THIRD FROM THE SUN

by Richard Matheson
A family attempts to steal a spaceship and escape from their home planet on a voyage to another world.

THE EMISSARY

by Ray Bradbury
A young boy’s only connection to the outside world is his dog. But what happens when dog brings home something terrible?

TIME ENOUGH AT LAST

by Lynn Venable
A man’s only wish is to have time to read. When nuclear war breaks out, he has plenty of time. But will he enjoy it?

THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

by Edgar Allan Poe
The all-time classic story of revenge. When a man finally decides he can take no more, he sets up his enemy for the most devastating scheme of vengeance in literature.
THE NECKLACE  
by Guy de Maupassant
A woman obsessed with appearances borrows a fabulous diamond necklace for a party...and loses it.

HARRISON BERGERON  
by Kurt Vonnegut
In the future, everyone must be made to be equal. What happens when one boy dares to show he can be different?

THE LANDLADY  
by Roald Dahl
A young man arrives in Bath looking for a lodging for the night. He finds far more than he was looking for.

SORRY, WRONG NUMBER  
by Lucille Fletcher
A woman overhears two men on the phone plotting a horrible murder. But when she tries to inform the authorities, no one believes her. But just whose murder was being plotted, anyway?
She was silent for a few seconds. He heard her throat contract. She shivered. He knew what she was going to say.

“We’re still going?” she asked.

He twisted his shoulders on the bed and took a deep breath.

“Yes,” he said, and felt her fingers tighten on his arm.

“What time is it?” she asked.

“About five.”

“We’d better get ready.”

“Yes, we’d better.”

They made no move.

“You’re sure we can get on the ship without anyone noticing?” she asked.

“They think it’s just another test flight. Nobody will be checking.”

She didn’t say anything. She moved a little closer to him. He felt how cold her skin was.

“I’m afraid,” she said.

He took her hand and held it in a tight grip. “Don’t be,” he said. “We’ll be safe.”

“It’s the children I’m worried about.”

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**THIRD FROM THE SUN**

_by Richard Matheson_

HIS EYES were open five seconds before the alarm was set to go off. There was no effort in waking. It was sudden. Coldly conscious, he reached out his left hand in the dark and pushed in the stop. The alarm glowed a second, then faded.

At his side, his wife put her hand on his arm.

“Did you sleep?” he asked.

“No, did you?”

“A little,” he said. “Not much.”
“We’ll be safe,” he repeated.

She lifted his hand to her lips and kissed it gently.

“All right,” she said.

They both sat up in the darkness. He heard her stand. Her night garment rustled to the floor. She didn’t pick it up. She stood still, shivering in the cold morning air.

“You’re sure we don’t need anything else with us?” she asked.

“No, nothing. I have all the supplies we need in the ship. Anyway…”

“What?”

“We can’t carry anything past the guard,” he said. “He has to think you and the kids are just coming to see me off.”

She began dressing. He threw off the covering and got up. He went across the cold floor to the closet and dressed.

“I’ll get the children up,” she said, “if they aren’t already.” He grunted, pulling clothes over his head. At the door she stopped. “Are you sure—” she began.

“Hm?”

“Won’t the guard think it’s funny that… that our neighbors are coming down to see you off, too?”

He sank down on the bed and fumbled for the clasps on his shoes.

“We’ll have to take that chance.” he said. “We need them with us.”

She sighed. “It seems so cold. So calculating.”

He straightened up and saw her silhouette in the doorway.

“What else can we do?” he asked tensely. “We can’t interbreed our own children.”

“No,” she said. “It’s just…”

“Just what?”

“Nothing, darling. I’m sorry.”

She closed the door. Her footsteps disappeared down the hall. The door to the children’s room opened. He heard their two voices. A cheerless smile raised his lips. You’d think it was a holiday, he thought.

He pulled on his shoes. At least the kids didn’t know what was happening. They thought they were going to take him down to the field. They thought they’d come back and tell all their schoolmates. They didn’t know they’d never come back.

He finished clasping his shoes and stood up. He shuffled over to the bureau and turned on the light. He looked at himself in the mirror. It was odd, such an undistinguished looking man planning this.

Cold. Calculating. Her words filled his mind again. Well, there was no other way. In a few years, probably less, the whole planet would go up with a blinding flash. This was the only way out. Escaping, starting all over again with a few people on a new planet.

He stared at the reflection.

“There’s no other way,” he said.

He glanced around the bedroom.

Good-by, this part of my life. Turning off the lamp was like turning off a light in his mind. He closed the door gently behind him and slid his fingers off the worn handle.

His son and daughter were going down the ramp. They were talking in mysterious whispers. He shook his head in slight amusement.

His wife waited for him. They went down together, holding hands.

“I’m not afraid, darling,” she said. “It’ll be all right.”

“Sure,” he said. “Sure it will.”

They all went in to eat. He sat down with his children. His wife poured out juice for them. Then she went to get the food.
Help your mother, doll," he told his daughter. She got up.

“Pretty soon, haah, pop?” his son said. “Pretty soon, haah?”

“Take it easy,” he cautioned. “Remember what I told you. If you say a word of it to anybody, I'll have to leave you behind.”

A dish shattered on the floor. He darted a glance at his wife. She was staring at him, her lips trembling.

She averted her eyes and bent down. She fumbled at the pieces, picked up a few. Then she dropped them all, stood up and pushed them against the wall with her shoe.

“As if it mattered,” she said nervously. “As if it mattered whether the place is clean or not.”

The children were watching her in surprise.

“What is it?” asked the daughter.

“Nothing, darling, nothing,” she said. “I'm just nervous. Go back to the table. Drink your juice. We have to eat quickly. The neighbors will be here soon.”

“Pop, why are the neighbors coming with us?” asked his son.

“Because,” he said vaguely. “Because they want to. Now forget it. Don't talk about it so much.”

THE room was quiet. His wife brought over their food and set it down. Only her footsteps broke the silence. The children kept glancing at each other, at their father. He kept his eyes on his plate. The food tasted thick and flat in his mouth and he felt his heart thudding against the wall of his chest. Last day. This is the last day. It felt like a silly, dangerous plan.

“You'd better eat,” he told his wife.

She sat down and began to eat mechanically, without enthusiasm. Suddenly the door buzzer sounded. The eating utensil skidded out of her nerveless fingers and clattered on the floor. He reached out quickly and put his hand on hers.

“All right, darling,” he said. “It's all right.” He turned to the children. “Go answer the door,” he told them.

“Both of us?” his daughter asked.

“Both of you.”

“But…”

“Do as I say.”

They slid off their chairs and left the room, glancing back at their parents.

When the sliding door shut off their view, he turned back to his wife. Her face was pale and tight; she had her lip's pressed together.

“Darling, please,” he said. “Please. You know I wouldn't take you if I wasn't sure it was safe. You know how many times I've flown the ship before. And I know just where we're going. It's safe. Believe me, it's safe.”

SHE pressed his hand against her cheek. She closed her eyes and large tears ran out under her lids and down her cheeks.

“It's not that so m-much,” she said. “It's just… leaving, never coming back. We've been here all our lives. It isn't like… like moving. We can't come back. Ever.”

“Listen, darling,” his voice was tense and hurried, “you know as well as I do. In a matter of years, maybe less, there's going to be another war, a terrible one. There won't be a thing left. We have to leave. For our children, for ourselves…"

He paused, testing the words in his mind.

“For the future of life itself,” he finished weakly. He was sorry he said it. Early on a prosaic morning, over everyday food, that kind of talk didn't sound right. Even if it was true.

“Just don’t be afraid,” he said. “We'll be all right.”

She squeezed his hand.

“I know,” she said quietly. “I know.”

There were footsteps coming toward them. He pulled out a tissue and gave it to her. She hastily dabbed at her face.
The door slid open. The neighbors and their son and daughter came in. The children were excited. They had trouble keeping it down.

“Good morning,” the neighbor said.

The neighbor’s wife went to his wife and the two of them went over by the window and talked in low voices. The children stood around, fidgeted, and looked nervously at each other.

“You’ve eaten?” he asked his neighbor.

“Yes,” his neighbor said. “Don’t you think we’d better be going?”

“I suppose so,” he said.

They left all the dishes on the table. His wife went upstairs and got outer garments for the family.

He and his wife stayed on the porch a moment while the rest went out to the ground car.

“Should we lock the door?” he asked.

She smiled helplessly and ran a hand through her hair. She shrugged helplessly. “Does it matter?”

He locked the door and followed her down the walk. She turned as he came up to her.

“It’s a nice house,” she murmured.

“Don’t think about it,” he said.

They turned their backs on their home and got in the ground car.

“Did you lock it?” asked the neighbor.

“Yes.”

The neighbor smiled wryly. “So did we,” he said. “I tried not to, but then I had to go back.”

They moved through the quiet streets. The edges of the sky were beginning to redden. The neighbor’s wife and the four children were in back. His wife and the neighbor were in front with him.

“Going to be a nice day,” said his neighbor.

“I suppose so,” he said.

“Have you told your children?” the neighbor asked softly.

“Of course not.”

“I haven’t, I haven’t,” insisted his neighbor. “I was just asking.”

“Oh.”

They rode in silence a while.

“Do you ever get the feeling that we’re... running out?” asked the neighbor.

He tightened. “No,” he said. “No! We’re the ones who were run out on—all of us.”

“I guess it’s better not to talk about it,” his neighbor said hastily.

“Much better,” he said.

As they drove up to the guardhouse at the gate, he turned to the back.

“Remember,” he said, “not a word from any of you.”

THE guard, sleepy and not caring much, recognized him right away as the chief test pilot for the new ship. That was enough. The family was coming down to watch him off, he told the guard. No objection. The guard let them drive to the ship’s platform.

The car stopped under the huge columns. They all got out and stared up.

Far above them, its nose pointed toward the sky, the great metal ship was just beginning to reflect the early morning glow.
“Let’s go,” he said. “Quickly.”

As they hurried toward the ship’s elevator, he stopped for a moment to look back. The guard house looked deserted. He looked around at everything and tried to fix it all in his memory.

He bent over and picked up some dirt. He put it in his pocket.

“Good-bye,” he whispered.

He ran to the elevator.

The doors shut in front of them. There was no sound in the rising cubicle but the hum of the motor and a few self-conscious coughs from the children. He looked down at them. To have to leave so young, he thought, unable to help.

He closed his eyes. His wife’s hand rested on his arm. He looked at her. Their eyes met and she smiled at him.

“And I thought it would be difficult,” she whispered.

The elevator shuddered to a stop. The doors slid open and they went out. It was getting lighter. He hurried them along the enclosed platform.

They all climbed through the narrow doorway in the ship’s side. He hesitated before following them. He wanted to say something fitting the moment. It burned in him to say something fitting the moment. There wasn’t a thing to say.

HE SWUNG in and grunted as he pulled the door shut and turned the wheel tight.

“That’s it,” he said. “Come on, everybody.”

Their footsteps echoed on the metal decks and ladders as they went up to the control room.

The children ran to the ports and looked out. They gasped when they saw how high they were. Their mothers stood behind them, looking down at the ground. Their eyes were frightened. The children’s were not.

“So high,” said his daughter.

He patted her head gently. “So high,” he repeated.

Then he, turned abruptly and went over to the instrument panel. He stood there, hesitantly. He heard someone come up behind him.

“Shouldn’t we tell the children?” asked his wife. “Shouldn’t we let them know it’s their last look?”

“Go ahead,” he said.

He waited to hear her footsteps. There were none. He turned. She kissed him on the cheek. Then she went to tell the children.

He threw over the switch. Deep in the belly of the ship, a spark ignited the fuel. A concentrated rush of gas flooded from the vents. The bulkheads began to shake.

He heard his daughter crying. He tried not to listen, extended a trembling hand toward the lever, then glanced back suddenly. They were all staring at him. He put his hand on the lever and threw it over.

The ship quivered a brief second and then they felt it rush along the smooth incline. It flashed into the air, faster and faster. They all heard the wind rushing past.

He watched the children turn to the ports and look out again.

“Good-bye,” they said.

He sank down wearily at the control panel. Out of the corner of his eye he saw his neighbor sit down next to him.

“You know just where we’re going?” his neighbor asked.

“On that chart there.”

His neighbor looked at the chart. His eyebrows wiggled in surprise.

“Another solar system?”

“That’s right. There’s a planet there with an oxygen atmosphere that can support our kind of life. We’ll probably have it all to ourselves. No hatred. No war.”
"We'll be safe," his neighbor said. "And the race will be safe."

He nodded and looked back at his and his neighbor's family. They were still staring out the ports.

