallest caliber and range. If my quarry eludes me for three whole days, he wins the game. If I find him”—the general smiled—“he loses.”

“Suppose he refuses to be hunted?”

“Oh,” said the general, “I give him his option, of course. He need not play that game if he doesn’t wish to. If he does not wish to hunt, I turn him over to Ivan, who has his own ideas of sport. Invariably, Mr. Rainsford, invariably they choose the hunt.”

“And if they win?” The smile on the general’s face widened.

“The smile on the general’s face widened. “To date I have not lost.” he said.

“I hope,” said Rainsford, “that you will excuse me tonight, General Zaroff. I’m really not feeling at all well.”

“Oh, indeed?” the general inquired. “Well, I suppose that’s only natural, after your long swim. You need a good, restful night’s sleep. Tomorrow we’ll hunt, eh? I’ve one rather promising prospect—"

Rainsford hurried from the room. Despite the comforts of his bedroom, Rainsford had difficulty sleeping. The next morning, Rainsford expressed his wishes to leave the island at once.

“But, my dear fellow,” the general protested, “you’ve only just come. You’ve had no hunting.”

“I wish to go today,” said Rainsford. He saw the dead black eyes of the general on him, studying him. General Zaroff’s face suddenly brightened.

“Tonight,” said the general, “we will hunt—you and I.”

Rainsford shook his head. “No, general,” he said. “I will not hunt.”

The general shrugged his shoulders. “As you wish, my friend,” he said. “Though imprudent, the choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find my idea of sport more diverting than Ivan’s?”

“You don’t mean—” cried Rainsford.

“My dear fellow,” said the general, “have I not told you I always mean what I say about hunting? At last, you are a foeman worthy of my steel. Your brain against mine. Your woodcraft against mine. Your strength and stamina against mine.”

“And if I win—” began Rainsford huskily.

“T’ll cheerfully acknowledge myself defeated if I do not find you by midnight of the third day, and my ship will place you on the mainland near a town. Ivan will supply you with
hunting clothes, food, a knife. Avoid the big swamp in the southeast corner of the island; there's quicksand there. You'll want to start immediately. I shall not follow till dusk. Hunting at night is so much more exciting than by day. Au revoir, Mr. Rainsford, au revoir." General Zaroff left to take his afternoon siesta and from another door came Ivan with provisions for Rainsford.

At first, Rainsford just wanted to put distance between himself and General Zaroff, but after two hours, he stopped to assess his situation. "I'll give him a trail to follow," muttered Rainsford. He executed a series of intricate loops; he doubled on his trail again and again. As night fell, he climbed a tree with a thick trunk and outspread branches, taking care to leave not the slightest mark. He stretched out on one of the broad limbs to rest. Toward morning he was awakened by the sound of General Zaroff coming through the brush.

Rainsford's first impulse was to hurl himself down like a panther, but he saw the general's right hand held a small pistol. The general's sharp eyes had left the ground and were traveling inch by inch up the tree, but stopped before they reached the limb where Rainsford lay. A smile spread over Zaroff's brown face. He turned his back on the tree and walked carelessly away. Rainsford was at first stunned that the general could follow such a difficult trail at night. But his next thought was worse. Why had the general smiled? Why had he turned back? The general was prolonging the hunt! The general was saving him for another day's sport!

Rainsford formulated his first trap. He found a huge dead tree leaned on a smaller living one. Throwing off his sack, Rainsford took his knife from its sheath and began to work. When the job was finished, he threw himself down behind a fallen log a hundred feet away. He did not have to wait long.

Following the trail with the sureness of a bloodhound came General Zaroff. So intent was he on his stalking that he was upon the thing Rainsford had made before he saw it. His foot touched the protruding tree limb that was the trigger. As he touched it, the general sensed his danger and leapt back. But he was not quite quick enough; the dead tree, delicately adjusted to rest on the cut living one, crashed down and struck the general a glancing blow on the shoulder as it fell. He staggered, but he did not fall; nor did he drop his revolver.

"Rainsford," called the general, "let me congratulate you. Not many men know how to make a Malay man-catcher. You are proving interesting, Mr. Rainsford. I am going now to have my wound dressed, but I shall be back. I shall be back."

When the general had gone, Rainsford took up his flight again until his foot sank into the ooze. He knew where he was now. Death Swamp and its quicksand. An idea for a second trap came to him. Rainsford dug a pit and planted saplings sharpened into fine pointed stakes in the bottom of the pit with the points sticking up. He covered the mouth of the pit with a rough carpet of weeds and branches. Then, he hid again to wait for General Zaroff.

He soon heard the padding sound of feet on the soft earth, but could not see the general nor the pit. Rainsford leapt up from his place of concealment when he heard the sharp crackle of the breaking branches as the cover of the pit gave way and the sharp scream of pain as the pointed stakes found their mark. Then he cowered back. Three feet from the pit was General Zaroff.

"You've done well, Rainsford," the general called. "Your Burmese tiger pit claimed one of my best dogs. I'm going home for a rest, but later I'll see what you can do against my whole pack."

At daybreak, Rainsford was awakened by the distant baying of a pack of dogs. An idea that held a wild chance came to him, a third trap. From the tree he had climbed, Rainsford saw the giant Ivan holding the pack in leash just ahead of General Zaroff. They would be on him any minute now, so Rainsford prepared a native trick he had learned in Uganda. He slid down the tree. He caught hold of a springy young sapling and to it he fastened his hunting knife, with the blade pointing down the trail; with a bit of wild grapevine he tied back the sapling. Then he ran until the baying of the hounds stopped abruptly. They must have reached the knife.

Rainsford climbed excitedly up a tree and looked back. His pursuers had stopped. But the knife had killed Ivan, not General Zaroff. Rainsford ran again, this time toward the shore of the sea. Across a cove he could see gloomy gray stone of Zaroff's home. Twenty feet below him the sea rumbled. Rainsford hesitated. He heard the hounds. Then he leapt far out into the sea....

When the general and his pack reached the sea, the general
stopped. For some minutes he stood regarding the blue-green expanse of water. Then he shrugged his shoulders and headed home. General Zaroff had an exceedingly good dinner in that evening. Two slight annoyances kept him from perfect enjoyment. One was the thought that it would be difficult to replace Ivan; the other was that his quarry had escaped him; of course the American hadn't played the game fairly. Later when he locked his bedroom and he switched on the light, he was startled by a man, who had been hiding in the curtains of the bed.

"Rainsford!" screamed the general. "How in God's name did you get here?"

"Swam," said Rainsford. "I found it quicker than walking through the jungle."

The general sucked in his breath and smiled. "I congratulate you," he said. "You have won."

Rainsford did not smile. "I am still a beast at bay," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Get ready, General Zaroff."

The general made one of his deepest bows. "I see," he said. "Splendid! One of us is to furnish a meal for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford..."

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.
“I’m listening,” said the son, seriously studying the board as he stretched out his hand. “Check.”

“I should hardly think that he’ll come tonight,” said his father, with his hand held in the air over the board.

“Mate,” replied the son.

“That’s the worst of living so far out,” cried Mr. White with sudden and unexpected violence; “Of all the awful out of the way places to live in, this is the worst. Can’t walk on the footpath without getting stuck in the mud, and the road’s a river. I don’t know what the people are thinking about. I suppose they think it doesn’t matter because only two houses in the road have people in them.”

“Never mind, dear,” said his wife calmly, “perhaps you’ll win the next one.”

Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to see a knowing look between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty smile in his thin grey beard.

“There he is,” said Herbert White as the gate banged shut loudly and heavy footsteps came toward the door.

The old man rose quickly and opening the door, was heard telling the new arrival how sorry he was for his recent loss.

**THE MONKEY’S PAW**

*by WW Jacobs*

**PART ONE**

Outside, the night was cold and wet, but in the small living room the curtains were closed and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were playing chess; the father, whose ideas about the game involved some very unusual moves, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary danger that it even brought comment from the white-haired old lady knitting quietly by the fire.

“Listen to the wind,” said Mr. White who, having seen a mistake that could cost him the game after it was too late, was trying to stop his son from seeing it.
The new arrival talked about his sadness, so that Mrs. White said, “Tut, tut!” and coughed gently as her husband entered the room followed by a tall, heavy built, strong-looking man, whose skin had the healthy reddish colour associated with outdoor life and whose eyes showed that he could be a dangerous enemy.

“Sergeant-Major Morris,” he said, introducing him to his wife and his son, Herbert.

The Sergeant-Major shook hands and, taking the offered seat by the fire, watched with satisfaction as Mr. White got out whiskey and glasses.

After the third glass his eyes got brighter and he began to talk. The little family circle listened with growing interest to this visitor from distant parts, as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair and spoke of wild scenes and brave acts; of wars and strange peoples.

“Twenty-one years of it,” said Mr. White, looking at his wife and son. “When he went away he was a thin young man. Now look at him.”

“He doesn’t look to have taken much harm.” said Mrs. White politely.

“I’d like to go to India myself,” said the old man, just to look around a bit, you know.”

“Better where you are,” said the Sergeant-Major, shaking his head. He put down the empty glass and sighing softly, shook it again.

“I should like to see those old temples and fakirs and the street entertainers,” said the old man. “What was that that you started telling me the other day about a monkey’s paw or something, Morris?”

“Nothing,” said the soldier quickly. “At least, nothing worth hearing.”

“Monkey’s paw?” said Mrs. White curiously.

“Well, it’s just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps,” said the Sergeant-Major, without first stopping to think.

His three listeners leaned forward excitedly. Deep in thought, the visitor put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. Mr. White filled it for him again.

“To look at it,” said the Sergeant-Major, feeling about in his pocket, “it’s just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy.”

He took something out of his pocket and held it out for them. Mrs. White drew back with a look of disgust, but her son, taking it, examined it curiously.

“And what is there special about it?” asked Mr. White as he took it from his son, and having examined it, placed it upon the table.

“It had a spell put on it by an old fakir,” said the Sergeant-Major, “a very holy man. He wanted to show that fate ruled people’s lives, and that those who tried to change it would be sorry. He put a spell on it so that three different men could each have three wishes from it.”

The way he told the story showed that he truly believed it and his listeners became aware that their light laughter was out of place and had hurt him a little.

“Well, why don’t you have three, sir?” said Herbert, cleverly.

The soldier looked at him the way that the middle aged usually look at disrespectful youth. “I have,” he said quietly, and his face whitened.

“And did you really have the three wishes granted?” asked Mrs. White.

“I did,” said the Sergeant-Major, and his glass tapped against his strong teeth.

“And has anybody else wished?” continued the old lady.

“The first man had his three wishes. Yes,” was the reply, “I don’t know what the first two were, but the third was for death. That’s how I got the paw.”

His voice was so serious that the group fell quiet.

“If you’ve had your three wishes it’s no good to you now then Morris,” said the old man at last. “What do you keep it for?”

The soldier shook his head. “Fancy I suppose,” he said slowly.
“I did have some idea of selling it, but I don’t think I will. It has caused me enough trouble already. Besides, people won’t buy. They think it’s just a story, some of them; and those who do think anything of it want to try it first and pay me afterward.”

“If you could have another three wishes,” said the old man, watching him carefully, “would you have them?”

“I don’t know,” said the other. “I don’t know.”

He took the paw, and holding it between his front finger and thumb, suddenly threw it upon the fire. Mr. White, with a slight cry, quickly bent down and took it off.

“Better let it burn,” said the soldier sadly, but in a way that let them know he believed it to be true.

“If you don’t want it Morris,” said the other, “give it to me.”

“I won’t,” said his friend with stubborn determination. “I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don’t hold me responsible for what happens. Throw it on the fire like a sensible man.”

The other shook his head and examined his possession closely. “How do you do it?” he asked.

“Hold it up in your right hand, and state your wish out loud so that you can be heard,” said the Sergeant-Major; “But I warn you of what might happen.”

“Sounds like the ‘Arabian Nights”, said Mrs. White, as she rose and began to set the dinner. “Don’t you think you might wish for four pairs of hands for me.”

Her husband drew the talisman from his pocket, and all three laughed loudly as the Sergeant-Major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm.

“If you must wish,” he demanded, “Wish for something sensible.”

Mr. White dropped it back in his pocket, and placing chairs, motioned his friend to the table. In the business of dinner the talisman was partly forgotten, and afterward the three sat fascinated as the listened to more of the soldier’s adventures in India.

“If the tale about the monkey’s paw is not more truthful than those he has been telling us,” said Herbert, as the door closed behind their guest, just in time to catch the last train, “we shan’t make much out of it.”

“Did you give anything for it, father?” asked Mrs. White, watching her husband closely.

“A little,” said he, colouring slightly. “He didn’t want it, but I made him take it. And he pressed me again to throw it away.”

“Not likely!” said Herbert, with pretended horror. “Why, we’re going to be rich, and famous, and happy.” Smiling, he said, “Wish to be a king, father, to begin with; then mother can’t complain all the time.”

He ran quickly around the table, chased by the laughing Mrs White armed with a piece of cloth.

Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it doubtfully. “I don’t know what to wish for, and that’s a fact,” he said slowly. “It seems to me I’ve got all I want.”

“If you only paid off the house, you’d be quite happy, wouldn’t you?” said Herbert, with his hand on his shoulder. “Well, wish for two hundred pounds, then; that’ll just do it.”

His father, smiling and with an embarrassed look for his foolishness in believing the soldier’s story, held up the talisman. Herbert, with a serious face, spoiled only by a quick smile to his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few grand chords.

