The Magazine of Terrifying Tales

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SHOCK

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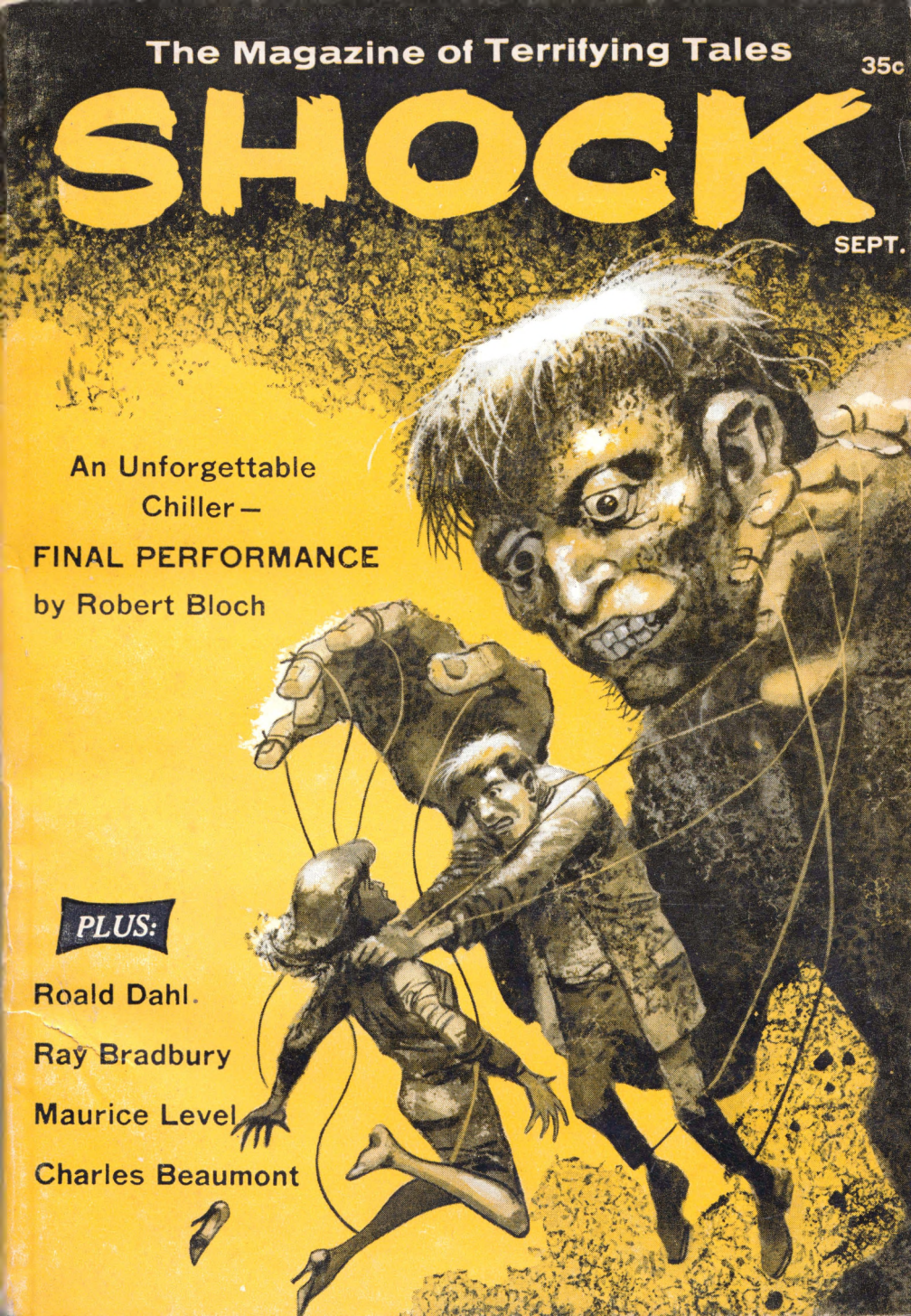


An Unforgettable Chiller—

FINAL PERFORMANCE

by Robert Bloch

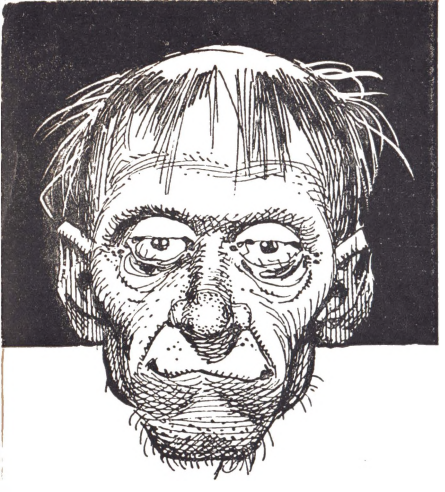
PLUS:

Roald Dahl

Ray Bradbury

Maurice Level

Charles Beaumont



I'm going to be really annoyed...

... if all of you keep writing letters to Lulubel, my assistant. Lulubel is just a tarantula, and I'm almost human. Of course, I'm not as good-looking as Lulubel, with her silky black hair and long spidery legs, but I've got feelings just the same. Why don't you dumbbells address your mail to me?

Besides, if Lulubel keeps getting all the attention, I may just ship her to one of you. That would be a nice surprise—and I can practically guarantee it will be your last. So let's try to be fair about this. Divide up the letters. Let all the tarantulas write to Lulubel and all the people write to me. Heh-heh! If Lulubel keeps getting more letters than I do, that will prove *something* about the kind of readers we've got.

