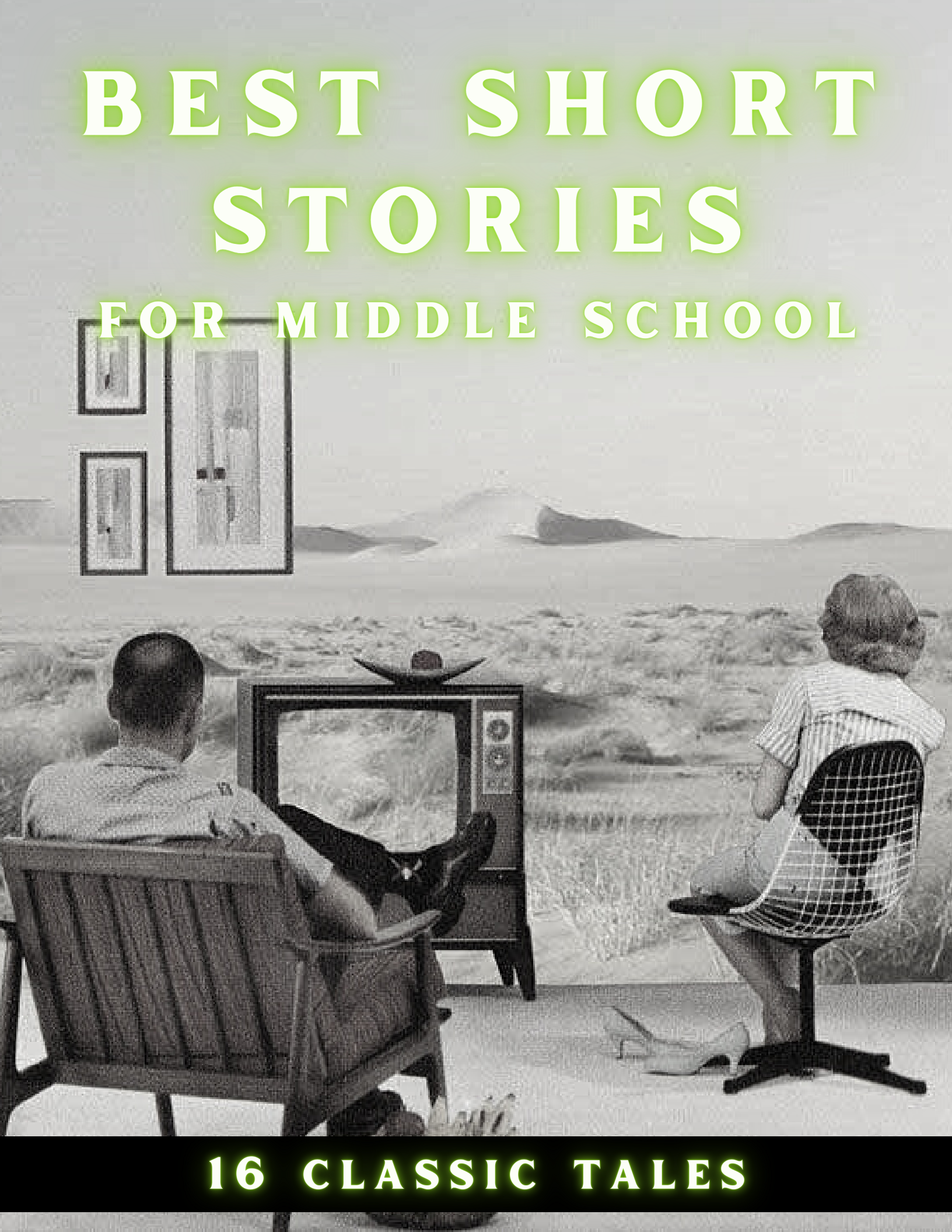
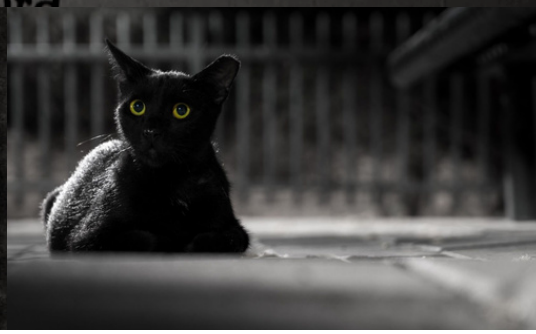
BEST SHORT STORIES

FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL



16 CLASSIC TALES

BEST SHORT STORIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL



THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

by Richard Connell

Trapped on a remote and desolate island, Rainsford must match wits against a cruel and dangerous hunter who hunts men for sport.

THE MONKEY'S PAW

by WW Jacobs

The classic story of a monkey's paw that grants three wishes & demonstrates you should be careful what you wish for.

THE BLACK CAT

by Edgar Allan Poe

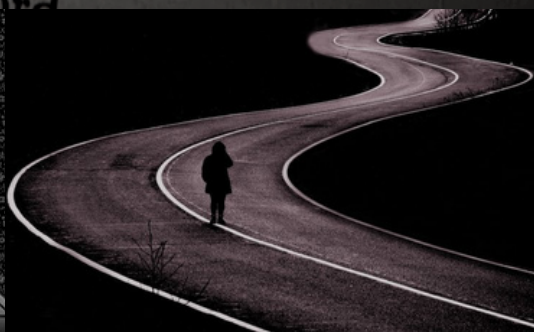
A man descends into madness as he believes himself haunted by a demonic black cat that he once loved and then killed.

THE VELDT

by Ray Bradbury

In the future, children immerse themselves in technology so powerful that it can almost replace reality. But when Mother and Father threaten to turn that technology off, the children are not pleased.

BEST SHORT STORIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL



THE LOTTERY

by Shirley Jackson

What begins as an innocent local tradition -- a lottery held each year in a tiny village -- quickly becomes a scene of horror when the real purpose of the lottery becomes clear.

LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER

by Roald Dahl

A wicked murder mystery in which the criminal finds a unique way of disposing of all evidence of the crime.

THE HITHCHIKER

by Lucille Fletcher

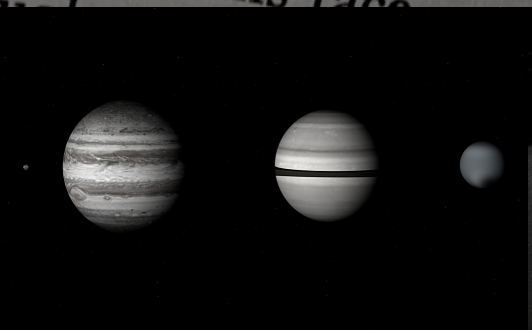
A haunting radio play about a man driving the lonely highways across America, & the disturbing hitchhiker he spots along the road time and again, always just ahead, and always calling to him.