“I wish for two hundred pounds,” said the old man clearly.

A fine crash from the piano greeted his words, broken by a frightened cry from the old man. His wife and son ran toward him.

“It moved,” he cried, with a look of horror at the object as it lay on the floor. “As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake.”

“Well, I don’t see the money,” said his son, as he picked it up and placed it on the table, “and I bet I never shall.”

“It must have been your imagination, father,” said his wife, regarding him worriedly.

He shook his head. “Never mind, though; there’s no harm
They sat down by the fire again while the two men finished their pipes. Outside, the wind was higher than ever, and the old man jumped nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. An unusual and depressing silence settled on all three, which lasted until the old couple got up to go to bed.

“I expect you’ll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed,” said Herbert, as he wished them goodnight, “and something horrible sitting on top of your wardrobe watching you as you pocket your ill-gotten money.”

Herbert, who normally had a playful nature and didn’t like to take things too seriously, sat alone in the darkness looking into the dying fire. He saw faces in it; the last so horrible and so monkey-like that he stared at it in amazement. It became so clear that, with a nervous laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing some water to throw over it. His hand found the monkey’s paw, and with a little shake of his body he wiped his hand on his coat and went up to bed.

PART TWO

In the brightness of the wintry sun next morning as it streamed over the breakfast table he laughed at his fears. The room felt as it always had and there was an air of health and happiness which was not there the previous night. The dirty, dried-up little paw was thrown on the cabinet with a carelessness which indicated no great belief in what good it could do.

“I suppose all old soldiers are the same,” said Mrs. White. “The idea of our listening to such nonsense! How could wishes be granted in these days? And if they could, how could two hundred pounds hurt you, father?”

“Might drop on his head from the sky,” said Herbert.

“Morris said the things happened so naturally,” said his father, “that you might if you so wished not see the relationship.”

“Well don’t break into the money before I come back,” said Herbert as he rose from the table to go to work. “I’m afraid it’ll turn you into a mean, greedy old man, and we shall have to tell everyone that we don’t know you.”

His mother laughed, and following him to the door, watched him go down the road, and returning to the breakfast table, she felt very happy at the expense of her husband’s readiness to believe such stories. All of which did not prevent her from hurrying to the door at the postman’s knock nor, when she found that the post brought only a bill, talking about how Sergeant-Majors can develop bad drinking habits after they leave the army.

“Herbert will have some more of his funny remarks, I expect, when he comes home,” she said as they sat at dinner.

“I know,” said Mr. White, pouring himself out some beer; “but for all that, the thing moved in my hand; that I’ll swear to.”

“You thought it did,” said the old lady, trying to calm him.

“I say it did,” replied the other. “There was no thought about it; I had just – What’s the matter?”

His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who, looking in an undecided fashion at the house, appeared to be trying to make up his mind to enter. In mental connection with the two hundred pounds, she noticed that the stranger was well dressed, and wore a silk hat of shiny newness. Three times he stopped briefly at the gate, and then walked on again. The fourth time he stood with his hand upon it, and then with sudden firmness of mind pushed it open and walked up the path. Mrs White at the same moment placed her hands behind her, hurriedly untied the strings of her apron, and put it under the cushion of her chair.

She brought the stranger, who seemed a little uncomfortable, into the room. He looked at her in a way that said there was something about his purpose that he wanted to keep secret, and seemed to be thinking of something else as the old lady said she was sorry for the appearance of the room and her husband’s coat, which he usually wore in the garden. She then waited as patiently as her sex would permit for him to state his business, but he was at first strangely silent.

“I was asked to call,” he said at last, and bent down and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. “I come from ‘Maw and Meggins.’”

The old lady jumped suddenly, as in alarm. “Is anything the matter?” she asked breathlessly. “Has anything happened to Herbert? What is it? What is it?”
Her husband spoke before he could answer. “There there mother,” he said hurriedly. “Sit down, and don’t jump to a conclusion. You’ve not brought bad news, I’m sure sir,” and eyed the other, expecting that it was bad news but hoping he was wrong.

“I’m sorry — ” began the visitor.

“Is he hurt?” demanded the mother wildly.

The visitor lowered and raised his head once in agreement. ”Badly hurt,” he said quietly, “but he is not in any pain.”

“Oh thank God!” said the old woman, pressing her hands together tightly. “Thank God for that! Thank — ”

She broke off as the tragic meaning of the part about him not being in pain came to her. The man had turned his head slightly so as not to look directly at her, but she saw the awful truth in his face. She caught her breath, and turning to her husband, who did not yet understand the man’s meaning, laid her shaking hand on his. There was a long silence.

“He was caught in the machinery,” said the visitor at length in a low voice.

“Caught in the machinery,” repeated Mr. White, too shocked to think clearly, ”yes.”

He sat staring out the window, and taking his wife’s hand between his own, pressed it as he used to do when he was trying to win her love in the time before they were married, nearly forty years before.

“He was the only one left to us,” he said, turning gently to the visitor. “It is hard.”

The other coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window. “The firm wishes me to pass on their great sadness about your loss,” he said, without looking round. “I ask that you to please understand that I am only their servant and simply doing what they told me to do.”

There was no reply; the old woman’s face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath unheard; on the husband’s face was a look such as his friend the Sergeant-Major might have carried into his first battle.

“I was to say that Maw and Meggins accept no responsibility,” continued the other. “But, although they don’t believe that they have a legal requirement to make a payment to you for your loss, in view of your son’s services they wish to present you with a certain sum.”

Mr. White dropped his wife’s hand, and rising to his feet, stared with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words, “How much?”

“Two hundred pounds,” was the answer.

Without hearing his wife’s scream, the old man smiled weakly, put out his hands like a blind man, and fell, a senseless mass, to the floor.

PART THREE

In the huge new cemetery, some two miles away, the old people buried their dead, and came back to the house which was now full of shadows and silence. It was all over so quickly that at first they could hardly realize it, and remained in a state of waiting for something else to happen – something else which was to lighten this load, too heavy for old hearts to bear.

But the days passed, and they realized that they had to accept the situation – the hopeless acceptance of the old. Sometimes they hardly said a word to each other, for now they had nothing to talk about, and their days were long to tiredness.

It was about a week after that the old man, waking suddenly in the night, stretched out his hand and found himself alone. The room was in darkness, and he could hear the sound of his wife crying quietly at the window. He raised himself in bed and listened.

“Come back,” he said tenderly. “You will be cold.”

“It is colder for my son,” said the old woman, who began crying again.

The sounds of crying died away on his ears. The bed was warm, and his eyes heavy with sleep. He slept lightly at first, and then was fully asleep until a sudden wild cry from his wife woke him with a start.

“THE PAW!” she cried wildly. “THE MONKEY’S PAW!”
He started up in alarm. “Where? Where is it? What’s the matter?”

She almost fell as she came hurried across the room toward him. “I want it,” she said quietly. “You’ve not destroyed it?”

“It’s in the living room, on the shelf above the fireplace,” he replied. “Why?”

She cried and laughed together, and bending over, kissed his cheek.

“I only just thought of it,” she said. “Why didn’t I think of it before? Why didn’t you think of it?”

“Think of what?” he questioned.

“The other two wishes,” she replied quickly. “We’ve only had one.”

“Was not that enough?” he demanded angrily.

“No,” she cried excitedly; “We’ll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again.”

The man sat up in bed and threw the blankets from his shaking legs. “Good God, you are mad!” he cried, struck with horror.

“Get it,” she said, breathing quickly; “get it quickly, and wish – Oh my boy, my boy!”

Her husband struck a match and lit the candle. “Get back to bed he said,” his voice shaking. “You don’t know what you are saying.”

“We had the first wish granted,” said the old woman, desperately; “why not the second?”

“A c-c-coincidence,” said the old man.

“Go get it and wish,” cried his wife, shaking with excitement.

The old man turned and looked at her, and his voice shook. “He has been dead ten days, and besides he – I would not tell you before, but – I could only recognize him by his clothing. If he was too terrible for you to see then, how now?”

“Bring him back,” cried the old woman, and pulled him towards the door. “Do you think I fear the child I have nursed?”

He went down in the darkness, and felt his way to the living room, and then to the fireplace. The talisman was in its place on the shelf, and then a horrible fear came over him that the unspoken wish might bring the broken body of his son before him before he could escape from the room. He caught his breath as he found that he had lost the direction of the door. His forehead cold with sweat, he felt his way round the table and along the walls until he found himself at the bottom of the stairs with the evil thing in his hand.

Even his wife’s face seemed changed as he entered the room. It was white and expectant, and to his fears seemed to have an unnatural look upon it. He was afraid of her.

“WISH!” she cried in a strong voice.

“It is foolish and wicked,” he said weakly.

“WISH!” repeated his wife.

He raised his hand. “I wish my son alive again.”

The talisman fell to the floor, and he looked at it fearfully. Then he sank into a chair and the old woman, with burning eyes, walked to the window and opened the curtains.

He sat until he could no longer bear the cold, looking up from time to time at the figure of his wife staring through the window. The candle, which had almost burned to the bottom, was throwing moving shadows around the room. When the candle finally went out, the old man, with an unspeakable sense of relief at the failure of the talisman, went slowly back back to his bed, and a minute afterward the old woman came silently and lay without movement beside him.

Neither spoke, but lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. They heard nothing else other than the normal night sounds. The darkness was depressing, and after lying for some time building up his courage, the husband took the box of matches, and lighting one, went downstairs for another candle.

At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he stopped to light another; and at the same moment a knock sounded on
the front door. It was so quiet that it could only be heard downstairs, as if the one knocking wanted to keep their coming a secret.

The matches fell from his hand. He stood motionless, not even breathing, until the knock was repeated. Then he turned and ran quickly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

"WHAT'S THAT?" cried the old woman, sitting up quickly.

"A rat," said the old man shakily – "a rat. It passed me on the stairs."

His wife sat up in bed listening. A loud knock echoed through the house.

"It's Herbert!" she screamed. "It's Herbert!"

She ran to the door, but her husband was there before her, and catching her by the arm, held her tightly. "What are you going to do?" he asked in a low, scared voice.

"It's my boy; it's Herbert!" she cried, struggling automatically. "I forgot it was two miles away. What are you holding me for? Let go. I must open the door."

"For God's sake don't let it in," cried the old man, shaking with fear.

"You're afraid of your own son," she cried struggling. "Let me go. I'm coming, Herbert; I'm coming."

There was another knock, and another. The old woman with a sudden pull broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the top of the stairs, and called after her as she hurried down. He heard the chain pulled back and the bottom lock open. Then the old woman's voice, desperate and breathing heavily.

"The top lock," she cried loudly. "Come down. I can't reach it."

But her husband was on his hands and knees feeling around wildly on the floor in search of the paw. If only he could find it before the thing outside got in. The knocks came very quickly now echoing through the house, and he heard the noise of his wife moving a chair and putting it down against the door. He heard the movement of the lock as she began to open it, and at the same moment he found the monkeys's paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish.

The knocking stopped suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair pulled back, and the door opened. A cold wind blew up the staircase, and a long loud cry of disappointment and pain from his wife gave him the courage to run down to her side, and then to the gate. The streetlight opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.
THE BLACK CAT

by Edgar Allan Poe

For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not—and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified—have tortured—have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but Horror—to many they will seem less terrible than barroques. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place—some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere Man.

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog...
rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat.

This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever serious upon this point—and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered.

Pluto—this was the cat’s name—was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character—through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance—had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them. For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!—and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish—even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper.

One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

When reason returned with the morning—when I had slept off the fumes of the night’s debauch—I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed.

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had so much of my old heart left, as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is law, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to vex itself—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong’s sake only—that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute. One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree;—hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart;—hung it because I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence;—hung it because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it—if such a thing were possible—even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair.
I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am detailing a chain of facts—and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire—a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words “strange!” “singular!” and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven in bas relief upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic cat. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvelous. There was a rope about the animal’s neck.

When I first beheld this apparition—for I could scarcely regard it as less—my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at length reflection came to my aid. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd—by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly—spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames, and the ammonia from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

Although I thus readily accounted to my reason, if not altogether to my conscience, for the startling fact just detailed, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented, for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place.

One night as I sat, half stupified, in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object,

reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of Gin, or of Rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat—a very large one—fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast. Upon my touching him, he immediately arose, purred loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice. This, then, was the very creature of which I was in search. I at once offered to purchase it of the landlord; but this person made no claim to it—knew nothing of it—had never seen it before.

I continued my caresses, and, when I prepared to go home, the animal evinced a disposition to accompany me. I permitted it to do so; occasionally stooping and patting it as I proceeded. When it reached the house it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favorite with my wife.

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but—I know not how or why it was—its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed. By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually—very gradually—I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.

What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast, was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed, in a high degree, that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures. With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader
comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber, in this manner, to my breast. At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a memory of my former crime, but chiefly—let me confess it at once—by absolute dread of the beast.

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil—and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it. I am almost ashamed to own—yes, even in this felon’s cell, I am almost ashamed to own—that the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me, had been heightened by one of the merest chimeraeas it would be possible to conceive. My wife had called my attention, more than once, to the character of the mark of white hair, of which I have spoken, and which constituted the sole visible difference between the strange beast and the one I had destroyed. The reader will remember that this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite; but, by slow degrees—degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my Reason struggled to reject as fanciful—it had, at length, assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline. It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name—and for this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster had I dared—it was now, I say, the image of a hideous—of a ghastly thing—of the GALLOWS!—oh, mournful and terrible engine of Horror and of Crime—of Agony and of Death!

