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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.



"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."

“

*What was it
you started
telling me the
other day about
a monkey's
paw?*

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 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

done, but it gave me a shock all the same."

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 monkey'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 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.

“

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

Rainsford sprang up and moved quickly to the rail of the ship, mystified. He strained his eyes in the direction from which the shots had come, but it was like trying to see through a blanket. He leapt upon the rail to get greater elevation but he lost his balance and suddenly he found the blood-warm waters of the Caribbean Sea closing over his head.



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 a 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.

"And if they win?"

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."

"Ah, 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.

"I'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.



THE TELL TALE HEART

by Edgar Allan Poe

True! — nervous — very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses — not destroyed — not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily — how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture — a pale blue

eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees — very gradually — I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded — with what caution — with what foresight — with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it — oh, so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly — very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep.

“

I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him.

It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! — would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously — oh, so cautiously — cautiously (for the hinges creaked) — I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye.



And this I did for seven long nights — every night just at midnight — but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I felt the extent of my own powers — of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back — but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers,) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out — “Who’s there?”

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening; — just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief — oh, no! — it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself — “It is nothing but the wind in the chimney — it is only a mouse crossing the floor,” or “it is merely a

cricket which has made a single chirp.” Yes, he has been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel — although he neither saw nor heard — to feel the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little — a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it — you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily — until, at length a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell upon the vulture eye.

It was open — wide, wide open — and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness — all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And now have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over acuteness of the senses? — now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! — do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me — the sound would be heard by a neighbor! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once — once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled

sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye — not even his — could have detected any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash out — no stain of any kind — no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all — ha! ha!

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock — still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, — for what had I now to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled, — for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search — search well. I led them, at length, to his chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct: — it continued

and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling; but it continued and gained definitiveness — until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

No doubt I now grew very pale; — but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased — and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound — much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath — and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly — more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men — but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what could I do? I foamed — I raved — I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder — louder — louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! — no, no! They heard! — they suspected! — they knew! — they were making a mockery of my horror! — this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! — and now — again! — hark! louder! louder! louder! louder! —

“Villains!” I shrieked, “dissemble no more! I admit the deed! — tear up the planks! — here, here! — it is the beating of his hideous heart!”



THE LITTLE ROOM

by Madeline Yale Wynne

"How would it do for a smoking-room?"

'Just the very place! only, you know, Roger, you must not think of smoking in the house. I am almost afraid that having just a plain, common man around, let alone a smoking man, will upset Aunt Hannah. She is New England—Vermont New England—boiled down.'

'You leave Aunt Hannah to me; I'll find her tender side. I'm going to ask her about the old sea-captain and the yellow calico.'

'Not yellow calico—blue chintz.'

'Well, yellow *shell* then.'

'No, no! don't mix it up so; you won't know yourself what to expect, and

that's half the fun.'

'Now you tell me again exactly what to expect; to tell the truth, I didn't half hear about it the other day; I was wool-gathering. It was something queer that happened when you were a child, wasn't it?'

'Something that began to happen long before that, and kept happening, and may happen again; but I hope not.'

'What was it?'

'I wonder if the other people in the car can hear us?'

'I fancy not; we don't hear them—not consecutively, at least.'

'Well, mother was born in Vermont, you know; she was the only child by a second marriage. Aunt Hannah and Aunt Maria are only half-aunts to me, you know.'

'I hope they are half as nice as you are.'

“

*Something that
began to happen
long before that,
and kept
happening, and
may happen
again.*

'Roger, be still; they certainly will hear us.'

'Well, don't you want them to know we are married?'

'Yes, but not just married. There's all the difference in the world.'

'You are afraid we look too happy!'



'No; only I want my happiness all to myself.'

'Well, the little room?'

'My aunts brought mother up; they were nearly twenty years older than she. I might say Hiram and they brought her up. You see, Hiram was bound out to my grandfather when he was a boy, and when grandfather died Hiram said he "s'posed he went with the farm, 'long o' the critters," and he has been there ever since. He was my mother's only refuge from the decorum of my aunts. They are simply workers. They make me think of the Maine woman who wanted her epitaph to be: "She was a *hard* working woman."

'They must be almost beyond their working-days. How old are they?'

'Seventy, or thereabouts; but they will die standing; or, at least, on a Saturday night, after all the house-work is done up. They were rather strict with mother, and I think she had a lonely childhood. The house is almost a mile away from any neighbors, and off on top of what they call Stony Hill. It is bleak enough up there, even in summer.

'When mamma was about ten years old they sent her to cousins in Brooklyn, who had children of their own, and knew more about bringing them up. She staid there till she was married; she didn't go to Vermont in all that time, and of course hadn't seen her sisters, for they never would leave home for a day. They couldn't even be induced to go to Brooklyn to her wedding, so she and father took their wedding trip up there.'

'And that's why we are going up there on our own?'

'Don't, Roger; you have no idea how loud you speak.'

'You never say so except when I am going to say that one little word.'

'Well, don't say it, then, or say it very, very quietly.'

'Well, what was the queer thing?'

'When they got to the house, mother wanted to take father right off into the little room; she had been telling him about it, just as I am going to tell you, and she had said that of all the rooms, that one was the only one that seemed pleasant to

her. She described the furniture and the books and paper and everything, and said it was on the north side, between the front and back room. Well, when they went to look for it, there was no little room there; there was only a shallow china-closet. She asked her sisters when the house had been altered and a closet made of the room that used to be there. They both said the house was exactly as it had been built—that they had never made any changes, except to tear down the old wood-shed and build a smaller one.

'Father and mother laughed a good deal over it, and when anything was lost they would always say it must be in the little room, and any exaggerated statement was called "little-roomy." When I was a child I thought that was a regular English phrase, I heard it so often.

'Well, they talked it over, and finally they concluded that my mother had been a very imaginative sort of a child, and had read in some book about such a little room, or perhaps even dreamed it, and then had "made believe," as children do, till she herself had really thought the room was there.'

'Why, of course, that might easily happen.'

'Yes, but you haven't heard the queer part yet; you wait and see if you can explain the rest as easily.

'They staid at the farm two weeks, and then went to New York to live. When I was eight years old my father was killed in the war, and mother was broken-hearted. She never was quite strong afterwards, and that summer we decided to go up to the farm for three months.

'I was a restless sort of a child, and the journey seemed very long to me; and finally, to pass the time, mamma told me the story of the little room, and how it was all in her own imagination, and how there really was only a china-closet there.

'She told it with all the particulars; and even to me, who knew beforehand that the room wasn't there, it seemed just as real as could be. She said it was on the north side, between the front and back rooms; that it was very small, and they sometimes called it an entry. There was a door also that opened out-of-doors, and that one was painted green, and was cut in the middle like the old Dutch doors, so that it could be used for a window by opening the top part only. Directly opposite the door was a lounge or couch; it was

covered with blue chintz—India chintz—some that had been brought over by an old Salem sea-captain as a “venture.” He had given it to Hannah when she was a young girl. She was sent to Salem for two years to school. Grandfather originally came from Salem.’

‘I thought there wasn’t any room or chintz.’

‘*That is just it.* They had decided that mother had imagined it all, and yet you see how exactly everything was painted in her mind, for she had even remembered that Hiram had told her that Hannah could have married the sea-captain if she had wanted to!

‘The India cotton was the regular blue stamped chintz, with the peacock figure on it. The head and body of the bird were in profile, while the tail was full front view behind it. It had seemed to take mamma’s fancy, and she drew it for me on a piece of paper as she talked. Doesn’t it seem strange to you that she could have made all that up, or even dreamed it?

‘At the foot of the lounge were some hanging shelves with some old books on them. All the books were leather-colored except one; that was bright red, and was called the *Ladies’ Album*. It made a bright break between the other thicker books.

‘On the lower shelf was a beautiful pink sea-shell, lying on a mat made of balls of red shaded worsted. This shell was greatly coveted by mother, but she was only allowed to play with it when she had been particularly good. Hiram had shown her how to hold it close to her ear and hear the roar of the sea in it.

‘I know you will like Hiram, Roger; he is quite a character in his way.

‘Mamma said she remembered, or *thought* she remembered, having been sick once, and she had to lie quietly for some days on the lounge; then was the time she had become so familiar with everything in the room, and she had been allowed to have the shell to play with all the time. She had had her toast brought to her in there, with make-believe tea. It was one of her pleasant memories of her childhood; it was the first time she had been of any importance to anybody, even herself.