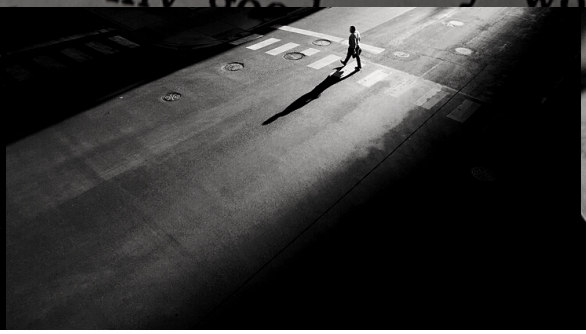
THE 9 BILLION NAMES OF GOD

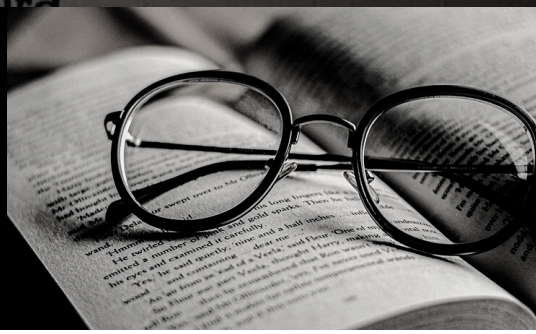
by Arthur C Clarke

A trek high up into the mountains to deliver a sequencing computer to a group of monks who believe that once they have transcribed all nine billion names of God everything in existence will end leads to one of the great twist endings in literature.

BEST SHORT STORIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL







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 PEDESTRIAN

by Ray Bradbury

In a bleak future world a lone man strides through the night and discovers that even walking can be a rebellious act.

TIME ENOUGH AT LAST

by Lynn Venable

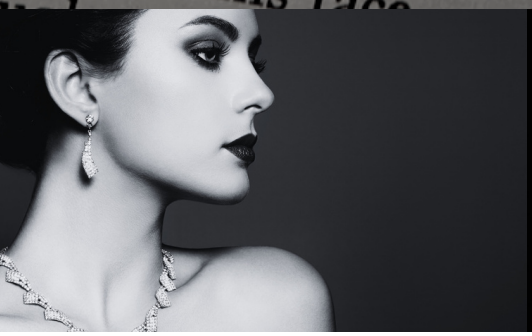
A man's only wish is to have time to read. When nuclear war breaks out, he has plenty of time. But will he enjoy it?

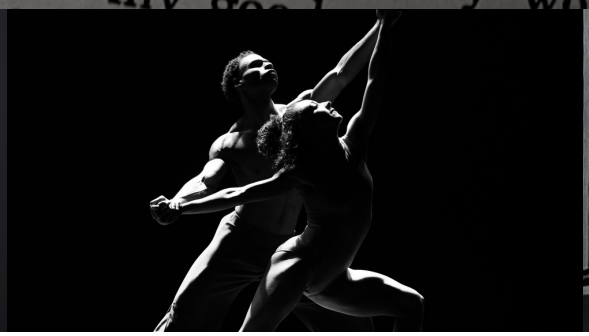
THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

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.

BEST SHORT STORIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL





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?

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

by Richard Connell

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

"It's rather a mystery—"

"What island is it?" Rainsford asked.

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

"Cannibals?" suggested Rainsford. "

Hardly. Even cannibals wouldn't live in such a Godforsaken place. But it's

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

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

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

"I'm not sleepy," said Rainsford. "I'm going to smoke another pipe on the afterdeck. Good night, Whitney."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The general nodded. "The biggest."

"Really?"

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

"A new animal? You're joking."

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

"But the animal, General Zaroff?"

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

"But no animal can reason," objected Rainsford.

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

"I can't believe you are serious, General Zaroff," gasped Rainsford. "This is a grisly joke."

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

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

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

"Suppose he refuses to be hunted?"

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

"And if they win?" The smile on the general's face widened.

"And if they win?"

The smile on the general's face widened. "To date I have not lost." he said.

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

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

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

"But, my dear fellow," the general protested, "you've only just come. You've had no hunting."

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

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

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

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

"You don't mean—" cried Rainsford.

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

"And if I win—" began Rainsford huskily.

"I'll cheerfully acknowledge myself defeated if I do not find you by midnight of the third day, and my ship will place you on the mainland near a town. Ivan will supply you with

hunting clothes, food, a knife. Avoid the big swamp in the southeast corner of the island; there's quicksand there. You'll want to start immediately. I shall not follow till dusk. Hunting at night is so much more exciting than by day. Au revoir, Mr. Rainsford, au revoir." General Zaroff left to take his afternoon siesta and from another door came Ivan with provisions for Rainsford.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When the general and his pack reached the sea, the general

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

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

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

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

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

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

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.

THE MONKEY'S PAW

by WW Jacobs

PART ONE

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

"Listen to the wind," said Mr. White who, having seen a mistake that could cost him the game after it was too late, was trying to stop his son from seeing it.

"I'm listening," said the son, seriously studying the board as he stretched out his hand. "Check."

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

"Mate," replied the son.

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

"Never mind, dear," said his wife calmly; "perhaps you'll win the next one."

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

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

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

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

The new arrival talked about his sadness, so that Mrs. White said, “Tut, tut!” and coughed gently as her husband entered the room followed by a tall, heavy built, strong-looking man, whose skin had the healthy reddish colour associated with outdoor life and whose eyes showed that he could be a dangerous enemy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His voice was so serious that the group fell quiet.

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

The soldier shook his head. “Fancy I suppose,” he said slowly.

"I did have some idea of selling it, but I don't think I will. It has caused me enough trouble already. Besides, people won't buy. They think it's just a story, some of them; and those who do think anything of it want to try it first and pay me afterward."

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

"I don't know," said the other. "I don't know."

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

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

"If you don't want it Morris," said the other, "give it to me."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He shook his head. "Never mind, though; there's no harm

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

They sat down by the fire again while the two men finished their pipes. Outside, the wind was higher than ever, and the old man jumped nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. An unusual and depressing silence settled on all three, which lasted until the old couple got up to to go to bed.