And now was I indeed wretched beyond the wretchedness of mere Humanity. And a brute beast—whose fellow I had contempulously destroyed—a brute beast to work out forme—for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God—so much of insufferable woe! Alas! neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of Rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone; and, in the latter, I started, hourly, from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of the thing upon my face, and its vast weight—an incarnate Night—Mare that I had no power to shake off—incumbent eternally upon my heart!

Beneath the pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates—the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind; while, from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas! was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers.

One day she accompanied me, upon some household errand, into the cellar of the old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan.

This hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith, and with entire deliberation, to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the neighbors. Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting it in the well in the yard—about packing it in a box, as if merchandize, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered a far better expedient than either of these. I determined to wall it up in the cellar—as the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims.

For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed, and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the dampness of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled up, and made to resemble the red of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect any thing suspicious. And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crow—bar I easily dislodged the bricks, and, having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped it in that
position, while, with little trouble, I re-laid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar, sand, and hair, with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brickwork. When I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The rubbish on the floor was picked up with the minutest care. I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself—"Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain."

My next step was to look for the beast which had been the cause of so much wretchedness; for I had, at length, firmly resolved to put it to death. Had I been able to meet with it, at the moment, there could have been no doubt of its fate; but it appeared that the crafty animal had been alarmed at the violence of my previous anger, and forebore to present itself in my present mood. It is impossible to describe, or to imagine, the deep, the blissful sense of relief which the absence of the detested creature occasioned in my bosom. It did not make its appearance during the night—and thus for one night at least, since its introduction into the house, I soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, slept even with the burden of murder upon my soul!

The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor came not. Once again I breathed as a freeman. The monster, in terror, had fled the premises forever! I should behold it no more! My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little. Some few inquiries had been made, but these had been readily answered. Even a search had been instituted—but of course nothing was to be discovered. I looked upon my future felicity as secured.

Upon the fourth day of the assassination, a party of the police came, very unexpectedly, into the house, and proceeded again to make rigorous investigation of the premises. Secure, however, in the inscrutability of my place of concealment, I felt no embarrassment whatever. The officers bade me accompany them in their search. They left no nook or corner unexplored. At length, for the third or fourth time, they descended into the cellar. I quivered not in a muscle. My heart beat calmly as that of one who slumbers in innocence. I walked the cellar from end to end. I folded my arms upon my bosom, and roamed easily to and fro. The police were thoroughly satisfied and prepared to depart. The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained. I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness.

"Gentlemen," I said at last, as the party ascended the steps, "I delight to have allayed your suspicions. I wish you all health, and a little more courtesy. By the bye, gentlemen, this—is a very well constructed house." [In the rabid desire to say something easily, I scarcely knew what I uttered at all.]—"I may say an excellently well constructed house. These walls are you going, gentlemen?—these walls are solidly put together;" and here, through the mere phrenzy of bravado, I rapped heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.

But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs of the Arch-Fiend! No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb!—by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman—a howl—a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.

Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next, a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb!
THE VELDT

by Ray Bradbury

“George, I wish you’d look at the nursery.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, then.”

“I just want you to look at it, is all, or call a psychologist in to look at it.”

“What would a psychologist want with a nursery?”

“You know very well what he’d want.” His wife paused in the middle of the kitchen and watched the stove busy humming to itself, making supper for four. “It’s just that the nursery is different now than it was.”

“All right, let’s have a look.”

They walked down the hall of their soundproofed Happylife Home, which had cost them thirty thousand dollars installed, this house which clothed and fed and rocked them to sleep and played and sang and was good to them. Their approach sensitized a switch somewhere and the nursery light flicked on when they came within ten feet of it. Similarly, behind them, in the halls, lights went on and off as they left them behind, with a soft automaticity.

“Well,” said George Hadley.

They stood on the thatched floor of the nursery. It was forty feet across by forty feet long and thirty feet high; it had cost half again as much as the rest of the house.

“It’s just that the nursery is different now than it was.”

“But nothing’s too good for our children,” George had said.

The nursery was silent. It was empty as a jungle glade at hot high noon. The walls were blank and two dimensional. Now, as George and Lydia Hadley stood in the center of the room, the walls began to purr and recede into crystalline distance, it seemed, and presently an African veldt appeared, in three dimensions, on all sides, in color reproduced to the final pebble and bit of straw. The ceiling above
them became a deep sky with a hot yellow sun. George Hadley felt the perspiration start on his brow.

“Let’s get out of this sun,” he said. “This is a little too real. But I don’t see anything wrong.”

“Wait a moment, you’ll see,” said his wife.

Now the hidden odorophonics were beginning to blow a wind of odor at the two people in the middle of the baked veldtland. The hot straw smell of lion grass, the cool green smell of the hidden water hole, the great rusty smell of animals, the smell of dust like a red paprika in the hot air. And now the sounds: the thump of distant antelope feet on grassy sod, the papery rustling of vultures. A shadow passed through the sky. The shadow flickered on George Hadley’s upturned, sweating face.

“Filthy creatures,” he heard his wife say. “The vultures.”

“You see, there are the lions, far over, that way. Now they’re on their way to the water hole. They’ve just been eating,” said Lydia. “I don’t know what.”

“Some animal.” George Hadley put his hand up to shield off the burning light from his squinted eyes. “A zebra or a baby giraffe, maybe.”

“Are you sure?” His wife sounded peculiarly tense.

“No, it’s a little late to be sure,” he said, amused. “Nothing over there I can see but cleaned bone, and the vultures dropping for what’s left.”

“Did you hear that scream?” she asked.

“No.”

“About a minute ago?”

“Sorry, no.”

The lions were coming. And again George Hadley was filled with admiration for the mechanical genius who had conceived this room. A miracle of efficiency selling for an absurdly low price. Every home should have one. Oh, occasionally they frightened you with their clinical accuracy, they startled you, gave you a twinge, but most of the time what fun for everyone, not only your own son and daughter, but for yourself when you felt like a quick jaunt to a foreign land, a quick change of scenery. Well, here it was!

And here were the lions now, fifteen feet away, so real, so feverishly and startlingly real that you could feel the prickling fur on your hand, and your mouth was stuffed with the dusty upholstery smell of their heated pelts, and the yellow of them was in your eyes like the yellow of an exquisite French tapestry, the yellows of lions and summer grass, and the sound of the matted lion lungs exhalating on the silent noontide, and the smell of meat from the panting, dripping mouths.

The lions stood looking at George and Lydia Hadley with terrible green-yellow eyes.

“Watch out!” screamed Lydia.

The lions came running at them. Lydia bolted and ran.

Instinctively, George sprang after her. Outside, in the hall, with the door slammed he was laughing and she was crying, and they both stood appalled at the other’s reaction.

“George!”

“Lydia! Oh, my dear poor sweet Lydia!”

“They almost got us!”

“Walls, Lydia, remember; crystal walls, that’s all they are. Oh, they look real, I must admit — Africa in your parlor — but it’s all dimensional, superreactionary, supersensitive color film and mental tape film behind glass screens. It’s all odorophonics and sonics, Lydia. Here’s my handkerchief.”

“I’m afraid.” She came to him and put her body against him and cried steadily. “Did you see? Did you feel? It’s too real.”

“Now, Lydia…”

“You’ve got to tell Wendy and Peter not to read any more on Africa.”

“Of course — of course.” He patted her.

“Promise?”
“Sure.”

“And lock the nursery for a few days until I get my nerves settled.”

“You know how difficult Peter is about that. When I punished him a month ago by locking the nursery for even a few hours — the tantrum he threw! And Wendy too. They live for the nursery.”

“It’s got to be locked, that’s all there is to it.”

“All right.” Reluctantly he locked the huge door. “You’ve been working too hard. You need a rest.”

“I don’t know — I don’t know,” she said, blowing her nose, sitting down in a chair that immediately began to rock and comfort her. “Maybe I don’t have enough to do. Maybe I have time to think too much. Why don’t we shut the whole house off for a few days and take a vacation?”

“You mean you want to fry my eggs for me?”

“Yes.” She nodded. “And dam my socks?”

“Yes.” A frantic, watery-eyed nodding.

“And sweep the house?”

“Yes, yes — oh, yes!”

“But I thought that’s why we bought this house, so we wouldn’t have to do anything?”

“That’s just it. I feel like I don’t belong here. The house is wife and mother now, and nursemaid. Can I compete with an African veldt? Can I give a bath and scrub the children as efficiently or quickly as the automatic scrub bath can? I cannot. And it isn’t just me. It’s you. You’ve been awfully nervous lately.”

“I suppose I have been smoking too much.”

“You look as if you didn’t know what to do with yourself in this house, either. You smoke a little more every morning and drink a little more every afternoon and need a little more sedative every night. You’re beginning to feel unnecessary too.”

“Am I?” He paused and tried to feel into himself to see what was really there.

“Oh, George!” She looked beyond him, at the nursery door.

“Those lions can’t get out of there, can they?” He looked at the door and saw it tremble as if something had jumped against it from the other side.

“Of course not,” he said.

***

At dinner they ate alone, for Wendy and Peter were at a special plastic carnival across town and had televised home to say they’d be late, to go ahead eating. So George Hadley, bemused, sat watching the dining-room table produce warm dishes of food from its mechanical interior.

“We forgot the ketchup,” he said.

“Sorry,” said a small voice within the table, and ketchup appeared.

As for the nursery, thought George Hadley, it won’t hurt for the children to be locked out of it awhile. Too much of anything isn’t good for anyone. And it was clearly indicated that the children had been spending a little too much time on Africa. That sun. He could feel it on his neck, still, like a hot paw. And the lions. And the smell of blood. Remarkable how the nursery caught the telepathic emanations of the children’s minds and created life to fill their every desire. The children thought lions, and there were lions. The children thought zebras, and there were zebras. Sun — sun. Giraffes — giraffes. Death and death.

That last. He chewed tastelessly on the meat that the table bad cut for him. Death thoughts. They were awfully young, Wendy and Peter, for death thoughts. Or, no, you were never too young, really. Long before you knew what death was you were wishing it on someone else. When you were two years old you were shooting people with cap pistols.

But this — the long, hot African veldt — the awful death in the jaws of a lion. And repeated again and again.
“Where are you going?”

He didn't answer Lydia. Preoccupied, be let the lights glow softly on ahead of him, extinguish behind him as he padded to the nursery door. He listened against it. Far away, a lion roared.

He unlocked the door and opened it. Just before he stepped inside, he heard a faraway scream. And then another roar from the lions, which subsided quickly.

He stepped into Africa. How many times in the last year had he opened this door and found Wonderland, Alice, the Mock Turtle, or Aladdin and his Magical Lamp, or Jack Pumpkinhead of Oz, or Dr. Doolittle, or the cow jumping over a very real-appearing moon—all the delightful contraptions of a make-believe world. How often had he seen Pegasus flying in the sky ceiling, or seen fountains of red fireworks, or heard angel voices singing. But now, is yellow hot Africa, this bake oven with murder in the heat. Perhaps Lydia was right. Perhaps they needed a little vacation from the fantasy which was growing a bit too real for ten-year-old children. It was all right to exercise one's mind with gymnastic fantasies, but when the lively child mind settled on one pattern...? It seemed that, at a distance, for the past month, he had heard lions roaring, and smelled their strong odor seeping as far away as his study door. But, being busy, he had paid it no attention.

George Hadley stood on the African grassland alone. The lions looked up from their feeding, watching him. The only flaw to the illusion was the open door through which he could see his wife, far down the dark hall, like a framed picture, eating her dinner abstractedly.

“Go away,” he said to the lions.

They did not go.

He knew the principle of the room exactly. You sent out your thoughts. Whatever you thought would appear.

“Let's have Aladdin and his lamp,” he snapped. The veldtland remained; the lions remained.

“Come on, room! I demand Aladin!” he said.

Nothing happened. The lions mumbled in their baked pelts.

“Aladin!”

He went back to dinner.

“The fool room's out of order,” he said. “It won't respond.”

“Or —”

“Or what?”

“Oh it can't respond,” said Lydia, “because the children have thought about Africa and lions and killing so many days that the room's in a rut.”

“Could be.”

“Or Peter's set it to remain that way.”

“Set it?”

“He may have got into the machinery and fixed something.”

“Peter doesn’t know machinery.”

“He's a wise one for ten. That I.Q. of his —”

“Nevertheless —”

“Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad.”

The Hadleys turned. Wendy and Peter were coming in the front door, cheeks like peppermint candy, eyes like bright blue agate marbles, a smell of ozone on their jumpers from their trip in the helicopter. “You're just in time for supper,” said both parents.

“We're full of strawberry ice cream and hot dogs,” said the children, holding hands. “But we'll sit and watch.”

“Yes, come tell us about the nursery,” said George Hadley. The brother and sister blinked at him and then at each other.

“Nursery?”

“All about Africa and everything,” said the father with false joviality.
“I don’t understand,” said Peter.

“Your mother and I were just traveling through Africa with rod and reel; Tom Swift and his Electric Lion,” said George Hadley.

“There’s no Africa in the nursery,” said Peter simply.

“Oh, come now, Peter. We know better.”

“I don’t remember any Africa,” said Peter to Wendy. “Do you?”