Meanwhile, for all our readers, this issue is a gruesome package of ghoulish delight. There are bone-chilling stories by such masters of the macabre as Roald Dahl, Ray Bradbury, Charles Beaumont and Robert Bloch. You'd better be prepared for the worst when you turn to these paralyzing tales of terror—because they are especially designed to keep you awake nights.

Horrifically yours,

and

SHOCK
Magazine

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

KUDOS

I think your book is great, but I would like to make a suggestion. Try to print *The Shadow Over Innsmouth,* by H. P. Lovecraft. This story is a real SHOCK CLASSIC.

Thomas D. Tracey, Jr.
Columbia, Tenn.

P.S. My pet dog says he loves Lulubel. I think he really means it too, heh-heh! Just lately he has developed a taste for human fingers and SPIDERS! Watch out, Lulubel!

Hear that Lulubel? Better be carefid, or we'll send you to the nice dog. —*Ed.*

Welcome to you, SHOCK magazine. We fantasy fans have been lost long enough in a desert of gadget-and-gimmick science-fiction stories. SHOCK is our welcome oasis. My joy knew no bounds when I found you on the newsstand.

Reggie Capes
Porterdale, Georgia

Just picked up your Vol. 1, No. 2 (sorry to have missed previous) and am sending a subscription with reliable check for two bucks.

I feel your magazine will meet my needs admirably, since the only time I'm happy is when I'm disturbed.

Eugenia L. McGee
Chicago, Ill.

P.S. Please note that I use spy-proof envelopes—that's the only way to do things of this sort.

We noted. Very clever. —*Ed.*

WHO?

Let me compliment you on the fine blood-curdling tales in your last issue of SHOCK. I especially enjoyed *Baby Picture*, by Mort Golding. Lately, I've been bored with the same old dribble in other magazines and it's a pleasure to see one like yours come out—with some *fresh new blood.*

Count Dracula
San Francisco, Calif.

So that's where you've been hiding these past years. —*Ed.*

FOR LULUBEL

Dear Lulubel, When I was a little boy, I had a pet tarantula just like you. But my governess took him away. Before he left, though, he kissed her goodbye—heh-heh. She was never the same.

Frances Kroll
Biloxi, Miss.

Dear Lulubel, I'm looking for

a present for my wife. Do you have a brother or sister I could send her?

Ian Igolescu
Ravensbek, Maine

Dear Lulubel, We have a dear friend who lives in our cellar. She's black and shiny, and there is a bright red mark on her back. She's a widow, poor thing. We think she's related to you.

Jon Carter
Evansville, Pa.

Dear Lulubel, We've learned to know and to love you, but who is that weird-looking creature that always accompanies you? Doesn't he have a name? Probably not—ugh!

Alice Breen
New York City

See what I mean? Lulubel gets all the nice letters. —*Ed.*

HOW ABOUT

I read your magazine and there are a few suggestions I would like to make:

How about getting some good stories?

How about getting some new stories?

How about getting a *GOOD* cover?

How about getting rid of that monstrous editor (is it a man)?

Bill Pringle
Little Rock, Arkansas

How about drinking a nice warm cup of cyanide? —*Ed.*

RUN DOWN

I read the first two issues of your magazine. They both were great, but I think the second was twice as good.

This is what I thought about the second issue:

A) The cover was better than the first.

B) I liked the letters section.

C) *Bright Segment*—Different, like Ted Sturgeon stories usually are.

D) *Mean Mr. Murray*—Good, but could have been better.

E) *The House Party*—Good. The ending was a surprise.

F) *Pin-up Girl*—That mean Prince Ahmed must know the wrong kind of girls?

G) *9-Finger Jack*—I LIKED IT.

H) *The Emissary*—Great. It's good you gave us warning.

I) *Baby Picture*—Too bad about the photographer. He just wanted to know.

J) *Laughing Moths*—Great! Now we have *weremoths.*

K) *Sredni Vashtar*—(shudder)

L) *The Frog Prince*—A humorous shock, but a good story.

M) *Our Feathered Friends*—I *used* to like to hear birds in a forest.

Larry Hollis
Pampa, Texas

There's nothing I admire more than a man who is a master of his craft. I knew an undertaker once—lovely fellow—who was without a peer in dressing up a corpse to look handsomer than in life. He once offered to give me a free haircut, and I'd have accepted—except for one thing. I was afraid he didn't know how to cut hair in the back. Heh-heh. But that undertaker was nowhere near as good as Rudolph Bitzner, the character in this grisly masterpiece by one of our favorite macabre authors.

FINAL PERFORMANCE

by ROBERT BLOCH

THE NEON INTESTINES HAD BEEN twisted to form the word *Eat.*

I squinted up at it, the sand stinging my eyes, and shifted my overnight bag to the left hand. As I opened the sagging screen-door a trickle of perspiration ran down my arm.

Two flies accompanied me into the restaurant. One of them headed for a pile of crullers on the counter and the other alighted on the bald head of an elderly fat man who leaned behind it. The man looked up and the fly buzzed away.

"Evening," he said. "What'll it be?"

"Are you Rudolph?" I asked.

He nodded.

I slid onto a stool. "Fellow named Davis sent me."

"From the garage?"

"That's right—the place up the highway. My car conked out on me coming through the mountains. He had to phone Bakersfield for a new connecting-rod. They're bringing it out first thing tomorrow morning and he figures he can get it installed before evening. But tonight I'm looking for a place to stay. He told me to try here—said you used to run a motel."