“I said,” his neighbor repeated, “which one of these planets is it?”

He leaned over the chart, pointed. “That small one there,” he said.

“This one, third from the sun?”

“That's right,” he said. “The green planet with the single moon.”
THE EMISSARY

by Ray Bradbury

Martin knew it was autumn again, for Dog ran into the house bringing wind and frost and a smell of apples turned to cider under trees. In dark clock-springs of hair, Dog fetched goldenrod, dust of farewell-summer, acorn-husk, hair of squirrel, feather of departed robin, sawdust from fresh-cut cordwood, and leaves like charcoals shaken from a blaze of maple trees. Dog jumped. Showers of brittle fern, blackberry vine, marsh-grass sprang over the bed where Martin shouted. No doubt, no doubt of it at all, this incredible beast was October!"

"Here, boy, here!"

And Dog settled to warm Martin’s body with all the bonfires and subtle burnings of the season, to fill the room with soft or heavy, wet or dry odors of far-traveling. In spring, he smelled of lilac, iris, lawn-mowered grass; in summer, iccream-mustached, he came pungent with firecracker, Roman candle, pinwheel, baked by the sun. But autumn! Autumn!

“Dog, what’s it like outside?”

And lying there, Dog told as he always told. Lying there, Martin found autumn as in the old days before sickness bleached him white on his bed. Here was his contact, his carry-all, the quick-moving part of himself he sent with a yell to run and return, circle and scent, collect and deliver the time and texture of worlds in town, country, by creek, river, lake, down-cellar, up-attic, in closet or coal-bin. Ten dozen times a day he was gifted with sunflower seed, cinder-path, milkweed, horse-chestnut, or full flame-smell of pumpkin. Through the loomings of the universe Dog shuttled; the design

No doubt, no doubt of it at all, this incredible beast was October!

was hid in his pelt. Put out your hand, it was there. . . .

“And where did you go this morning?"

But he knew without hearing where Dog had rattled down hills where autumn lay in cereal crispness, where children lay in funeral pyres, in rustling heaps, the leaf-buried but watchful dead,
as Dog and the world blew by. Martin trembled his fingers, searched the thick fur, read the long journey. Through stubbled fields, over glitters of ravine creek, down marbled spread of cemetery yard, into woods. In the great season of spices and rare incense, now Martin ran through his emissary, around, about, and home! The bedroom door opened.

“That dog of yours is in trouble again.”

Mother brought in a tray of fruit salad, cocoa, and toast, her blue eyes snapping. “Mother . . .”

“Always digging places. Dug a hole in Miss Tarkin’s garden this morning. She’s spittin’ mad. That’s the fourth hole he’s dug there this week.”

“Maybe he’s looking for something.”

“Fiddlesticks, he’s too darned curious. If he doesn’t behave he’ll be locked up.”

Martin looked at this woman as if she were a stranger.

“Oh, you wouldn’t do that! How would I learn anything? How would I find things out if Dog didn’t tell me?”

Mom’s voice was quieter. “Is that what he does—tell you things?”

“There’s nothing I don’t know when he goes out and around and back, nothing I can’t find out from him!”

They both sat looking at Dog and the dry strewings of mold and seed over the quilt.

“Well, if he’ll just stop digging where he shouldn’t, he can run all he wants,” said Mother.

“Here, boy, here!” And Martin snapped a tin note to the dog’s collar: my owner is martin smith—ten years old—sick in bed—visitors welcome.

Dog barked.

Mother opened the downstairs door and let him out.

Far off and away you could hear Dog run in the quiet autumn rain that was falling now. You could hear the barking-jingling fade, rise, fade again as he cut down alley, over lawn, to fetch back Mr. Holloway and the oiled metallic smell of the delicate snowflake-interiored watches he repaired in his home shop. Or maybe he would bring Mr. Jacobs, the grocer, whose clothes were rich with lettuce, celery, tomatoes, and the secret tinned and hidden smell of the red demons stamped on cans of deviled ham. Mr. Jacobs and his unseen pink-meat devils waved often from the yard below. Or Dog brought Mr. Jackson, Mrs. Gillespie, Mr. Smith, Mrs. Holmes, any friend or near-friend, encountered, cornered, begged, worried, and at last shepherded home for lunch, or tea-and-biscuits.

Now, listening, Martin heard Dog below, with footsteps moving in a light rain behind him. The downstairs bell rang. Mom opened the door, light voices murmured. Martin sat forward, face shining. The stair treads creaked. A young woman’s voice laughed quietly. Miss Haight, of course, his teacher from school!

The bedroom door sprang open.

Martin had company.

*****

Morning, afternoon, evening, dawn and dusk, sun and moon circled with Dog, who faithfully reported temperatures of turf and air, color of earth and tree, consistency of mist or rain, but—most important of all—brought back again and again and again—Miss Haight.

On Saturday, Sunday and Monday she baked Martin orange-iced cupcakes, brought him library books about dinosaurs and cavemen. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday somehow he beat her at dominoes, somehow she lost at checkers, and soon, she cried, he’d defeat her handsomely at chess. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday they talked and never stopped talking, and she was so young and laughing and handsome and her hair was a soft, shining brown like the season outside the window, and she walked clear, clean and quick, a heartbeat warm in the bitter afternoon when he heard it. Above all, she had the secret of signs, and could read and interpret Dog and the symbols she searched out and plucked forth from his coat with her miraculous fingers. Eyes
shut, softly laughing, in a gypsy's voice, she divined the world from the treasures in her hands.

And on Monday afternoon, Miss Haight was dead.

Martin sat up in bed, slowly.

“Dead?” he whispered.

Dead, said his mother, yes, dead, killed in an auto accident a mile out of town. Dead, yes, dead, which meant cold to Martin, which meant silence and whiteness and winter come long before its time. Dead, silent, cold, white. The thoughts circled round, blew down, and settled in whispers.

Martin held Dog, thinking; turned to the wall. The lady with the autumn-colored hair. The lady with the laughter that was very gentle and never made fun and the eyes that watched your mouth to see everything you ever said. The other-half of autumn-lady, who told what was left untold by Dog, about the world. The heartbeat at the still center of gray afternoon. The heartbeat fading . . .

“Mom? What do they do in the graveyard, Mom, under the ground? Just lay there?”

“Lie there.”

“Lie there? Is that all they do? It doesn’t sound like much fun.”

“For goodness sake, it’s not made out to be fun.”

“Why don’t they jump up and run around once in a while if they get tired lying there? God’s pretty silly—”

“Martin!”

“Well, you’d think He’d treat people better than to tell them to lie still for keeps. That's impossible. Nobody can do it! I tried once. Dog tries. I tell him, 'dead Dog!' He plays dead awhile, then gets sick and tired and wags his tail or opens one eye and looks at me, bored. Boy, I bet sometimes those graveyard people do the same, huh, Dog?”

Dog barked.

“Be still with that kind of talk!” said Mother. Martin looked off into space. “Bet that's exactly what they do,” he said.

*****

Autumn burnt the trees bare and ran Dog still farther around, fording creek, prowling graveyard as was his custom, and back in the dusk to fire off volleys of barking that shook windows wherever he turned.

In the late last days of October, Dog began to act as if the wind had changed and blew from a strange country. He stood quivering on the porch below. He whined, his eyes fixed at the empty land beyond town. He brought no visitors for Martin. He stood for hours each day, as if leashed, trembling, then shot away straight, as if someone had called. Each night he returned later, with no one following. Each night, Martin sank deeper and deeper in his pillow.

“Well, people are busy,” said Mother. “They haven't time to notice the tag Dog carries. Or they mean to come visit, but forget.”

But there was more to it than that. There was the fevered shining in Dog's eyes, and his whimpering tic late at night, in some private dream. His shivering in the dark, under the bed. The way he sometimes stood half the night, looking at Martin as if some great and impossible secret was his and he knew no way to tell it save by savagely thumping his tail, or turning in endless circles, never to lie down, spinning and spinning again.

On October thirtieth, Dog ran out and didn't come back at all, even when after supper Martin heard his parents call and call. The hour grew late, the streets and sidewalks stood empty, the air moved cold about the house and there was nothing, nothing.

Long after midnight, Martin lay watching the world beyond the cool, clear glass windows. Now there was not even autumn, for there was no Dog to fetch it in. There would be no winter, for who could bring the snow to melt in your hands? Father, Mother? No, not the same. They couldn't play the game with its special secrets and rules, its sounds and pantomimes. No more seasons. No more time. The go-between, the emissary, was lost to the wild throngings of civilization, poisoned, stolen, hit by a car, left somewhere in a culvert. . . .
Sobbing, Martin turned his face to his pillow. The world was a picture under glass, untouchable. The world was dead.

*****

Martin twisted in bed and in three days the last Hallowe’en pumpkins were rotting in trash cans, papier-mâché skulls and witches were burnt on bonfires, and ghosts were stacked on shelves with other linens until next year.

To Martin, Hallowe’en had been nothing more than one evening when tin horns cried off in the cold autumn stars, children blew like goblin leaves along the flinty walks, flinging their heads, or cabbages, at porches, soap-writing names or similar magic symbols on icy windows. All of it as distant, unfathomable, and nightmarish as a puppet show seen from so many miles away that there is no sound or meaning.

For three days in November, Martin watched alternate light and shadow sift across his ceiling. The fire-pageant was over forever; autumn lay in cold ashes. Martin sank deeper, yet deeper in white marble layers of bed, motionless, listening always listening. . . .

Friday evening, his parents kissed him good-night and walked out of the house into the hushed cathedral weather toward a motion-picture show. Miss Tarkins from next door stayed on in the parlor below until Martin called down he was sleepy, then took her knitting off home.

In silence, Martin lay following the great move of stars down a clear and moonlit sky, remembering nights such as this when he’d spanned the town with Dog ahead, behind, around about, tracking the green-plush ravine, lapping slumbrous streams gone milky with the fullness of the moon, leaping cemetery tombstones while whispering the marble names; on, quickly on, through shaved meadows where the only motion was the off-on quivering of stars, to streets where shadows would not stand aside for you but crowded all the sidewalks for mile on mile. Run now run! chasing, being chased by bitter smoke, fog, mist, wind, ghost of mind, fright of memory; home, safe, sound, snug-warm, asleep. . . .

Nine o’clock.

Chime.

The drowsy clock in the deep stairwell below. Chime. Dog, come home, and run the world with you. Dog, bring a thistle with frost on it, or bring nothing else but the wind. Dog, where are you? Oh, listen, now, I’ll call.

Martin held his breath.

Way off somewhere—a sound.

Martin rose up, trembling. There, again—the sound.

So small a sound, like a sharp needle-point brushing the sky long miles and many miles away.

The dreamy echo of a dog—barking. The sound of a dog crossing fields and farms, dirt roads and rabbit paths, running, running, letting out great barks of steam, cracking the night. The sound of a circling dog which came and went, lifted and faded, opened up, shut in, moved forward, went back, as if the animal were kept by someone on a fantastically long chain. As if the dog were running and someone whistled under the chestnut trees, in mold-shadow, tar-shadow, moon-shadow, walking, and the dog circled back and sprang out again toward home.

Dog! Martin thought, oh Dog, come home, boy! Listen, oh, listen, where you been? Come on, boy, make tracks!

Five, ten, fifteen minutes; near, very near, the bark, the sound. Martin cried out, thrust his feet from the bed, leaned to the window. Dog! Listen, boy! Dog! He said it over and over. Dog! Dog! Wicked Dog, run off and gone all these days! Bad Dog, good Dog, home, boy, hurry, and bring what you can!

Near now, near, up the street, barking, to knock clapboard housefronts with sound, whirl iron cocks on rooftops in the moon, firing off volleys—Dog! now at the door below. . . .

Martin shivered.

Should he run—let Dog in, or wait for Mom and Dad? Wait? Oh, God, wait? But what if Dog ran off again? No, he’d go down, snatch the door wide, yell, grab Dog in, and run upstairs so fast, laughing, crying, holding tight, that . . .

Dog stopped barking. Hey! Martin almost broke the window, jerking to it.
Silence. As if someone had told Dog to hush now, hush, hush. A full minute passed.

Martin clenched his fists.

Below, a faint whimpering.

Then, slowly, the downstairs front door opened. Someone was kind enough to have opened the door for Dog. Of course! Dog had brought Mr. Jacobs or Mr. Gillespie or Miss Tarkins, or . . .

The downstairs door shut.

Dog raced upstairs, whining, flung himself on the bed.

“Dog, Dog, where've you been, what've you done! Dog, Dog!”