“No.”

“Run see and come tell.” She obeyed.

“Wendy, come back here!” said George Hadley, but she was gone. The house lights followed her like a flock of fireflies. Too late, he realized he had forgotten to lock the nursery door after his last inspection. “Wendy’ll look and come tell us,” said Peter.

“She doesn’t have to tell me. I’ve seen it.”

“I’m sure you’re mistaken, Father.”

“I’m not, Peter. Come along now.” But Wendy was back.

“It’s not Africa,” she said breathlessly.

“We’ll see about this,” said George Hadley, and they all walked down the hall together and opened the nursery door.

There was a green, lovely forest, a lovely river, a purple mountain, high voices singing, and Rima, lovely and mysterious, lurking in the trees with colorful flights of butterflies, like animated bouquets, lingering in her long hair. The African veldtland was gone. The lions were gone. Only Rima was here now, singing a song so beautiful that it brought tears to your eyes.

George Hadley looked in at the changed scene. “Go to bed,” he said to the children.

They opened their mouths.

“You heard me,” he said.

They went off to the air closet, where a wind sucked them like brown leaves up the flue to their slumber rooms.

George Hadley walked through the singing glade and picked up something that lay in the corner near where the lions had been. He walked slowly back to his wife.

“What is that?” she asked.

“An old wallet of mine,” he said. He showed it to her.

The smell of hot grass was on it and the smell of a lion. There were drops of saliva on it, it had been chewed, and there were blood smears on both sides.

He closed the nursery door and locked it, tight.

***

In the middle of the night he was still awake and he knew his wife was awake. “Do you think Wendy changed it?” she said at last, in the dark room.

“Of course.”

“Made it from a veldt into a forest and put Rima there instead of lions?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. But it’s staying locked until I find out.”

“How did your wallet get there?”

“I don’t know anything,” he said, “except that I’m beginning to be sorry we bought that room for the children. If children are neurotic at all, a room like that —”

“It’s supposed to help them work off their neuroses in a healthful way.”

“I’m starting to wonder.” He stared at the ceiling. “We’ve given the children everything they ever wanted. Is this our reward—secrecy, disobedience?”
“Who was it said, 'Children are carpets, they should be stepped on occasionally?' We’ve never lifted a hand. They’re insufferable — let’s admit it. They come and go when they like; they treat us as if we were offspring. They’re spoiled and we’re spoiled.”

“They’ve been acting funny ever since you forbade them to take the rocket to New York a few months ago.”

“They’re not old enough to do that alone, I explained.”

“Nevertheless, I’ve noticed they’ve been decidedly cool toward us since.”

“I think I’ll have David McClean come tomorrow morning to have a look at Africa.”

“But it’s not Africa now, it’s Green Mansions country and Rima.”

“I have a feeling it’ll be Africa again before then.”

A moment later they heard the screams.

Two screams. Two people screaming from downstairs. And then a roar of lions.

“Wendy and Peter aren’t in their rooms,” said his wife.

He lay in his bed with his beating heart. “No,” he said. “They’ve broken into the nursery.”

“Those screams — they sound familiar.”

“Do they?”

“Yes, awfully.”

And although their beds tried very hard, the two adults couldn’t be rocked to sleep for another hour. A smell of cats was in the night air.

***

“Father?” said Peter.

“Yes.” Peter looked at his shoes. He never looked at his father any more, nor at his mother. “You aren’t going to lock up the nursery for good, are you?”

“That all depends.”

“On what?” snapped Peter.

“On you and your sister. If you intersperse this Africa with a little variety — oh, Sweden perhaps, or Denmark or China —”

“I thought we were free to play as we wished.”

“You are, within reasonable bounds.”

“What’s wrong with Africa, Father?”

“Oh, so now you admit you have been conjuring up Africa, do you?”

“I wouldn’t want the nursery locked up,” said Peter coldly. “Ever.”

“Matter of fact, we’re thinking of turning the whole house off for about a month. Live sort of a carefree one-for-all existence.”

“That sounds dreadful! Would I have to tie my own shoes instead of letting the shoe tier do it? And brush my own teeth and comb my hair and give myself a bath?”

“It would be fun for a change, don’t you think?”

“No, it would be horrid. I didn’t like it when you took out the picture painter last month.”

“That’s because I wanted you to learn to paint all by yourself, son.”

“I don’t want to do anything but look and listen and smell; what else is there to do?”

“All right, go play in Africa.”

“Will you shut off the house sometime soon?”

“We’re considering it.” “I don’t think you’d better consider it
any more, Father."

"I won't have any threats from my son!"

"Very well." And Peter strolled off to the nursery.

***

"Am I on time?" said David McClean.

"Breakfast?" asked George Hadley.

"Thanks, had some. What's the trouble?"

"David, you're a psychologist."

"I should hope so."

"Well, then, have a look at our nursery. You saw it a year ago when you dropped by; did you notice anything peculiar about it then?"

"Can't say I did; the usual violences, a tendency toward a slight paranoia here or there, usual in children because they feel persecuted by parents constantly, but, oh, really nothing."

They walked down the hall. "I locked the nursery up," explained the father; "and the children broke back into it during the night. I let them stay so they could form the patterns for you to see."

There was a terrible screaming from the nursery.

"There it is," said George Hadley. "See what you make of it."

They walked in on the children without rapping.

The screams had faded. The lions were feeding.

"Run outside a moment, children," said George Hadley. "No, don't change the mental combination. Leave the walls as they are. Get!"

With the children gone, the two men stood studying the lions clustered at a distance, eating with great relish whatever it was they had caught.

"I wish I knew what it was," said George Hadley. "Sometimes I can almost see. Do you think if I brought high-powered binoculars here and —"

David McClean laughed dryly. "Hardly." He turned to study all four walls. "How long has this been going on?"

"A little over a month."

"It certainly doesn't feel good."

"I want facts, not feelings."

"My dear George, a psychologist never saw a fact in his life. He only hears about feelings; vague things. This doesn't feel good, I tell you. Trust my hunches and my instincts. I have a nose for something bad. This is very bad. My advice to you is to have the whole damn room torn down and your children brought to me every day during the next year for treatment."

"Is it that bad?"

"I'm afraid so. One of the original uses of these nurseries was so that we could study the patterns left on the walls by the child's mind, study at our leisure, and help the child. In this case, however, the room has become a channel toward-destructive thoughts, instead of a release away from them."

"Didn't you sense this before?"

"I sensed only that you had spoiled your children more than most. And now you're letting them down in some way. What way?"

"I wouldn't let them go to New York."

"What else?"

"I've taken a few machines from the house and threatened them, a month ago, with closing up the nursery unless they did their homework. I did close it for a few days to show I meant business."

"Ah, ha!"

"Does that mean anything?"
“Everything. Where before they had a Santa Claus now they have a Scrooge. Children prefer Santas. You’ve let this room and this house replace you and your wife in your children’s affections. This room is their mother and father, far more important in their lives than their real parents. And now you come along and want to shut it off. No wonder there’s hatred here. You can feel it coming out of the sky. Feel that sun. George, you’ll have to change your life. Like too many others, you’ve built it around creature comforts. Why, you’d starve tomorrow if something went wrong in your kitchen. You wouldn’t know bow to tap an egg. Nevertheless, turn everything off. Start new. It’ll take time. But we’ll make good children out of bad in a year, wait and see.”

“But won’t the shock be too much for the children, shutting the room up abruptly, for good?”

“I don’t want them going any deeper into this, that’s all.”

The lions were finished with their red feast. The lions were standing on the edge of the clearing watching the two men.

“Now I’m feeling persecuted,” said McClean. “Let’s get out of here. I never have cared for these damned rooms. Make me nervous.”

“The lions look real, don’t they?” said George Hadley. I don’t suppose there’s any way —”

“What?”

“— That they could become real?”

“Not that I know.”

“Some flaw in the machinery, a tampering or something?”

“No.”

They went to the door.

“I don’t imagine the room will like being turned off,” said the father. “Nothing ever likes to die — even a room.”

“I wonder if it hates me for wanting to switch it off?”

“Paranoia is thick around here today,” said David McClean.

“You can follow it like a spoor. Hello.” He bent and picked up a bloody scarf. “This yours?”

“No.” George Hadley’s face was rigid. “It belongs to Lydia.”

They went to the fuse box together and threw the switch that killed the nursery.

***

The two children were in hysterics. They screamed and pranced and threw things. They yelled and sobbed and swore and jumped at the furniture.

“You can’t do that to the nursery, you can’t!”

“Now, children.”

The children flung themselves onto a couch, weeping.

“George,” said Lydia Hadley, “turn on the nursery, just for a few moments. You can’t be so abrupt.”

“No.”

“You can’t be so cruel...”

“Lydia, it’s off, and it stays off. And the whole damn house dies as of here and now. The more I see of the mess we’ve put ourselves in, the more it sickens me. We’ve been contemplating our mechanical, electronic navels for too long. My God, how we need a breath of honest air!”

And he marched about the house turning off the voice clocks, the stoves, the heaters, the shoe shiners, the shoe lacers, the body scrubbers and swabbers and massagers, and every other machine be could put his hand to.

The house was full of dead bodies, it seemed. It felt like a mechanical cemetery. So silent. None of the humming hidden energy of machines waiting to function at the tap of a button.

“Don’t let them do it!” wailed Peter at the ceiling, as if he was talking to the house, the nursery. “Don’t let Father kill everything.” He turned to his father. “Oh, I hate you!”

“Insults won’t get you anywhere.”
“I wish you were dead!”

“We were, for a long while. Now we’re going to really start living. Instead of being handled and massaged, we’re going to live.”

Wendy was still crying and Peter joined her again. “Just a moment, just one moment, just another moment of nursery,” they wailed.

“Oh, George,” said the wife, “it can’t hurt.”

“All right — all right, if they’ll just shut up. One minute, mind you, and then off forever.”

“Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!” sang the children, smiling with wet faces.

“And then we’re going on a vacation. David McClean is coming back in half an hour to help us move out and get to the airport. I’m going to dress. You turn the nursery on for a minute, Lydia, just a minute, mind you.”

And the three of them went babbling off while he let himself be vacuumed upstairs through the air flue and set about dressing himself. A minute later Lydia appeared.

“I’ll be glad when we get away,” she sighed.

“Did you leave them in the nursery?”

“I wanted to dress too. Oh, that horrid Africa. What can they see in it?”

“Well, in five minutes we’ll be on our way to Iowa. Lord, how did we ever get in this house? What prompted us to buy a nightmare?”

“Pride, money, foolishness.”

“I think we’d better get downstairs before those kids get engrossed with those damned beasts again.”

Just then they heard the children calling, “Daddy, Mommy, come quick — quick!”

They went downstairs in the air flue and ran down the hall. The children were nowhere in sight.

“Wendy? Peter!”

They ran into the nursery. The veldtland was empty save for the lions waiting, looking at them. “Peter, Wendy?”

The door slammed.

“Wendy, Peter!”

George Hadley and his wife whirled and ran back to the door.

“Open the door!” cried George Hadley, trying the knob. “Why, they’ve locked it from the outside! Peter!” He beat at the door.

“Open up!” He heard Peter’s voice outside, against the door.

“Don’t let them switch off the nursery and the house,” he was saying.

Mr. and Mrs. George Hadley beat at the door. “Now, don’t be ridiculous, children. It’s time to go. Mr. McClean’ll be here in a minute and...”

And then they heard the sounds. The lions on three sides of them, in the yellow veldt grass, padding through the dry straw, rumbling and roaring in their throats.

The lions.

Mr. Hadley looked at his wife and they turned and looked back at the beasts edging slowly forward crouching, tails stiff.

Mr. and Mrs. Hadley screamed.

And suddenly they realized why those other screams bad sounded familiar.

***

“Well, here I am,” said David McClean in the nursery doorway.

“Oh, hello.” He stared at the two children seated in the center of the open glade eating a little picnic lunch. Beyond them was the water hole and the yellow veldtland; above was the hot sun. He began to perspire. “Where are your father and mother?”

The children looked up, startled. “In the Veldtland.
directly."

“Good, we must get going.” At a distance Mr. McClean saw the lions fighting and clawing and then quieting down to feed in silence under the shady trees. He squinted at the lions with his hand tip to his eyes.

Now the lions were done feeding. They moved to the water hole to drink.

A shadow flickered over Mr. McClean’s hot face. Many shadows flickered. The vultures were dropping down the blazing sky.

“A cup of tea?” asked Wendy in the silence.
THE LOTTERY

by Shirley Jackson

The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a fullsummer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green. The people of the village began to gather in the square, between the post office and the bank, around ten o’clock; in some towns there were so many people that the lottery took two days and had to be started on June 26th. But in this village, where there were only about three hundred people, the whole lottery took less than two hours, so it could begin at ten o’clock in the morning and still be through in time to allow the villagers to get home for noon dinner.

The children assembled first, of course. School was recently over for the summer, and the feeling of liberty sat uneasily on most of them; they tended to gather together quietly for a while before they broke into boisterous play, and their talk was still of the classroom and the teacher, of books and reprimands. Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones, and the other boys soon followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones; Bobby and Harry Jones and Dickie Delacroix the villagers pronounced this name “Dellacroy” eventually made a great pile of stones in one corner of the square and guarded it against the raids of the other boys. The girls stood aside, talking among themselves, looking over their shoulders at the boys, and the very small children rolled in the dust or clung to the hands of their older brothers or sisters.