‘Right at the head of the lounge was a light-stand, as they

called it, and on it was a very brightly polished brass candlestick and a brass tray, with snuffers. That is all I remember of her describing, except that there was a braided rag rug on the floor, and on the wall was a beautiful flowered paper—roses and morning-glories in a wreath on a light blue ground. The same paper was in the front room.’

‘And all this never existed except in her imagination?’

‘She said that when she and father went up there, there wasn’t any little room at all like it anywhere in the house; there was a china-closet where she had believed the room to be.’

‘And your aunts said there had never been any such room.’

‘That is what they said.’

‘Wasn’t there any blue chintz in the house with a peacock figure?’

‘Not a scrap, and Aunt Hannah said there had never been any that she could remember; and Aunt Maria just echoed her—she always does that. You see, Aunt Hannah is an up-and-down New England woman. She looks just like herself; I mean, just like her character. Her joints move up and down or backward and forward in a plain square fashion. I don’t believe she ever leaned on anything in her life, or sat in an easy-chair. But Maria is different; she is rounder and softer; she hasn’t any ideas of her own; she never had any. I don’t believe she would think it right or becoming to have one that differed from Aunt Hannah’s, so what would be the use of having any? She is an echo, that’s all.

‘When mamma and I got there, of course I was all excitement to see the china-closet, and I had a sort of feeling that it would be the little room after all. So I ran ahead and threw open the door, crying, “Come and see the little room.”

‘And Roger,’ said Mrs. Grant, laying her hand in his, ‘there really was a little room there, exactly as mother had remembered it. There was the lounge, the peacock chintz, the green door, the shell, the morning-glory, and rose paper, everything exactly as she had described it to me.’

‘What in the world did the sisters say about it?’

‘Wait a minute and I will tell you. My mother was in the front

hall still talking with Aunt Hannah. She didn't hear me at first, but I ran out there and dragged her through the front room, saying, "The room is here—it is all right."

'It seemed for a minute as if my mother would faint. She clung to me in terror. I can remember now how strained her eyes looked and how pale she was.

'I called out to Aunt Hannah and asked her when they had had the closet taken away and the little room built; for in my excitement I thought that that was what had been done.

"That little room has always been there," said Aunt Hannah, "ever since the house was built."

"But mamma said there wasn't any little room here, only a china-closet, when she was here with papa," said I.

"No, there has never been any china-closet there; it has always been just as it is now," said Aunt Hannah.

'Then mother spoke; her voice sounded weak and far off. She said, slowly, and with an effort, "Maria, don't you remember that you told me that there had never been any little room here? and Hannah said so too, and then I said I must have dreamed it?"

"No, I don't remember anything of the kind," said Maria, without the slightest emotion. "I don't remember you ever said anything about any china-closet. The house has never been altered; you used to play in this room when you were a child, don't you remember?"

"I know it," said mother, in that queer slow voice that made me feel frightened. "Hannah, don't you remember my finding the china-closet here, with the gilt-edged china on the shelves, and then you said that the china-closet had always been here?"

"No," said Hannah, pleasantly but unemotionally—"no, I don't think you ever asked me about any china-closet, and we haven't any gilt-edged china that I know of."

'And that was the strangest thing about it. We never could make them remember that there had ever been any question about it. You would think they could remember how surprised mother had been before, unless she had imagined the whole thing. Oh, it was so queer! They were always

pleasant about it, but they didn't seem to feel any interest or curiosity. It was always this answer: "The house is just as it was built; there have never been any changes, so far as we know."

'And my mother was in an agony of perplexity. How cold their gray eyes looked to me! There was no reading anything in them. It just seemed to break my mother down, this queer thing. Many times that summer, in the middle of the night, I have seen her get up and take a candle and creep softly down-stairs. I could hear the steps creak under her weight. Then she would go through the front room and peer into the darkness, holding her thin hand between the candle and her eyes. She seemed to think the little room might vanish. Then she would come back to bed and toss about all night, or lie still and shiver; it used to frighten me.

'She grew pale and thin, and she had a little cough; then she did not like to be left alone. Sometimes she would make errands in order to send me to the little room for something—a book, or her fan, or her handkerchief; but she would never sit there or let me stay in there long, and sometimes she wouldn't let me go in there for days together. Oh, it was pitiful!

'Well, don't talk any more about it, Margaret, if it makes you feel so,' said Mr. Grant.

'Oh yes, I want you to know all about it, and there isn't much more—no more about the room.

'Mother never got well, and she died that autumn. She used often to sigh, and say, with a wan little laugh, "There is one thing I am glad of, Margaret: your father knows now all about the little room." I think she was afraid I distrusted her. Of course, in a child's way, I thought there was something queer about it, but I did not brood over it. I was too young then, and took it as a part of her illness. But, Roger, do you know, it really did affect me. I almost hate to go there after talking about it; I somehow feel as if it might, you know, be a china-closet again.'

'That's an absurd idea.'

'I know it; of course it can't be. I saw the room, and there isn't any china-closet there, and no gilt-edged china in the house, either.'

And then she whispered: 'But, Roger, you may hold my hand as you do now, if you will, when we go to look for the little room.'

'And you won't mind Aunt Hannah's gray eyes?'

'I won't mind anything.'

It was dusk when Mr. and Mrs. Grant went into the gate under the two old Lombardy poplars and walked up the narrow path to the door, where they were met by the two aunts.

Hannah gave Mrs. Grant a frigid but not unfriendly kiss; and Maria seemed for a moment to tremble on the verge of an emotion, but she glanced at Hannah, and then gave her greeting in exactly the same repressed and non-committal way.

Supper was waiting for them. On the table was the gilt-edged china. Mrs. Grant didn't notice it immediately, till she saw her husband smiling at her over his teacup; then she felt fidgety, and couldn't eat. She was nervous, and kept wondering what was behind her, whether it would be a little room or a closet.

After supper she offered to help about the dishes, but, mercy! she might as well have offered to help bring the seasons round; Maria and Hannah couldn't be helped. So she and her husband went to find the little room, or closet, or whatever was to be there.

Aunt Maria followed them, carrying the lamp, which she set down, and then went back to the dish-washing.

Margaret looked at her husband. He kissed her, for she seemed troubled; and then, hand in hand, they opened the door. It opened into a china-closet. The shelves were neatly draped with scalloped paper; on them was the gilt-edged china, with the dishes missing that had been used at the supper, and which at that moment were being carefully washed and wiped by the two aunts.

Margaret's husband dropped her hand and looked at her. She was trembling a little, and turned to him for help, for some explanation, but in an instant she knew that something was wrong. A cloud had come between them; he was hurt; he was antagonized.

He paused for an appreciable instant, and then said, kindly enough, but in a voice that cut her deeply:

'I am glad this ridiculous thing is ended; don't let us speak of it again.'

'Ended!' said she. 'How ended?' And somehow her voice sounded to her as her mother's voice had when she stood there and questioned her sisters about the little room. She seemed to have to drag her words out. She spoke slowly: 'It seems to me to have only just begun in my case. It was just so with mother when she—'

'I really wish, Margaret, you would let it drop. I don't like to hear you speak of your mother in connection with it. It—' He hesitated, for was not this their wedding-day? 'It doesn't seem quite the thing, quite delicate, you know, to use her name in the matter.'

She saw it all now: he didn't believe her. She felt a chill sense of withering under his glance.

'Come,' he added, 'let us go out, or into the dining-room, somewhere, anywhere, only drop this nonsense.'

He went out; he did not take her hand now—he was vexed, baffled, hurt. Had he not given her his sympathy, his attention, his belief—and his hand?—and she was fooling him. What did it mean?—she so truthful, so free from morbidness—a thing he hated. He walked up and down under the poplars, trying to get into the mood to go and join her in the house.

Margaret heard him go out; then she turned and shook the shelves; she reached her hand behind them and tried to push the boards away; she ran out of the house on to the north side and tried to find in the darkness, with her hands, a door, or some steps leading to one. She tore her dress on the old rose-trees, she fell and rose and stumbled, then she sat down on the ground and tried to think. What could she think—was she dreaming?

She went into the house and out into the kitchen, and begged Aunt Maria to tell her about the little room—what had become of it, when had they built the closet, when had they bought the gilt-edged china?

They went on washing dishes and drying them on the

spotless towels with methodical exactness; and as they worked they said that there had never been any little room, so far as they knew; the china-closet had always been there, and the gilt-edged china had belonged to their mother, it had always been in the house.