"Not any more. Isn't enough traffic along this route."

"I noticed a couple of cabins out in back."

"Closed up." The fat man reached under the counter and came up with a half-empty bottle of beer. He took a long gulp; when he set the bottle down again it was empty. "Look, you could hitch a ride into Bakersfield and come back tomorrow."

"I thought of that, but I hate to leave all my belongings. Everything I own is in that car—guess it broke down because it was overloaded. You see, I'm moving to Hollywood, and I packed all my books and—"

"Hollywood?" The fat man blinked. "You in show biz?"

"I'm a writer."

"Television?"

"Short stories and books."

He blinked again. "That's better. TV is lousy. I can't understand what they think they're doing out there. Now you take a guy like that Ed Sullivan—" He broke off abruptly and stared at me. "Book writer, you say. Ever run into Arnie Pringle?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

"Before your time, I guess. Probably dead by now. He used to write my act."

"You were in show business?"

"Are you kidding? Rudolph the Great. Twenty years top billing, Pantages, Albee, Keith-Orpheum time. Why, I've got three pressbooks full of—"

I rose from the stool.

"Here, where you going?"

I shrugged. "Sorry, but if I'm hitching a ride into Bakersfield, I'd better get out there on the highway before dark."

"Never mind that. Guess we can fix up a cabin for you. Put some clean sheets on the bed." He swayed along behind the counter and it suddenly occurred to me that he was just a little bit drunk.

"Look, I wouldn't want to put you to any trouble," I told him.

"No trouble. My pleasure." He jerked his head towards the swinging door behind him. "Rosie!" he yelled.

Rosie came into the room.

She was a tall girl, blonde and amply proportioned, her hair done up in a ponytail. She wore a blue, sleeveless smock and her legs

were bare.

"Rosie, this is Mr.—"

"Chatham. Jim Chatham." I nodded at her and she wrinkled up her nose at me. It took a moment before I realized she was smiling.

"Had a little trouble with his car," Rudolph said. "Davis is fixing it up at the crossroads. He needs a place to stay overnight. You think you can find some clean bedclothes for Number One?"

She nodded at him, still looking at me.

"Better take him out with you, let him have a look."

"All right." Her voice was soft, deeper than I'd expected.

"Keys in my desk, right-hand drawer."

"I know. I'll get them."

She turned and left the room. Rudolph reached under the counter into the cooler and brought out another bottle of beer; a full one, this time. "Care for a brew?" he asked.

"Later, perhaps. Let me get settled and then I'll come back for dinner."

"Suit yourself." He bent to open the bottle, then raised it to his lips.

Rosie came back into the room; she carried a bundle of sheets wrapped around a pillow. "All set?" she asked.

I picked up my bag and followed her outside. The sun was setting and the desert wind was cool. Joshuas cast their shadows along the path leading to the cabins in the rear, striping the sand and the backs of her bare calves as she walked along before me.

"Here we are." She halted and opened the door of the tiny cabin. The interior of the little shack was dark and stifling hot. She switched on the light. "It'll cool off in a minute with the door open," she said. "I'll make up the bed for you."

I put down the suitcase and slumped into the single chair next to the grey-filmed window. She went to work, bending over the bed. She had fine breasts. As she moved around to tuck in the sheet, her leg brushed mine.

All at once, for no reason at all, my mind was filled with corny dialogue. *What's a nice girl like you doing in such a godforsaken hole? Let me take you away from all this—*

Suddenly I noticed she had stopped working. She stood there with the pillow in her arms, staring at me.

"I heard you talking to him," she said. "About being a writer. What are you going to do out in Hollywood, work for the movies?"

"I doubt it. Probably just keep turning out stories the same as usual. But the climate's better."

"Yes, the climate." She nodded and wrinkled her nose at me.

"Take me with you."

"What?"

"I said, take me with you."

"But Mrs. Rudolph—"

"His *first* name is Rudolph. Rudolph Bitzner."

"Mrs. Bitzner, then—"

"I'm not Mrs. Bitzner, either."

"Oh, I just thought—"

"I know what you thought. Never mind that. Just take me with you. All I'd do is ride along. There wouldn't be any trouble." She let the pillow fall on the bed and moved closer. "I wouldn't be any bother at all. I promise."

I stood up, but I didn't reach for her. I didn't have to reach for her, because she came right into my arms, and she said, "Please, please, say you'll take me, you've got to, you don't know what it's like all alone out here, you don't know what he's like, he's crazy—"

She had this trick of talking without opening her mouth, keeping her lips puckered up waiting to be kissed, and she wrinkled her nose and I could see the tiny freckles on the bridge, and her skin was marble-cool in all this heat. And it's one thing to sit back and make sophisticated remarks about cheap waitresses named Rosie (*Rosie, for God's sake!*) and another thing entirely to feel a waiting, willing woman stirring hard against you and whispering, "Please . . . p r o m i s e me you will . . . I'll do anything . . ."

So I opened my mouth to answer, then let it remain open in bewilderment as she stepped back quickly and picked up the pillow again. Then I heard him scuffling along the path and understood.

"Rosie!" he yelled. "You almost finished? Customers!"

"Be right in," she called.

I stepped over to the doorway and waved at Rudolph.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"Everything's fine."

"Come and eat, then. You can wash up inside."

I glanced back at Rosie. She was bending over the bed and she didn't look at me. But she whispered, "I'll see you later. Wait for me."

That's what kept me going through the long evening.