Soon the men began to gather, surveying their own children, speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes. They stood together, away from the pile of stones in the corner, and their jokes were quiet and they smiled rather than laughed.

They stood together, away from the pile of stones...

The women, wearing faded house dresses and sweaters, came shortly after their menfolk. They greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip as they went to join their husbands. Soon the women, standing by their husbands, began to call to their children, and the children came reluctantly, having to be called four or five times. Bobby Martin ducked under his mother’s grasping hand and ran, laughing, back to the pile of stones. His father spoke up sharply, and Bobby came quickly and took his place between his father and his oldest brother.
The lottery was conducted as were the square dances, the
teen club, the Halloween program by Mr. Summers who had
time and energy to devote to civic activities. He was a round-
faced, jovial man and he ran the coal business, and people
were sorry for him because he had no children and his wife
was a scold. When he arrived in the square, carrying the
black wooden box, there was a murmur of conversation
among the villagers, and he waved and called, "Little late
today, folks." The postmaster, Mr. Graves, followed him,
carrying a three legged stool, and the stool was put in the
center of the square and Mr. Summers set the black box
down on it. The villagers kept their distance, leaving a space
between themselves and the stool, and when Mr. Summers
said, "Some of you fellows want to give me a hand?" there
was a hesitation before two men, Mr. Martin and his oldest son,
Baxter, came forward to hold the box steady on the stool
while Mr. Summers stirred up the papers inside it.

The original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long
ago, and the black box now resting on the stool had been put
into use even before Old Man Warner, the oldest man in
town, was born. Mr. Summers spoke frequently to the
villagers about making a new box, but no one liked to upset
even as much tradition as was represented by the black box.
There was a story that the present box had been made with
some pieces of the box that had preceded it, the one that had
been constructed when the first people settled down to make
a village here. Every year, after the lottery, Mr. Summers
began talking again about a new box, but every year the
subject was allowed to fade off without anything's being
done. The black box grew shabbier each year: by now it was
no longer completely black but splintered badly along one
side to show the original wood color, and in some places
faded or stained.

Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, held the black box
securely on the stool until Mr. Summers had stirred the
papers thoroughly with his hand. Because so much of the
ritual had been forgotten or discarded, Mr. Summers had
been successful in having slips of paper substituted for the
chips of wood that had been used for generations. Chips of
wood, Mr. Summers had argued, had been all very well when
the village was tiny, but now that the population was more
than three hundred and likely to keep on growing, it was
necessary to use something that would fit more easily into he
black box. The night before the lottery, Mr. Summers and Mr.
Graves made up the slips of paper and put them in the box,
and it was then taken to the safe of Mr. Summers' coal
company and

locked up until Mr. Summers was ready to take it to the
square next morning. The rest of the year, the box was put
way, sometimes one place, sometimes another; it had spent
one year in Mr. Graves' barn and another year underfoot in
the post office, and sometimes it was set on a shelf in the
Martin grocery and left there.

There was a great deal of fussing to be done before Mr.
Summers declared the lottery open. There were the lists to
make up of heads of families, heads of households in each
family, members of each household in each family. There was
the proper swearing-in of Mr. Summers by the postmaster, as
the official of the lottery; at one time, some people
remembered, there had been a recital of some sort,
performed by the official of the lottery, a perfunctory,
tuneless chant that had been rattled off duly each year; some
people believed that the official of the lottery used to stand
just so when he said or sang it, others believed that he was
supposed to walk among the people, but years and years ago
this part of the ritual had been allowed to lapse. There had
been, also, a ritual salute, which the official of the lottery had
had to use in addressing each person who came up to draw
from the box, but this also had changed with time, until now
it was felt necessary only for the official to speak to each
person approaching. Mr. Summers was very good at all this;
in his clean white shirt and blue jeans, with one hand resting
carelessly on the black box, he seemed very proper and
important as he talked interminably to Mr. Graves and the
Martin.

Just as Mr. Summers finally left off talking and turned to the
assembled villagers, Mrs. Hutchinson came hurriedly along
the path to the square, her sweater thrown over her
shoulders, and slid into place in the back of the crowd. "Clean
forgot what day it was," she said to Mrs. Delacroix, who stood
next to her, and they both laughed softly. "Thought my old
man was out back stacking wood," Mrs. Hutchinson went on.
"And then I looked out the window and the kids was gone,
and then I remembered it was the twenty-seventh and came
arunning." She dried her hands on her apron, and Mrs.
Delacroix said, "You're in time, though. They're still talking
away up there."

Mrs. Hutchinson craned her neck to see through the crowd
and found her husband and children standing near the front.
She tapped Mrs. Delacroix on the arm as a farewell and began
to make her way through the crowd. The people separated
goodhumouredly to let her through: two or three people said,
in voices just loud enough to be heard across the crowd, "Here comes your, Missus, Hutchinson," and "Bill, she made it after all." Mrs. Hutchinson reached her husband, and Mr. Summers, who had been waiting, said cheerfully, "Thought we were going to have to get on without you, Tessie." Mrs. Hutchinson said, grinning, "Wouldn't have me leave m'dishes in the sink, now, would you. Joe?" and soft laughter ran through the crowd as the people stirred back into position after Mrs. Hutchinson's arrival.

"Well, now." Mr. Summers said soberly, "guess we better get started, get this over with, so's we can go back to work. Anybody ain't here?"

"Dunbar." several people said. "Dunbar. Dunbar."

Mr. Summers consulted his list. "Clyde Dunbar," he said. "That's right. He's broke his leg, hasn't he? Who's drawing for him?"

"Me. I guess," a woman said, and Mr. Summers turned to look at her. "Wife draws for her husband." Mr. Summers said. "Don't you have a grown boy to do it for you, Janey?"

Although Mr. Summers and everyone else in the village knew the answer perfectly well, it was the business of the official of the lottery to ask such questions formally. Mr. Summers waited with an expression of polite interest while Mrs. Dunbar answered.

"Horace's not but sixteen yet," Mrs. Dunbar said regretfully. "Guess I gotta fill in for the old man this year." "

Right," Mr. Summers said. He made a note on the list he was holding. Then he asked, "Watson boy drawing this year?"

A tall boy in the crowd raised his hand. "Here," he said. "I'm drawing for my mother and me." He blinked his eyes nervously and ducked his head as several voices in the crowd said things like "Good fellow, Jack." and "Glad to see your mother's got a man to do it."

"Well," Mr. Summers said, "guess that's everyone. Old Man Warner make it?"

"Here," a voice said, and Mr. Summers nodded.

A sudden hush fell on the crowd as Mr. Summers cleared his throat and looked at the list. "All ready?" he called. "Now, I'll read the names heads of families first and the men come up and take a paper out of the box. Keep the paper folded in your hand without looking at it until everyone has had a turn. Everything clear?"

The people had done it so many times that they only half listened to the directions: most of them were quiet, wetting their lips, not looking around. Then Mr. Summers raised one hand high and said, "Adams." A man disengaged himself from the crowd and came forward. "Hi, Steve." Mr. Summers said and Mr. Adams said, "Hi, Joe." They grinned at one another humourlessly and nervously. Then Mr. Adams reached into the black box and took out a folded paper. He held it firmly by one corner as he turned and went hastily back to his place in the crowd, where he stood a little apart from his family, not looking down at his hand.

"Allen." Mr. Summers said. "Anderson... Bentham."

"Seems like there's no time at all between lotteries any more," Mrs. Delacroix said to Mrs. Graves in the back row.

"Seems like we got through with the last one only last week."

"Time sure goes fast," Mrs. Graves said.

"Clark... Delacroix"

"There goes my old man." Mrs. Delacroix said. She held her breath while her husband went forward.

"Dunbar," Mr. Summers said, and Mrs. Dunbar went steadily to the box while one of the women said, "Go on, Janey," and another said, "There she goes."

"We're next." Mrs. Graves said. She watched while Mr. Graves came around from the side of the box, greeted Mr. Summers gravely and selected a slip of paper from the box. By now, all through the crowd there were men holding the small folded papers in their large hand, turning them over and over nervously Mrs. Dunbar and her two sons stood together, Mrs. Dunbar holding the slip of paper.

"Harburt... Hutchinson."

"Get up there, Bill," Mrs. Hutchinson said, and the people near her laughed.

"Jones."
"They do say," Mr. Adams said to Old Man Warner, who stood next to him, "that over in the north village they’re talking of giving up the lottery."

Old Man Warner snorted. "Pack of crazy fools," he said. "Listening to the young folks, nothing’s good enough for them. Next thing you know, they’ll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work any more, live hat way for a while. Used to be a saying about ‘Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon.’ First thing you know, we’d all be eating stewed chickweed and acorns. There’s always been a lottery," he added petulantly. "Bad enough to see young Joe Summers up there joking with everybody."


"Martin." And Bobby Martin watched his father go forward.

"Overydye.... Percy."

"I wish they’d hurry," Mrs. Dunbar said to her older son. "I wish they’d hurry."

"They’re almost through," her son said.

You get ready to run tell Dad," Mrs. Dunbar said.

Mr. Summers called his own name and then stepped forward precisely and selected a slip from the box. Then he called, "Warner."

"Seventy-seventh year I been in the lottery," Old Man Warner said as he went through the crowd. "Seventy-seventh time."

"Watson." The tall boy came awkwardly through the crowd. Someone said, "Don’t be nervous, Jack," and Mr. Summers said, "Take your time, son."

"Zanini."

After that, there was a long pause, a breathless pause, until Mr. Summers, holding his slip of paper in the air, said, "All right, fellows." For a minute, no one moved, and then all the slips of paper were opened. Suddenly, all the women began to speak at once, saying, "Who is it?" "Who’s got it?" "Is it the Dunbars?" "Is it the Watkins?" Then the voices began to say, "It’s Hutchinson. It’s Bill," "Bill Hutchinson’s got it."

"Go tell your father," Mrs. Dunbar said to her older son.

People began to look around to see the Hutchisons. Bill Hutchinson was standing quiet, staring down at the paper in his hand. Suddenly, Tessie Hutchinson shouted to Mr. Summers, "You didn’t give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn’t fair!"

"Be a good sport, Tessie," Mrs. Delacroix called, and Mrs. Graves said, "All of us took the same chance."

"Shut up, Tessie," Bill Hutchinson said.

"Well, everyone," Mr. Summers said, "that was done pretty fast, and now we’ve got to be hurrying a little more to get done in time." He consulted his next list. "Bill," he said, "you draw for the Hutchinson family. You got any other households in the Hutchisons?"

"There’s Don and Eva," Mrs. Hutchinson yelled. "Make them take their chance!"

"Daughters draw with their husbands’ families, Tessie," Mr. Summers said gently. "You know that as well as anyone else."

"It wasn’t fair," Tessie said.

"I guess not, Joe," Bill Hutchinson said regretfully. "My daughter draws with her husband’s family; that’s only fair. And I’ve got no other family except the kids."

"Then, as far as drawing for families is concerned, it’s you," Mr. Summers said in explanation, "and as far as drawing for households is concerned, that’s you, too. Right?"

"Right," Bill Hutchinson said.

"How many kids, Bill?" Mr. Summers asked formally.

"Three," Bill Hutchinson said. "There’s Bill, Jr., and Nancy, and little Dave. And Tessie and me."

"All right, then," Mr. Summers said. "Harry, you got their tickets back?"
Mr. Graves nodded and held up the slips of paper. "Put them in the box, then," Mr. Summers directed. "Take Bill's and put it in."

"I think we ought to start over," Mrs. Hutchinson said, as quietly as she could. "I tell you it wasn't fair. You didn't give him time enough to choose. Everybody saw that."

Mr. Graves had selected the five slips and put them in the box, and he dropped all the papers but those onto the ground where the breeze caught them and lifted them off.

"Listen, everybody," Mrs. Hutchinson was saying to the people around her.

"Ready, Bill?" Mr. Summers asked, and Bill Hutchinson, with one quick glance around at his wife and children, nodded.

"Remember," Mr. Summers said. "Take the slips and keep them folded until each person has taken one. Harry, you help little Dave." Mr. Graves took the hand of the little boy, who came willingly with him up to the box. "Take a paper out of the box, Davy." Mr. Summers said. Davy put his hand into the box and laughed. "Take just one paper." Mr. Summers said. "Harry, you hold it for him." Mr. Graves took the child's hand and removed the folded paper from the tight fist and held it while little Dave stood next to him and looked up at him wonderingly.

"Nancy next," Mr. Summers said. Nancy was twelve, and her school friends breathed heavily as she went forward switching her skirt, and took a slip daintily from the box.

"Bill, Jr.," Mr. Summers said, and Billy, his face red and his feet overlarge, near knocked the box over as he got a paper out.

"Tessie," Mr. Summers said. She hesitated for a minute, looking around defiantly, and then set her lips and went up to the box. She snatched a paper out and held it behind her.

"Bill," Mr. Summers said, and Bill Hutchinson reached into the box and felt around, bringing his hand out at last with the slip of paper in it.

The crowd was quiet. A girl whispered, "I hope it's not Nancy," and the sound of the whisper reached the edges of the crowd.

"All right," Mr. Summers said. "Open the papers. Harry, you open little Dave's."

Mr. Graves opened the slip of paper and there was a general sigh through the crowd as he held it up and everyone could see that it was blank. Nancy and Bill Jr. opened theirs at the same time and both beamed and laughed, turning around to the crowd and holding their slips of paper above their heads.