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

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

PART TWO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I – was asked to call," he said at last, and bent down and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from 'Maw and Meggins.' "

The old lady jumped suddenly, as in alarm. "Is anything the matter?" she asked breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert? What is it? What is it?"

Her husband spoke before he could answer. “There there mother,” he said hurriedly. “Sit down, and don’t jump to a conclusion. You’ve not brought bad news, I’m sure sir,” and eyed the other, expecting that it was bad news but hoping he was wrong.

“I’m sorry – ” began the visitor.

“Is he hurt?” demanded the mother wildly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Two hundred pounds,” was the answer.

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

PART THREE

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

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

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

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

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

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

“THE PAW!” she cried wildly. “THE MONKEY’S PAW!”

He started up in alarm. “Where? Where is it? What’s the matter?”

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

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

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

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

“Think of what?” he questioned.

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

“Was not that enough?” he demanded angrily.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“WISH!” she cried in a strong voice.

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

“WISH!” repeated his wife.

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

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

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

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

At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he stopped to light another; and at the same moment a knock sounded on

the front door. It was so quiet that it could only be heard downstairs, as if the one knocking wanted to keep their coming a secret.

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

“WHAT’S THAT?” cried the old woman, sitting up quickly.

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

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

“It’s Herbert!” she screamed. “It’s Herbert!”

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

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

“For God’s sake don’t let it in,” cried the old man, shaking with fear.

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

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

“The top lock,” she cried loudly. “Come down. I can’t reach it.”

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

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

THE BLACK CAT

by Edgar Allan Poe

For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not—and very surely do I not dream. But to–morrow I die, and to–day I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified—have tortured—have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but Horror—to many they will seem less terrible than barroques. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common–place—some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the

circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious dog, I need

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

hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. There is something in the unselfish and self–sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere Man.

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

rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair.

I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am detailing a chain of facts—and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire—a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words "strange!" "singular!" and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven inbas relief upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic cat. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvelous. There was a rope about the animal's neck.

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

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

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

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

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

What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast, was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed, in a high degree, that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures. With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader

comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber, in this manner, to my breast. At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a memory of my former crime, but chiefly—let me confess it at once—by absolute dread of the beast.

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

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

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

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

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

For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed, and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the dampness of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled up, and made to resemble the red of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect any thing suspicious. And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crow-bar I easily dislodged the bricks, and, having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped it in that

position, while, with little trouble, I re–laid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar, sand, and hair, with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brickwork. When I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The rubbish on the floor was picked up with the minutest care. I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself—"Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain."

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE VELDT

by Ray Bradbury

"George, I wish you'd look at the nursery."

"What's wrong with it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, then."

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

"What would a psychologist want with a nursery?"

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

"All right, let's have a look."

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

"Well," said George Hadley.

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

> *"It's just that the nursery is different now than it was.*

"But nothing's too good for our children," George had said.

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

them became a deep sky with a hot yellow sun. George Hadley felt the perspiration start on his brow.

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

"Wait a moment, you'll see," said his wife.

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

"Filthy creatures," he heard his wife say. "The vultures."

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

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

"Are you sure?" His wife sounded peculiarly tense.

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

"Did you bear that scream?" she asked.

"No."

"About a minute ago?"

"Sorry, no."

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

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

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

"Watch out!" screamed Lydia.

The lions came running at them. Lydia bolted and ran. Instinctively, George sprang after her. Outside, in the hall, with the door slammed he was laughing and she was crying, and they both stood appalled at the other's reaction.

"George!"

"Lydia! Oh, my dear poor sweet Lydia!"

"They almost got us!"

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

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

"Now, Lydia..."

"You've got to tell Wendy and Peter not to read any more on Africa."

"Of course — of course." He patted her.

"Promise?"

"Sure."

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

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

"It's got to be locked, that's all there is to it."

"All right." Reluctantly he locked the huge door. "You've been working too hard. You need a rest."

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

"You mean you want to fry my eggs for me?"

"Yes." She nodded. "And dam my socks?"

"Yes." A frantic, watery-eyed nodding.

"And sweep the house?"

"Yes, yes — oh, yes!"

"But I thought that's why we bought this house, so we wouldn't have to do anything?"

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

"I suppose I have been smoking too much."

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

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

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

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

"Of course not," he said.

***

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

"We forgot the ketchup," he said.

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

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

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

But this — the long, hot African veldt — the awful death in the jaws of a lion. And repeated again and again.

"Where are you going?"

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

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

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

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

"Go away," he said to the lions.

They did not go.

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

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

"Come on, room! I demand Aladin!" he said.

Nothing happened. The lions mumbled in their baked pelts.

"Aladin!"

He went back to dinner.

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

"Or —"

"Or what?"

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

"Could be."

"Or Peter's set it to remain that way."

"Set it?"

"He may have got into the machinery and fixed something."

"Peter doesn't know machinery."

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

"Nevertheless —"

"Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad."

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

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

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

"Nursery?"

"All about Africa and everything," said the father with false joviality.

"I don't understand," said Peter.

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

"There's no Africa in the nursery," said Peter simply.

"Oh, come now, Peter. We know better."

"I don't remember any Africa," said Peter to Wendy. "Do you?"

"No."

"Run see and come tell." She obeyed.

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

"She doesn't have to tell me. I've seen it."

"I'm sure you're mistaken, Father."

"I'm not, Peter. Come along now." But Wendy was back.

"It's not Africa," she said breathlessly.

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

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

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

They opened their mouths.

"You heard me," he said.

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

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

"What is that?" she asked.

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

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

He closed the nursery door and locked it, tight.

***

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

"Of course."

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

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know. But it's staying locked until I find out."

"How did your wallet get there?"

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

"It's supposed to help them work off their neuroses in a healthful way."

"I'm starting to wonder." He stared at the ceiling. "We've given the children everything they ever wanted. Is this our reward--secrecy, disobedience?"

"Who was it said, 'Children are carpets, they should be stepped on occasionally'? We've never lifted a hand. They're insufferable — let's admit it. They come and go when they like; they treat us as if we were offspring. They're spoiled and we're spoiled."

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

"They're not old enough to do that alone, I explained."

"Nevertheless, I've noticed they've been decidedly cool toward us since."

"I think I'll have David McClean come tomorrow morning to have a look at Africa."

"But it's not Africa now, it's Green Mansions country and Rima."

"I have a feeling it'll be Africa again before then."

A moment later they heard the screams.

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

"Wendy and Peter aren't in their rooms," said his wife.