‘No, I don’t remember that your mother ever asked about any little room,’ said Hannah. ‘She didn’t seem very well that summer, but she never asked about any changes in the house; there hadn’t ever been any changes.’

There it was again: not a sign of interest, curiosity, or annoyance, not a spark of memory.

She went out to Hiram. He was telling Mr. Grant about the farm. She had meant to ask him about the room, but her lips were sealed before her husband.

Months afterwards, when time had lessened the sharpness of their feelings, they learned to speculate reasonably about the phenomenon, which Mr. Grant had accepted as something not to be scoffed away, not to be treated as a poor joke, but to be put aside as something inexplicable on any ordinary theory.

Margaret alone in her heart knew that her mother’s words carried a deeper significance than she had dreamed of at the time. ‘One thing I am glad of, your father knows now,’ and she wondered if Roger or she would ever know.

Five years later they were going to Europe. The packing was done; the children were lying asleep, with their traveling things ready to be slipped on for an early start.

Roger had a foreign appointment. They were not to be back in America for some years. She had meant to go up to say good-by to her aunts; but a mother of three children intends to do a great many things that never get done. One thing she had done that very day, and as she paused for a moment between the writing of two notes that must be posted before she went to bed, she said:

‘Roger, you remember Rita Lash? Well, she and Cousin Nan go up to the Adirondacks every autumn. They are clever girls, and I have entrusted to them something I want done very much.’

‘They are the girls to do it, then, every inch of them.’

‘I know it, and they are going to.’

‘Well?’

‘Why, you see, Roger, that little room—’

‘Oh—’

‘Yes, I was a coward not to go myself, but I didn’t find time, because I hadn’t the courage.’

‘Oh! that was it, was it?’

‘Yes, just that. They are going, and they will write us about it.’

‘Want to bet?’

‘No; I only want to know.’

Rita Lash and Cousin Nan planned to go to Vermont on their way to the Adirondacks. They found they would have three hours between trains, which would give them time to drive up to the Keys farm, and they could still get to the camp that night. But, at the last minute, Rita was prevented from going. Nan had to go to meet the Adirondack party, and she promised to telegraph her when she arrived at the camp. Imagine Rita’s amusement when she received this message: ‘Safely arrived; went to the Keys farm; it is a little room.’

Rita was amused, because she did not in the least think Nan had been there. She thought it was a hoax; but it put it into her mind to carry the joke further by really stopping herself when she went up, as she meant to do the next week.

She did stop over. She introduced herself to the two maiden ladies, who seemed familiar, as they had been described by Mrs. Grant.

They were, if not cordial, at least not disconcerted at her visit, and willingly showed her over the house. As they did not speak of any other stranger’s having been to see them lately, she became confirmed in her belief that Nan had not been there.

In the north room she saw the roses and morning-glory paper on the wall, and also the door that should open into—what?

She asked if she might open it.

‘Certainly,’ said Hannah; and Maria echoed, ‘Certainly.’

She opened it, and found the china-closet. She experienced a certain relief; she at least was not under any spell. Mrs. Grant left it a china-closet; she found it the same. Good.

But she tried to induce the old sisters to remember that there had at various times been certain questions relating to a confusion as to whether the closet had always been a closet. It was no use; their stony eyes gave no sign.

Then she thought of the story of the sea-captain, and said, ‘Miss Keys, did you ever have a lounge covered with India chintz, with a figure of a peacock on it, given to you in Salem by a sea-captain, who brought it from India?’

‘I dun’no’ as I ever did,’ said Hannah. That was all. She thought Maria’s cheeks were a little flushed, but her eyes were like a stone wall.

She went on that night to the Adirondacks. When Nan and she were alone in their room she said, ‘By-the-way, Nan, what did you see at the farm-house? and how did you like Maria and Hannah?’

Nan didn’t mistrust that Rita had been there, and she began excitedly to tell her all about her visit. Rita could almost have believed Nan had been there if she hadn’t known it was not so. She let her go on for some time, enjoying her enthusiasm, and the impressive way in which she described her opening the door and finding the ‘little room.’ Then Rita said: ‘Now, Nan, that is enough fibbing. I went to the farm myself on my way up yesterday, and there is no little room, and there never has been any; it is a china-closet, just as Mrs. Grant saw it last.’

She was pretending to be busy unpacking her trunk, and did not look up for a moment; but as Nan did not say anything, she glanced at her over her shoulder. Nan was actually pale, and it was hard to say whether she was most angry or frightened. There was something of both in her look. And then Rita began to explain how her telegram had put her in the spirit of going up there alone. She hadn’t meant to cut Nan out. She only thought—Then Nan broke in: ‘It isn’t that; I am sure you can’t think it is that. But I went myself, and you did not go; you can’t have been there, for it is a *little room*.’

Oh, what a night they had! They couldn’t sleep. They talked and argued, and then kept still for a while, only to break out again, it was so absurd. They both maintained that they had been there, but both felt sure the other one was either crazy or obstinate beyond reason. They were wretched; it was perfectly ridiculous, two friends at odds over such a thing; but there it was—‘little room,’ ‘china-closet,’—‘china-closet,’ ‘little room.’

The next morning Nan was tacking up some tarlatan at a window to keep the midges out. Rita offered to help her, as she had done for the past ten years. Nan’s ‘No, thanks,’ cut her to the heart.

‘Nan,’ said she, ‘come right down from that step-ladder and pack your satchel. The stage leaves in just twenty minutes. We can catch the afternoon express train, and we will go together to the farm. I am either going there or going home. You better go with me.’

Nan didn’t say a word. She gathered up the hammer and tacks, and was ready to start when the stage came round.

It meant for them thirty miles of staging and six hours of train, besides crossing the lake; but what of that, compared with having a lie lying round loose between them! Europe would have seemed easy to accomplish, if it would settle the question.

At the little junction in Vermont they found a farmer with a wagon full of meal-bags. They asked him if he could not take them up to the old Keys farm and bring them back in time for the return train, due in two hours.

They had planned to call it a sketching trip, so they said, ‘We have been there before, we are artists, and we might find some views worth taking; and we want also to make a short call upon the Misses Keys.’

‘Did ye calculate to paint the old house in the picture?’

They said it was possible they might do so. They wanted to see it, anyway.

‘Waal, I guess you are too late. The house burnt down last night, and everything in it.’



THE STORM

by McKnight Malmar

She inserted her key in the lock and turned the knob. The March wind snatched the door out of her hand and slammed it against the wall. It took strength to close it against the pressure of the gale, and she had no sooner closed it than the rain came in a pounding downpour, beating noisily against the windows as if trying to follow her in. She could not hear the taxi as it started up and went back down the road.

She breathed a sigh of thankfulness at being home again and in time.

In rain like this, the crossroads always were flooded. Half an hour later her cab could not have got through the rising water, and there was no alternative route.

There was no light anywhere in the house. Ben was not home, then. As she turned on the lamp by the sofa she had a sense of anticlimax. All the way

home-she had been visiting her sister-she had seen herself going into a lighted house, to Ben, who would be sitting by the fire with his paper. She had taken delight in picturing his happy surprise at seeing her, home a week earlier than he had expected her. She had known just how his round face would light up, how his eyes would twinkle behind his glasses, how he would catch her by the shoulders and look down into her face to see the changes a month had made in her, and then kiss her resoundingly on both cheeks, like a French general bestowing a decoration. Then she would make coffee and find a piece of cake, and they would sit together by the fire and talk.

But Ben wasn't here. She looked at the clock on the mantel and saw it was nearly ten. Perhaps he had not planned to come home tonight, as he was not expecting her; even before she had left he frequently was in the city all night because business kept him too late to catch the last train. If he

“

*She could hear
the wild lash of
the trees, the
whistle of the
wind around the
corners...*

did not come soon, he would not be able to make it at all.

She did not like the thought. The storm was growing worse. She could hear the wild lash of the trees, the whistle of the wind around the corners of the little house. For the first time she regretted this move to the far suburbs. There had been neighbors at first, a quarter-mile down the road; but they moved



away several months ago, and now their house stood empty.

She had thought nothing of the lonesomeness. It was perfect here--for two. She had taken such pleasure in fixing up her house--her very own house--and caring for it that she had not missed company other than Ben. But now, alone and with the storm trying to batter its way in, she found it frightening to be so far away from other people. There was no one this side of the crossroads; the road that passed the house wandered past farmland into nothingness in the thick woods a mile farther on.

She hung her hat and her coat in the closet and went to stand before the hall mirror to pin up the soft strands of hair that the wind had loosened. She did not really see the pale face with its blunt nose, the slender, almost childish figure in its grown-up black dress, or the big brown eyes that looked back at her.