"Tessie," Mr. Summers said. There was a pause, and then Mr. Summers looked at Bill Hutchinson, and Bill unfolded his paper and showed it. It was blank.

"It's Tessie," Mr. Summers said, and his voice was hushed. "Show us her paper, Bill."

Bill Hutchinson went over to his wife and forced the slip of paper out of her hand. It had a black spot on it, the black spot Mr. Summers had made the night before with the heavy pencil in the coal company office. Bill Hutchinson held it up, and there was a stir in the crowd.

"All right, folks." Mr. Summers said. "Let's finish quickly."

Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones. The pile of stones the boys had made earlier was ready; there were stones on the ground with the blowing scraps of paper that had come out of the box. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands and turned to Mrs. Dunbar.

"Come on," she said. "Hurry up."

Mr. Dunbar had small stones in both hands, and she said, gasping for breath, "I can't run at all. You'll have to go ahead and I'll catch up with you."

The children had stones already. And someone gave little Davy Hutchinson few pebbles.

Tessie Hutchinson was in the center of a cleared space by now and she held her hands out desperately as the villagers moved in on her.

"It isn't fair," she said. A stone hit her on the side of the head. Old Man Warner was saying. "Come on, come on, everyone."
Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers, with Mrs. Graves beside him.

"It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed, and then they were upon her.
LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER

by Roald Dahl

The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight—hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whiskey. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket.

Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work.

Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did. The drop of a head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil. Her skin—this was her sixth month with

child--had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger darker than before. When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.

"Hullo darling," she said.

"Hullo darling," he answered.

She took his coat and hung it in the closet. Then she walked over and made the drinks, a strongish one for him, a weak one for herself; and soon she was back again in her chair with the sewing, and he in the other, opposite, holding the tall glass with both hands, rocking it so the ice cubes tinkled against the side.

“For her, this was a blissful time of day.”

For her, this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn’t want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house. She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel—almost as a sunbather feels the sun—that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room.
with long strides. She loved intent, far look in his eyes when they rested in her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whiskey had taken some of it away.

"Tired darling?"

"Yes," he said. "I'm tired," And as he spoke, he did an unusual thing. He lifted his glass and drained it in one swallow although there was still half of it, at least half of it left. She wasn't really watching him, but she knew what he had done because she heard the ice cubes falling back against the bottom of the empty glass when he lowered his arm. He paused a moment, leaning forward in the chair, then he got up and went slowly over to fetch himself another.

"I'll get it!" she cried, jumping up.

"Sit down," he said.

When he came back, she noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whiskey in it.

"Darling, shall I get your slippers?"

"No."

She watched him as he began to sip the dark yellow drink, and she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.

"I think it's a shame," she said, "that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long."

He didn't answer, so she bent her head again and went on with her sewing; but each time he lifted the drink to his lips, she heard the ice cubes clinking against the side of the glass.

"Darling," she said. "Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday."

"No," he said.

"If you're too tired to eat out," she went on, "it's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair."

Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign.

"Anyway," she went on, "I'll get you some cheese and crackers first."

"I don't want it," he said.

She moved uneasily in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face. "But you must eat! I'll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like."

She stood up and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp.

"Sit down," he said. "Just for a minute, sit down."

It wasn't till then that she began to get frightened.

"Go on," he said. "Sit down."

She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the time with those large, bewildered eyes. He had finished the second drink and was staring down into the glass, frowning.

"Listen," he said. "I've got something to tell you."

"What is it, darling? What's the matter?"

He had now become absolutely motionless, and he kept his head down so that the light from the lamp beside him fell across the upper part of his face, leaving the chin and mouth in shadow. She noticed there was a little muscle moving near the corner of his left eye.

"This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid," he said. "But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much."

And he told her. It didn't take long, four or five minutes at most, and she sat very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror as he went further and further away from her with each word.
"So there it is," he added. "And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't any other way. Of course I'll give you money and see you're looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job."

Her first instinct was not to believe any of it, to reject it all. It occurred to her that perhaps he hadn't even spoken, that she herself had imagined the whole thing. Maybe, if she went about her business and acted as though she hadn't been listening, then later, when she sort of woke up again, she might find none of it had ever happened.

"I'll get the supper," she managed to whisper, and this time he didn't stop her.

When she walked across the room she couldn't feel her feet touching the floor. She couldn't feel anything at all—except a slight nausea and a desire to vomit. Everything was automatic now—down the steps to the cellar, the light switch, the deep freeze, the hand inside the cabinet taking hold of the first object it met. She lifted it out, and looked at it. It was wrapped in paper; so she took off the paper and looked at it again.

A leg of lamb.

All right then, they would have lamb for supper. She carried it upstairs, holding the thin bone-end of it with both her hands, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him standing over by the window with his back to her, and she stopped.

"For God's sake," he said, hearing her, but not turning round. "Don't make supper for me. I'm going out."

At that point, Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head.

She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.

She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying. Then he crashed to the carpet.

The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of her shock. She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.

All right, she told herself. So I've killed him.

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill then both-mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do?

Mary Maloney didn't know. And she certainly wasn't prepared to take a chance.

She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved it inside. Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tied her hair, touched up her lops and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.

"Hullo Sam," she said brightly, aloud.

The voice sounded peculiar too.

"I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas."

That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street.

It wasn't six o'clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.

"Hullo Sam," she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.

"Why, good evening, Mrs. Maloney. How're you?"

"I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of
peas.

The man turned and reached up behind him on the shelf for the peas.

"Patrick's decided he's tired and doesn't want to eat out tonight," she told him. "We usually go out Thursdays, you know, and now he's caught me without any vegetables in the house."

"Then how about meat, Mrs. Maloney?"

"No, I've got meat, thanks. I got a nice leg of lamb from the freezer."

"Oh."

"I don't know much like cooking it frozen, Sam, but I'm taking a chance on it this time. You think it'll be all right?"

"Personally," the grocer said, "I don't believe it makes any difference. You want these Idaho potatoes?"

"Oh yes, that'll be fine. Two of those."

"Anything else?" The grocer cocked his head on one side, looking at her pleasantly. "How about afterwards? What you going to give him for afterwards?"

"Well—what would you suggest, Sam?"

The man glanced around his shop. "How about a nice big slice of cheesecake? I know he likes that."

"Perfect," she said. "He loves it."

And when it was all wrapped and she had paid, she put on her brightest smile and said, "Thank you, Sam. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Mrs. Maloney. And thank you."

And now, she told herself as she hurried back, all she was doing now, she was returning home to her husband and he was waiting for his supper; and she must cook it good, and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired; and if, when she entered the house, she happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock and she'd become frantic with grief and horror. Mind you, she wasn't expecting to find anything. She was just going home with the vegetables. Mrs. Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband.

That's the way, she told herself. Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there'll be no need for any acting at all.

Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming a little tune to herself and smiling.

"Patrick!" she called. "How are you, darling?"

She put the parcel down on the table and went through into the living room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, it really was rather a shock. All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out. It was easy. No acting was necessary.

A few minutes later she got up and went to the phone. She know the number of the police station, and when the man at the other end answered, she cried to him, "Quick! Come quick! Patrick's dead!"

"Who's speaking?"

"Mrs. Maloney. Mrs. Patrick Maloney."

"You mean Patrick Maloney's dead?"

"I think so," she sobbed. "He's lying on the floor and I think he's dead."

"Be right over," the man said.

The car came very quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policeman walked in. She know them both—she know nearly all the man at that precinct—and she fell right into a chair, then went over to join the other one, who was called O'Malley, kneeling by the body.

"Is he dead?" she cried.

"I'm afraid he is. What happened?"
Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the floor. While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of congealed blood on the dead man's head. He showed it to O'Malley who got up at once and hurried to the phone.

Soon, other men began to come into the house. First a doctor, then two detectives, one of whom she knew by name. Later, a police photographer arrived and took pictures, and a man who knew about fingerprints. There was a great deal of whispering and muttering beside the corpse, and the detectives kept asking her a lot of questions. But they always treated her kindly. She told her story again, this time right from the beginning, when Patrick had come in, and she was sewing, and he was tired, so tired he hadn't wanted to go out for supper. She told how she'd put the meat in the oven—"it's there now, cooking"—and how she'd slopped out to the grocer for vegetables, and come back to find him lying on the floor.

"Which grocer?" one of the detectives asked.

She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective who immediately went outside into the street.

In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases—"...acted quite normal...very cheerful...wanted to give him a good supper...peas...cheesecake...impossible that she..."

After a while, the photographer and the doctor departed and two other men came in and took the corpse away on a stretcher. Then the fingerprint man went away. The two detectives remained, and so did the two policeman. They were exceptionally nice to her, and Jack Noonan asked if she wouldn't rather go somewhere else, to her sister's house perhaps, or to his own wife who would take care of her and put her up for the night.

No, she said. She didn't feel she could move even a yard at the moment. Would they mind awfuly of she stayed just where she was until she felt better. She didn't feel too good at the moment, she really didn't.

Then hadn't she better lie down on the bed? Jack Noonan asked.

No, she said. She'd like to stay right where she was, in this chair. A little later, perhaps, when she felt better, she would move.

So they left her there while they went about their business, searching the house. Occasionally one of the detectives asked her another question. Sometimes Jack Noonan spoke at her gently as he passed by. Her husband, he told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument, almost certainly a large piece of metal. They were looking for the weapon. The murderer may have taken it with him, but on the other hand he may have thrown it away or hidden it somewhere on the premises.

"It's the old story," he said. "Get the weapon, and you've got the man."

Later, one of the detectives came up and sat beside her. Did she know, he asked, of anything in the house that could've been used as the weapon? Would she mind having a look around to see if anything was missing—a very big spanner, for example, or a heavy metal vase.

They didn't have any heavy metal vases, she said.

"Or a big spanner?"

She didn't think they had a big spanner. But there might be some things like that in the garage.

The search went on. She knew that there were other policemen in the garden all around the house. She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw a flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains. It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantle. The four men searching the rooms seemed to be growing weary, a trifle exasperated.

"Jack," she said, the next tome Sergeant Noonan went by.

"Would you mind giving me a drink?"

"Sure I'll give you a drink. You mean this whiskey?"

"Yes please. But just a small one. It might make me feel better."

He handed her the glass.

"Why don't you have one yourself," she said. "You must be awfully tired. Please do. You've been very good to me."
"Well," he answered. "It's not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going."

One by one the others came in and were persuaded to take a little nip of whiskey. They stood around rather awkwardly with the drinks in their hands, uncomfortable in her presence, trying to say consoling things to her. Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, come out quickly and said, "Look, Mrs. Maloney. You know that oven of yours is still on, and the meat still inside."

"Oh dear me!" she cried. "So it is!"

"I better turn it off for you, hadn't I?"

"Will you do that, Jack. Thank you so much."

When the sergeant returned the second time, she looked at him with her large, dark tearful eyes. "Jack Noonan," she said.

"Yes?"

"Would you do me a small favor—you and these others?"

"We can try, Mrs. Maloney."

"Well," she said. "Here you all are, and good friends of dear Patrick's too, and helping to catch the man who killed him. You must be terrible hungry by now because it's long past your suppertime, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality. Why don't you eat up that lamb that's in the oven. It'll be cooked just right by now."

"Wouldn't dream of it," Sergeant Noonan said.

"Please," she begged. "Please eat it. Personally I couldn't tough a thing, certainly not what's been in the house when he was here. But it's all right for you. It'd be a favor to me if you'd eat it up. Then you can go on with your work again afterwards."

There was a good deal of hesitating among the four policemen, but they were clearly hungry, and in the end they were persuaded to go into the kitchen and help themselves. The woman stayed where she was, listening to them speaking among themselves, their voices thick and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.

"Have some more, Charlie?"

"No. Better not finish it."

"She wants us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favor."

"Okay then. Give me some more."

"That's the hell of a big club the gut must've used to hit poor Patrick," one of them was saying. "The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledgehammer."

"That's why it ought to be easy to find."

"Exactly what I say."

"Whoever done it, they're not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need."

One of them belched.

"Personally, I think it's right here on the premises."

"Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?"

And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.
THE HITCHHIKER

by Lucille Fletcher

ADAMS: I'm in a trailer camp on I-40 just west of Gallup, New Mexico. If I tell it, maybe it'll help me -- it'll-- it'll--keep me from going crazy. I must tell this quickly. I'm not crazy now - I feel perfectly well, perfectly well, except that I'm running a slight temperature.

My name is Ronald Adams. I'm thirty-six years of age, unmarried, tall, dark with a black mustache. I drive a 1978 Ford, license number 6V7989. I was born in Brooklyn. All this I know. I know I'm at this moment--I'm perfectly sane, that it's not me that's gone mad -- but something else, something utterly beyond my control.

But I must speak quickly. At any minute the link with life may break. This may be the last thing I ever tell on earth - the last night I ever see the stars.

ADAMS: Six days ago I left Brooklyn to drive to California.

MRS. ADAMS: (APPREHENSIVE) Goodbye, son. Good luck to you, my boy.

ADAMS: (LIGHTLY) Goodbye, mom. Here, give me a kiss... and then I'll go.

MRS. ADAMS: I'll come out with you to the car.

ADAMS: Oh, it's raining. Stay here at the door.

MRS. ADAMS: (STIFLES A SOB)

ADAMS: (LAUGHS) Hey, what's this, tears?

MRS. ADAMS: Oh, it's - it's just the trip, Ron. I wish you weren't driving.