And he crushed Dog hard and long to himself, weeping. Dog, Dog. He laughed and shouted. Dog! But after a moment he stopped laughing and crying, suddenly. He pulled back away. He held the animal and looked at him, eyes widening.

The odor coming from Dog was different.

It was a smell of strange earth. It was a smell of night within night, the smell of digging down deep in shadow through earth that had lain cheek by jowl with things that were long hidden and decayed. A stinking and rancid soil fell away in clods of dissolution from Dog's muzzle and paws. He had dug deep. He had dug very deep indeed. That was it, wasn't it? wasn't it? wasn't it!

What kind of message was this from Dog? What could such a message mean? The stench—the ripe and awful cemetery earth. Dog was a bad dog, digging where he shouldn't. Dog was a good dog, always making friends.

Dog loved people. Dog brought them home.

And now, moving up the dark hall stairs, at intervals, came the sound of feet, one foot dragged after the other, painfully, slowly, slowly, slowly.

Dog shivered.

A rain of strange night earth fell seething on the bed.

Dog turned.

The bedroom door whispered in.

Martin had company.
TIME ENOUGH AT LAST

by Lynn Venable

For a long time, Henry Bemis had had an ambition. To read a book. Not just the title or the preface, or a page somewhere in the middle. He wanted to read the whole thing, all the way through from beginning to end. A simple ambition perhaps, but in the cluttered life of Henry Bemis, an impossibility.

Henry had no time of his own. There was his wife, Agnes who owned that part of it that his employer, Mr. Carsville, did not buy. Henry was allowed enough to get to and from work—that in itself being quite a concession on Agnes’ part.

Also, nature had conspired against Henry by handing him with a pair of hopelessly myopic eyes. Poor Henry literally couldn't see his hand in front of his face. For a while, when he was very young, his parents had thought him an idiot. When they realized it was his eyes, they got glasses for him. He was never quite able to catch up. There was never enough time. It looked as though Henry’s ambition would never be realized. Then something happened which changed all that.

Henry was down in the vault of the Eastside Bank & Trust when it happened. He had stolen a few moments from the duties of his teller’s cage to try to read a few pages of the magazine he had bought that morning. He’d made an excuse to Mr. Carsville about needing bills in large denominations for a certain customer, and then, safe inside the dim recesses of the vault he had pulled from inside his coat the pocket size magazine.

He had just started a picture article cheerfully entitled "The New Weapons and What They’ll Do To YOU", when all the noise in the world crashed in upon his ear-drums. It seemed to be inside of him and outside of him all at once. Then the concrete floor was rising up at him and the ceiling came slanting down toward him, and for a fleeting second Henry thought of a story he had started to read once called "The Pit and The Pendulum". He regretted in
that insane moment that he had never had time to finish that story to see how it came out. Then all was darkness and quiet and unconsciousness.

When Henry came to, he knew that something was desperately wrong with the Eastside Bank & Trust. The heavy steel door of the vault was buckled and twisted and the floor tilted up at a dizzy angle, while the ceiling dipped crazily toward it. Henry gingerly got to his feet, moving arms and legs experimentally. Assured that nothing was broken, he tenderly raised a hand to his eyes. His precious glasses were intact, thank God! He would never have been able to find his way out of the shattered vault without them.

He made a mental note to write Dr. Torrance to have a spare pair made and mailed to him. Blasted nuisance not having his prescription on file locally, but Henry trusted no-one but Dr. Torrance to grind those thick lenses into his own complicated prescription. Henry removed the heavy glasses from his face. Instantly the room dissolved into a neutral blur. Henry saw a pink splash that he knew was his hand, and a white blob come up to meet the pink as he withdrew his pocket handkerchief and carefully dusted the lenses. As he replaced the glasses, they slipped down on the bridge of his nose a little. He had been meaning to have them tightened for some time.

He suddenly realized, without the realization actually entering his conscious thoughts, that something momentous had happened, something worse than the boiler blowing up, something worse than a gas main exploding, something worse than anything that had ever happened before. He felt that way because it was so quiet. There was no whine of sirens, no shouting, no running, just an ominous and all pervading silence.

Henry walked across the slanting floor. Slipping and stumbling on the uneven surface, he made his way to the elevator. The car lay crumpled at the foot of the shaft like a discarded accordion. There was something inside of it that Henry could not look at, something that had once been a person, or perhaps several people, it was impossible to tell now.

Feeling sick, Henry staggered toward the stairway. The steps were still there, but so jumbled and piled back upon one another that it was more like climbing the side of a mountain than mounting a stairway. It was quiet in the huge chamber that had been the lobby of the bank. It looked strangely cheerful with the sunlight shining through the girders where the ceiling had fallen. The dappled sunlight glinted across the silent lobby, and everywhere there were huddled lumps of unpleasantness that made Henry sick as he tried not to look at them.

"Mr. Carsville," he called. It was very quiet. Something had to be done, of course. This was terrible, right in the middle of a Monday, too. Mr. Carsville would know what to do. He called again, more loudly, and his voice cracked hoarsely, "Mr. Carrrrsville!" And then he saw an arm and shoulder extending out from under a huge fallen block of marble ceiling. In the buttonhole was the white carnation Mr. Carsville had worn to work that morning, and on the third finger of that hand was a massive signet ring, also belonging to Mr. Carsville. Numbly, Henry realized that the rest of Mr. Carsville was under that block of marble.

Henry felt a pang of real sorrow. Mr. Carsville was gone, and so was the rest of the staff—Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Emory and Mr. Prithard, and the same with Pete and Ralph and Jenkins and Hunter and Pat the guard and Willie the doorman. There was no one to say what was to be done about the Eastside Bank & Trust except Henry Bemis, and Henry wasn't worried about the bank, there was something he wanted to do.

He climbed carefully over piles of fallen masonry. Once he stepped down into something that crunched and squashed beneath his feet and he set his teeth on edge to keep from retching. The street was not much different from the inside, bright sunlight and so much concrete to crawl over, but the unpleasantness was much, much worse. Everywhere there were strange, motionless lumps that Henry could not look at. Suddenly, he remembered Agnes. He should be trying to get to Agnes, shouldn't he? He remembered a poster he had seen that said, "In event of emergency do not use the telephone, your loved ones are as safe as you." He wondered about Agnes. He looked at the smashed automobiles, some with their four wheels pointing skyward like the stiffened legs of dead animals. He couldn't get to Agnes now anyway, if she was safe, then, she was safe, otherwise ... of course, Henry knew Agnes wasn't safe. He had a feeling that there wasn't anyone safe for a long, long way, maybe not in the whole state or the whole country, or the whole world. No, that was a thought Henry didn't want to think, he forced it from his mind and turned his thoughts back to Agnes.
She had been a pretty good wife, now that it was all said and done. It wasn't exactly her fault if people didn't have time to read nowadays. It was just that there was the house, and the bank, and the yard. There were the Jones' for bridge and the Graysons' for canasta and charades with the Bryants. And the television, the television Agnes loved to watch, but would never watch alone. He never had time to read even a newspaper. He started thinking about last night, that business about the newspaper.

Henry had settled into his chair, quietly, afraid that a creaking spring might call to Agnes' attention the fact that he was momentarily unoccupied. He had unfolded the newspaper slowly and carefully, the sharp crackle of the paper would have been a clarion call to Agnes. He had glanced at the headlines of the first page. "Collapse Of Conference Imminent." He didn't have time to read the article. He turned to the second page. "Solon Predicts War Only Days Away." He flipped through the pages faster, reading brief snatches here and there, afraid to spend too much time on any one item. On a back page was a brief article entitled, "Prehistoric Artifacts Unearthed In Yucatan". Henry smiled to himself and carefully folded the sheet of paper into fourths. That would be interesting, he would read all of it. Then it came, Agnes' voice. "Henrrreee!" And then she was upon him. She lightly flicked the paper out of his hands and into the fireplace. He saw the flames lick up and curl possessively around the unread article. Agnes continued, "Henry, tonight is the Jones' bridge night. They'll be here in thirty minutes and I'm not dressed yet, and here you are ... reading." She had emphasized the last word as though it were an unclean act. "Hurry and shave, you know how smooth Jasper Jones' chin always looks, and then straighten up this room." She glanced regretfully toward the fireplace. "Oh dear, that paper, the television schedule ... oh well, after the Jones leave there won't be time for anything but the late-late movie and.... Don't just sit there, Henry, hurrreeee!"

Henry was hurrying now, but hurrying too much. He cut his leg on a twisted piece of metal that had once been an automobile fender. He thought about things like lock-jaw and gangrene and his hand trembled as he tied his pocket-handkerchief around the wound. His trouser leg was sticky red where the wound in his leg had soaked through the handkerchief. It was throbbing badly but Henry didn't care. He had reached his destination.

He was going in now though, almost crawling, his breath coming in stabbing gasps, his hands torn and bleeding. His trouser leg was sticky red where the wound in his leg had soaked through the handkerchief. It was throbbing badly but Henry didn't care. He had reached his destination.

Part of the inscription was still there, over the now doorless entrance. P-U-B—C L-I-B-R—-. The rest had been torn away. The place was in shambles. The shelves were overturned, broken, smashed, tilted, their precious contents spilled in
disorder upon the floor. A lot of the books, Henry noted gleefully, were still intact, still whole, still readable. He was literally knee deep in them, he wallowed in books. He picked one up. The title was "Collected Works of William Shakespeare." Yes, he must read that, sometime. He laid it aside carefully. He picked up another. Spinoza. He tossed it away, seized another, and another, and still another. Which to read first ... there were so many.

He had been conducting himself a little like a starving man in a delicatessen—grabbing a little of this and a little of that in a frenzy of enjoyment.

But now he steadied away. From the pile about him, he selected one volume, sat comfortably down on an overturned shelf, and opened the book.

Henry Bemis smiled.

There was the rumble of complaining stone. Minute in comparison with the epic complaints following the fall of the bomb. This one occurred under one corner of the shelf upon which Henry sat. The shelf moved; threw him off balance. The glasses slipped from his nose and fell with a tinkle.

He bent down, clawing blindly and found, finally, their smashed remains. A minor, indirect destruction stemming from the sudden, wholesale smashing of a city. But the only one that greatly interested Henry Bemis.

He stared down at the blurred page before him.

He began to cry.
THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

by Edgar Allan Poe

THE thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that gave utterance to a threat. At length I would be avenged; this was a point definitely, settled -- but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my in to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my to smile now was at the thought of his immolation.

He had a weak point --this Fortunato --although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity, to practise imposture upon the British and Austrian millionaires. In painting and gemmery, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack, but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially; --I was skilful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

I said to him --"My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are
looking to-day. But I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts."

"How?" said he. "Amontillado, A pipe? Impossible! And in the middle of the carnival!"

"I have my doubts," I replied; "and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

"Amontillado!"

"I have my doubts."

"Amontillado!"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado!"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchresi. If any one has a critical turn it is he. He will tell me --"

"Luchresi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry."

"And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own."

"Come, let us go."

"Whither?"

"To your vaults."

"My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchresi--"

"I have no engagement; --come."

"My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre."

"Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchresi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado."

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm; and putting on a mask of black silk and drawing a roquelaire closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honour of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux, and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together upon the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

"The pipe," he said.

"It is farther on," said I; "but observe the white web--work which gleams from these cavern walls."

He turned towards me, and looked into my eves with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication.

"Nitre?" he asked, at length.

"Nitre," I replied. "How long have you had that cough?"

"Ugh! ugh! ugh! --ugh! ugh! ugh! --ugh! ugh! ugh! --ugh! ugh! ugh! --ugh! ugh! ugh! --ugh! ugh! ugh!"

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes. "It is nothing," he said, at last.

"Come," I said, with decision, "we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchresi --"

"Enough," he said; "the cough's a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough."

"True --true," I replied; "and, indeed, I had no intention of
alarming you unnecessarily -- but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damps.

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould.

"Drink," I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

"I drink," he said, "to the buried that repose around us."

"And I to your long life."

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

"These vaults," he said, "are extensive."

"The Montresors," I replied, "were a great and numerous family."

"I forget your arms."

"A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel."

"And the motto?"

"Nemo me impune lacessit."

"Good!" he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through long walls of piled skeletons, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

"The nitre!" I said; "see, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough --"

"It is nothing," he said; "let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc."

I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grave. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upwards with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement -- a grotesque one.

"You do not comprehend?" he said.

"Not I," I replied.

"Then you are not of the brotherhood."

"How?"

"You are not of the masons."

"Yes, yes," I said; "yes, yes."