I followed Rudolph, and I cleaned myself up a bit in the filthy washroom, and I shared a steak and french fries with the two flies and their cousins. The customers were in and out for the next couple of hours, and there was no chance to talk to Rudolph or even catch a glimpse of Rosie out in back. Then, finally, it was nine o'clock and the place was empty again. Rudolph yawned and walked over to the door, switching off the *Eat* sign.

"This concludes the evening's performance," he said. "Thanks

for the use of the hall." He went over to the swinging door. "You fixing yourself something?" he yelled.

"Yes, just a hamburger. How about you?" Rosie asked.

"Never mind. I'll have myself another beer." He looked at me. "You ready for one now?"

I shook my head and stood up. "No, thanks. It's about time I turned in."

"What's your hurry? Stick around, we'll go in back and chew the fat a while. To hell with the beer—I've got some hard stuff there."

"Well, I—"

"Come on. Got some things that might interest you. Man doesn't get much chance to talk to anybody halfway intelligent around here."

"All right."

He ran his wrist across the gray stubble around his mouth. "Tell you what, I'll check the register first. You go right on back, through that door at the end. I'll be along."

So I went back, into the little room on the side of the restaurant which served as a parlor. I saw the overstuffed couch and the easy chair and the desk, the lamp, the TV set, but I didn't do any more than glance at them.

Because I was staring at the walls—the walls of another world.

It was the world of the Twenties and the early Thirties; a world that belonged to the half-forgotten faces which peered out at me from a thousand photographs reaching from floor to ceiling. Some of the pictures had peeled and faded, just as my memories had peeled and faded in the long years since early childhood. But I could still remember the familiar countenances and I had at least heard of most of the names scrawled in autograph-fashion beneath the unfamiliar ones. I moved around the room, moved around the mementos of what had once been a world called Vaudeville

Here was a skinny, gangling kid called Milton Berle, and a buxom young woman named Sophie Tucker. Here was a youthful Bert Wheeler holding an apple and a smiling Joe Cook holding an Indian club and explaining why he would not imitate the Four Hawaiians. There was an entire section of faces in burnt cork—Cantor, Jolson, Lou Holtz in the pre-Sam Lapidus days, Frank Tinney (way before my time) and one mournfully humorous countenance which needed no spurious blackface; the signature read, *"To Rudolph from Bert Williams."*

And there were the teams and the acts—Moran and Mack, Gallagher and Shean, Cross and Dunn, Phil Baker and Ben Bernie,

Smith and Dale (Dr. Kronkheit, I presume?) and a surprisingly handsome young couple who signed themselves *"George and Gracie."* And there was an incredible Jimmy Durante—with hair—and Clayton and Jackson.

"See? It's like I told you, I knew 'em all." Rudolph had come up behind me, carrying a bottle and glasses. "Here, let me fix you a snort and I'll show you my press-books."

He made me a drink, but he didn't get around to the press-books. Instead he sprawled out on the sofa, uncorked the bottle again, and uncorked himself.

I don't know how long he rambled on about the old days and the old ways; about the Six Brown Brothers and Herman Timberg and Walter C. Kelly and Chic Sale. At another time, under other circumstances, I might have hung on to his every word. But right now I was hanging on to other words. *"I'll see you later. Wait for me."*

So I really didn't listen to him; to Rudolph the Great who used to do Orpheum Time until vaudeville died and then wandered out here into the desert to do a twenty-year layoff as Rudolph Bitzner. Twenty years—why, Rosie couldn't be much over twenty herself! And here was this fat old man wheezing away on the couch, drinking out of the bottle now and slobbering. He was getting ready to pass out; he had to pass out soon, he *had* to—

"Have 'nother drink?" He sat up, blinking at the bottle. "Oh, 's empty, well whaddya know?"

"That's all right," I told him. "I've had enough."

"Well, I haven'. Got more 'round here someplace. Rosie!" He yelled her name, then lowered his voice as he turned to me. "She's out front, told her to clean up the joint. Won't come near me when I'm drinking, anyhow, you know?" He chuckled. "Don't matter—I locked the door before I came back. Got the key ri' here, so she can't get away. Never get away, not from me."

He swayed to his feet. "Know what you're thinkin'—just an old lush, tha's all, just an old lush. But wait 'til I show you the press-books. Then you'll see who I was. Who I *am*." He stumbled back against the sofa. "Rudolph the Great. Tha's me. Keep in practice. Jus' as good as I ever was. Better. Why I could go on Sullivan's show nex' week—"

Then the color drained from his face and he fell back on the couch. I never did get to see those press-books. By the time I put his feet up on the sofa he'd started to snore.

I took the keys from his pocket and went back into the restaurant. She was waiting for me in the dark. And we went out through the dark to my cabin, and she

clung to me in the dark and that's the one thing I want to remember, *have* to remember now.

Afterwards she told me about herself. She'd been ten when she'd come to Rudolph—her parents stopped by on their way to Texas and dropped her off while they filled a Fair date. They were a couple of ex-vaudevillians themselves; the Flying Keenos. They knew Rudolph from the old days and they accepted his suggestion to leave her in his care while they traveled on, because they were down on their luck.

"Only they never came back," she said. "They never came back. And he tried to find them, he wrote to *Billboard* and everything, but they just disappeared. So I stayed on. Rudolph—he wasn't so bad then, you know. I mean, he didn't drink so much or anything. He sent me to school on the bus, bought me clothes and things. Treated me just like he was my father—until I was sixteen."