He lay in his bed with his beating heart. "No," he said. "They've broken into the nursery."

"Those screams — they sound familiar."

"Do they?"

"Yes, awfully."

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

***

"Father?" said Peter.

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

"That all depends."

"On what?" snapped Peter.

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

"I thought we were free to play as we wished."

"You are, within reasonable bounds."

"What's wrong with Africa, Father?"

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

"I wouldn't want the nursery locked up," said Peter coldly. "Ever."

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

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

"It would be fun for a change, don't you think?"

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

"That's because I wanted you to learn to paint all by yourself, son."

"I don't want to do anything but look and listen and smell; what else is there to do?"

"All right, go play in Africa."

"Will you shut off the house sometime soon?"

"We're considering it." "I don't think you'd better consider it

any more, Father."

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

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

***

"Am I on time?" said David McClean.

"Breakfast?" asked George Hadley.

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

"David, you're a psychologist."

"I should hope so."

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

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

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

There was a terrible screaming from the nursery.

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

They walked in on the children without rapping.

The screams had faded. The lions were feeding.

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

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

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

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

"A little over a month."

"It certainly doesn't feel good."

"I want facts, not feelings."

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

"Is it that bad?"

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

"Didn't you sense this before?"

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

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

"What else?"

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

"Ah, ha!"

"Does that mean anything?"

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

"But won't the shock be too much for the children, shutting the room up abruptly, for good?"

"I don't want them going any deeper into this, that's all."

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

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

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

"What?"

"— That they could become real?"

"Not that I know."

"Some flaw in the machinery, a tampering or something?"

"No."

They went to the door.

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

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

"Paranoia is thick around here today," said David McClean.

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

"No." George Hadley's face was rigid. "It belongs to Lydia."

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

***

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

"You can't do that to the nursery, you can't!"

"Now, children."

The children flung themselves onto a couch, weeping.

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

"No."

"You can't be so cruel..."

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

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

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

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

"Insults won't get you anywhere."

"I wish you were dead!"

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

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

"Oh, George," said the wife, "it can't hurt."

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

"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" sang the children, smiling with wet faces.

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

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

"I'll be glad when we get away," she sighed.

"Did you leave them in the nursery?"

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

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

"Pride, money, foolishness."

"I think we'd better get downstairs before those kids get engrossed with those damned beasts again."

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

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

"Wendy? Peter!"

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

The door slammed.

"Wendy, Peter!"

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

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

"Open up!" He heard Peter's voice outside, against the door.

"Don't let them switch off the nursery and the house," he was saying.

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

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

The lions.

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

Mr. and Mrs. Hadley screamed.

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

***

"Well, here I am," said David McClean in the nursery doorway,

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

directly."

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

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

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

"A cup of tea?" asked Wendy in the silence.

THE LOTTERY

by Shirley Jackson

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

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

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

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

The women, wearing faded house dresses and sweaters, came shortly after their menfolk. They greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip as they went to join their husbands. Soon the women, standing by their husbands, began to call to their children, and the children came reluctantly, having to be called four or five times. Bobby Martin ducked under his mother's grasping hand and ran, laughing, back to the pile of stones. His father spoke up sharply, and Bobby came quickly and took his place between his father and his oldest brother.

The lottery was conducted as were the square dances, the teen club, the Halloween program by Mr. Summers who had time and energy to devote to civic activities. He was a round-faced, jovial man and he ran the coal business, and people were sorry for him because he had no children and his wife was a scold. When he arrived in the square, carrying the black wooden box, there was a murmur of conversation among the villagers, and he waved and called, "Little late today, folks." The postmaster, Mr. Graves, followed him, carrying a three legged stool, and the stool was put in the center of the square and Mr. Summers set the black box down on it. The villagers kept their distance, leaving a space between themselves and the stool, and when Mr. Summers said, "Some of you fellows want to give me a hand?" there was a hesitation before two men, Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, came forward to hold the box steady on the stool while Mr. Summers stirred up the papers inside it.

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

Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, held the black box securely on the stool until Mr. Summers had stirred the papers thoroughly with his hand. Because so much of the ritual had been forgotten or discarded, Mr. Summers had been successful in having slips of paper substituted for the chips of wood that had been used for generations. Chips of wood, Mr. Summers had argued. had been all very well when the village was tiny, but now that the population was more than three hundred and likely to keep on growing, it was necessary to use something that would fit more easily into he black box. The night before the lottery, Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves made up the slips of paper and put them in the box, and it was then taken to the safe of Mr. Summers' coal company and locked up until Mr. Summers was ready to take it to the square next morning. The rest of the year, the box was put way, sometimes one place, sometimes another; it had spent one year in Mr. Graves' barn and another year underfoot in the post office, and sometimes it was set on a shelf in the Martin grocery and left there.

There was a great deal of fussing to be done before Mr. Summers declared the lottery open. There were the lists to make upof heads of families, heads of households in each family, members of each household in each family. There was the proper swearingin of Mr. Summers by the postmaster, as the official of the lottery; at one time, some people remembered, there had been a recital of some sort, performed by the official of the lottery, a perfunctory. tuneless chant that had been rattled off duly each year; some people believed that the official of the lottery used to stand just so when he said or sang it, others believed that he was supposed to walk among the people, but years and years ago this p3rt of the ritual had been allowed to lapse. There had been, also, a ritual salute, which the official of the lottery had had to use in addressing each person who came up to draw from the box, but this also had changed with time, until now it was felt necessary only for the official to speak to each person approaching. Mr. Summers was very good at all this; in his clean white shirt and blue jeans, with one hand resting carelessly on the black box, he seemed very proper and important as he talked interminably to Mr. Graves and the Martins.

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

Mrs. Hutchinson craned her neck to see through the crowd and found her husband and children standing near the front. She tapped Mrs. Delacroix on the arm as a farewell and began to make her way through the crowd. The people separated goodhumouredly to let her through: two or three people said,

in voices just loud enough to be heard across the crowd, "Here comes your, Missus, Hutchinson," and "Bill, she made it after all." Mrs. Hutchinson reached her husband, and Mr. Summers, who had been waiting, said cheerfully, "Thought we were going to have to get on without you, Tessie." Mrs. Hutchinson said, grinning, "Wouldn't have me leave m'dishes in the sink, now, would you. Joe?" and soft laughter ran through the crowd as the people stirred back into position after Mrs. Hutchinson's arrival.