"You? Impossible! A mason?"

"A mason," I replied.

"A sign," he said, "a sign."

"It is this," I answered, producing from beneath the folds of my roquelaire a trowel.

"You jest," he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. "But let us proceed to the Amontillado."

"Be it so," I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our route in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth side the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior crypt or recess, in depth about four
feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavoured to pry into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.

"Proceed," I said; "herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchresi---"

"He is an ignoramus," interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In niche, and finding an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche, and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess.

"Pass your hand," I said, "over the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed, it is very damp. Once more let me implore you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power."

"The Amontillado!" ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

"True," I replied; "the Amontillado."

As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was not the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labours and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated, I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall; I replied to the yells of him who clamoured. I re-echoed, I aided, I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamourer grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said--

"Ha! ha! ha! --he! he! he! --a very good joke, indeed --an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo --he! he! he! --over our wine --he! he! he!"

"The Amontillado!" I said.

"He! he! he! --he! he! he! --yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone."

"Yes," I said, "let us be gone."

"For the love of God, Montresor!"

"Yes," I said, "for the love of God!"

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud--
"Fortunato!"

No answer. I called again --

"Fortunato!"

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick; it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so. I hastened to make an end of my labour. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. In pace requiescat!
THE NECKLACE

by Guy de Maupassant

She was one of those pretty and charming girls born, as though fate had blundered over her, into a family of artisans. She had no marriage portion, no expectations, no means of getting known, understood, loved, and wedded by a man of wealth and distinction; and she let herself be married off to a little clerk in the Ministry of Education. Her tastes were simple because she had never been able to afford any other, but she was as unhappy as though she had married beneath her; for women have no caste or class, their beauty, grace, and charm serving them for birth or family, their natural delicacy, their instinctive elegance, their nimbleness of wit, are their only mark of rank, and put the slum girl on a level with the highest lady in the land.

She suffered endlessly, feeling herself born for every delicacy and luxury. She suffered from the poorness of her house, from its mean walls, worn chairs, and ugly curtains. All these things, of which other women of her class would not even have been aware, tormented and insulted her. The sight of the little Breton girl who came to do the work in her little house aroused heartbroken regrets and hopeless dreams in her mind. She imagined silent antechambers, heavy with Oriental tapestries, lit by torches in lofty bronze sockets, with two tall footmen in knee-breeches sleeping in large arm-chairs, overcome by the heavy warmth of the stove. She imagined vast saloons hung with antique silks, exquisite pieces of furniture supporting priceless ornaments, and small, charming, perfumed rooms, created just for little parties of intimate friends, men who were famous and sought after, whose homage roused every other woman's envious longings.

When she sat down for dinner at the round table covered with a three-days-old cloth, opposite her husband, who took the cover off the soup-tureen, exclaiming delightedly: "Aha! Scotch broth!

"The sight of the little Breton girl...aroused heartbroken regrets and hopeless dreams in her mind.

What could be better?" she imagined delicate meals, gleaming silver, tapestries peopling the walls with folk of a past age and strange birds in faery forests; she imagined delicate food served in marvellous dishes, murmured gallantries, listened to with an inscrutable smile as one trifled with the rosy flesh of trout or wings of asparagus chicken.
She had no clothes, no jewels, nothing. And these were the only things she loved; she felt that she was made for them. She had longed so eagerly to charm, to be desired, to be wildly attractive and sought after.

She had a rich friend, an old school friend whom she refused to visit, because she suffered so keenly when she returned home. She would weep whole days, with grief, regret, despair, and misery.

One evening her husband came home with an exultant air, holding a large envelope in his hand.

"Here's something for you," he said.

Swiftly she tore the paper and drew out a printed card on which were these words:

"The Minister of Education and Madame Ramponneau request the pleasure of the company of Monsieur and Madame Loisel at the Ministry on the evening of Monday, January the 18th."

Instead of being delighted, as her husband hoped, she flung the invitation petulantly across the table, murmuring: "What do you want me to do with this?"

"Why, darling, I thought you'd be pleased. You never go out, and this is a great occasion. I had tremendous trouble to get it. Every one wants one; it's very select, and very few go to the clerks. You'll see all the really big people there."

He looked at him out of furious eyes, and said impatiently: "And what do you suppose I am to wear at such an affair?"

"Why, darling, I thought you'd be pleased. You never go out, and this is a great occasion. I had tremendous trouble to get it. Every one wants one; it's very select, and very few go to the clerks. You'll see all the really big people there."

She looked at him out of furious eyes, and said impatiently: "And what do you suppose I am to wear at such an affair?"

He had not thought about it; he stammered: "Why, the dress you go to the theatre in. It looks very nice, to me . . . ."

He stopped, stupefied and utterly at a loss when he saw that his wife was beginning to cry. Two large tears ran slowly down from the corners of her eyes towards the corners of her mouth.

"What's the matter with you? What's the matter with you?" he faltered.

But with a violent effort she overcame her grief and replied in a calm voice, wiping her wet cheeks: "Nothing. Only I haven't a dress and so I can't go to this party. Give your invitation to some friend of yours whose wife will be turned out better than I shall."

He was heart-broken. "Look here, Mathilde," he persisted. "What would be the cost of a suitable dress, which you could use on other occasions as well, something very simple?"

She thought for several seconds, reckoning up prices and also wondering for how large a sum she could ask without bringing upon herself an immediate refusal and an exclamation of horror from the careful-minded clerk.

At last she replied with some hesitation: "I don't know exactly, but I think I could do it on four hundred francs."

He grew slightly pale, for this was exactly the amount he had been saving for a gun, intending to get a little shooting next summer on the plain of Nanterre with some friends who went lark-shooting there on Sundays.

Nevertheless he said: "Very well. I'll give you four hundred francs. But try and get a really nice dress with the money."

The day of the party drew near, and Madame Loisel seemed sad, uneasy and anxious. Her dress was ready, however.

One evening her husband said to her: "What's the matter with you? You've been very odd for the last three days."

"I'm utterly miserable at not having any jewels, not a single stone, to wear," she replied. "I shall look absolutely no one. I would almost rather not go to the party."

"Wear flowers," he said. "They're very smart at this time of the year. For ten francs you could get two or three gorgeous roses."

She was not convinced. "No . . . there's nothing so humiliating as looking poor in the middle of a lot of rich women."

"How stupid you are!" exclaimed her husband. "Go and see Madame Forestier and ask her to lend you some jewels. You know her quite well enough for that."

She uttered a cry of delight. "That's true. I never thought of it."
Next day she went to see her friend and told her her trouble. Madame Forestier went to her dressing-table, took up a large box, brought it to Madame Loisel, opened it, and said:

"Choose, my dear."

First she saw some bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian cross in gold and gems, of exquisite workmanship. She tried the effect of the jewels before the mirror, hesitating, unable to make up her mind to leave them, to give them up.

She kept on asking: "Haven't you anything else?"

"Yes. Look for yourself. I don't know what you would like best."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin case, a superb diamond necklace; her heart began to beat covetously. Her hands trembled as she lifted it. She fastened it round her neck, upon her high dress, and remained in ecstasy at sight of herself.

Then, with hesitation, she asked in anguish: "Could you lend me this, just this alone?"

"Yes, of course."

She flung herself on her friend's breast, embraced her frenziedly, and went away with her treasure.

The day of the party arrived. Madame Loisel was a success. She was the prettiest woman present, elegant, graceful, smiling, and quite above herself with happiness. All the men stared at her, inquired her name, and asked to be introduced to her. All the Under-Secretaries of State were eager to waltz with her. The Minister noticed her.

She danced madly, ecstatically, drunk with pleasure, with no thought for anything, in the triumph of her beauty, in the pride of her success, in a cloud of happiness made up of this universal homage and admiration, of the desires she had aroused, of the completeness of a victory so dear to her feminine heart.

She left about four o'clock in the morning. Since midnight her husband had been dozing in a deserted little room, in company with three other men whose wives were having a good time.

He threw over her shoulders the garments he had brought for them to go home in, modest everyday clothes, whose poverty clashed with the beauty of the balldress. She was conscious of this and was anxious to hurry away, so that she should not be noticed by the other women putting on their costly furs.

Loisel restrained her.

"Wait a little. You'll catch cold in the open. I'm going to fetch a cab."

But she did not listen to him and rapidly descended the staircase. When they were out in the street they could not find a cab; they began to look for one, shouting at the drivers whom they saw passing in the distance.

They walked down towards the Seine, desperate and shivering. At last they found on the quay one of those old nightprowling carriages which are only to be seen in Paris after dark, as though they were ashamed of their shabbiness in the daylight.

It brought them to their door in the Rue des Martyrs, and sadly they walked up to their own apartment. It was the end, for her. As for him, he was thinking that he must be at the office at ten.

She took off the garments in which she had wrapped her shoulders, so as to see herself in all her glory before the mirror.

But suddenly she uttered a cry. The necklace was no longer round her neck!

"What's the matter with you?" asked her husband, already half undressed.

She turned towards him in the utmost distress. "I . . . I . . . I've no longer got Madame Forestier's necklace. . . ."

He started with astonishment. "What! . . . Impossible!"

They searched in the folds of her dress, in the folds of the coat, in the pockets, everywhere. They could not find it.
"Are you sure that you still had it on when you came away from the ball?" he asked.

"Yes, I touched it in the hall at the Ministry."

"But if you had lost it in the street, we should have heard it fall."

"Yes. Probably we should. Did you take the number of the cab?"

"No. You didn't notice it, did you?"

"No."

They stared at one another, dumbfounded. At last Loisel put on his clothes again.

"I'll go over all the ground we walked," he said, "and see if I can't find it."

And he went out.

She remained in her evening clothes, lacking strength to get into bed, huddled on a chair, without volition or power of thought. Her husband returned about seven. He had found nothing.

He went to the police station, to the newspapers, to offer a reward, to the cab companies, everywhere that a ray of hope impelled him.

She waited all day long, in the same state of bewilderment at this fearful catastrophe. Loisel came home at night, his face lined and pale; he had discovered nothing.

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"You must write to your friend," he said, "and tell her that you've broken the clasp of her necklace and are getting it mended. That will give us time to look about us."

She wrote at his dictation.

*****

By the end of a week they had lost all hope. Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

"We must see about replacing the diamonds."

Next day they took the box which had held the necklace and went to the jewellers whose name was inside. He consulted his books.

"It was not I who sold this necklace, Madame; I must have merely supplied the clasp."

Then they went from jeweller to jeweller, searching for another necklace like the first, consulting their memories, both ill with remorse and anguish of mind. In a shop at the Palais-Royal they found a string of diamonds which seemed to them exactly like the one they were looking for. It was worth forty thousand francs. They were allowed to have it for thirty-six thousand. They begged the jeweller not to sell it for three days. And they arranged matters on the understanding that it would be taken back for thirty-four thousand francs, if the first one were found before the end of February.

Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs left to him by his father. He intended to borrow the rest. He did borrow it, getting a thousand from one man, five hundred from another, five louis here, three louis there. He gave notes of hand, entered into ruinous agreements, did business with usurers and the whole tribe of moneylenders. He mortgaged the whole remaining years of his existence, risked his signature without even knowing if he could honour it, and, appalled at the agonising face of the future, at the black misery about to fall upon him, at the prospect of every possible physical privation and moral torture, he went to get the new necklace and put down upon the jeweller's counter thirty-six thousand francs.

When Madame Loisel took back the necklace to Madame Forestier, the latter said to her in a chilly voice:

"You ought to have brought it back sooner; I might have needed it."

She did not, as her friend had feared, open the case. If she had noticed the substitution, what would she have thought? What would she have said? Would she not have taken her for a thief?

*****

Madame Loisel came to know the ghastly life of abject poverty. From the very first she played her part heroically. This fearful debt must be paid off. She would pay it. The
servant was dismissed. They changed their flat; they took a garret under the roof.

She came to know the heavy work of the house, the hateful duties of the kitchen. She washed the plates, wearing out her pink nails on the coarse pottery and the bottoms of pans. She washed the dirty linen, the shirts and dishcloths, and hung them out to dry on a string; every morning she took the dustbin down into the street and carried up the water, stopping on each landing to get her breath. And, clad like a poor woman, she went to the fruiterer, to the grocer, to the butcher, a basket on her arm, haggling, insulted, fighting for every wretched halfpenny of her money.

Every month notes had to be paid off, others renewed, time gained. Her husband worked in the evenings at putting straight a merchant's accounts, and often at night he did copying at twopence-halfpenny a page.

And this life lasted ten years.