She started to cry, very softly. "He isn't even in love with me, not really. It's because of living out here all alone on this crazy desert, and knowing he's getting old. Before it started he used to talk about making a comeback on TV. He said it was just like vaudeville, he'd always known there'd be a revival. Then, that summer when I was sixteen, he decided the time was right and he took me with him out to L.A. He went around and saw some agents, had a few auditions. I never did find out what really happened. But when we came back here in the fall, he started to drink right away, and that's when—"

That's when she tried to sneak off, and he caught her, and he closed up the motel so she couldn't see anyone or attempt to hitch a ride. He kept her inside the restaurant, didn't even allow her to go up to the crossroads for supplies, wouldn't let anyone come near her.

There were times when she thought of running away in the night, but something always stopped her. She realized she owed him something for all the years he'd taken care of her, and he needed her now. He was just an old man, not quite right in the head, and he seldom bothered her any more. Most nights he just drank and passed out. She'd resigned herself to putting up with it until this evening. Then, when she saw me—

"I know. You figured you *could* get a ride, and maybe I'd even take care of you out on the Coast for a week or so, long enough for you to find a job. That's it, isn't it?"

"No!" She dug her nails into my arms. "Maybe I *did* think something like that, at first. But

not *now*. Believe me, not *now*."

I believed her. I believed her voice and I believed her body; even though it was incredible that I should be lying here in the desert night with this stranger whom I'd known forever.

"It's all right," I said. "We'll go away. But I'd feel better if we told him. Maybe if I talked things over with him, explained, I could make him understand."

"Oh no—you can't do that! He's crazy jealous, I didn't want to tell you, but one time he caught this truck driver talking to me outside, just talking is all, and he took after him with that big butcher-knife. He would have killed him if he caught him, I know he would! And he beat me up so that I couldn't even get out of bed for three days. No, he mustn't even suspect. Tomorrow afternoon, when the car is fixed—"

We made our simple plans. The restaurant was closed on Sundays, and it would be better if I didn't attempt to take a meal there—just went straight to the garage and saw to it that Davis got the car fixed as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Rosie would have her suitcase packed and ready. She'd encourage Rudolph to drink—not that he generally needed any encouragement from her. Maybe he'd even pass out. If not, she'd go so far as to cut the phone wire, if necessary; just so she could slip out to me with the assurance of getting a head start.

So we talked it all over, calmly and sensibly, and she slipped out of the cabin, and I lay there and tried to sleep. It was almost dawn when I closed my eyes, and the bats were out, flying against the gaudy desert sunrise.

I slept for a long time. When I left the cabin and cut across to the highway, it was almost two o'clock. I walked the mile to the crossroads garage and found Davis working with the car up on the rack. We talked for a while, but I didn't listen to what he said, or to what I said, either. From time to time somebody drove up for gas and Davis would have to stop and give them service. The car wasn't ready until a little after five; it was already getting dark.

I paid him and drove off. The motor hummed smoothly, but I almost stripped gears as I shifted. I was nervous, that's all; just nervous. I didn't feel any guilt and I didn't feel any fear. Certainly I didn't feel any horror.

That came later.

That came when I parked in the deepening shadows on the side of the darkened restaurant and went up to the door.

This was it. If something had gone wrong—

But nothing could go wrong. I squared my shoulders and took a deep breath, then rattled the door-

knob. That was the signal; she'd be waiting to hear me.

Nothing happened. A few flies buzzed against the glass, awaiting entry. I rattled the door again, softly. It was locked.

Then the figure emerged from the back room.

I recognized Rudolph.

He moved briskly; there was no shuffle in his gait, and no stagger, either. His face was gray and puffy, but his red-rimmed eyes weren't blinking. He stooped and unlocked the door, motioning for me to come inside.

"Good afternoon," I said. There was nothing else I *could* say, not yet, not until I knew what had happened.

He nodded, moving behind me to lock the door again. I could hear the click of the key and I didn't bother to look around.

That's when the horror came.

Horror is something cold and sharp, biting against the back of your neck.

"Let's go into the other room," Rudolph said. "Rosie has something to say to you."

"What have you done to her?"

"Nothing. She just wants to talk to you. You'll see."

We went down the aisle past the counter, the flies buzzing in our wake. Then we were in the back room and they were all waiting for me there—George and Gracie, Frank Tinney, Lou Holtz. They were all staring, as I stared, at the open suitcase on the floor. It's contents had been scattered in a torn heap; for a moment, in the dim light, I thought it was Rosie lying there.

But no, Rosie was sitting on the sofa and she was looking at the suitcase too. She didn't say a word when I came in because there was nothing to say, now.

I could feel Rudolph's breath on my neck, right behind me. And I could feel the coldness too, the sharpness, the horror. All at once it went away. I heard the knife clatter to the floor.

"You can thank her for that," Rudolph murmured. "I could have killed you, you know. I wanted to kill you. But she talked me out of it. And now she has something to say to you. Go ahead, Rosie, tell him."

He left me standing there in the doorway and walked over to where Rosie was sitting. He slid down on the sofa beside her and put his arm around her, smiling. Rosie looked up, then, but she didn't smile.

The shadows crept across the walls, across the faces of Williams and Bernie and Jolson; across his face and hers. But I wasn't watching the shadows, I was listening to the girl.

"You see how it happened," she murmured. "He walked in while I was packing. He found out."

"All right," I said. "So he found out. I wanted to tell him in the first place. And now that he knows, he can let us go."

I was already moving before I finished my last sentence; crossing the room in two strides and scooping up the big, broad-bladed butcher knife from the floor.

"Look," I said. "I've got the knife now. He can't hurt us and he'd better not try. We can walk out of here whenever we please."