She fastened the last strands into the pompadour and turned away from the mirror. Her shoulders drooped a little. There was something childlike about her, like a small girl craving protection, something immature and yet appealing, in spite of her plainness. She was thirty-one and had been married for fifteen months. The fact that she had married at all still seemed a miracle to her.

Now she began to walk through the house, turning on lights as she went.

Ben had left it in fairly good order. There was very little trace of an untidy masculine presence; but then, he was a tidy man. She began to realize that the house was cold. Of course, Ben would have lowered the thermostat. He was very careful about things like that. He would not tolerate waste.

No wonder it was cold; the thermostat was set at fifty-eight. She pushed the little needle up to seventy, and the motor in the cellar started so suddenly and noisily that it frightened her for a moment.

She went into the kitchen and made some coffee. While she waited for it to drip she began to prowling around the lower floor. She was curiously restless and could not relax. Yet it was good to be back again among her own things, in her own home. She studied the living-room with fresh eyes. Yes, it was a pleasant room even though it was small. The bright, flowered chintzes on the furniture and at the windows were cheerful and pretty, and the lowboy she had bought three

months ago was just right for the middle of the long wall. But her plants, set so bravely along the window sill, had died. Ben had forgotten to water them, in spite of all her admonitions and now they added to the depression that was beginning to blur out all the pleasure of homecoming.

She returned to the kitchen and poured herself a cup of coffee, wishing that Ben would come home to share it with her. She carried her cup into the living-room and set it on the small, round table beside Ben's special big chair. The furnace was still mumbling busily, sending up heat, but she was colder than ever. She shivered and got an old jacket of Ben's from the closet and wrapped it around her before she sat down.

The wind hammered at the door and the windows, and the air was full of the sound of water, racing in the gutters, pouring from the leaders, thudding on the roof. Listening, she wished for Ben almost feverishly. She never had felt so alone. And he was such a comfort. He had been so good about her going for this long visit, made because her sister was ill. He had seen to everything and had put her on the train with her arms loaded with books and candy and fruit. She knew those farewell gifts had meant a lot to him--he didn't spend money easily. To be quite honest, he was a little close.

But he was a good husband. She sighed unconsciously, not knowing it was because of youth and romance missed. She repeated it to herself, firmly, as she sipped her coffee. He was a good husband. Suppose he was ten years older than she, and a little set in his ways; a little--perhaps--dictatorial at times, and moody. He had given her what she thought she wanted, security and a home of her own; if security were not enough, she could not blame him for it.

Her eye caught a shred of white protruding under a magazine on the table beside her. She put out a hand toward it, yet her fingers were almost reluctant to grasp it. She pulled it out nevertheless and saw that it was, as she had known instinctively, another of the white envelopes. It was empty, and it bore, as usual, the neat, typewritten address: Benj. T. Willsom, Esq., Wildwood Road, Fairport, Conn. The postmark was New York City. It never varied.

She felt the familiar constriction about the heart as she held it in her hands. What these envelopes contained she never had known. What she did know was their effect on Ben. After receiving one--one came every month or two--he was

irritable, at times almost ugly. Their peaceful life together fell apart. At first she had questioned him, had striven to soothe and comfort him; but she soon had learned that this only made him angry, and of late she had avoided any mention of them. For a week after one came they shared the same room and the same table like two strangers, in a silence that was morose on his part and a little frightened on hers.

This one was postmarked three days before. If Ben got home tonight he would probably be cross, and the storm would not help his mood. Just the same she wished he would come.

She tore the envelope into tiny pieces and tossed them into the fireplace.

The wind shook the house in its giant grip, and a branch crashed on the roof. As she straightened, a movement at the window caught her eye.

She froze there, not breathing, still half-bent toward the cold fireplace, her hand still extended. The glimmer of white at the window behind the sheeting blur of rain had been--she was sure of it--a human face. There had been eyes. She was certain there had been eyes staring in at her.

The wind's shout took on a personal, threatening note. She was rigid for a long time, never taking her eyes from the window. But nothing moved there now except the water on the windowpane; beyond it there was blackness, and that was all. The only sounds were the thrashing of the trees, the roar of water, and the ominous howl of the wind.

She began to breathe again, at last found courage to turn out the light and go to the window. The darkness was a wall, impenetrable and secret, and the blackness within the house made the storm close in, as if it were a pack of wolves besieging the house. She hastened to put on the light again.

She must have imagined those staring eyes. Nobody could be out on a night like this. Nobody. Yet she found herself terribly shaken.

If only Ben would come home. If only she were not so alone.

She shivered and pulled Ben's coat tighter about her and told herself she was becoming a morbid fool. Nevertheless, she found the aloneness intolerable. Her ears strained to hear prowling footsteps outside the windows. She became convinced that she did hear them, slow and heavy.

Perhaps Ben could be reached at the hotel where he sometimes stayed. She no longer cared whether her homecoming was a surprise to him. She wanted to hear his voice. She went to the telephone and lifted the receiver.

The line was quite dead.

The wires were down, of course.

She fought panic. The face at the window had been an illusion, a trick of the light reflected on the sluicing pane; and the sound of footsteps was an illusion, too. Actual ones would be inaudible in the noise made by the wild storm. Nobody would be out tonight. Nothing threatened her, really. The storm was held at bay beyond these walls, and in the morning the sun would shine again.

The thing to do was to make herself as comfortable as possible and settle down with a book. There was no use going to bed--she couldn't possibly sleep. She would only lie there wide awake and think of that face at the window, hear the footsteps.

She would get some wood for a fire in the fireplace. She hesitated at the top of the cellar stairs. The light, as she switched it on, seemed insufficient; the concrete wall at the foot of the stairs was dank with moisture and somehow gruesome. And wind was chilling her ankles. Rain was beating in through the outside door to the cellar, because that door was standing open.

The inner bolt sometimes did not hold, she knew very well. If it had not been carefully closed, the wind could have loosened it. Yet the open door increased her panic. It seemed to argue the presence of something less impersonal than the gale. It took her a long minute to nerve herself to go down the steps and reach out into the darkness for the doorknob.

In just that instant she was soaked; but her darting eyes could find nothing outdoors but the black, wavering shapes of the maples at the side of the house. The wind helped her and slammed the door resoundingly. She jammed the bolt home with all her strength and then tested it to make sure it would hold. She almost sobbed with the relief of knowing it to be firm against any intruder.

She stood with her wet clothes clinging to her while the thought came that turned her bones to water. Suppose--suppose the face at the window had been real, after all.

Suppose its owner had found shelter in the only shelter to be had within a quarter-mile--this cellar.

She almost flew up the stairs again, but then she took herself firmly in hand. She must not let herself go. There had been many storms before; just because she was alone in this one, she must not let morbid fancy run away with her. But she could not throw off the reasonless fear that oppressed her, although she forced it back a little. She began to hear again the tread of the prowler outside the house. Although she knew it to be imagination, it was fearfully real--the crunch of feet on gravel, slow, persistent, heavy, like the patrol of a sentinel.

She had only to get an armful of wood. Then she could have a fire, she could have light and warmth and comfort. She would forget these terrors.

The cellar smelled of dust and old moisture. The beams were fuzzed with cobwebs. There was only one light, a dim one in the corner. A little rivulet was running darkly down the wall and already had formed a foot-square pool on the floor.

The woodpile was in the far corner away from the light. She stopped and peered around. Nobody could hide here. The cellar was too open, the supporting stanchions too slender to hide a man.

The oil burner went off with a sharp click. Its mutter, she suddenly realized, had had something human and companionable about it. Nothing was down here with her now but the snarl of the storm.

She almost ran to the woodpile. Then something made her pause and turn before she bent to gather the logs.

What was it? Not a noise. Something she had seen as she hurried across that dusty floor. Something odd.

She searched with her eyes. It was a spark of light she had seen, where no spark should be.

An inexplicable dread clutched at her heart. Her eyes widened, round and dark as a frightened deer's. Her old trunk that stood against the wall was open just a crack; from the crack came this tiny pinpoint of reflected light to prick the cellar's gloom.

She went toward it like a woman hypnotized. It was only one

more insignificant thing, like the envelope on the table, the vision of the face at the window, the open door. There was no reason for her to feel smothered in terror.

Yet she was sure she had not only closed, but clamped the lid on the trunk; she was sure because she kept two or three old coats in it, wrapped in newspapers and tightly shut away from moths.

Now the lid was raised perhaps an inch. And the twinkle of light was still there.