At the end of ten years everything was paid off, everything, the usurer's charges and the accumulation of superimposed interest.

Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become like all the other strong, hard, coarse women of poor households. Her hair was badly done, her skirts were awry, her hands were red. She spoke in a shrill voice, and the water slopped all over the floor when she scrubbed it.

But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she sat down by the window and thought of that evening long ago, of the ball at which she had been so beautiful and so much admired.

What would have happened if she had never lost those jewels. Who knows? Who knows? How strange life is, how fickle! How little is needed to ruin or to save!

One Sunday, as she had gone for a walk along the Champs-Elysees to freshen herself after the labours of the week, she caught sight suddenly of a woman who was taking a child out for a walk.

It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still attractive. Madame Loisel was conscious of some emotion. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all. Why not? She went up to her.

"Good morning, Jeanne."

The other did not recognise her, and was surprised at being thus familiarly addressed by a poor woman. "But . . . Madame . . ." she stammered. "I don't know . . . you must be making a mistake."

"No . . . I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry. "Oh! . . . my poor Mathilde, how you have changed! . . ."

"Yes, I've had some hard times since I saw you last; and many sorrows . . . and all on your account."

"On my account! . . . How was that?"

"You remember the diamond necklace you lent me for the ball at the Ministry?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"How could you? Why, you brought it back."

"I brought you another one just like it. And for the last ten years we have been paying for it. You realise it wasn't easy for us; we had no money. . . . Well, it's paid for at last, and I'm glad indeed."

Madame Forestier had halted. "You say you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?"

"Yes. You hadn't noticed it? They were very much alike." And she smiled in proud and innocent happiness.

Madame Forestier, deeply moved, took her two hands. "Oh, my poor Mathilde! But mine was imitation. It was worth at the very most five hundred francs! . . ."
THE YEAR WAS 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They weren’t only equal before God and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General.

Some things about living still weren’t quite right, though. April for instance, still drove people crazy by not being springtime. And it was in that clammy month that the H-G men took George and Hazel Bergeron’s fourteen-year-old son, Harrison, away.

It was tragic, all right, but George and Hazel couldn’t think about it very hard. Hazel had a perfectly average intelligence, which meant she couldn’t think about anything except in short bursts. And George, while his intelligence was way above normal, had a little mental handicap radio in his ear. He was required by law to wear it at all times. It was tuned to a government transmitter. Every twenty seconds or so, the transmitter would send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains.

George and Hazel were watching television. There were tears on Hazel’s cheeks, but she’d forgotten for the moment what they were about.

On the television screen were ballerinas.

A buzzer sounded in George’s head. His thoughts fled in panic, like bandits from a burglar alarm.

"That was a real pretty dance, that dance they just did," said Hazel.

"They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else.

'Huh" said George. "That dance-it was nice," said Hazel.

'Yup," said George. He tried to think a little about the ballerinas. They weren’t really very good-no better than anybody else would have been, anyway. They were burdened with sashweights and bags of birdshot, and their faces were masked, so that no one,
seeing a free and graceful gesture or a pretty face, would feel like something the cat drug in. George was toying with the vague notion that maybe dancers shouldn't be handicapped. But he didn't get very far with it before another noise in his ear radio scattered his thoughts.

George winced. So did two out of the eight ballerinas.

Hazel saw him wince. Having no mental handicap herself, she had to ask George what the latest sound had been.

"Sounded like somebody hitting a milk bottle with a ball peen hammer," said George.

"I'd think it would be real interesting, hearing all the different sounds," said Hazel a little envious. "All the things they think up."

"Um," said George.

"Only, if I was Handicapper General, you know what I would do?" said Hazel. Hazel, as a matter of fact, bore a strong resemblance to the Handicapper General, a woman named Diana Moon Glampers.

"If I was Diana Moon Glampers," said Hazel, "I'd have chimes on Sunday—just chimes. Kind of in honor of religion."

"I could think, if it was just chimes," said George.

"Well—maybe make 'em real loud," said Hazel. "I think I'd make a good Handicapper General."

"Good as anybody else," said George.

"Who knows better then I do what normal is?" said Hazel.

"Right," said George.

He began to think glimmeringly about his abnormal son who was now in jail, about Harrison, but a twenty-one-gun salute in his head stopped that.

"Boy!" said Hazel, "that was a doozy, wasn't it?"

It was such a doozy that George was white and trembling, and tears stood on the rims of his red eyes. Two of the eight ballerinas had collapsed to the studio floor, were holding their temples.

"All of a sudden you look so tired," said Hazel. "Why don't you stretch out on the sofa, so's you can rest your handicap bag on the pillows, honey bunch."

She was referring to the forty-seven pounds of birdshot in a canvas bag, which was padlocked around George's neck.

"Go on and rest the bag for a little while," she said. "I don't care if you're not equal to me for a while."

George weighed the bag with his hands. "I don't mind it," he said. "I don't notice it any more. It's just a part of me."

"You been so tired lately—kind of wore out," said Hazel. "If there was just some way we could make a little hole in the bottom of the bag, and just take out a few of them lead balls. Just a few."

"Two years in prison and two thousand dollars fine for every ball I took out," said George. "I don't call that a bargain."

"If you could just take a few out when you came home from work," said Hazel. "I mean—you don't compete with anybody around here. You just set around."

"If I tried to get away with it," said George, "then other people'd get away with it—and pretty soon we'd be right back to the dark ages again, with everybody competing against everybody else. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

"I'd hate it," said Hazel.

"There you are," said George. The minute people start cheating on laws, what do you think happens to society?"

If Hazel hadn't been able to come up with an answer to this question, George couldn't have supplied one. A siren was going off in his head.

"Reckon it'd fall all apart," said Hazel.

"What would?" said George blankly.

"Society," said Hazel uncertainly. "Wasn't that what you just
said?

"Who knows?" said George.

The television program was suddenly interrupted for a news bulletin. It wasn't clear at first as to what the bulletin was about, since the announcer, like all announcers, had a serious speech impediment.

For about half a minute, and in a state of high excitement, the announcer tried to say, "Ladies and Gentlemen." He finally gave up, handed the bulletin to a ballerina to read.

"That's all right," Hazel said of the announcer, "he tried. That's the big thing. He tried to do the best he could with what God gave him. He should get a nice raise for trying so hard."

"Ladies and Gentlemen," said the ballerina, reading the bulletin. She must have been extraordinarily beautiful, because the mask she wore was hideous. And it was easy to see that she was the strongest and most graceful of all the dancers, for her handicap bags were as big as those worn by two-hundred pound men.

And she had to apologize at once for her voice, which was a very unfair voice for a woman to use. Her voice was a warm, luminous, timeless melody.

"Excuse me," she said, and she began again, making her voice absolutely uncompetitive. "Harrison Bergeron, age fourteen," she said in a grackle squawk, "has just escaped from jail, where he was held on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government. He is a genius and an athlete, under-handicapped, and should be regarded as extremely dangerous."

A police photograph of Harrison Bergeron was flashed on the screen—upside down, then sideways, upside down again, then right side up. The picture showed the full length of Harrison against a background calibrated in feet and inches. He was exactly seven feet tall.

The rest of Harrison's appearance was Halloween and hardware. Nobody had ever born heavier handicaps. He had outgrown hindrances faster than the H-G men could think them up. Instead of a little ear radio for a mental handicap, he wore a tremendous pair of earphones, and spectacles with thick wavy lenses. The spectacles were intended to make him not only half blind, but to give him whanging headaches besides.

Scrap metal was hung all over him. Ordinarily, there was a certain symmetry, a military neatness to the handicaps issued to strong people, but Harrison looked like a walking junkyard. In the race of life, Harrison carried three hundred pounds. And to offset his good looks, the H-G men required that he wear at all times a red rubber ball for a nose, keep his eyebrows shaved off, and cover his even white teeth with black caps at snagle-tooth random.

"If you see this boy," said the ballerina, "do not - I repeat, do not - try to reason with him."

There was the shriek of a door being torn from its hinges.

Screams and barking cries of consternation came from the television set. The photograph of Harrison Bergeron on the screen jumped again and again, as though dancing to the tune of an earthquake.

George Bergeron correctly identified the earthquake, and well he might have—for many was the time his own home had danced to the same crashing tune. "My God," said George, "that must be Harrison!"

The realization was blasted from his mind instantly by the sound of an automobile collision in his head.

When George could open his eyes again, the photograph of Harrison was gone. A living, breathing Harrison filled the screen.

Clanking, clownish, and huge, Harrison stood—in the center of the studio. The knob of the uprooted studio door was still in his hand. Ballerinas, technicians, musicians, and announcers cowered on their knees before him, expecting to die.

"I am the Emperor!" cried Harrison. "Do you hear? I am the Emperor! Everybody must do what I say at once!" He stamped his foot and the studio shook.

"Even as I stand here" he bellowed, "crippled, hobbled,
sickened - I am a greater ruler than any man who ever lived! Now watch me become what I can become!"

Harrison tore the straps of his handicap harness like wet tissue paper, tore straps guaranteed to support five thousand pounds.

Harrison's scrap-iron handicaps crashed to the floor.

Harrison thrust his thumbs under the bar of the padlock that secured his head harness. The bar snapped like celery.

Harrison smashed his headphones and spectacles against the wall. He flung away his rubber-ball nose, revealed a man that would have awed Thor, the god of thunder.

"I shall now select my Empress!" he said, looking down on the cowering people. "Let the first woman who dares rise to her feet claim her mate and her throne!"

A moment passed, and then a ballerina arose, swaying like a willow.

Harrison plucked the mental handicap from her ear, snapped off her physical handicaps with marvelous delicacy. Last of all he removed her mask.

She was blindingly beautiful.

"Now-" said Harrison, taking her hand, "shall we show the people the meaning of the word dance? Music!" he commanded.

The musicians scrambled back into their chairs, and Harrison stripped them of their handicaps, too.

"Play your best," he told them, "and I'll make you barons and dukes and earls."

The music began. It was normal at first-cheap, silly, false. But Harrison snatched two musicians from their chairs, waved them like batons as he sang the music as he wanted it played. He slammed them back into their chairs.

The music began again and was much improved.

Harrison and his Empress merely listened to the music for a while-listened gravely, as though synchronizing their heartbeats with it.

They shifted their weights to their toes.

Harrison placed his big hands on the girls tiny waist, letting her sense the weightlessness that would soon be hers.

And then, in an explosion of joy and grace, into the air they sprang!

Not only were the laws of the land abandoned, but the law of gravity and the laws of motion as well.

They reeled, whirled, swiveled, flounced, capered, gamboled, and spun.

They leaped like deer on the moon.

The studio ceiling was thirty feet high, but each leap brought the dancers nearer to it.

It became their obvious intention to kiss the ceiling. They kissed it.

And then, neutralizing gravity with love and pure will, they remained suspended in air inches below the ceiling, and they kissed each other for a long, long time.

It was then that Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General, came into the studio with a double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun.

She fired twice, and the Emperor and the Empress were dead before they hit the floor.

Diana Moon Glampers loaded the gun again. She aimed it at the musicians and told them they had ten seconds to get their handicaps back on.

It was then that the Bergerons' television tube burned out.

Diana Moon Glampers loaded the gun again. She aimed it at the musicians and told them they had ten seconds to get their handicaps back on.

Hazel turned to comment about the blackout to George. But George had gone out into the kitchen for a can of beer.

George came back in with the beer, paused while a handicap signal shook him up. And then he sat down again.
"You been crying" he said to Hazel.

"Yup," she said.

"What about?" he said.

"I forget," she said. "Something real sad on television."

"What was it?" he said.

"It's all kind of mixed up in my mind," said Hazel.

"Forget sad things," said George.

"I always do," said Hazel.

"That's my girl," said George.

He winced. There was the sound of a rivetting gun in his head.

"Gee - I could tell that one was a doozy," said Hazel.

"You can say that again," said George.

"Gee--" said Hazel, "I could tell that one was a doozy."
Billy Weaver had travelled down from London on the slow afternoon train, with a change at Reading on the way, and by the time he got to Bath it was about nine o’clock in the evening and the moon was coming up out of a clear, starry sky over the houses opposite the station entrance. But the air was deadly cold and the wind was like a flat blade of ice on his cheeks.

“Excuse me,” he said to a porter, “but is there a fairly cheap hotel not too far away from here?”

“Try the Bell and Dragon,” the porter answered, pointing down the road. “They might take you in. It’s about a quarter of a mile along on the other side.”