She sat there, turning her head to stare at the knife. And he stared too, tightened his arm around her and stared and smiled while she said, "No. I've changed my mind. I'm not going with you."

"But I don't understand—"

"We talked it all over before you came. I can't go. He needs me so. It's right that I should stay, I belong with him. Can't you see that?"

I shook my head. There was something wrong with her words, something wrong with the way she stared and he smiled. And all at once it came to me as I looked into his fat face off in the shadows. "Maybe I can see," I said. "Rudolph the Great. You were a hypnotist, weren't you? That's the answer, isn't it? You've hypnotized her, that's what you've done—"

He started to laugh.

"You're wrong, Mister," he said. "Tell him how wrong he is, darling."

And then she was laughing, too, in a high, hysterical titter. But there was no laughter in her face, and her words, when they came, were soft and sombre.

"He's no hypnotist. I know what I'm doing, believe me. I'm telling you to get out. Just get out, do you hear me? Go away and don't come back. I don't want to go to the Coast with you. I don't want you pawing me in some dirty cabin. I know what you are. You're a—"

She began to curse me then; the filth and the foulness poured out of her mouth and she bobbed her head at me in rage, while he just sat there and smiled.

Finally she was finished. "All right," he said. "Have you heard enough?"

"I've heard enough," I said. "I'll go." And I dropped the knife again. It rolled across the floor and a thin ray of light from the dying sunset streaked the dulled and darkened blade.

I turned to go and neither of them rose. They just sat there, arms entwined, and stared at me. The shadows blotted out their faces, then pursued me all the way down the hall.

The car stood waiting for me in the twilight. I climbed in, switched on the ignition, pulled away. I must have driven two or three miles before I remembered to turn on my lights. I was in a daze. There was nothing but the

shadows, the strange shadows. Shadows in the room, on their faces, on the dulled and darkened knife. *The dulled and darkened knife—*

Then it hit me, and I speeded up. I found a phone just ahead in a filling-station outside Pono, and put in my call.

The state troopers arrived in fifteen minutes, and I told my story as we roared back to the restaurant in their patrol car.

"He must have done *something* to her,' I said. "That knife-blade was dark with dried blood."

"We'll see," the sergeant told me.

But at first we didn't see, because Rudolph must have heard us coming, and that's when he used the knife on himself. We found it sticking out of his chest there on the floor in the back room, and he was quite dead.

Rosie still sat there on the sofa, staring at us. It was the sergeant who discovered she'd been strangled.

"Must have happened a couple of hours ago," he told me. "The body's getting stiff."

"Strangled? A couple of hours? But I was just here, we were talking—"

"See for yourself."

I walked over and touched her shoulder. She was stiff and cold and there were purple marks on her neck. Suddenly she toppled forward, and that's when I saw how the knife had been used—saw the huge, foot-long gash extending from the back of her neck down across the shoulders. The wound was incredibly deep; I couldn't understand why. Not even when the sergeant called my attention to the blood on Rudolph's right hand.

It wasn't until I saw the press-books that I really knew. Yes, we found his press-books and I finally saw them there at the last; finally found out what must have happened in his dark room, in his dark mind, when he walked in and discovered her getting ready to leave.

That's when he'd strangled her, of course, strangled her to death in a crazy rage. But he was sane enough to realize I'd be coming by to get her, and that he'd have to find a way to get rid of me.

So he used the knife, then, and cut the hole; cut it wide and deep. Wide and deep enough so that she could bow and nod and turn her head when he had his hand behind her. Of course I'd heard her talking to me, but the press-books explained all that.

He wasn't lying about his notices; they were raves.

And he wasn't lying about hypnotism, either. Rudolph the Great hadn't been a hypnotist. He was just one of the best damned ventriloquists in the business... ■ ■

There's been a lot of loose talk going around about witches lately. I don't believe it. After all, have you *ever seen a witch? More important, would you recognize a witch if you saw her?*

THE WITCH

by RALPH E. HAYES

LITTLE JIMMY SMITH NUDGED THE sardine can back onto the pavement with the side of his foot and gave it a kick that sent it careening along the sidewalk ahead of him. Sardine cans, he concluded, were not good for kicking; they were too flat. You had to kind of skid them along, and sometimes, if you weren't careful, you stubbed your toe into the cement.

Jimmy looked across the street momentarily and saw several girls from his class at school playing in front of Suzy Adams' house. They were chanting in unison to a game they were playing.

A-leanie to clapsie, to twirlie around to backsie,

Right hand, left hand, highest a-leanie, lowest a-leanie,

Touch your knee and your toe,

And your heel and under you go.

Even at his age, Jimmy felt an odd uneasiness when he heard these weird little tunes that little girls sang, and it added to his inherent distrust of the opposite sex.

Who could tell which of them would grow up to be a witch, like Old Mrs. Moore? The ones that could chant best became witches, he supposed. He turned back to the challenge of the can, and continued along his way. As he reached the next corner a man walked briskly by, clutching his coat and hat against an explosive fall wind.

"I kicked this can six blocks," announced Jimmy to the passer-by, who smiled and walked on. "And I could kick it to China if I wanted to," he yelled after the man. He rubbed a bit of dust out of his eye. "Or even a hundred miles."

Jimmy turned at the corner because his friend Leonard lived down the block. Leonard's mother was Mrs. Moore, whom everybody called a witch just for fun, but not when Leonard was around, because they liked Leonard. In giving the can one last kick he stubbed his toe on the cement. "Ouch," he cried, and his eyes grew moist for a brief moment. "Darn it," he added sullenly, and limped away from it.