She threw back the lid.

For a long moment she stood looking down into the trunk, while each detail of its contents imprinted itself on her brain like an image on a film. Each tiny detail was indelibly clear and never to be forgotten.

She could not have stirred a muscle in that moment. Horror was a black cloak thrown around her, stopping her breath, hobbling her limbs.

Then her face dissolved into formlessness. She slammed down the lid and ran up the stairs like a mad thing. She was breathing again, in deep, sobbing breaths that tore at her lungs. She shut the door at the top of the stairs with a crash that shook the house; then she turned the key. Gasping she clutched one of the sturdy maple chairs by the kitchen table and wedged it under the knob with hands she could barely control.

The wind rook the house in its teeth and shook it as a dog shakes a rat.

Her first impulse was to get out of the house. But in the time it took to get to the front door she remembered the face at the window.

Perhaps she had not imagined it. Perhaps it was the face of a murderer--a murderer waiting for her out there in the storm; ready to spring on her out of the dark.

She fell into the big chair, her huddled body shaken by great tremors.

She could not stay here--not with that thing in her trunk. Yet she dared not leave. Her whole being cried out for Ben. He would know what to do. She closed her eyes, opened them

again, rubbed them hard. The picture still burned into her brain as if it had been etched with acid. Her hair, loosened, fell in soft straight wisps about her forehead, and her mouth was slack with terror.

Her old trunk had held the curled-up body of a woman.

She had not seen the face; the head had been tucked down into the hollow of the shoulder, and a shower of fair hair had fallen over it. The woman had worn a red dress. One hand had rested near the edge of the trunk, and on its third finger there had been a man's ring, a signet bearing the raised figure of a rampant lion with a small diamond between its paws. It had been the diamond that caught the light. The little bulb in the corner of the cellar had picked out this ring from the semidarkness and made it stand out like a beacon.

She never would be able to forget it. Never forget how the woman looked: the pale, luminous flesh of her arms; her doubled-up knees against the side of the trunk, with their silken covering shining softly in the gloom; the strands of hair that covered her face. . .

Shudders continued to shake her. She bit her tongue and pressed her hand against her jaw to stop the chattering of her teeth. The salty taste of blood in her mouth steadied her. She tried to force herself to be rational, to plan; yet all the time the knowledge that she was imprisoned with the body of a murdered woman kept beating at her nerves like a flail.

She drew the coat closer about her, trying to dispel the mortal cold that held her. Slowly something beyond the mere fact of murder, of death, began to penetrate her mind. Slowly she realized that beyond this 'fact there would be consequences. That body in the cellar was not an isolated phenomenon; some train of events had led to its being there and would follow its discovery there.

There would be policemen.

At first the thought of policemen was a comforting one; big, brawny men in blue, who would take the thing out of her cellar, take it away so she never need think of it again.

Then she realized it was her cellar--hers and Ben's; and policemen are suspicious and prying. Would they think she killed the woman? Could they be made to believe she never had seen her before?

Or would they think Ben had done it? Would they take the letters in the white envelopes, and Ben's absences on business, and her own visit to her sister, about which Ben was so helpful, and out of them build a double life for him? Would they insist that the woman had been a discarded mistress, who had hounded him with letters until out of desperation he had killed her?

That was a fantastic theory, really; but the police might do that.

They might.

Now a sudden new panic invaded her. The dead woman must be taken out of the cellar, must be hidden. The police must never connect her with this house.

Yet the dead woman was bigger than she herself was; she could never move her.

Her craving for Ben became a frantic need. If only he would come home!

Come home and take that body away, hide it somewhere so the police could not connect it with this house. He was strong enough to do it.

Even with the strength to move the body by herself she would not dare do it, because there was the prowler--real or imaginary--outside the house. Perhaps the cellar door had not been open by chance. Or perhaps it had been, and the murderer, seeing it so welcoming, had seized the opportunity to plant the evidence of his crime upon the Willsoms' innocent shoulders.

She crouched there, shaking. It was as if the jaws of a great trap had closed on her: on one side the storm and the silence of the telephone, on the other the presence of the prowler and of that still, cramped figure in her trunk. She was caught between them, helpless.

As if to accent her helplessness, the wind stepped up its shriek and a tree crashed thunderously out in the road. She heard glass shatter.

Her quivering body stiffened like a drawn bow. Was it the prowler attempting to get in? She forced herself to her feet and made a round of the windows on the first floor and the

one above. All the glass was intact, staunchly resisting the pounding of the rain.

Nothing could have made her go into the cellar to see if anything had happened there.

The voice of the storm drowned out all other sounds, yet she could not rid herself of the fancy that she heard footsteps going round and round the house, that eyes sought an opening and spied upon her.

She pulled the shades down over the shiny black windows. It helped a little to make her feel more secure, more sheltered; but only a very little. She told herself sternly that the crash of glass had been nothing more than a branch blown through a cellar window.

The thought brought her no comfort--just the knowledge that it would not disturb that other woman. Nothing could comfort her now but Ben's plump shoulder and his arms around her and his neat, capable mind planning to remove the dead woman from this house.

A kind of numbness began to come over her, as if her capacity for fear were exhausted. She went back to the chair and curled up in it. She prayed mutely for Ben and for daylight.

The clock said half-past twelve.

She huddled there, not moving and not thinking, not even afraid, only numb for another hour. Then the storm held its breath for a moment, and in the brief space of silence she heard footsteps on the walk--actual footsteps, firm and quick and loud. A key turned in the lock. The door opened and Ben came in.

He was dripping, dirty, and white with exhaustion. But it was Ben. Once she was sure of it she flung herself on him, babbling incoherently of what she had found.

He kissed her lightly on the cheek and took her arms down from around his neck. "Here, here, my dear. You'll get soaked. I'm drenched to the skin." He removed his glasses and handed them to her, and she began to dry them for him. His eyes squinted at the light. "I had to walk in from the crossroads. What a night!" He began to strip off rubbers and coat and shoes. "You'll never know what a difference it made,

finding the place lighted. Lord, but it's good to be home."

She tried again to tell him of the past hours, but again he cut her short.

"Now, wait a minute, my dear. I can see you're bothered about something. Just wait until I get into some dry things; then I'll come down and we'll straighten it out. Suppose you rustle up some coffee and toast. I'm done up--the whole trip out was a nightmare, and I didn't know if I'd ever make it from the crossing. I've been hours."

He did look tired, she thought with concern. Now that he was back, she could wait. The past hours had taken on the quality of a nightmare, horrifying but curiously unreal. With Ben here, so solid and commonplace and cheerful, she began to wonder if the hours were nightmare. She even began to doubt the reality of the woman in the trunk, although she could see her as vividly as ever. Perhaps only the storm was real.

She went to the kitchen and began to make fresh coffee. The chair, still wedged against the kitchen door, was a reminder of her terror. Now that Ben was home it seemed silly, and she put it back in its place by the table.

He came down very soon, before the coffee was ready. How good it was to see him in that old gray bathrobe of his, his hands thrust into its pockets. How normal and wholesome he looked with his round face rubbed pink by a rough towel and his hair standing up in damp little spikes around his bald spot. She was almost shamefaced when she told him of the face at the window, the open door, and finally of the body in the trunk. None of it, she saw quite clearly now, could possibly have happened.

Ben said so, without hesitation. But he came to put an arm around her, "You poor child, The storm scared you to death, and I don't wonder. It's given you the horrors."

She smiled dubiously, "Yes, I'm almost beginning to think so, Now that you're back, it seems so safe. But but you will look in the trunk, Ben? I've got to know. I can see her so plainly, How could I imagine a thing like that?"

He said indulgently, "Of course I'll look, if it will make you feel better, I'll do it now, Then I can have my coffee in peace,"

He went to the cellar door and opened it and snapped on the

light. Her heart began to pound once more, a deafening roar in her ears. The opening of the cellar door opened, again, the whole vista of fear: the body, the police, the suspicions that would cluster about her and Ben, The need to hide this evidence of somebody's crime.

She could not have imagined it; it was incredible that she could have believed, for a minute, that her mind had played such tricks on her, In another moment Ben would know it, too.

She heard the thud as he threw back the lid of the trunk. She clutched at the back of a chair, waiting for his voice. It came in an instant.

She could not believe it. It was as cheerful and reassuring as before, He said, "There's nothing here but a couple of bundles, Come take a look."

Nothing! Her knees were weak as she went down the stairs, down into the cellar again.

It was still musty and damp and draped with cobwebs. The rivulet was still running down the wall, but the pool was larger now. The light was still dim.