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

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

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

"Me. I guess," a woman said, and Mr. Summers turned to look at her. "Wife draws for her husband." Mr. Summers said. "Don't you have a grown boy to do it for you, Janey?" Although Mr. Summers and everyone else in the village knew the answer perfectly well, it was the business of the official of the lottery to ask such questions formally. Mr. Summers waited with an expression of polite interest while Mrs. Dunbar answered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Clark.... Delacroix"

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

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

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

"Harburt.... Hutchinson."

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

"Jones."

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

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

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

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

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

"Overdyke.... Percy."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Zanini."

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

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

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

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

"Shut up, Tessie," Bill Hutchinson said.

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

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

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

"It wasn't fair," Tessie said.

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

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

"Right," Bill Hutchinson said.

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

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

"All right, then," Mr. Summers said. "Harry, you got their tickets back?"

Mr. Graves nodded and held up the slips of paper. "Put them in the box, then," Mr. Summers directed. "Take Bill's and put it in."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It isn't fair," she said. A stone hit her on the side of the head. Old Man Warner was saying, "Come on, come on, everyone."

Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers, with Mrs. Graves beside him.

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

LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER

by Roald Dahl

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

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

Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did. The drop of a head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil. Her skin--for this was her sixth month with child--had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger darker than before. When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.

"Hullo darling," she said.

"Hullo darling," he answered.

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

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

For her, this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn't want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house. She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel-almost as a sunbather feels the sun-that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room

with long strides. She loved intent, far look in his eyes when they rested in her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whiskey had taken some of it away.

"Tired darling?"

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

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

"Sit down," he said.

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

"Darling, shall I get your slippers?"

"No."

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

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

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

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

"No," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And he told her. It didn't take long, four or five minutes at most, and she say very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror as he went further and further away from her with each word.

"So there it is," he added. "And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, bet there simply wasn't any other way. Of course I'll give you money and see you're looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job."

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

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

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

A leg of lamb.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hullo Sam," she said brightly, aloud.

The voice sounded peculiar too.

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

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

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

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

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

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

peas."

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

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

"Then how about meat, Mrs. Maloney?"

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

"Oh."

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

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

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

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

"Well-what would you suggest, Sam?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Who's speaking?"

"Mrs. Maloney. Mrs. Patrick Maloney."

"You mean Patrick Maloney's dead?"

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

"Be right over," the man said.

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

"Is he dead?" she cried.

"I'm afraid he is. What happened?"

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

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

"Which grocer?" one of the detectives asked.

She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective who immediately went outside into the street.
In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases-"...acted quite normal...very cheerful...wanted to give him a good supper...peas...cheesecake...impossible that she..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Or a big spanner?"

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

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

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

"Would you mind giving me a drink?"

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

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

He handed her the glass.

"Why don't you have one yourself," she said. "You must be awfully tired. Please do. You've been very good to me."

"Well," he answered. "It's not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going."

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes?"

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

"We can try, Mrs. Maloney."

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

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

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

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

"Have some more, Charlie?"

"No. Better not finish it."

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

"Okay then. Give me some more."

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

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

"Exactly what I say."

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

One of them belched.

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

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

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

THE HITCHHIKER

by Lucille Fletcher

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MRS. ADAMS: (STIFLES A SOB)

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

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

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

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

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

ADAMS: Stranger? Look... don't worry. There isn't anything going to happen. It's just eight days of perfectly simple driving on smooth, decent, civilized roads

with a hot dog or a hamburger stand every ten miles. Now, don't worry. Goodbye...

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

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

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

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

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

HIKER: (GHOSTLY ECHO) Hellooo! Hellooo!

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

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

ADAMS: Uh, fill 'er up, will ya?

ATTENDANT: Check your oil?

ADAMS: No, thanks. No.

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

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

ATTENDANT: Not a drop of rain all week.

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

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

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

ATTENDANT: (CHUCKLE) Hitchhikers? Here?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let me explain about his appearance before I go on. I repeat: there was nothing sinister about him. He was as drab as a mud fence, nor was his attitude menacing. He-- he just stood there

- waiting, almost drooping a little, the cheap overnight bag in his hand. He looked as though he'd been waiting there for hours. And he hailed me - - started to walk forward.

HIKER: (FROM A DISTANCE) Hellooo!

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

HIKER: (CLOSER) Hellooo!

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

HIKER: Goin' to California?!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOUND: (DOOR STARTS TO CLOSE)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOUND: (DISTANT TRAIN WHISTLE)

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

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

SOUND: (TRAIN WHISTLE AND BELL)

ADAMS: The train was coming closer. I could hear its bell. It's

- It's cry. It's whistle crying. Still he stood there. Now I knew that he was beckoning -- beckoning me to my death!

SOUND: MUSIC

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

After that, I knew I had to do something.

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

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

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

ADAMS: Like a ride?

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

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

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: Amarillo, Texas?

ADAMS: Yeah, I'll drive you there.

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: Gee!

ADAMS: Hop in...

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

ADAMS: No. Go right ahead.

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

ADAMS: You hitchhike much?

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

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

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: I don't get ya.

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

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

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

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

ADAMS: What would you do instead?

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

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

HITCHHIKING WOMAN: See who?

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

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

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

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

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

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

concerned--

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

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

ADAMS: Did you see him that time?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HIKER: (OFF) Hellooo!

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

HIKER: (DROWNED OUT BY SOUND) Hellooo!

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

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

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

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

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

MRS. WHITNEY: Mrs. Adams' residence.

ADAMS: Hello? Hello, mother?

MRS. WHITNEY: This is Mrs. Adams' residence. Who is it you wish to speak to, please?

ADAMS: Wha--? Who's this?

MRS. WHITNEY: This is Mrs. Whitney.

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

MRS. WHITNEY: Yes.

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

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

ADAMS: The hospital?