By the time he had gotten to Leonard's house, he had forgotten the can and the limp. Leonard had not been at school today, and he wondered if his friend were sick. Leonard and he had sat together all through the first grade last year. They had had a lot of good times together, he and old Leonard.

Jimmy turned in at the faded picket gate and went up the rickety steps to the porch. He was always a little scared when he came to Leonard's house, because of Leonard's mother. She acted crazy sometimes, and once she squeezed Jimmy's arm so hard it hurt for two days.

Leonard had come to school several times with blue marks on him, and Jimmy knew The Witch had done something to him, but the teacher didn't see them, and Leonard wouldn't talk about it to the kids. Whenever Jimmy saw marks on Leonard he remembered his own sore arm and became even more afraid of Leonard's mother.

"Leonard," sung out Jimmy.

The front door was open, and Jimmy looked through the screen to the dim interior. He couldn't see anyone.

Jimmy remembered, as he peered into the hallway, that Leonard had told him one time that Mrs. Moore was not his real mother. And, shortly after she had come to live with him and his dad, his dad had gone away, and he never came back. Since then, Leonard and Mrs. Moore had lived by themselves, and Leonard almost never got to play out with the rest of the kids.

"Leon-ard." His falsetto voice rung clearly in the dry autumn air.

In the next moment Leonard's

mother towered in the doorway behind the screen. Her dark hair, streaked with grey, hung along her face. She was tall and gaunt, and her eyes were open wide, staring at him. She looked very angry.

"Leonard is not here. He is visiting his grandmother. Go away and quit yelling on the porch." Her voice was not loud, like his mother's voice was when she was angry with him, but it was funny sounding, and scarey.

Jimmy broke away from what seemed a spellbinding look from her, and hopped down the steps. When he stopped in the yard and looked back, she was gone. Now his courage returned, and he remembered a rhyme the older boys had made up about Mrs. Moore, and he blurted it out defiantly:

The Witch is mean and lazy,
Old Mrs. Moore is crazy.

He ran impishly to the gate and swung on it, looking over his shoulder toward the house. He was just about to go when he saw the movement behind the low-pulled shade in the large front window. And it seemed that he heard Mrs. Moore talking to someone. The spirit of adventure flushing his cheeks, he tiptoed to the gate again, holding his breath. Yes, she was moving around in there, and talking.

Jimmy made a wide circuit around the inside perimeter of the yard and came up beside the house on the north side. Then he raised himself up on his tiptoes and looked into the interior, and his eyes went wide. Leonard *was* there.

Leonard was bound to a straight kitchen chair in the middle of the large living room, a hand-towel tied across his mouth. He was not trying to talk or cry out, but merely sat there, little and scared, his face white. He was wearing his small horn-rimmed glasses. Jimmy listened as Mrs. Moore spoke to him. She was leaning close over Leonard, shaking a long finger at him.

"Didn't I tell you?" she said. "Didn't I tell you what would happen to you if you disobeyed a fundamental law of God? There is no escape, no alternative. You must be punished."

She was breathing hard. "Do you think I didn't see you behind the garage with that Perkins girl?" Her unkempt hair fell forward enveloping part of her face as she leaned over him. "You think I don't know what dirty, filthy things you were doing out there?"

Leonard now attempted to protest, but only muffled noises came from behind the towel. He looked very small sitting there; he was Jimmy's age, only smaller.

"You could not have tainted yourself this way if you had been

of my body," she said, walking to the doorway and picking up a square red can. She brought it back with her to the chair.

"Now that you have, you must be cleansed," she said. "Cleansed in body and spirit."

She unscrewed a cap from the can and poured the contents over Leonard's clothing. Jimmy now saw the lettering on the side that read *Kerosene,* and knew what it was because his dad used it for a small stove in the garage. She was going to start a fire. Jimmy saw Leonard recoil from the feel and smell of the liquid as she continued to pour it over him.

"Your father left this place to you," she said, "so it's only fitting you should take it with you." She was smiling as she threw some of the kerosene about the room, on the floor, sofa, draperies. "It is God's will," she said, "that you suffer severe penance." In a moment the can was empty.

"Need some more. There's another can in the basement," she said to herself. She turned and disappeared through the doorway.

Jimmy thought what a big blaze the house would make and found himself looking forward to seeing it. But then there was poor old Leonard there, tied to the chair. He started to yell to him, but thought better of it. Mrs. Moore might hear him. Somebody, he decided, should try to help Leonard, though. Maybe he should get home and tell his mother and dad. That sounded like a good idea.

Jimmy Smith raised himself once more to get a last look at Leonard, then skipped out of the yard and down the street toward home. He could see his house from Leonard's back yard, but his father had forbade him from cutting through the several empty lots because of a barbed wire fence there. Even so, it would take only a few minutes to get home, and maybe his dad would come over here and talk Mrs. Moore out of setting fire to Leonard. At the first corner he ran into Bobby Kempski and they almost knocked each other down.

"Hi," said Jimmy.

"Hi. Ain't you home from school yet?" Bobby was bouncing a large red rubber ball on the cement.

"Nope. I stopped at Leonard's house," said Jimmy, watching the bouncing ball. "Is that your ball?"

"Uh-huh."

"Did your dad buy it for you?" said Jimmy, eyes on the ball.

"I bought it myself," said Bobby. "It cost fifty cents."

"Bet it didn't cost as much as my magnifying glass," said Jimmy, digging into his pocket for it. "But I'd trade you if you want to."