It was just as she remembered it except that the wind was whistling through a broken window and rain was splattering in on the bits of shattered glass on the floor. The branch lying across the sill had removed every scrap of glass from the frame and left not a single jagged edge.

Ben was standing by the open trunk, waiting for her, His stocky body was a bulwark, "See," he said, "there's nothing, Just some old clothes of yours, I guess."

She went to stand beside him, Was she losing her mind? Would she, now, see that crushed figure in there, see the red dress and the smooth shining knees, when Ben could not? And the ring with the diamond between the lion's paws?

Her eyes looked, almost reluctantly, into the trunk, "It is empty!"

There were the neat, newspaper-wrapped packages she had put away so carefully, just as she had left them deep in the bottom of the trunk, And nothing else. She must have imagined the body. She was light with the relief

could imagine anything so gruesome in the complete detail with which she had seen the dead woman in the trunk, the thought of the future was terrifying. When might she not have another such hallucination?

The actual, physical danger did not exist, however, and never existed, The threat of the law hanging over Ben had been based on a dream.

"I--dreamed it all, I must have," she admitted, "Yet it was so horribly clear and I wasn't asleep," Her voice broke, "I thought--oh, Ben, I thought--"

"What did you think, my dear?" His voice was odd, not like Ben's at all, It had a cold cunning edge to it.

He stood looking down at her with an immobility that chilled her more than the cold wind that swept in through the broken window. She tried to read his face, but the light from the little bulb was too weak. It left his features shadowed in broad, dark planes that made him look like a stranger, and somehow sinister.

She said, "I--" and faltered, He still did not move, but his voice hardened. "What was it you thought?"

She backed away from him.

He moved, then, It was only to take his hands from his pockets to stretch his arms toward her; but she stood for an instant staring at the thing that left her stricken, with a voiceless scream forming in her throat.

She was never to know whether his arms had been outstretched to take her within their shelter or to clutch at her white neck. For she turned and lied, stumbling up the stairs in a mad panic of escape.

He shouted, "Janet! Janet!" His steps were heavy behind her. He tripped on the bottom step and fell on one knee and cursed.

Terror lent her strength and speed. She could not be mistaken, Although she had seen it only once, she knew that on the little finger of his left hand there had been the same, the unmistakable ring the dead woman had worn.

The blessed wind snatched the front door from her and flung it wide, and she was out in the safe, dark shelter of the storm.



THE KIT-BAG

by Algernon Blackwood

When the words 'Not Guilty' sounded through the crowded courtroom that dark December afternoon, Arthur Wilbraham, the great criminal KC, and leader for the triumphant defence, was represented by his junior; but Johnson, his private secretary, carried the verdict across to his chambers like lightning.

'It's what we expected, I think,' said the barrister, without emotion; 'and, personally, I am glad the case is over.' There was no particular sign of pleasure that his defence of John Turk, the murderer, on a plea of insanity, had been successful, for no doubt he felt, as everybody who had watched the case felt, that no man had ever better deserved the gallows.

'I'm glad too,' said Johnson. He had sat in the court for ten days watching the face of the man who had carried out with callous detail one of the most brutal and cold-blooded murders of recent years.

The counsel glanced up at his secretary. They were more than employer and employed; for family and other reasons, they were friends. 'Ah, I remember; yes,' he said with a kind smile, 'and you want to get away for Christmas? You're going to skate and ski in the Alps, aren't you? If I was your age I'd come with you.' Johnson laughed shortly. He was a young man of twenty-six, with a delicate face like a girl's. 'I can catch the morning boat now,' he said; 'but that's not the reason I'm glad the trial is over. I'm glad it's over because I've seen the last of that man's dreadful face. It positively haunted me. That white skin, with the black hair brushed low over the forehead, is a thing I shall never forget, and the description of the way the dismembered body was crammed and packed with lime into that—' 'Don't dwell on it, my dear fellow,' interrupted the other, looking at him curiously out of his keen eyes, 'don't think about it. Such pictures have a

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*I shall never
forget...the way
the dismembered
body was
crammed and
packed with lime*



trick of coming back when one least wants them.' He paused a moment. 'Now go,' he added presently, 'and enjoy your holiday. I shall want all your energy for my Parliamentary work when you get back. And don't break your neck skiing.' Johnson shook hands and took his leave. At the door he turned suddenly.

'I knew there was something I wanted to ask you,'

he said. 'Would you mind lending me one of your kit-bags? It's too late to get one tonight, and I leave in the morning before the shops are open.'

'Of course; I'll send Henry over with it to your rooms. You shall have it the moment I get home.'

'I promise to take great care of it,' said Johnson gratefully, delighted to think that within thirty hours he would be nearing the brilliant sunshine of the high Alps in winter. Be thought of that criminal court was like an evil dream in his mind.

He dined at his club and went on to Bloomsbury, where he occupied the top floor in one of those old, gaunt houses in which the rooms are large and lofty. The floor below his own was vacant and unfurnished, and below that were other lodgers whom he did not know. It was cheerless, and he looked forward heartily to a change. The night was even more cheerless: it was miserable, and few people were about. A cold, sleety rain was driving down the streets before the keenest east wind he had ever felt. It howled dismally among the big, gloomy houses of the great squares, and when he reached his rooms he heard it whistling and shouting over the world of black roofs beyond his windows.

In the hall he met his landlady, shading a candle from the draughts with her thin hand. 'This come by a man from Mr Wilbrim's, sir.' She pointed to what was evidently the kit-bag, and Johnson thanked her and took it upstairs with him. 'I shall be going abroad in the morning for ten days, Mrs Monks,' he said. 'I'll leave an address for letters.' 'And I hope you'll 'ave a merry Christmas, sir,' she said, in a raucous, wheezy voice that suggested spirits, 'and better weather than this.' 'I hope so too,' replied her lodger, shuddering a little as the wind went roaring down the street outside

When he got upstairs he heard the sleet volleying against the window panes. He put his kettle on to make a cup of hot coffee, and then set about putting a few things in order for his absence. 'And now I must pack—such as my packing is,' he laughed to himself, and set to work at once.

He liked the packing, for it brought the snow mountains so vividly before him, and made him forget the unpleasant scenes of the past ten days. Besides, it was not elaborate in nature. His friend had lent him the very thing—a stout canvas kit-bag, sackshaped, with holes round the neck for the brass

bar and padlock. It was a bit shapeless, true, and not much to look at, but its capacity was unlimited, and there was no need to pack carefully. He shoved in his waterproof coat, his fur cap and gloves, his skates and climbing boots, his sweaters, snow-boots, and earcaps; and then on the top of these he piled his woollen shirts and underwear, his thick socks, puttees, and knickerbockers. The dress suit came next, in case the hotel people dressed for dinner, and then, thinking of the best way to pack his white shirts, he paused a moment to reflect. 'That's the worst of these kitbags,' he mused vaguely, standing in the centre of the sitting-room, where he had come to fetch some string.

It was after ten o'clock. A furious gust of wind rattled the windows as though to hurry him up, and he thought with pity of the poor Londoners whose Christmas would be spent in such a climate, whilst he was skimming over snowy slopes in bright sunshine, and dancing in the evening with rosy-checked girls— Ah! That reminded him; he must put in his dancing pumps and evening socks. He crossed over from his sitting-room to the cupboard on the landing where he kept his linen.

And as he did so he heard someone coming softly up the stairs.

He stood still a moment on the landing to listen. It was Mrs Monks's step, he thought; she must be coming up with the last post. But then the steps ceased suddenly, and he heard no more. They were at least two flights down, and he came to the conclusion they were too heavy to be those of his bibulous landlady. No doubt they belonged to a late lodger who had mistaken his floor. He went into his bedroom and packed his pumps and dress-shirts as best he could.

The kit-bag by this time was two-thirds full, and stood upright on its own base like a sack of flour. For the first time he noticed that it was old and dirty, the canvas faded and worn, and that it had obviously been subjected to rather rough treatment. It was not a very nice bag to have sent him—certainly not a new one, or one that his chief valued. He gave the matter a passing thought, and went on with his packing. Once or twice, however, he caught himself wondering who it could have been wandering down below, for Mrs Monks had not come up with letters, and the floor was empty and unfurnished. From time to time, moreover, he was almost certain he heard a soft tread of someone padding about over the bare boards— cautiously, stealthily, as silently

as possible—and, further, that the sounds had been lately coming distinctly nearer.