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

ADAMS: What's she in the hospital for?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

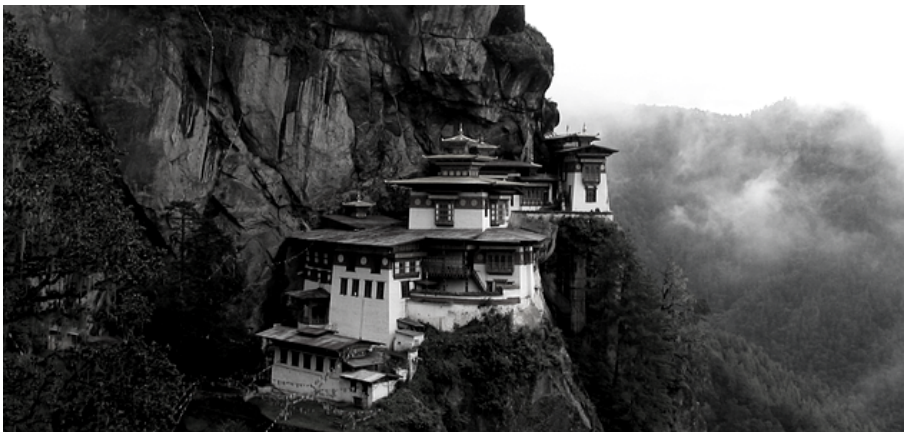
MUSIC: RUMBLES OMINOUSLY TO A FINISH

THE 9 BILLION NAMES OF GOD

by Arthur C Clarke

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

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



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

"I don't quite understand...."

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

"Naturally."

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

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

"I beg your pardon?"

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

"And you have been doing this for three centuries?"

"Yes: we expected it would take us about fifteen thousand years to

complete the task."

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

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

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

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

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

"Three? Surely you mean two."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The view from the parapet was vertiginous, but in time one gets used to anything. After three months, George Hanley was not impressed by the two-thousand-foot swoop into the abyss or the remote checkerboard of fields in the valley below. He was leaning against the wind-smoothed stones and staring morosely at the distant mountains whose names he

had never bothered to discover.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What d’ya mean? I thought we knew.”

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

“Tell me something new,” growled George.

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

“Go on: I’ll buy it.”

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

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

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

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

Chuck gave a nervous little laugh.

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

George thought this over a moment.

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

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

“I see,” said George slowly. “You’ve got a point there. But this sort of thing’s happened before, you know. When I was a kid down in Louisiana we had a crackpot preacher who once said

the world was going to end next Sunday. Hundreds of people believed him — even sold their homes. Yet when nothing happened, they didn't turn nasty, as you'd expect. They just decided that he'd made a mistake in his calculations and went right on believing. I guess some of them still do."

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

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

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

"Like hell we could! That would make things worse."

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

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

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

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

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

"There she is!" called Chuck, pointing down into the valley. "Ain't she beautiful!"

She certainly was, thought George. The battered old DC3 lay at the end of the runway like a tiny silver cross. In two hours she would be bearing them away to freedom and sanity. It was a thought worth savoring like a fine liqueur. George let it roll round his mind as the pony trudged patiently down the slope.

The swift night of the high Himalayas was now almost upon them. Fortunately, the road was very good, as roads went in that region, and they were both carrying torches. There was not the slightest danger, only a certain discomfort from the bitter cold. The sky overhead was perfectly clear, and ablaze with the familiar, friendly stars. At least there would be no risk, thought George, of the pilot being unable to take off because of weather conditions. That had been his only remaining worry.

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

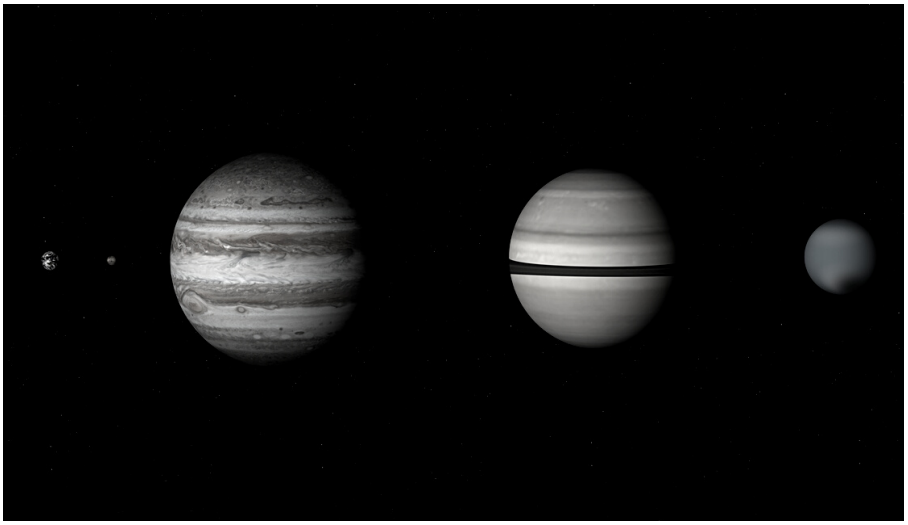
"Should be there in an hour," he called back over his shoulder

to Chuck. Then he added, in an afterthought: “Wonder if the computer’s finished its run. It was due about now.”

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

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

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



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.”

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.”

> *“You're sure we can get on the ship without anyone noticing?" she asked.*

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.”

“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 PEDESTRIAN

by Ray Bradbury

To enter out into that silence that was the city at eight o'clock of a misty evening in November, to put your feet upon that buckling concrete walk, to step over grassy seams and make your way, hands in pockets, through the silences, that was what Mr. Leonard Mead most dearly loved to do. He would stand upon the corner of an intersection and peer down long moonlit avenues of sidewalk in four directions, deciding which way to go, but it really made no difference; he was alone in this world of A.D. 2053, or as good as alone, and with a final decision made, a path selected, he would stride off, sending patterns of frosty air before him like the smoke of a cigar.

Sometimes he would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight to his house. And on his way he would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows. Sudden gray phantoms seemed to manifest upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night, or there were whisperings and murmurs where a window in a tomblike building was still open.

Mr. Leonard Mead would pause, cock his head, listen, look, and march on, his feet making no noise on the lumpy walk. For long ago he had wisely changed to sneakers when strolling at night, because the dogs in intermittent squads would parallel his journey with barkings if he wore hard heels, and lights might click on and faces appear and an entire street be startled by the passing of a lone figure, himself, in the early November evening.

> *Sometimes he would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight...*

On this particular evening he began his journey in a westerly direction, toward the hidden sea. There was a good crystal frost in the air; it cut the nose and made the lungs blaze like a Christmas tree inside; you could feel the cold light going on and off, all the branches filled with invisible snow. He listened to the faint push of his soft shoes through autumn leaves with satisfaction,

and whistled a cold quiet whistle between his teeth, occasionally picking up a leaf as he passed, examining its skeletal pattern in the infrequent lamplights as he went on, smelling its rusty smell.

"Hello, in there," he whispered to every house on every side as he moved. "What's up tonight on Channel 4, Channel 7, Channel 9? Where are the cowboys rushing, and do I see the United States Cavalry over the next hill to the rescue?"