I know...that it's not me that's gone mad -- but something else...

ADAMS: Oh, mom. There you go again. People do it every day.

MRS. ADAMS: I know, but - you'll be careful, won't you? Promise me you'll be extra careful. Don't fall asleep or drive fast or pick up any strangers on the road.

ADAMS: Stranger? Look... don't worry. There isn't anything going to happen. It's just eight days of perfectly simple driving on smooth, decent, civilized roads.
with a hot dog or a hamburger stand every ten miles. Now, don’t worry. Goodbye...

ADAMS: I was in excellent spirits. The drive ahead of me, even the loneliness, seemed like a lark. But I didn’t count on him.

Crossing Brooklyn Bridge that morning in the rain, I saw a man leaning against the cables. He seemed to be waiting for a lift. There were spots of fresh rain on his shoulders. He was carrying a cheap overnight bag in one hand. He was thin, nondescript, with a cap pulled down over his eyes.

Now, I would have forgotten him completely except that just an hour later, while crossing the Pulaski Skyway over the Jersey Flats, I saw him again. At least, he looked like the same person. He was standing now with one thumb pointing west. I couldn’t figure out how he’d got there, but I thought maybe a fast truck had picked him up, beaten me to the Skyway, and let him off. I didn’t stop for him.

And then, late that night -- I saw him again.

It was on the new Pennsylvania Turnpike between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. It’s two hundred and sixty-five miles long with a very high speed limit. I--I was just slowing down for one of the tunnels - when I saw him - standing under an arch light by the side of the road. I could see him quite distinctly - the bag, the cap - even the spots of fresh rain spattered over his shoulders. He “Hallooed” at me this time.

HIKER: (GHOSTLY ECHO) Hellooo! Hellooo!

ADAMS: I stepped on the gas like a shot. It’s lonely country through the Alleghenies, and I had no intention of stopping. Besides, the coincidences, or whatever it was, gave me the willies. I stopped at the next gas station.

ATTENDANT: Yes, sir? What can I do for ya?

ADAMS: Uh, fill ‘er up, will ya?

ATTENDANT: Check your oil?

ADAMS: No, thanks. No.

ATTENDANT: Let me get the gas cap here. Nice night, ain’t it?

ADAMS: Yes. It hasn’t been raining here lately, has it?

ATTENDANT: Not a drop of rain all week.

ADAMS: Oh? Oh, no? I - I suppose that hasn’t done your business any harm?

ATTENDANT: Oh, people drive through here all kinds of weather. Mostly business, though. Ain’t many pleasure cars out on the turnpike this season of the year.

ADAMS: I--I guess not. What, ah - er - ah - What about hitchhikers?

ATTENDANT: (CHUCKLE) Hitchhikers? Here?

ADAMS: What’s the matter? Don’t you ever see any?

ATTENDANT: Oh, a guy’d be a fool who started out to hitch rides on this road. Just look at it.

ADAMS: You mean--then - you’ve never seen anybody?

ATTENDANT: No. Maybe they get the lift before the turnpike starts. I mean, you know, just before the toll house. But then it’s a pretty long ride. Most cars wouldn’t want to pick up a guy for that long a ride. And, this is pretty lonesome country here, mountains and woods. You ain’t seen nobody like that, have you?

ADAMS: Oh, no. Oh, no, not - not at all. I was just-- Ah, uh, a technical question.

ATTENDANT: Oh, I see. Well, that’ll be twenty-four forty-nine, with the tax, sir.

ADAMS: The thing gradually passed from my mind as sheer coincidence. I had a good night’s sleep in Pittsburgh. I didn’t think about the man all next day until -- just outside of Zanesville, Ohio. I saw him again.

It was a bright sunshiny afternoon. The peaceful Ohio fields, brown with the autumn stubble, lay dreaming in the golden light. I was driving slowly, drinking it all in, when the road suddenly ended in a detour. In front of the barrier, HE was standing...

Let me explain about his appearance before I go on. I repeat: there was nothing sinister about him. He was as drab as a mud fence, nor was his attitude menacing. He-- he just stood there
- waiting, almost drooping a little, the cheap overnight bag in his hand. He looked as though he'd been waiting there for hours. And he hailed me - - started to walk forward.

HIKER: (FROM A DISTANCE) Hellooo!

ADAMS: I had stopped the car of course for the detour. For a few minutes I--I couldn't seem to find the new road. I realized he must be thinking I'd stopped for him...

HIKER: (CLOSER) Hellooo!

ADAMS: (NERVOUS, CALLS OUT) No, not just now, sorry!

HIKER: Goin' to California?!

ADAMS: No, no, not today! I’m--I'm going to New York! Sorry... sorry! After I got the car back on the road again, I felt like a fool. Yet the thought of picking him up, of having him sit beside me, was somehow unbearable. Yet at the same time I felt - more than ever - unspeakably alone.

(AFTER A LONG PAUSE) Hour after hour went by. The fields, the towns, ticked off one by one. The light changed. I knew now that I was going to see him again.

And though I dreaded the sight, I caught myself searching the side of the road, waiting for him to appear.

SOUND: (CAR BRAKES, ENGINE SLOWS TO IDLE ... HORN HONKS ... DOOR OPENS)

STOREKEEPER: (FROM OFF, ANNOYED) What is it?! What d'you want?!

ADAMS: You sell sandwiches and pop here, don't ya?

STOREKEEPER: Yeah, we do in the daytime! But we're closed for the night! ADAMS: Well, I know, but I was wondering if you could possibly let me have a cup of coffee. Black coffee.

STOREKEEPER: My wife's the cook, she's in bed!

SOUND: (DOOR STARTS TO CLOSE)

ADAMS: Well, n--now, listen, just a minute ago-- Just a minute ago there was a man standing here, right beside this - here - a suspicious looking man.

STOREKEEPER'S WIFE: Henry? Who is it, Henry?

STOREKEEPER: It's nobody, Mother. Just a fella thinks he wants a cup o' coffee. Go back to bed.

ADAMS: I--I don't mean to disturb you. You see, I was driving along when I just happened to look... and there he was...

STOREKEEPER: What was he doin'? Awwww, you've been hittin' the bottle - that's what's the matter with you. Got nothin' better to do than wake decent folks out of their hard-earned sleep? What've you been doin'? Get goin'? Get on!

ADAMS: Well... it looked as if he was going to rob ya...

STOREKEEPER: I've got nothin' to stand to lose. Now, on your way before I call out Sheriff Paltz!

ADAMS: I got into the car again and drove on slowly. I was beginning to hate the car. If I could've found a place to rest a little... I was in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri now. The few resort places there were closed. I HAD seen him at that roadside stand. I knew I'd see him again. Maybe at the next turn of the road. I knew then that when I saw him next -- I would run him down.

But I didn't see him again - until late next afternoon.

I'd stopped the car at a sleepy little junction just across the border into Oklahoma to let a train pass... when he appeared across the tracks - leaning against a telephone pole.

SOUND: (DISTANT TRAIN WHISTLE)

ADAMS: It was a perfectly airless, dry day. The red clay of Oklahoma was baking under the southwestern sun... yet there were spots of fresh rain on his shoulders. I couldn't stand that. Without thinking, blindly, I started the car across the tracks.

He didn't even look up at me. He was staring at the ground. I stepped on the gas hard, veering the wheel sharply toward him. I could hear the train in the distance now, but I didn't care. Then something... something went wrong with the car. It stalled right on the tracks.

SOUND: (TRAIN WHISTLE AND BELL)

ADAMS: The train was coming closer. I could hear its bell. It's
- It's cry. It's whistle crying. Still he stood there. Now I knew that he was beckoning -- beckoning me to my death!

SOUND: MUSIC

ADAMS: Well ... I frustrated him that time. It started. It worked at last. I managed to back up. But after - when the train passed, he--he was gone. And I was all alone in the hot, dry afternoon.

After that, I knew I had to do something.

I didn't know who this man was - or what he wanted of me. I only knew that from now on -- I mustn't let myself alone on the road for one minute.

SOUND: (CAR ENGINE SLOWS TO IDLE ... CAR BRAKES)

ADAMS: (CALLS OUT) Uh, hello there! Hello...

ADAMS: Like a ride?

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: Well, what do you think? How far are you goin'?

ADAMS: Amarillo. I'll take you to Amarillo.

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: Amarillo, Texas?

ADAMS: Yeah, I'll drive you there.

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: Gee!

ADAMS: Hop in...

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: Uh, you mind if I take off my shoes? My feet are killin' me.

ADAMS: No. Go right ahead.

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: (RELIEVED) Ohhhh. Gee, what a break this is -- great car, decent guy, driving all the way to Amarillo. All I've been gettin' so far is trucks.

ADAMS: You hitchhike much?

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: Sure. Only it's tough sometimes in these great open spaces to get the breaks.

ADAMS: Yeah, I should think it would be, but I'll bet though - you get a good pick up in a fast car, you could get places faster than, say... another person in... another car

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: I don't get ya.

ADAMS: Well, take me for instance. Suppose I'm - I'm driving across the country, say, at a nice steady clip, about sixty-five miles an hour. Couldn't - couldn't a girl like you, just standing beside the road waiting for a lift, beat me to town, after town, provided she got picked up every time in a car doing from seventy-five to eighty miles an hour?

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: I don't know. Maybe she could. Maybe she couldn't. What difference does it make?

ADAMS: Oh, it's no difference. It's--It's just a crazy idea I had sitting here in the car.

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: (AMUSED) Oh, imagine spending your time in a great car thinkin' of things like that.

ADAMS: What would you do instead?

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: What would I do? Well, if I was a good-lookin' fellow like yourself? I'd just enjoy myself, every minute of the time. I'd sit back and - and relax. And if I saw a good-lookin' g-- (GASPS) Hey!

ADAMS: Did you see him? Did you see him, too?

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: See who?

ADAMS: That man, standing beside the barbed-wire fence.

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: I didn't see - anybody. I-- it's just a barbed-wire fence. What'd you think you was doin'? Tryin' to run into the barbed-wire fence?

ADAMS: Th--There--There was a man there, I tell ya! A thin, gray man with - with an overnight bag in his hand. I -- I was trying to ... run him down.

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: Run him down? You mean -- kill 'im?

ADAMS: You say you didn't see him back there? You sure?

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: I didn't see a soul. And as far as that's
concerned--

ADAMS: Well, you watch for him. You watch for him the next time. Keep watching. Keep your eyes peeled on the road. He'll turn up again. May be any minute now. There... right there!

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: (PANICS) Ah - No! How does this door work?! I - I've gotta get outta here!

ADAMS: Did you see him that time?

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: No, I didn't see him that time! And, personally, mister, I don't expect never to see him! All I want to do is go on livin'! I don't see how I will very long, drivin' with you!

ADAMS: Look - Look, I'm sorry. I - I don't know what came over me. Please...

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: So, if you'll excuse me--

ADAMS: You can't go! Listen, how would you like to go to California? I'll drive you all the way to California!

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: You're creepin' me out, man...

ADAMS: Listen, please, just - just one minute, please!

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: You know what I think you need, man? Not a girlfriend, just a good dose o' sleep.

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: Leave your hands off o' me! Just-- Just-- Leave your hands off me!

ADAMS: Come back here! Please! Please come back!

She ran from me ... as if I were some kind of monster. A few minutes later, I saw a passing truck pick her up. And I knew then that I was - utterly alone. I was in the heart of the great Texas prairies. There wasn't a car on the road after the truck went by. I tried to figure out what to do, how to get a hold of myself.

If I could find a place to rest or even if I could sleep right here in the car - just a few hours - along the side of the road ... I was getting my winter overcoat out of the back seat to use as a blanket, just as a blanket - when - I saw him coming toward me - emerging from the herd of moving steer.

HIKER: (OFF) Hellooo!

ADAMS: I didn't wait for him to come any closer.

HIKER: (DROWNED OUT BY SOUND) Hellooo!

ADAMS: Maybe I should have spoken to him then. Fought it out, then and there. And now he began to be everywhere. Wherever I stopped, even for a minute - for gas, for oil, for a drink of pop, a cup o' coffee, sandwich - he was there!

I saw him standing outside the trailer camp in Amarillo that night when I dared to slow down. He was standing near the drinking fountain of a little camping spot just inside the border of New Mexico. He was waiting for me outside the Navajo reservation where I stopped to check my tires. I saw him in Albuquerque when I bought more gas. I--I was afraid now - afraid to stop.

I began to drive faster and faster. I was - in a lunar landscape now -- the great, arid mesa country of New Mexico. I drove through it with the indifference of a fly crawling over the face of the moon. And now he didn't even wait for me to stop! Unless I drove at eighty-five miles an hour over those endless roads, he waited for me at every other mile. I'd see his figure, shadowless, flitling before me, still in its same attitude, over the cold, lifeless ground -- flitling over dried up rivers, over broken stones cast up by old glacial upheavals -- flitling in that pure, cloudless air.

I was beside myself when I finally reached Gallup, New Mexico, this morning. There's a trailer camp here -- It's cold, almost deserted, this time of year.

I went inside and asked if there was a telephone. I had the feeling that if only I could speak to someone familiar, someone I loved, I could pull myself together... It was in the middle of the morning, I -- I -- I knew mother'd be home. I pictured her tall and white-haired, in her crisp house dress, going about her tasks. It'd be enough, I thought, just to hear the even calmness of her voice.

MRS. WHITNEY: Mrs. Adams' residence.