Billy thanked him and picked up his suitcase and set out to walk the quarter mile to the Bell and Dragon. He had never been to Bath before. He didn’t know anyone who lived there. But Mr. Greenslade at the Head Office in London had told him it was a splendid town. “Find your own lodgings,” he had said, “and then go along and report to the branch manager as soon as you’ve got yourself settled.”

Billy was seventeen years old. He was wearing a new navy-blue overcoat, a new brown trilby hat, and a new brown suit, and he was feeling fine. He walked briskly down the street. He was trying to do everything briskly these days. Briskness, he had decided, was the one common characteristic of all successful businessmen. The big shots up at Head Office were absolutely fantastically brisk all the time. They were amazing.

There were no shops on this wide street that he was walking along, only a line of tall houses on each side, all of them identical. They had porches and pillars and four or five steps going up to their front doors, and it was obvious that once upon a time they had been very swanky residences. But now, even in the darkness, he could see that the paint was peeling from the woodwork on their doors and windows, and that the handsome white façades were cracked and blotchy from neglect.
Suddenly, not six yards away, in a downstairs window that was brilliantly illuminated by a street lamp, Billy caught sight of a printed notice propped up against the glass in one of the upper panes. It said “bed and breakfast.” There was a vase of yellow chrysanthemums, tall and beautiful, standing just underneath the notice.

He stopped walking. He moved a bit closer. Green curtains (some sort of velvety material) were hanging down on either side of the window. The chrysanthemums looked wonderful beside them. He went right up and peered through the glass into the room, and the first thing he saw was a bright fire burning on the hearth. On the carpet in front of the fire, a pretty little dachshund was curled up asleep, with its nose tucked into its belly. The room itself, as far as he could see in the half darkness, was filled with pleasant furniture. There was a baby-grand piano and a big sofa and several plump armchairs, and in one corner he spotted a large parrot in a cage. Animals were usually a good sign in a place like this, Billy told himself, and all in all, it looked as though it would be a pretty decent house to stay in. Certainly it would be more comfortable than the Bell and Dragon.

On the other hand, a pub would be more congenial than a boarding house. There would be beer and darts in the evenings, and lots of people to talk to, and it would probably be a good bit cheaper, too. He had stayed a couple of nights in a pub once before, and he had liked it. He had never stayed in any boarding houses, and to be perfectly honest, he was a tiny bit frightened of them. The name itself conjured up images of watery cabbage, rapacious landladies, and a powerful smell of kippers in the living room. After dithering about like this in the cold for two or three minutes, Billy decided that he would walk on and take a look at the Bell and Dragon before making up his mind. He turned to go.

And now a queer thing happened to him. He was in the act of stepping back and turning away from the window when all at once his eye was caught again and held in the most peculiar manner by the small notice that was there, “bed and breakfast,” it said. “Bed and breakfast, bed and breakfast, bed and breakfast.” Each word was like a large black eye staring at him through the glass, holding him, compelling him, forcing him to stay where he was and not walk away from that house, and the next thing he knew he was actually moving across from the window to the front door, climbing the steps that led up to it, and reaching for the bell.

He pressed the bell. Far away in a back room, he heard it ringing, and then at once—it must have been at once, because he hadn’t even had time to take his finger from the bell button—the door swung open and a woman was standing there. Normally, you ring a bell and you have at least a half-minute wait before the door opens. But this person was like a jack-in-the-box. He pressed the bell—and out she popped! It made him jump.

She was about forty-five or fifty years old, and the moment she saw him she gave him a warm, welcoming smile. “Please come in,” she said pleasantly. She stepped aside, holding the door wide open, and Billy found himself automatically starting forward. The compulsion, or, more accurately, the desire to follow after her into that house was extraordinarily strong, but he held himself back.

“I saw the notice in the window,” he said.

“Yes, I know.”

“I was wondering about a room.”

“It’s all ready for you, my dear,” she said. She had a round pink face and very gentle blue eyes.

“I was on my way to the Bell and Dragon,” Billy told her. “But the notice in your window just happened to catch my eye.”

“My dear boy,” she said, “why don’t you come in out of the cold?”

“How much do you charge?”

“Five and sixpence a night, including breakfast,” It was fantastically cheap. It was less than half of what he had been willing to pay.

“If that is too much,” she added, “then perhaps I can reduce it just a tiny bit. Do you desire an egg for breakfast? Eggs are expensive at the moment. It would be sixpence less without the egg.”

“Five and sixpence is fine,” he answered. “I should like very much to stay here.”
“I knew you would. Do come in.”

She seemed terribly nice. She looked exactly like the mother of one’s best school friend welcoming one into the house to stay for the Christmas holidays. Billy took off his hat and stepped over the threshold.

“Just hang it there,” she said, “and let me help you with your coat.”

There were no other hats or coats in the hall. There were no umbrellas, no walking sticks—nothing.

“We have it all to ourselves,” she said, smiling at him over her shoulder as she led the way upstairs. “You see, it isn’t very often I have the pleasure of taking a visitor into my little nest.”

The old girl is slightly dotty, Billy told himself. But at five and sixpence a night, who gives a damn about that? “I should've thought you'd be simply swamped with applicants,” he said politely.

“Oh, I am, my dear, I am. Of course I am. But the trouble is that I'm inclined to be just a teeny-weeny bit choosy and particular—if you see what I mean.”

“Ah, yes.”

“But I’m always ready. Everything is always ready day and night in this house, just on the off chance that an acceptable young gentleman will come along. And it is such a pleasure, my dear, such a very great pleasure when now and again I open the door and I see someone standing there who is just exactly right.” She was halfway up the stairs, and she paused with one hand on the stair rail, turning her head and smiling down at him with pale lips. “Like you,” she added, and her blue eyes travelled slowly all the way down the length of Billy’s body to his feet and then up again.

On the second-floor landing, she said to him, “This floor is mine.”

They climbed up another flight. “And this one is all yours,” she said. “Here's your room. I do hope you'll like it.” She took him into a small but charming front bedroom, switching on the light as she went in.

“The morning sun comes right in the window, Mr. Perkins. It is Mr. Perkins, isn't it?”

“No,” he said. “It's Weaver.”

“Mr. Weaver. How nice. I've put a water bottle between the sheets, to warm them up, Mr. Weaver. It's such a comfort to have a hot-water bottle in a strange bed with clean sheets, don't you agree? And you may light the gas fire at any time, if you feel chilly.”

“Thank you,” Billy said. “Thank you ever so much.” He noticed that the bedspread had been taken off the bed and that the bedclothes had been neatly turned back on one side, all ready for someone to get in.

“I'm so glad you appeared,” she said, looking earnestly into his face. “I was beginning to get worried.”

“That’s all right,” Billy answered brightly. “You mustn't worry about me.” He put his suitcase on the chair and started to open it.

“And what about supper, my dear? Did you manage to get anything to eat before you came here?”

“I’m not a bit hungry, thank you,” he said. “I think I’ll just go to bed as soon as possible, because tomorrow I've got to get up rather early and report to the office.”

“Very well, then. I'll leave you now so that you can unpack. But before you go to bed, would you be kind enough to pop into the sitting room on the ground floor and sign the book? Everyone has to do that, because it’s the law of the land, and we don't want to go breaking any laws at this stage in the proceedings, do we?” She gave him a little wave of the hand and went quickly out the room and closed the door.

Now, the fact that his landlady appeared to be slightly off her rocker didn't worry Billy in the least. After all, she not only was harmless—there was no question about that—but she was also quite obviously a kind and generous soul. He guessed that she had probably lost a son in the war, or something like that, and had never got over it. So a few minutes later, after unpacking his suitcase and washing his hands, he trotted downstairs to the ground floor and entered the living room. His landlady wasn't there, but the fire was
glowing on the hearth, and the little dachshund was still sleeping soundly in front of it. The room was wonderfully warm and cozy. I'm a lucky fellow, he thought, rubbing his hands. This is a bit of all right.

He found the guestbook lying open on the piano, so he took out his pen and wrote down his name and address. There were only two other entries above his on the page, and as one always does with guestbooks, he started to read them. One was a Christopher Mulholland, from Cardiff. The other was Gregory W. Temple, from Bristol.

That's funny, he thought suddenly. Christopher Mulholland. It rings a bell. Now where on earth had he heard that rather unusual name before? Was it a boy at school? No. Was it one of his sister's numerous young men, perhaps, or a friend of his father's? No, no, it wasn't any of those. He glanced down again at the book.

Christopher Mulholland, 231 Cathedral Road, Cardiff

Gregory W. Temple, 27 Sycamore Drive, Bristol

As a matter of fact, now he came to think of it, he wasn't at all sure that the second name didn't have almost as much of a familiar ring about it as the first.

“Gregory Temple?” he said aloud, searching his memory. “Christopher Mulholland? . . .”

“Such charming boys,” a voice behind him answered, and he turned and saw his landlady sailing into the room with a large silver tea tray in her hands. She was holding it well out in front of her and rather high up, as though the tray were a pair of reins on a frisky horse.

“They sound somehow familiar,” he said.

“They do? How interesting.”

“I'm almost positive I've heard those names before somewhere. Isn't that odd? Maybe it was in the newspapers. They weren't famous in any way, were they? I mean, famous cricketers or footballers or something like that?”

“Famous?” she said, setting the tea tray down on the low table in front of the sofa. “Oh, no, I don't think they were famous. But they were incredibly handsome, both of them, I can promise you that. They were tall and young and handsome, my dear, just exactly like you.”

Once more, Billy glanced down at the book. “Look here,” he said, noticing the dates. “This last entry is over two years old.”

“It is?”

“Yes, indeed. And Christopher Mulholland's is nearly a year before that—more than three years ago.”

“Dear me,” she said, shaking her head and heaving a dainty little sigh. “I would never have thought it. How time does fly away from us all, doesn't it, Mr. Wilkins?”


“Oh, of course it is!” she cried, sitting down on the sofa. “How silly of me. I do apologize. In one ear and out the other, that's me, Mr. Weaver.”

“You know something?” Billy said. “Something that's really quite extraordinary about all this?”

“No, dear, I don't.”

“Well, you see, both of these names—Mulholland and Temple—I not only seem to remember each one of them separately, so to speak, but somehow or other, in some peculiar way, they both appear to be sort of connected together as well. As though they were both famous for the same sort of thing, if you see what I mean—like . . . well . . . like Dempsey and Tunney, for example, or Churchill and Roosevelt.”

“How amusing,” she said. “But come over here now, dear, and sit down beside me on the sofa and I'll give you a nice cup of tea and a ginger biscuit before you go to bed.”

“You really shouldn't bother,” Billy said. “I didn't mean you to do anything like that.” He stood by the piano, watching her as she fussed about with the cups and saucers. He noticed that she had small, white, quickly moving hands and red fingernails.

“I'm almost positive it was in the newspapers I saw them,” Billy said. “I'll think of it in a second. I'm sure I will.”
There is nothing more tantalizing than a thing like this that lingers just outside the borders of one's memory. He hated to give up. "Now wait a minute," he said. "Wait just a minute. Mulholland . . . Christopher Mulholland . . . wasn't that the name of the Eton schoolboy who was on a walking tour through the West Country and then all of a sudden—"

"Milk?" she said. "And sugar?"

"Yes, please. And then all of a sudden—"

"Eton schoolboy?" she said. "Oh, no, my dear, that can't possibly be right, because my Mr. Mulholland was certainly not an Eton schoolboy when he came to me. He was a Cambridge undergraduate. Come over here now and sit next to me and warm yourself in front of this lovely fire. Come on. Your tea's all ready for you." She patted the empty place beside her on the sofa and sat there smiling at Billy and waiting for him to come over.

He crossed the room slowly and sat down on the edge of the sofa. She placed his teacup on the table in front of him.

"There we are," she said. "How nice and cozy this is, isn't it?"

Billy started sipping his tea. She did the same. For half a minute or so, neither of them spoke. But Billy knew that she was looking at him. Her body was half turned toward him, and he could feel her eyes resting on his face, watching him over the rim of her teacup. Now and again, he caught a whiff of a peculiar smell that seemed to emanate directly from her person. It was not in the least unpleasant, and it reminded him—well, he wasn't quite sure what it reminded him of. Pickled walnuts? New leather? Or was it the corridors of a hospital?

At length, she said, "Mr. Mulholland was a great one for his tea. Never in my life have I seen anyone drink as much tea as dear, sweet Mr. Mulholland."

"I suppose he left fairly recently," Billy said. He was still puzzling his head about the two names. He was positive now that he had seen them in the newspapers—in the headlines.

"Left?" she said, arching her brows. "But my dear boy, he never left. He's still here. Mr. Temple is also here. They're on the fourth floor, both of them together."