The street was silent and long and empty, with only his shadow moving like the shadow of a hawk in midcountry. If he closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he could imagine himself upon the center of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona desert with no house in a thousand miles, and only dry river beds, the streets, for company.

"What is it now?" he asked the houses, noticing his wrist watch. "Eight-thirty P.M.? Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue? A comedian falling off the stage?"

Was that a murmur of laughter from within a moon-white house? He hesitated, but went on when nothing more happened. He stumbled over a particularly uneven section of sidewalk. The cement was vanishing under flowers and grass. In ten years of walking by night or day, for thousands of miles, he had never met another person walking, not once in all that time.

He came to a cloverleaf intersection which stood silent where two main highways crossed the town. During the day it was a thunderous surge of cars, the gas stations open, a great insect rustling and a ceaseless jockeying for position as the scarabbeetles, a faint incense puttering from their exhausts, skimmed homeward to the far directions. But now these highways, too, were like streams in a dry season, all stone and bed and moon radiance.

He turned back on a side street, circling around toward his home. He was within a block of his destination when the lone car turned a corner quite suddenly and flashed a fierce white cone of light upon him.

He stood entranced, not unlike a night moth, stunned by the illumination, and then drawn toward it.

A metallic voice called to him:

"Stand still. Stay where you are! Don't move!"

He halted.

"Put up your hands!"

"But-" he said.

"Your hands up! Or we'll Shoot!"

The police, of course, but what a rare, incredible thing; in a city of three million, there was only one police car left, wasn't that correct? Ever since a year ago, 2052, the election year, the force had been cut down from three cars to one. Crime was ebbing; there was no need now for the police, save for this one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets.

"Your name?" said the police car in a metallic whisper.

He couldn't see the men in it for the bright light in his eyes.

"Leonard Mead," he said.

"Speak up!"

"Leonard Mead!"

"Business or profession?"

"I guess you'd call me a writer."

"No profession," said the police car, as if talking to itself. The light held him fixed, like a museum specimen, needle thrust through chest.

"You might say that, " said Mr. Mead.

He hadn't written in years. Magazines and books didn't sell any more. Everything went on in the tomblike houses at night now, he thought, continuing his fancy. The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the gray or multicolored lights touching their faces, but never really touching them.

"No profession," said the phonograph voice, hissing.

"What are you doing out?"

"Walking," said Leonard Mead.

"Walking!"

"Just walking," he said simply, but his face felt cold.

"Walking, just walking, walking?"

"Yes, sir."

"Walking where? For what?"

"Walking for air. Walking to see."

"Your address!"

"Eleven South Saint James Street."

"And there is air in your house, you have an air conditioner, Mr. Mead?"

"Yes."

"And you have a viewing screen in your house to see with?"

"No."

"No?" There was a crackling quiet that in itself was an accusation.

"Are you married, Mr. Mead?"

"No."

"Not married," said the police voice behind the fiery beam, The moon was high and clear among the stars and the houses were gray and silent.

"Nobody wanted me," said Leonard Mead with a smile.

"Don't speak unless you're spoken to!"

Leonard Mead waited in the cold night.

"Just walking, Mr. Mead?"

"Yes."

"But you haven't explained for what purpose."

"I explained; for air, and to see, and just to walk."

"Have you done this often?"

"Every night for years."

The police car sat in the center of the street with its radio throat faintly humming.

"Well, Mr. Mead," it said.

"Is that all?" he asked politely.

"Yes," said the voice. "Here."

There was a sigh, a pop. The back door of the police car sprang wide.

"Get in."

"Wait a minute, I haven't done anything!"

"Get in."

"I protest!"

"Mr. Mead."

He walked like a man suddenly drunk. As he passed the front window of the car he looked in. As he had expected, there was no one in the front seat, no one in the car at all.

"Get in."

He put his hand to the door and peered into the back seat, which was a little cell, a little black jail with bars. It smelled of riveted steel. It smelled of harsh antiseptic; it smelled too clean and hard and metallic. There was nothing soft there.

"Now if you had a wife to give you an alibi," said the iron voice. "But–"

"Where are you taking me?" The car hesitated, or rather gave

a faint whirring click, as if information, somewhere, was dropping card by punch-slotted card under electric eyes.

"To the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies."

He got in. The door shut with a soft thud. The police car rolled through the night avenues, flashing its dim lights ahead. They passed one house on one street a moment later, one house in an entire city of houses that were dark, but this one particular house had all of its electric lights brightly lit, every window a loud yellow illumination, square and warm in the cool darkness.

"That's my house," said Leonard Mead.

No one answered him.

The car moved down the empty river-bed streets and off away, leaving the empty streets with the empty side-walks, and no sound and no motion all the rest of the chill November night.

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

> *There was never enough time. It looked as though Henry's ambition would never be realized.*

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 accordian. 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. In his mind, he saw the fire again, licking across the face of last night's newspaper. He thought that now he would have time to read all the newspapers he wanted to, only now there wouldn't be any more. That heap of rubble across the street had been the Gazette Building. It was terrible to think there would never be another up to date newspaper. Agnes would have been very upset, no television schedule. But then, of course, no television. He wanted to laugh but he didn't. That wouldn't have been fitting, not at all.

He could see the building he was looking for now, but the silhouette was strangely changed. The great circular dome was now a ragged semi-circle, half of it gone, and one of the great wings of the building had fallen in upon itself. A sudden panic gripped Henry Bemis. What if they were all ruined, destroyed, every one of them? What if there wasn't a single one left? Tears of helplessness welled in his eyes as he painfully fought his way over and through the twisted fragments of the city.

He thought of the building when it had been whole. He remembered the many nights he had paused outside its wide and welcoming doors. He thought of the warm nights when the doors had been thrown open and he could see the people inside, see them sitting at the plain wooden tables with the stacks of books beside them. He used to think then, what a wonderful thing a public library was, a place where anybody, anybody at all could go in and read.

He had been tempted to enter many times. He had watched the people through the open doors, the man in greasy work clothes who sat near the door, night after night, laboriously studying, a technical journal perhaps, difficult for him, but promising a brighter future. There had been an aged, scholarly gentleman who sat on the other side of the door, leisurely paging, moving his lips a little as he did so, a man having little time left, but rich in time because he could do with it as he chose.

Henry had never gone in. He had started up the steps once, got almost to the door, but then he remembered Agnes, her questions and shouting, and he had turned away.

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 gemmary, 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

> *“The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge.*

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!"

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!"