For the first time in his life he began to feel a little creepy. Then, as though to emphasize this feeling, an odd thing happened: as he left the bedroom, having, just packed his recalcitrant white shirts, he noticed that the top of the kit-bag lopped over towards him with an extraordinary resemblance to a human face. The canvas fell into a fold like a nose and forehead, and the brass rings for the padlock just filled the position of the eyes. A shadow—or was it a travel stain? For he could not tell exactly—looked like hair. It gave him rather a turn, for it was so absurdly, so outrageously, like the face of John Turk the murderer.

He laughed, and went into the front room, where the light was stronger.

‘That horrid case has got on my mind,’ he thought; ‘I shall be glad of a change of scene and air.’ In the sitting-room, however, he was not pleased to hear again that stealthy tread upon the stairs, and to realize that it was much closer than before, as well as unmistakably real. And this time he got up and went out to see who it could be creeping about on the upper staircase at so late an hour.

But the sound ceased; there was no one visible on the stairs. He went to the floor below, not without trepidation, and turned on the electric light to make sure that no one was hiding in the empty rooms of the unoccupied suite. There was not a stick of furniture large enough to hide a dog. Then he called over the banisters to Mrs Monks, but there was no answer, and his voice echoed down into the dark vault of the house, and was lost in the roar of the gale that howled outside. Everyone was in bed and asleep —everyone except himself and the owner of this soft and stealthy tread.

‘My absurd imagination, I suppose,’ he thought. ‘It must have been the wind after all, although—it seemed so very real and close, I thought.’ He went back to his packing. It was by this time getting on towards midnight. He drank his coffee up and lit another pipe—the last before turning in.

It is difficult to say exactly at what point fear begins, when the causes of that fear are not plainly before the eyes. Impressions gather on the surface of the mind, film by film, as ice gathers upon the surface of still water, but often so lightly that they claim no definite recognition from the

consciousness. Then a point is reached where the accumulated impressions become a definite emotion, and the mind realizes that something has happened. With something of a start, Johnson suddenly recognized that he felt nervous—oddly nervous; also, that for some time past the causes of this feeling had been gathering slowly in his mind, but that he had only just reached the point where he was forced to acknowledge them.

It was a singular and curious malaise that had come over him, and he hardly knew what to make of it. He felt as though he were doing something that was strongly objected to by another person, another person, moreover, who had some right to object. It was a most disturbing and disagreeable feeling, not unlike the persistent promptings of conscience: almost, in fact, as if he were doing something he knew to be wrong. Yet, though he searched vigorously and honestly in his mind, he could nowhere lay his finger upon the secret of this growing uneasiness, and it perplexed him. More, it distressed and frightened him.

‘Pure nerves, I suppose,’ he said aloud with a forced laugh. ‘Mountain air will cure all that! Ah,’ he added, still speaking to himself, ‘and that reminds me —my snow-glasses.’ He was standing by the door of the bedroom during this brief soliloquy, and as he passed quickly towards the sitting-room to fetch them from the cupboard he saw out of the corner of his eye the indistinct outline of a figure standing on the stairs, a few feet from the top. It was someone in a stooping position, with one hand on the banisters, and the face peering up towards the landing. And at the same moment he heard a shuffling footstep. The person who had been creeping about below all this time had at last come up to his own floor. Who in the world could it be? And what in the name of Heaven did he want? Johnson caught his breath sharply and stood stock still. Then, after a few seconds’ hesitation, he found his courage, and turned to investigate.

The stairs, he saw to his utter amazement, were empty; there was no one.

He felt a series of cold shivers run over him, and something about the muscles of his legs gave a little and grew weak. For the space of several minutes he peered steadily into the shadows that congregated about the top of the staircase where he had seen the figure, and then he walked fast—almost ran, in fact— into the light of the front room; but hardly had he passed inside the doorway when he heard

someone come up the stairs behind him with a quick bound and go swiftly into his bedroom. It was a heavy, but at the same time a stealthy footstep—the tread of somebody who did not wish to be seen. And it was at this precise moment that the nervousness he had hitherto experienced leaped the boundary line, and entered the state of fear, almost of acute, unreasoning fear. Before it turned into terror there was a further boundary to cross, and beyond that again lay the region of pure horror. Johnson's position was an unenviable one.

By Jove! That was someone on the stairs, then,' he muttered, his flesh crawling all over; 'and whoever it was has now gone into my bedroom.' His delicate, pale face turned absolutely white, and for some minutes he hardly knew what to think or do. Then he realized intuitively that delay only set a premium upon fear; and he crossed the landing boldly and went straight into the other room, where, a few seconds before, the steps had disappeared.

'Who's there? Is that you, Mrs Monks?' he called aloud, as he went, and heard the first half of his words echo down the empty stairs, while the second half fell dead against the curtains in a room that apparently held no other human figure than his own.

'Who's there?' he called again, in a voice unnecessarily loud and that only just held firm. 'What do you want here?' The curtains swayed very slightly, and, as he saw it, his heart felt as if it almost missed a beat; yet he dashed forward and drew them aside with a rush. A window, streaming with rain, was all that met his gaze. He continued his search, but in vain; the cupboards held nothing but rows of clothes, hanging motionless; and under the bed there was no sign of anyone hiding. He stepped backwards into the middle of the room, and, as he did so, something all but tripped him up. Turning with a sudden spring of alarm he saw—the kit-bag.

'Odd!' he thought. 'That's not where I left it!' A few moments before it had surely been on his right, between the bed and the bath; he did not remember having moved it. It was very curious. What in the world was the matter with everything? Were all his senses gone queer? A terrific gust of wind tore at the windows, dashing the sleet against the glass with the force of small gunshot, and then fled away howling dismally over the waste of Bloomsbury roofs. A sudden vision of the Channel next day rose in his mind and recalled him sharply to realities.

There's no one here at any rate; that's quite clear!' he exclaimed aloud.

Yet at the time he uttered them he knew perfectly well that his words were not true and that he did not believe them himself. He felt exactly as though someone was hiding close about him, watching all his movements, trying to hinder his packing in some way. 'And two of my senses,' he added, keeping up the pretence, 'have played me the most absurd tricks: the steps I heard and the figure I saw were both entirely imaginary.' He went back to the front room, poked the fire into a blaze, and sat down before it to think. What impressed him more than anything else was the fact that the kit-bag was no longer where he had left it. It had been dragged nearer to the door.

What happened afterwards that night happened, of course, to a man already excited by fear, and was perceived by a man that had not the full and proper control, therefore, of the senses. Outwardly, Johnson remained calm and master of himself to the end, pretending to the very last that everything he witnessed had a natural explanation, or was merely delusions of his tired nerves. But inwardly, in his very heart, he knew all along that someone had been hiding downstairs in the empty suite when he came in, that this person had watched his opportunity and then stealthily made his way up to the bedroom, and that all he saw and heard afterwards, from the moving of the kit-bag to—well, to the other things this story has to tell—were caused directly by the presence of this invisible person.

And it was here, just when he most desired to keep his mind and thoughts controlled, that the vivid pictures received day after day upon the mental plates exposed in the courtroom of the Old Bailey, came strongly to light and developed themselves in the dark room of his inner vision.

Unpleasant, haunting memories have a way of coming to life again just when the mind least desires them—in the silent watches of the night, on sleepless pillows, during the lonely hours spent by sick and dying beds.

And so now, in the same way, Johnson saw nothing but the dreadful face of John Turk, the murderer, lowering at him from every corner of his mental field of vision; the white skin, the evil eyes, and the fringe of black hair low over the forehead. All the pictures of those ten days in court crowded back into his mind unbidden, and very vivid.

'This is all rubbish and nerves,' he exclaimed at length, springing with sudden energy from his chair. 'I shall finish my packing and go to bed.'

I'm overwrought, overtired. No doubt, at this rate I shall hear steps and things all night!

But his face was deadly white all the same. He snatched up his field-glasses and walked across to the bedroom, humming a music-hall song as he went—a trifle too loud to be natural; and the instant he crossed the threshold and stood within the room something turned cold about his heart, and he felt that every hair on his head stood up.

The kit-bag lay close in front of him, several feet nearer to the door than he had left it, and just over its crumpled top he saw a head and face slowly sinking down out of sight as though someone were crouching behind it to hide, and at the same moment a sound like a long-drawn sigh was distinctly audible in the still air about him between the gusts of the storm outside.

Johnson had more courage and will-power than the girlish indecision of his face indicated; but at first such a wave of terror came over him that for some seconds he could do nothing but stand and stare. A violent trembling ran down his back and legs, and he was conscious of a foolish, almost a hysterical, impulse to scream aloud. That sigh seemed in his very ear, and the air still quivered with it. It was unmistakably a human sigh.