Billy set his cup down slowly on the table and stared at his landlady. She smiled back at him, and then she put out one of her white hands and patted him comfortably on the knee.

"How old are you, my dear?" she asked.

"Seventeen."

"Seventeen!" she cried. "Oh, it's the perfect age! Mr. Mulholland was also seventeen. But I think he was a trifle shorter than you are; in fact, I'm sure he was, and his teeth weren't quite so white. You have the most beautiful teeth, Mr. Weaver, did you know that?"

"They're not as good as they look," Billy said. "They've got simply masses of fillings in them at the back."

"Mr. Temple, of course, was a little older," she said, ignoring his remark. "He was actually twenty-eight. And yet I never would have guessed it if he hadn't told me—never in my whole life. There wasn't a blemish on his body."

"A what?" Billy said.

"His skin was just like a baby's."

There was a pause. Billy picked up his teacup and took another sip of his tea, then he set it down again gently in its saucer. He waited for her to say something else, but she seemed to have lapsed into another of her silences. He sat there staring straight ahead of him into the far corner of the room, biting his lower lip.

"That parrot," he said at last. "You know something? It had me completely fooled when I first saw it through the window. I could have sworn it was alive."

"Alas, no longer."

"It's most terribly clever the way it's been done," he said. "It doesn't look in the least bit dead. Who did it?"

"I did."

"You did?"

"Of course," she said. "And have you met my little Basil as well?" She nodded toward the dachshund curled up so
comfortably in front of the fire, and Billy looked at it, and as he did so he suddenly realized that this animal all the time had been just as silent and motionless as the parrot. He put out a hand and touched it gently on the top of its back. The back was hard and cold, and when he pushed the hair to one side with his fingers, he could see the skin underneath, grayish-black and dry and perfectly preserved.

“Good gracious me,” he said. “How absolutely fascinating.” He turned away from the dog and stared with deep admiration at the little woman beside him on the sofa. “It must be most awfully difficult to do a thing like that.”

“No in the least,” she said. “I stuff all my little pets myself when they pass away. Will you have another cup of tea?”

“No, thank you,” Billy said. The tea tasted faintly of bitter almonds, and he didn't much care for it.

“You did sign the book, didn't you?”

“Oh, yes.”

“That's good. Because later on, if I happened to forget what you were called, then I could always come down here and look it up. I still do that almost every day with Mr. Mulholland and Mr. . . . Mr. . . . ”

“Temple,” Billy said. “Gregory Temple. Excuse my asking, but haven't there been any other guests here except them in the last two or three years?”

Holding her teacup high in one hand, inclining her head slightly to the left, she looked up at him out of the corners of her eyes and gave him another gentle little smile.

“No, my dear,” she said. “Only you.”
SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

by Lucille Fletcher

SFX: PHONE DIALING NOISES BEGINS

SFX: Clicking telephone

AGNES: Operator, I’ve been trying to call Murray Hill 4-0098 for the last half hour and it’s been busy. I don’t see how it could possibly be busy that long. Can you try that number for me, please.

OPERATOR: (FILTER) I’ll be glad to try that number for you. One moment, please.

SFX: CLICKING AS OPERATOR DIALS THE TELEPHONE.

AGNES: I don’t see how it could be busy all that time. It’s my husband’s office and I’m all alone here in the house. My health is very poor and I’ve been feeling so nervous all day...

OPERATOR: Ringing Murray Hill 4-0098...

SFX: (FILTER) PHONE RINGING

MAN: (FILTER) Hello?

AGNES: Hello, is Mr. Stevenson there?

MAN: (FILTER) Hello? Hello?

“Is everything ok? Is the coast clear for tonight?

GEORGE: Hello...

MAN: Hello, George?

GEORGE: (FILTER) Yes, this is George speaking.

AGNES: Hello, who is this? What number am I calling please?

MAN: I’m here with our client...

GEORGE: Ohhh, good... Is everything OK? Is the coast clear for tonight?

MAN: Yes, George. He says the coast is clear for tonight.

GEORGE: Ok, ok...
MAN: Where are you now?

GEORGE: In a phone booth. Don't worry, everything's ok...

MAN: Very well, you know the address...

GEORGE: Yes, I know, I know. Let's see now...at 11 o'clock, the private patrolman goes around the corner to 2nd Avenue for a beer.

MAN: That's right. Eleven o'clock. And be sure all the lights downstairs are out.

GEORGE: OK...

MAN: There should be only one light visible from the street.

GEORGE: OK... OK...

MAN: (OFF MIC) What's that? (ON MIC) Just a minute, George.

(PAUSE) Oh, our client tells me that at 11:15, a train crosses the bridge. It makes a noise in case a window is open and she should scream.

AGNES: Hello! What number is this, please...

GEORGE: OK, I understand... That's 11:15 the train, eh?

MAN: Yeah. Do you remember everything else, George?

GEORGE: Yeah. Yeah. I'll make it quick...as little blood as possible because our client does not wish to make her suffer...

MAN: That's right...you'll use a knife?

GEORGE: Yes, a knife...it will be ok. The afterwards, I'll remove the rings and the bracelets and the jewelry in the bureau drawer because our client wishes it to look like a simple robbery. Don't worry, everything's ok, I know...

SFX: BUZZING SOUND AS PHONE DISCONNECTS.

AGNES: (STAGE WHISPER) Oh! How awful!

SFX: PHONE DIALING

AGNES: How unspeakably awful!... Operator!

OPERATOR: Your number, please...

AGNES: Operator! I've just been cut off...

OPERATOR: What number will you calling.

AGNES: Well, Operator, I was supposed to be calling Murray Hill 4-0098, but it wasn't. Some wires must have got crossed. I was cut into a wrong number -- and I -- I've just heard the most dreadful thing -- something about a -- murder -- and -- and Operator, you'll simply have to retrace that call at once ... I...

OPERATOR: I beg your pardon? Uh, may I help you?

AGNES: I know it was a wrong number and I had no business listening -- but these two men -- they were cold-blooded fiends-- and they are going to murder somebody -- some poor, innocent woman who was all alone -- in a house near a bridge... And we've got to stop them -- we've just got to ...

OPERATOR: (FRUSTRATED) What number are you dialing?

AGNES: It doesn't matter what number I was calling. This was a wrong number and you dialed it for me. And we've got to find out what it was -- immediately.

OPERATOR: What number did you call?

AGNES: Oh, why're you so stupid?... What time is it? Do you mean to tell me that you can't find out what that number was just now.

OPERATOR: I'll connect you to the chief operator.

AGNES: Oh -- I think it's perfectly shameful. Now, look -- it was obviously a case of some little slip of the finger. I told you to try Murray Hill 4-0098 for me -- you dialed it -- but your finger must have slipped -- and I was connected with some other number -- and I could hear them but they couldn't hear me. Now -- I simply fail to see why you couldn't make that same mistake again -- on purpose -- why couldn't you try to dial Murray Hill 4-0098 in the same careless way?
AGNES: Thank you.

AGNES: Operator! Operator!

AGNES: Your call, please?

AGNES: You didn't try to get that wrong number at all. I asked you explicitly. And all you did was dial correctly.

AGNES: All this talk -- can't make anyone understand ...

AGNES: Mrs. Stevenson. Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. But -- listen... Can't you for once forget what number I'm calling and do something for me . . . Now, I want to trace that call -- it's my civic duty -- and it's your civic duty -- to trace that call -- and apprehend those dangerous killers -- and if you won't ---

AGNES: Why?! No reason. I mean -- I merely felt very strongly that something ought to be done about it. These men sounded like killers -- they're dangerous! They're going to murder this woman at 11:15 tonight. I thought the police ought to know.

AGNES: Why?!

AGNES: Well, please!

AGNES: This is the chief operator.

AGNES: Chief Operator, I want you to trace a call--a telephone call, immediately. I don't know where it came from or who was making it, but it's absolutely necessary that it be tracked down. Because it was about a murder that someone's planning. A terrible, cold-blooded murder of a poor innocent woman -- tonight -- at 11:15.

AGNES: It depends on what?

CHIEF OP: It depends on whether the call is still going on. If it's a live call, we can trace it on the equipment. If it's been disconnected, we can't.

AGNES: Disconnected?

CHIEF OP: If the parties have stopped talking to each other.

AGNES: Oh, but of course they must have stopped talking to each other by now. That was at least five minutes ago -- and they didn't sound like the type that would make a long call... Can you trace it for me? Can you track down those men?

AGNES: Plaza 3-2098. But -- if you go on wasting all this time ---

AGNES: Why do you want this call traced?

AGNES: Mrs. Stevenson but I'm afraid we couldn't make this check for you and trace the call just on your say so.

AGNES: But...
AGNES: Why...

CHIEF OP: We have to have something more official...

AGNES: Oh, for heavens sake! You mean to tell me I can't report there's going to be a murder, without getting tied up in all this red tape? Why -- it's perfectly idiotic! Well alright, alright, I'll -- call the police.

CHIEF OP: I'm sure that will be the best way to deal with...

SFX: (SLAMS DOWN RECEIVER)

AGNES: (To herself) Ridiculous! Never heard of such nonsense!

SFX: DIALING, RINGING

OPERATOR: Your call, please?

AGNES: Police department – get me the police department. Please!

OPERATOR: Ringing the police department.

SFX: DIALING

AGNES: Oh, can't you ring them direct!

SFX: RINGING

MARTIN: Police station 43, Sergeant Marting speaking.

AGNES: Police Department? This is Mrs. Stevenson. Mrs. Elbert Smythe Stevenson of fifty-three, 5 - 3 --North Sutton Place. I'm calling to report a murder ...

MARTIN: Ehh?

AGNES: I mean -- the murder hasn't been committed yet. I just overheard plans for it over the telephone. Over a wrong number that the operator gave me. I've been trying to trace down the call myself but everybody is so stupid and I guess in the end you're the only people who could do anything.

MARTIN: (PATRONIZING) Yes, m'am.

AGNES: It was a perfectly definite murder -- I heard their plans distinctly -- two men were talking -- and they were going to murder some woman at 11: 15 tonight. She lived in a house near a bridge ... Are you listening to me?

MARTIN: Ehh? Oh, yes, m'am...

AGNES: And there was a private patrolman on the street. He was going to go around for a beer on Second Avenue. And there was some third man -- a client -- who was paying to have this poor woman murdered. They were going to take her rings and bracelets -- and use a knife ... Well, -- it's unnerved me dreadfully -- and I'm not well...

MARTIN: Mmmm, yes, yes, I see. When was all this, m'am?

AGNES: About 8 minutes ago. Oh, then you can do something! You do understand!

MARTIN: What's your name m'am?

AGNES: Mrs. Stevenson. Mrs. Elbert Stevenson.

MARTIN: And your address?

AGNES: Fifty-three...FIVE THREE North Sutton Place. That's near a bridge. The Queensborough Bridge -- you know -- And we have a private patrolman on our street...

MARTIN: Yeah...

AGNES: And Second Avenue is...

MARTIN: And, ehh, what was that number you were calling?

AGNES: Murray Hill 4-0098 but -- that wasn't the number I over heard. I mean, Murray Hill 4-0098 is my husband's office.

MARTIN: MmmHmm.

AGNES: He's working late tonight -- and I was trying to reach him to ask him to come home...

MARTIN: Yes...

AGNES: I'm an invalid, you know -- and it's the maid's night off and I hate to be alone even though he says...
MARTIN: Yeah, well...

AGNES: ...as long as I have the telephone here right beside my bed...

MARTIN: Well, we'll look into it, Mrs. Stevenson and see if we can check with the telephone company...

AGNES: The telephone company said they couldn't check the call! The parties have stopped talking! I've already taken care of that!

MARTIN: Oh, you have!

AGNES: Yes, and personally, I feel you ought to do something more immediate and drastic than just check the call. What good does checking the call do if they've stopped talking. By the time you track it down, they'll have already committed the murder!

MARTIN: Yeah, well, we'll take care of it. Don't you worry...

AGNES: I say the whole thing calls for a search! A complete and thorough search of the whole city. I'm very near the bridge and I'm not very far...

MARTIN: You said...

AGNES: From Second Avenue and I know I'd feel a whole lot better if you sent around a radio car to this neighborhood at once.

MARTIN: Well, what makes you think the murder is going to be committed in your neighborhood, m'am?

AGNES: Well, I – I – I don't know, only the coincidence is so horrible: Second Avenue, the patrolman, the bridge...

MARTIN: Yeah, well, Second Avenue you know, is a very long street, m'am. And you know how many bridges there are in the city of New York alone. Not to mention Brooklyn, Staten Island and Queens and the Bronx...