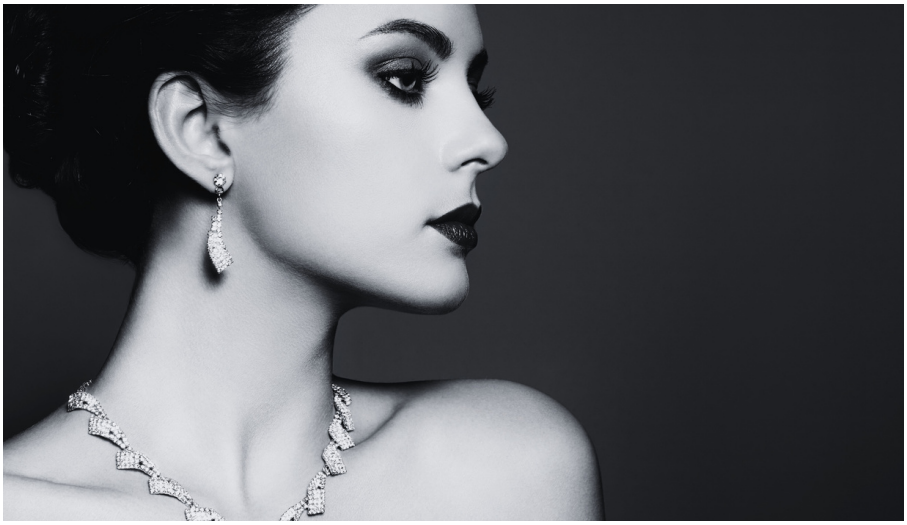
But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud --

"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 heart-broken 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."

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.

"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! . . . "

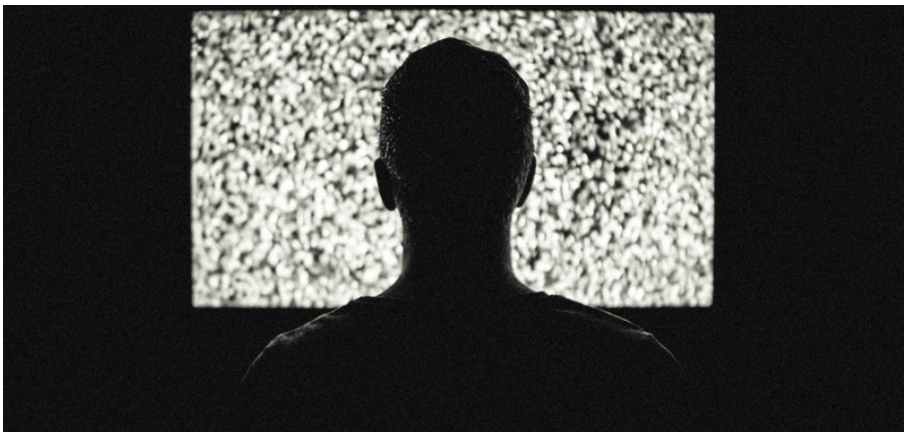
HARRISON BERGERON

by Kurt Vonnegut

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 fourteenyear-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 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, is 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 snaggle-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, neutraling 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.

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."

THE LANDLADY

by Roald Dahl

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 t

> *"Billy weaver had traveled down from London...*

he 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?"

"It's Weaver," Billy said. "W-e-a-v-e-r."

"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 comfortingly 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.”

“Not 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?

OPERATOR: Murray Hill 4-0098. I will try to get it for you.

AGNES: Thank you.

SFX: DIALING, THEN BUSY SIGNAL

OPERATOR: I'm sorry Murray Hill 4-0098 is busy...

SFX: Clicking receiver frantically

AGNES: Operator! Operator!

OPERATOR: 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.

OPERATOR: I am sorry. What number are you calling?
AGNES: 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 ---

OPERATOR: I will connect you with the chief operator.
AGNES: Well, please!

SFX: RINGING

AGNES: (MUTTERING TO HERSELF) All this talk -- can't make anyone understand ...

CHIEF OP: This is the chief operator.

AGNES: OH. 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.

CHIEF OP: I see.

AGNES: Can you trace it for me? Can you track down those men?

CHIEF OP: Well, I'm not certain, it depends.

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...
CHIEF OP: Well, I could try tracing it. May I have your name, please?

AGNES: Mrs. Stevenson. Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. But -- listen

CHIEF OP: And your telephone number, please?

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

CHIEF OP. Why do you want this call traced?

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.

CHIEF OP: Have you reported this to the police?

AGNES: Well, No. Not yet...

CHIEF OP: You want this call checked purely as a private individual?

AGNES: Yes! But mean while—

CHIEF OP: I'm sorry, 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...

CHIEF OP: ...as a private individual.

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: (pause) Oh, why did I hang up the phone like that. (breaking up) Now he'll think I am a fool. (crying) – oh, why doesn't Elbert come home? Why doesn't he?

SFX: DIALING

AGNES: (To herself) I'll get the operator again

SFX: RINGING

OPERATOR: Your call, please?

AGNES: Operator -- for heavens sake -- will you ring that Murray Hill 4-0098 number again? I can't think what's keeping him so long.

OPERATOR: I will try it for you.

SFX: DIALING BUSY SIGNAL

AGNES: (quietly whimpering)

OPERATOR: I'm sorry, Murray Hill 4-0098 is busy. I will try...

AGNES: (angrily) I can hear it. You don't have to tell me. I know it's busy!

SFX: SLAMS PHONE

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

SOUND: PHONE RINGS ONCE AND STOPS

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 – a

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

AGNES: I don't have a classified! I mean I'm to 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…

WESTERN U: The telegram is as follows: (reading) Mrs. Elbert Stevenson. 53 north Sutton Place, New York, New York. Darling, terribly sorry. Tried to get you for last hour, but line busy. Leaving for Boston eleven PM tonight on urgent business. Back tomorrow afternoon. Keep happy. Love. Signed, Elbert.

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

AGNES: OK. Hurry. I can hear him. Oh, no. Please, oh, god, hurry. –(begins a scream, barely audible at first, then gradually louder until it merges with train whistle)

SFX: Roar of train crossing the bridge.

SFX: AS TRAIN FADES, PHONE RINGING EMERGES

MARTIN: Police department, precinct 53, Sergeant Martin speaking.

GEORGE: Eh, er, police department? Oh, I'm sorry. Must have got the wrong numbah.

MUSIC: SUBTLE STING

GEORGE: Don't worry. Everything's OK.

SFX: TELEPHONE HANG UP.