'Who's there?' he said at length, finding his voice; but thought he meant to speak with loud decision, the tones came out instead in a faint whisper, for he had partly lost the control of his tongue and lips.

He stepped forward, so that he could see all round and over the kit-bag.

Of course there was nothing there, nothing but the faded carpet and the bulgang canvas sides. He put out his hands and threw open the mouth of the sack where it had fallen over, being only three parts full, and then he saw for the first time that round the inside, some six inches from the top, there ran a broad smear of dull crimson. It was an old and faded blood stain. He uttered a scream, and drew back his hands as if they had been burnt. At the same moment the kit-bag gave a faint, but unmistakable, lurch forward towards the door.

Johnson collapsed backwards, searching with his hands for the support of something solid, and the door, being further behind him than he realized, received his weight just in time to prevent his falling, and shut to with a resounding bang. At the same moment the swinging of his left arm accidentally touched the electric switch, and the light in the room went out.

It was an awkward and disagreeable predicament, and if Johnson had not been possessed of real pluck he might have done all manner of foolish things. As it was, however, he pulled himself together, and groped furiously for the little brass knob to turn the light on again. But the rapid closing of the door had set the coats hanging on it a-swinging, and his fingers became entangled in a confusion of sleeves and pockets, so that it was some moments before he found the switch. And in those few moments of bewilderment and terror two things happened that sent him beyond recall over the boundary into the region of genuine horror—he distinctly heard the kit-bag shuffling heavily across the floor in jerks, and close in front of his face sounded once again the sigh of a human being.

In his anguished efforts to find the brass button on the wall he nearly scraped the nails from his fingers, but even then, in those frenzied moments of alarm—so swift and alert are the impressions of a man keyed-up by a vivid emotion—he had time to realize that he dreaded the return of the light, and that it might be better for him to stay hidden in the merciful screen of darkness. It was but the impulse of a moment, however, and before he had time to act upon it he had yielded automatically to the original desire, and the room was flooded again with light.

But the second instinct had been right. It would have been better for him to have stayed in the shelter of the kind darkness. For there, close before him, bending over the half-packed kit-bag, clear as life in the merciless glare of the electric light, stood the figure of John Turk, the murderer. Not three feet from him the man stood, the fringe of black hair marked plainly against the pallor of the forehead, the whole horrible presentment of the scoundrel, as vivid as he had seen him day after day in the Old Bailey, when he stood there in the dock, cynical and callous, under the very shadow of the gallows.

In a flash Johnson realized what it all meant: the dirty and much-used bag; the smear of crimson within the top; the dreadful stretched condition of the bulging sides. He

remembered how the victim's body had been stuffed into a canvas bag for burial, the ghastly, dismembered fragments forced with lime into this very bag; and the bag itself produced as evidence—it all came back to him as clear as day...

Very softly and stealthily his hand groped behind him for the handle of the door, but before he could actually turn it the very thing that he most of all dreaded came about, and John Turk lifted his devil's face and looked at him. At the same moment that heavy sigh passed through the air of the room, formulated somehow into words: It's my bag. And I want it.' Johnson just remembered clawing the door open, and then falling in a heap upon the floor of the landing, as he tried frantically to make his way into the front room.

He remained unconscious for a long time, and it was still dark when he opened his eyes and realized that he was lying, stiff and bruised, on the cold boards. Then the memory of what he had seen rushed back into his mind, and he promptly fainted again. When he woke the second time the wintry dawn was just beginning to peep in at the windows, painting the stairs a cheerless, dismal grey, and he managed to crawl into the front room, and cover himself with an overcoat in the armchair, where at length he fell asleep.

A great clamour woke him. He recognized Mrs Monks's voice, loud and voluble.

'What! You ain't been to bed, sir! Are you ill, or has anything 'appened? And there's an urgent gentleman to see you, though it ain't seven o'clock yet, and —'

'Who is it?' he stammered. 'I'm all right, thanks. Fell asleep in my chair, I suppose.'

'Someone from Mr Wilb'rim's, and he says he ought to see you quick before you go abroad, and I told him—'

'Show him up, please, at once,' said Johnson, whose head was whirling, and his mind was still full of dreadful visions.

Mr Wilbraham's man came in with many apologies, and explained briefly and quickly that an absurd mistake had been made, and that the wrong kit-bag had been sent over the night before.

'Henry somehow got hold of the one that came over from the courtroom, and Mr Wilbraham only discovered it when he

saw his own lying in his room, and asked why it had not gone to you,' the man said.

'Oh!' said Johnson stupidly.

'And he must have brought you the one from the murder case instead, sir, I'm afraid,' the man continued, without the ghost of an expression on his face. 'The one John Turk packed the dead both in. Mr Wilbraham's awful upset about it, sir, and told me to come over first thing this morning with the right one, as you were leaving by the boat.' He pointed to a clean-looking kit-bag on the floor, which he had just brought. 'And I was to bring the other one back, sir,' he added casually.

For some minutes Johnson could not find his voice. At last he pointed in the direction of his bedroom. 'Perhaps you would kindly unpack it for me. Just empty the things out on the floor.' The man disappeared into the other room, and was gone for five minutes.

Johnson heard the shifting to and fro of the bag, and the rattle of the skates and boots being unpacked.

'Thank you, sir,' the man said, returning with the bag folded over his arm. 'And can I do anything more to help you, sir?' 'What is it?' asked Johnson, seeing that he still had something he wished to say.

The man shuffled and looked mysterious. 'Beg pardon, sir, but knowing your interest in the Turk case, I thought you'd maybe like to know what's happened—'

'Yes.'

'John Turk killed hisself last night with poison immediately on getting his release, and he left a note for Mr Wilbraham saying as he'd be much obliged if they'd have him put away, same as the woman he murdered, in the old kit-hag.'

'What time—did he do it?' asked Johnson.

'Ten o'clock last night, sir, the warder says.'



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

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*In their
consequences,
these
events...have
destroyed me.*

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 chimaeras 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 contemptuously destroyed—a brute beast to work out forme—for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God—so much of insufferable wo! 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—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 dammed 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.

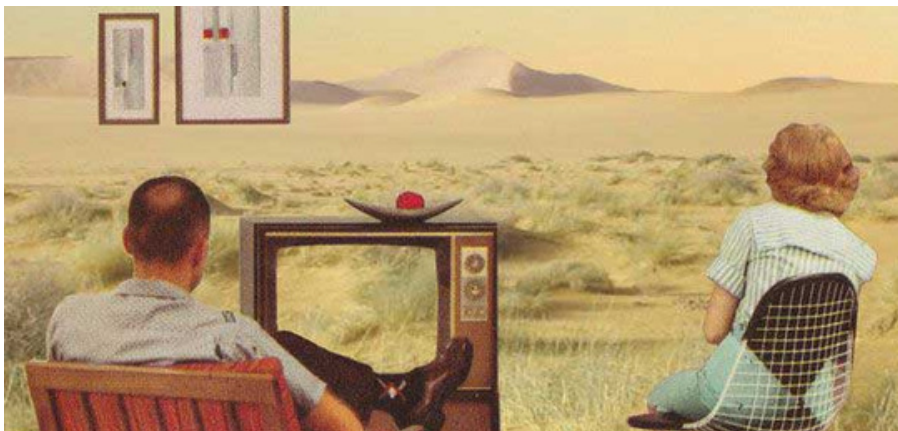
They stood on the thatched floor of the nursery. It was forty feet across by forty feet long and thirty feet high; it had cost half again as much as the rest of the house.

“

*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 bear 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 exhaling 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 darn 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 had 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, he 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?"

"Or 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 how 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 he 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 had 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 and smiled. "Oh, they'll be here

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 the 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 away, 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 Martins.

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 twentyseventh and came a-running." 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 vet." 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 that 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."

"Some places have already quit lotteries." Mrs. Adams said.

"Nothing but trouble in that," Old Man Warner said stoutly. "Pack of young fools."

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

"Overdyke.... 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, saving. "Who is it?" "Who's got it?" "Is it the

Dunbars?" "Is it the Watsons?" 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 Hutchinsons. 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 Hutchinsons?"

"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.

"It's not the way it used to be." Old Man Warner said clearly. "People ain't the way they used to be."

"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.



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.

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*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 arc 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'? Awwwww, 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, flitting before me, still in its same attitude, over the cold, lifeless ground -- flitting over dried up rivers, over broken stones cast up by old glacial upheavals -- flitting 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