ADAMS: Hello? Hello, mother?

MRS. WHITNEY: This is Mrs. Adams' residence. Who is it you wish to speak to, please?
ADAMS: Wha--? Who's this?

MRS. WHITNEY: This is Mrs. Whitney.

ADAMS: Mrs. Whitney? I - I don't know any Mrs. Whitney. Is this 748-9970?

MRS. WHITNEY: Yes.

ADAMS: W-w-where's my mother? Where's Mrs. Adams?

MRS. WHITNEY: Mrs. Adams is not at home. She's still in the hospital.

ADAMS: The hospital?

MRS. WHITNEY: Yes. Who is this calling, please? Is this a member of the family?

ADAMS: What's she in the hospital for?

MRS. WHITNEY: She's been resting for five days. A nervous breakdown. Who is this calling?

ADAMS: Nervous breakdown?! My mother doesn't have a ner--

MRS. WHITNEY: It's all taken place since the death of her oldest son, Ronald.

ADAMS: Death of her - oldest son, Ronald? Hey! What's this? What number is this?

MRS. WHITNEY: This is 748-9970. It's all been very sudden. He was killed six days ago - in an automobile accident on the Brooklyn Bridge.

ADAMS: And so - I'm sitting here in this deserted trailer camp in - Gallup, New Mexico. And so I'm trying to think. Trying to get hold of myself. Otherwise, otherwise, I - I'm going to go crazy.

Outside, it's night. The vast, soulless night of New Mexico. A million stars are in the sky. Ahead of me stretch a thousand miles of empty mesa -- and mountains, prairies, desert. Somewhere among them, he's waiting for me.

Somewhere. Somewhere I will know who he is - and who I am.

MUSIC: RUMBLES OMINOUSLY TO A FINISH
THE 9 BILLION NAMES OF GOD

by Arthur C Clarke

This is a slightly unusual request,” said Dr. Wagner, with what he hoped was commendable restraint. “As far as I know, it’s the first time anyone’s been asked to supply a Tibetan monastery with an Automatic Sequence Computer. I don’t wish to be inquisitive, but I should hardly have thought that your — ah — establishment had much use for such a machine. Could you explain just what you intend to do with it?”

“Gladly,” replied the lama, readjusting his silk robes and carefully putting away the slide rule he had been using for currency conversions. “Your Mark

V Computer can carry out any routine mathematical operation involving up to ten digits. However, for our work we are interested in letters, not numbers. As we wish you to modify the output circuits, the machine will be printing words, not columns of figures.”

“I don’t quite understand....”

“This is a project on which we have been working for the last three centuries — since the lamasery was founded, in fact. It is somewhat alien to your way of thought, so I hope you will listen with an open mind while I explain it.”

“Naturally.”

“It is really quite simple. We have been compiling a list which shall contain all the possible names of God.”

“’

We have been compiling a list which shall contain all the possible names of God

“I beg your pardon?”

“We have reason to believe,” continued the lama imperturbably, “that all such names can be written with not more than nine letters in an alphabet we have devised.”

“And you have been doing this for three centuries!”

“Yes: we expected it would take us about fifteen thousand years to
complete the task."

"Oh," Dr. Wagner looked a little dazed. "Now I see why you wanted to hire one of our machines. But exactly what is the purpose of this project?"

The lama hesitated for a fraction of a second, and Wagner wondered if he had offended him. If so, there was no trace of annoyance in the reply.

"Call it ritual, if you like, but it's a fundamental part of our belief. All the many names of the Supreme Being — God, Jehovah, Allah, and so on — they are only man-made labels. There is a philosophical problem of some difficulty here, which I do not propose to discuss, but somewhere among all the possible combinations of letters that can occur are what one may call the real names of God. By systematic permutation of letters, we have been trying to list them all."

"I see. You've been starting at AAAAAA... and working up to ZZZZZZZZ..."

"Exactly — though we use a special alphabet of our own. Modifying the electromatic typewriters to deal with this is, of course, trivial. A rather more interesting problem is that of devising suitable circuits to eliminate ridiculous combinations. For example, no letter must occur more than three times in succession."

"Three? Surely you mean two."

"Three is correct: I am afraid it would take too long to explain why, even if you understood our language."

"I'm sure it would," said Wagner hastily. "Go on."

"Luckily, it will be a simple matter to adapt your Automatic Sequence Computer for this work, since once it has been programmed properly it will permute each letter in turn and print the result. What would have taken us fifteen thousand years it will be able to do in a hundred days."

Dr. Wagner was scarcely conscious of the faint sounds from the Manhattan streets far below. He was in a different world, a world of natural, not man-made, mountains. High up in their remote aeries these monks had been patiently at work, generation after generation, compiling their lists of meaningless words. Was there any limit to the follies of mankind? Still, he must give no hint of his inner thoughts. The customer was always right...

"There's no doubt," replied the doctor, "that we can modify the Mark V to print lists of this nature. I'm much more worried about the problem of installation and maintenance. Getting out to Tibet, in these days, is not going to be easy."

"We can arrange that. The components are small enough to travel by air — that is one reason why we chose your machine. If you can get them to India, we will provide transport from there."

"And you want to hire two of our engineers?"

"Yes, for the three months that the project should occupy."

"I've no doubt that Personnel can manage that." Dr. Wagner scribbled a note on his desk pad. "There are just two other points —"

Before he could finish the sentence the lama had produced a small slip of paper.

"This is my certified credit balance at the Asiatic Bank."

"Thank you. It appears to be — ah — adequate. The second matter is so trivial that I hesitate to mention it — but it's surprising how often the obvious gets overlooked. What source of electrical energy have you?"

"A diesel generator providing fifty kilowatts at a hundred and ten volts. It was installed about five years ago and is quite reliable. It's made life at the lamasery much more comfortable, but of course it was really installed to provide power for the motors driving the prayer wheels."

"Of course," echoed Dr. Wagner. "I should have thought of that."

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The view from the parapet was vertiginous, but in time one gets used to anything. After three months, George Hanley was not impressed by the two-thousand-foot swoop into the abyss or the remote checkerboard of fields in the valley below. He was leaning against the wind-smoothed stones and staring morosely at the distant mountains whose names he
had never bothered to discover.

This, thought George, was the craziest thing that had ever happened to him. “Project Shangri-La,” some wit back at the labs had christened it. For weeks now the Mark V had been churning out acres of sheets covered with gibberish. Patiently, inexorably, the computer had been rearranging letters in all their possible combinations, exhausting each class before going on to the next. As the sheets had emerged from the electromatic typewriters, the monks had carefully cut them up and pasted them into enormous books.

In another week, heaven be praised, they would have finished. Just what obscure calculations had convinced the monks that they needn't bother to go on to words of ten, twenty, or a hundred letters, George didn't know. One of his recurring nightmares was that there would be some change of plan, and that the high lama (whom they'd naturally called Sam Jaffe, though he didn't look a bit like him) would suddenly announce that the project would be extended to approximately A.D. 2060. They were quite capable of it.

George heard the heavy wooden door slam in the wind as Chuck came out onto the parapet beside him. As usual, Chuck was smoking one of the cigars that made him so popular with the monks — who, it seemed, were quite willing to embrace all the minor and most of the major pleasures of life. That was one thing in their favor: they might be crazy, but they weren't bluenoses. Those frequent trips they took down to the village, for instance...

“Listen, George,” said Chuck urgently. “I've learned something that means trouble.”

“What's wrong? Isn't the machine behaving?” That was the worst contingency George could imagine. It might delay his return, and nothing could be more horrible. The way he felt now, even the sight of a TV commercial would seem like manna from heaven. At least it would be some link with home.

“No — it's nothing like that.” Chuck settled himself on the parapet, which was unusual because normally he was scared of the drop. “I've just found what all this is about.”

“What d'ya mean? I thought we knew.”

“Sure — we know what the monks are trying to do. But we didn't know why. It's the craziest thing—”

“Tell me something new,” growled George.

“— but old Sam's just come clean with me. You know the way he drops in every afternoon to watch the sheets roll out. Well, this time he seemed rather excited, or at least as near as he'll ever get to it. When I told him that we were on the last cycle he asked me, in that cute English accent of his, if I'd ever wondered what they were trying to do. I said, 'Sure' — and he told me.”

“Go on: I'll buy it.”

“Well, they believe that when they have listed all His names — and they reckon that there are about nine billion of them — God's purpose will be achieved. The human race will have finished what it was created to do, and there won't be any point in carrying on. Indeed, the very idea is something like blasphemy.”

“Then what do they expect us to do? Commit suicide?”

“There's no need for that. When the list's completed, God steps in and simply winds things up... bingo!”

“Oh, I get it. When we finish our job, it will be the end of the world.”

Chuck gave a nervous little laugh.

“That's just what I said to Sam. And do you know what happened? He looked at me in a very queer way, like I'd been stupid in class, and said, 'It's nothing as trivial as that.'”

George thought this over a moment.

“That's what I call taking the Wide View,” he said presently. “But what d'you suppose we should do about it? I don't see that it makes the slightest difference to us. After all, we already knew that they were crazy.”

“Yes — but don't you see what may happen? When the list's complete and the Last Trump doesn't blow — or whatever it is they expect — we may get the blame. It's our machine they've been using. I don't like the situation one little bit.”

“I see,” said George slowly. “You've got a point there. But this sort of thing's happened before, you know. When I was a kid down in Louisiana we had a crackpot preacher who once said...”
the world was going to end next Sunday. Hundreds of people
believed him — even sold their homes. Yet when nothing
happened, they didn’t turn nasty, as you’d expect. They just
decided that he’d made a mistake in his calculations and went
right on believing. I guess some of them still do.”

“Well, this isn’t Louisiana, in case you hadn’t noticed. There
are just two of us and hundreds of these monks. I like them,
and I’ll be sorry for old Sam when his lifework backfires on
him. But all the same, I wish I was somewhere else.”

“I’ve been wishing that for weeks. But there’s nothing we can
do until the contract’s finished and the transport arrives to
fly us out.

“Of course,” said Chuck thoughtfully, “we could always try a
bit of sabotage.”

“Like hell we could! That would make things worse.”

“Not the way I meant. Look at it like this. The machine will
finish its run four days from now, on the present twenty-
hours-a-day basis. The transport calls in a week. O.K. — then
all we need to do is to find something that needs replacing
during one of the overhaul periods — something that will
hold up the works for a couple of days. We’ll fix it, of course,
but not too quickly. If we time matters properly, we can be
down at the airfield when the last name pops out of the
register. They won’t be able to catch us then.”

“I don’t like it,” said George. “It will be the first time I ever
walked out on a job. Besides, it would make them suspicious.
No, I’ll sit tight and take what comes.”

---

“I still don’t like it,” he said, seven days later, as the tough
little mountain ponies carried them down the winding road.
“And don’t you think I’m running away because I’m afraid. I’m
just sorry for those poor old guys up there, and I don’t want
to be around when they find what suckers they’ve been.
Wonder how Sam will take it?” “It’s funny,” replied Chuck,
“but when I said good-bye I got the idea he knew we were
walking out on him — and that he didn’t care because he
knew the machine was running smoothly and that the job
would soon be finished. After that — well, of course, for him
there just isn’t any After That....”

George turned in his saddle and stared back up the mountain
road. This was the last place from which one could get a clear
view of the lamasery. The squat, angular buildings were
silhouetted against the afterglow of the sunset: here and
there, lights gleamed like portholes in the side of an ocean
liner. Electric lights, of course, sharing the same circuit as the
Mark V. How much longer would they share it? wondered
George. Would the monks smash up the computer in their
rage and disappointment? Or would they just sit down quietly
and begin their calculations all over again?

He knew exactly what was happening up on the mountain at
this very moment. The high lama and his assistants would be
sitting in their silk robes, inspecting the sheets as the junior
monks carried them away from the typewriters and pasted
them into the great volumes. No one would be saying
anything. The only sound would be the incessant patter, the
never-ending rainstorm of the keys hitting the paper, for the
Mark V itself was utterly silent as it flashed through its
thousands of calculations a second. Three months of this,
thought George, was enough to start anyone climbing up the
wall.

“There she is!” called Chuck, pointing down into the valley.
“Ain’t she beautiful!”

She certainly was, thought George. The battered old DC3 lay
at the end of the runway like a tiny silver cross. In two hours
she would be bearing them away to freedom and sanity. It
was a thought worth savoring like a fine liqueur. George let it
roll round his mind as the pony trudged patiently down the
slope.
The swift night of the high Himalayas was now almost upon
them. Fortunately, the road was very good, as roads went in
that region, and they were both carrying torches. There was
not the slightest danger, only a certain discomfort from the
bitter cold. The sky overhead was perfectly clear, and ablaze
with the familiar, friendly stars. At least there would be no
risk, thought George, of the pilot being unable to take off
because of weather conditions. That had been his only
remaining worry.

He began to sing, but gave it up after a while. This vast arena
of mountains, gleaming like whitely hooded ghosts on every
side, did not encourage such ebullience. Presently George
glanced at his watch.

“Should be there in an hour,” he called back over his shoulder
to Chuck. Then he added, in an afterthought: “Wonder if the computer's finished its run. It was due about now.”

Chuck didn't reply, so George swung round in his saddle. He could just see Chuck's face, a white oval turned toward the sky.

“Look,” whispered Chuck, and George lifted his eyes to heaven. (There is always a last time for everything.)

Overhead, without any fuss, the stars were going out.