AGNES: I know all that!!

MARTIN: How do you know it isn't some little house on Staten Island on some little Second Avenue you never heard about? How do you know they're even talking about New York at all?

AGNES: But I heard the call on the New York dialing system...

MARTIN: Well, maybe it was a long distance call you overheard.

AGNES: No!!

MARTIN: You know, telephones are funny things. Now, look, why don't you look at it this way: Supposing you hadn't broken in on that telephone call. Supposing you got your husband the way you always do. You wouldn't be so upset, would you?

AGNES: I – I – well I suppose not. But it sounded so inhuman, so cold blooded...

MARTIN: Well, a lot of murders are plotted in this city everyday, m'am. We manage to prevent almost all of them, but a clue of this kind is so vague, it isn't much more use to us than no clue at all...

AGNES: But surely you can...

MARTIN: Unless of course you have some reason for thinking this call was phony and somebody was planning to murder you.

AGNES: Me?! No! I hardly think so. I – I mean, why should anybody? I'm alone all day and night. I see nobody except my maid, Eloise. She's a big two-hundred-pounder.

MARTIN: Yeah.

AGNES: She's too lazy to bring up my breakfast tray...

MARTIN: MmmHmm.

AGNES: ...and the only other person is my husband, Elbert. He's crazy about me. He adores me. He waits on my hand and foot and...

MARTIN: MmmHmm.

AGNES: ...has scarcely left my side since I took sick twelve years ago...
MARTIN: Yeah, well, then there's nothing for you to worry about and you just leave the rest of this to us, we'll take care of it.

AGNES: Well, what will ya do? It's so late. It's nearly eleven now!

MARTIN: We'll take care of it, lady.

AGNES: Well, will ya, broadcast it all over the city? And send out squads. And warn your radio cars to watch out especially in suspicious neighborhoods like mine...

MARTIN: Lady, I said we'd take care of it...now, uh, I've got a couple other matters here on my desk that require immediate attention, so, uh, good night, m'am. Thank you.

AGNES: Oh, you! You idiot!

SFX: SLAMS TELEPHONE

AGNES: (groans) If I could only get out of this bed for a little while. (losing it) If I could get a breath of fresh air - or just lean out of the window -- and see the street ...

SFX: TELEPHONE RINGS

AGNES: (Picking up phone instantly) Hello -- Elbert? Hello.

Hello. HELLO!... Oh -- what's the matter with this phone? -- HELLO. HELLO --

SFX: SLAMS PHONE

AGNES: (Picking up phone instantly) Hello? Hello ... Oh, for heavens sake -- who is this? Hello -- hello. HELLO.

SFX: SLAMS PHONE. PICKS UP PHONE AND DIALS OPERATOR

AGNES: (To herself) Who is trying to call me? What are they trying to do to me?

SFX: RINGING

OPERATOR: Your call, please?

AGNES: Hello, Operator -- I don't know what's the matter with this telephone tonight, but it's positively driving me crazy. I've never seen such inefficient, miserable service ... Now, look! Look, I'm an invalid, and I'm very nervous -- and I'm not supposed to be annoyed, but if this keeps on much longer...

OPERATOR: What seems to be the trouble?

AGNES: Well, everything's wrong! I haven't had one bit of satisfaction out of one call I've made this evening! The whole world could be murdered for all you people care. And now my phone keeps ringing and ringing and ringing and ringing every five seconds or so and when I pick it up there's no one there...

OPERATOR: I am sorry. If you will hang up, I will test it for you.
AGNES: I don't want you to test it for me! I want you to put that call through, whatever it is, at once!

OPERATOR: I'm afraid I cannot do that, I...

AGNES: You can't! And why? Why may I ask?

OPERATOR: The dial system is automatic. If...

AGNES: (OHHH! Frustrated)

OPERATOR: ...someone is trying to dial your number, there is no way to check whether the call is coming through the system or not...

AGNES: (Arghh)

OPERATOR: ...unless the person who is trying to reach you complains to his particular operator.

AGNES: Well, of all the stupid...and meanwhile I've got to sit here, in my bed, suffering every time that phone rings. Imagining everything...

OPERATOR: I will try to check the trouble...

AGNES: Check it!! Check it!!!

OPERATOR: ...for you m'am.

AGNES: Oh, what's the use of talking to you! You're so stupid!

SFX: SLAMS PHONE DOWN.

AGNES: I'll fix her.

SFX: FRANTIC DIALING, RINGING

AGNES: How dare she speak to me like that. How dare she speak to me like that.

OPERATOR: Your call, please.

AGNES: Young woman, I don't know your name. But there are ways of finding you out. And I'm going to report you to your superiors for the most unpardonable rudeness and insolence that's ever been my privilege--- Oh -- give me the business office at once!

OPERATOR: You may dial that number direct.

AGNES: Dial it direct? I'll do no such thing! I don't even know the number.

OPERATOR: The number is in the directory or you may secure it by dialing infor...

AGNES: Listen here! You -- what's the use!

SFX: SLAMS PHONE. ALMOST INSTANTLY PHONE RINGS

AGNES: (To herself) Oh, for heavens sake! I'm going out of my mind!

SFX: PICKS UP PHONE

AGNES: Hello. Hello. Stop ringing me, do you hear? Answer me! Who is this? Do you realize you're driving me crazy? Who's calling me? What are ya doing it for? Now -- stop it -- stop it -- stop it, I say! If you don't stop ringing me I'm going to call the police, do you hear? HELLO -- hello. (Sobs) If Elbert would only come home.

SFX: PHONE RINGS

AGNES: (crying) Oh, let it ring. Let it go on ringing. I won't answer it. I won't answer it this time. If it goes on ringing all night, I won't answer it. (sobbing) I won't answer it.

SFX: RINGING STOPS

AGNES: It stopped. Why did it stop ringing all of a sudden? What time is it? Where's my clock? Where is it? Five to eleven. They've decided something. They're sure I'm home. They've heard my voice answering. That's why they've been ringing.

SFX: DIALING, RINGING

AGNES: Oh, where is she? Why doesn't she answer?

OPERATOR: You-er call, please?
AGNES: Where were you just now! Why didn't you answer? Give me the police department.

SFX: DIALING, BUSY SIGNAL

AGNES: (loud groan)

OPERATOR: I'm sorry the line is busy, I will call you when...

AGNES: Busy!! That's impossible. The police department can't be busy. There must be other lines available.

OPERATOR: The line is busy. I will try to get them for you later.

AGNES: NO! I've got to speak to them now. It may be too late. I've got to talk to someone...

OPERATOR: What number do you wish to speak to?

AGNES: I don't know but there must be someone to protect people besides the police department (hysterical, catching her breath—hyperventilating) a detective agency—a—

OPERATOR: You will find agencies listed in the classified directory...

AGNES: I don't have a classified! I mean I'm too nervous to look it up. I don't know how to use the book...

OPERATOR: I will connect you with information. Perhaps, she will be able to help you.

AGNES: No! No! (sobbing but angrily) Oh, your being spiteful aren't you! You don't care what happens to me. I can die and you won't care... (sobbing)

SFX: HANGS UP PHONE. PHONE RINGS

AGNES: (screaming) Oh, stop it! Stop it! I can't stand anymore.

SFX: PICKS UP RECEIVER

AGNES: (screaming into the telephone) Hello, what do you want? Stop ringing! Will you stop...

WESTERN U: Hello? Is this Plaza 3-2099?

AGNES: Yes. (regaining her poise but still crying) Yes, this is Plaza 3-2099.

WESTERN U: This is Western Union. I have a telegram here for Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. Is there anyone there to receive the message?

AGNES: I - I'm Mrs. Stevenson...


AGNES: (softly) Oh, no...

WESTERN U: Do you wish us to deliver a copy of the message?

AGNES: (on the brink of despair) No. No, thank you.

WESTERN U: Thank you, madam. Good night.

AGNES: (weakly, resigned) Good night.

SFX: TELEPHONE HANGS UP.

AGNES: No! (in grief) No, I don't believe it. He couldn't do it. He couldn't do it. Nobody knows I'll be all alone. It's some trick. It's some trick! I know it.

SFX: DIALING, RINGING.

OPERATOR: Your number, please?

AGNES: Operator, try that number, Murray Hill 4-0098 for me just once more. Please.

OPERATOR: You may dial that number direct.

AGNES: Ohhh!

SFX: HANGS UP. DIALING
AGNES: Four, Oh Oh nine eight...

SFX: RINGING.

AGNES: (sobbing) Oh, no! You're gone. Oh, Elbert, how could you? How could you? Oh but I can't stay alone tonight. I can't. If I'm alone one more second I'll go mad. I don't care what he says or what the expense is, I'm a sick woman. I'm entitled to some consideration. (sobbing)

SFX: PICKS UP PHONE, DIALING. RINGING.

INFORM: This is information, may I help you?

AGNES: I - I want to telephone number of Henchly Hospital.

INFORM: Henchly Hospital. Do you have the street address?

AGNES: No. No, it's somewhere in the 70s. It's a very small, private and exclusive hospital where I had my appendix out two years ago -- Henchly, H - E - N - C - H - L – Y.

INFORM: One moment, please.

AGNES: Please hurry, and please, what is the time?

INFORM: You may find out the time by dialing Meridian 71212

AGNES: Oh, for heavens sake, I've no time to be dialing!

INFORM: The number of Henchly Hospital is Butterfield 8-9970.

SFX: HANGS UP. PICKS UP AND DIALS BU 8-9970

AGNES: Is that Henchly Hospital?

RECEPT: Henchly Hospital.

AGNES: Nurses registry.

RECEPT: Who is it that you want to speak to?

AGNES: I want the Nurses Registry at once. I want a trained nurse. I want to hire her immediately -- for the night...

RECEPT: I see. What is the nature of the case, madam?

AGNES: Nerves. I'm very nervous. I need soothing and companionship. You see, my husband is away and I'm...

RECEPT: Have you been recommended to us by any doctor in particular madam?

AGNES: No, but I really don't see why all this is necessary. I want a trained nurse. I was a patient in your hospital two years ago and after all, I do expect to pay this person for attending me...

RECEPT: We quite understand that, madam, but these are war times, you know. Registered nurses are very scarce just now and our superintendent has asked us to send people out only on cases where the physician in charge feels it is absolutely necessary...

AGNES: Well, it is absolutely necessary! I'm a sick woman -- I -- I'm very upset... Very. I'm alone in this house -- and I'm an invalid -- and tonight I overheard a telephone conversation that upset me dreadfully. A woman is going to be killed when a train crosses a bridge... (beginning to yell) ... in fact, if someone doesn't come at once I'm afraid I'll go out of my mind!

RECEPT: (patronizing) Well, I'll speak to Miss Phillips as soon as she comes in. And what is your name, madam?

AGNES: Miss Phillips? When do you expect her to come in?

RECEPT: I really couldn't say. She went out to supper at eleven o'clock?

AGNES: Eleven o'clock! But it's not eleven yet! OH! Oh, my clock has stopped. I thought it was running down. What time is it?

RECEPT: Jus fifteen minutes past eleven.

SFX: TELEPHONE CLICKS

AGNES: (whispering) What was that?

RECEPT: What was what, madam?

AGNES: That. That click just now -- in my own telephone -- as though someone had lifted the receiver off the hook -- off
the extension telephone downstairs.

RECEPT: I didn't hear it, madam. Now about this nur...

AGNES: But I did! There's someone in this house -- someone downstairs -- in the kitchen -- and they're listening to me now. They're list...

SFX: TELEPHONE DISCONNECTS

AGNES: (To herself) I won't pick it up. I won't let them hear me. I'll be quiet -- and they'll think -- But if I don't call someone now while they're still down there there'll be no time.

SFX: PICKS UP PHONE. DIALS OPERATOR

AGNES: (To herself) I've got to get that operator.

OPERATOR: Your call, please?

AGNES: (Whisper) Operator! Operator! -- I -- I'm in desperate trouble -- I...

OPERATOR: I'm sorry, I cannot hear you. Please, speak louder.

AGNES: ...I don't dare speak louder. There's someone listening. Can you hear me now?

OPERATOR: I'm sorry...

AGNES: But you've got to hear me! Please, please. You've got to help me. There's someone in this house -- someone who's going to murder me -- and you've got to get in touch with the...

SFX: CLICKS ON TELEPHONE

AGNES: There it is! Did you hear it? He's put it down. He's put down the extension phone. He's coming up the stairs. Give me the police department.

OPERATOR: One moment, please, I will connect you.

SFX: DIALING, RINGING