"I wouldn't trade for that old thing," said Bobby. "You didn't even buy it; you got it from your

uncle. Anybody knows that. Ha, ha, ha."

"Ha, ha. I don't care. Anyway, I know something you don't know."

"Huh-uh."

"Yes I do, and it's about Leonard Moore."

"I know that. His mother is a witch," said Bobby triumphantly.

"Ha, ha. That's not it," said Jimmy in a mocking voice. "Leonard's mother is going to burn him with kerosene."

"That's just something you made up," said Bobby, bouncing the ball.

"I did not. I'm going to tell my dad and he'll stop her and then you'll see." Jimmy turned haughtily and walked away. He would show him all right. He ran for half a block because it was getting late and he would get the devil if he was late for supper.

A short distance from home Jimmy stopped being mad at Bobby and thought again of Leonard. That sure would be a big fire. He picked up a stick and let it run over a picket fence as he walked. He had better hurry, he decided, if he were to help Leonard. Just before he got to his own front gate Nancy Bronson ran from her house across the street to greet him.

"Hi, Jimmy," she smiled, barring his path.

"I got to get home," he said. He hated girls.

"Can you play over in my yard tomorrow?" she said. "It's Saturday."

"I don't think so," he said, moving slowly around her.

"You can, too, Jimmy Smith, you just don't want to," she frowned, stepping into his path again. "Please come over tomorrow, Jimmy." She was smiling again.

"I got to go home," he said firmly. "I got something to tell my mother and dad." He envisioned Mrs. Moore lighting a match at that very moment.

"What you got to tell them?"

"Nothing," he said, trying to get around her again. In a bold rush he ran by her and into his yard. "Ha, ha," he said.

"I don't want you over now," she said, turning and running back across the street.

"Ha, ha," Jimmy screamed after her. He turned and walked over to a dog house in the yard, and called out a scraggly mongrel.

"You just wait a few minutes," he said. "I'll bring you your supper." He knelt down and petted the dog for several minutes, seemingly completely absorbed in the exchange of affection, and then remembered it was supper time. And there was Leonard, too. He forgot for a moment just what it was he wanted to remember about Leonard, and then he saw in his

mind's eye the kerosene can.

When Jimmy burst into the house, his father was reading the evening paper, and his mother was setting the table for supper.

"Where in the world have you been?" she asked when she saw him.

"Nancy Bronson wouldn't let me in the yard," he said.

"Oh, really!" said his mother.

"You'd better start getting right home from school, young man," said his father, looking up momentarily from the paper. "It's almost dark. And don't use Nancy as an excuse."

"Honest, it's the truth, Dad," said Jimmy, wiping his hand across his cheek and leaving a smudge there. "Except, I stopped at Leonard's house, too, and I've got something important to tell you." He tried to see around the paper his father was holding, but was unsuccessful.

"I told you to stay away from there," said his mother.

"It's a good thing I went, mother," he said, skipping over to the table. "Mrs. Moore is going to set fire to Leonard."

"Jimmy!" said his mother. "What have I told you about that?"

"Gee, mother, I didn't call her a witch," Jimmy complained. "I just mean she's going to burn Leonard with kerosene. And their house, too."

"Jimmy," said his father, his tone ominous. "You heard your mother. You forget about Mrs. Moore, once and for all, or you'll go up to your room right now, minus your supper."

"But, Dad, don't you feel sorry for Leonard?" Jimmy protested.

"Did you hear me?" his father said. Jimmy knew from his tone that he had better forget the whole thing. Still, it seemed a shame to let The Witch burn old Leonard. Jimmy sullenly went to the bathroom and slowly washed up for supper. Leaving a badly soiled towel in his wake, he returned to the table about ten minutes later, just as his mother was placing the last hot dish on it.

"All right, let's eat," she said.

Jimmy looked out the dining room window just as he started to sit down, the window facing the rear of the house and the vacant lots, and what he saw made him forget about the meal. Excitement filled his eyes, and he ran to the window. Orange and yellow light reflected in kaleidoscopic fashion across his face from across the vacant lots. Leonard's house was blazing brightly in the fading light.

"Well, there goes old Leonard," he said loudly. His face showed surprise when his parents suddenly were beside him at the window. They looked at the blaze in the sky, and they looked at Jimmy.

"My God!" said his father. His face looked awfully funny. ■ ■

That pesty editor almost didn't give me a chance to introduce a single story in this issue. He's jealous, that's why. He doesn't want people to love me. He can't understand why men love my long silky hair, and spidery shapely legs, and women envy my unique beauty. Hah! I'll teach him a lesson, someday. He'll end up like some of the unfortunate people in this lovely, lovely story. I can hardly wait until he takes his next bath . . .

OPEN HOUSE

by CHARLES BEAUMONT

THERE WAS A KNOCK. ONLY ONE, but the glass-squared door shook in its poor-fitting jamb and sent sharp sounds trembling throughout the apartment.

Mr. Pierce froze. His head jerked up like the head of a feeding animal suddenly startled; then he recognized the sound and fear began to rearrange him, draining the blood from his head, stoppering his throat, popping his heart up into his craw. He listened and watched his nerves and his courage and his future all eddy away, like rotted lace in a quick wind.

The knock rang again, louder this time.

"Wait!" The word choked loose so softly he could scarcely hear

it; it was a prayer. "Wait—just a second. I'll be there in just a second!" Then there was another sound; the tinny clatter of the carving knife that had slipped slowly from his hands and fallen to the pink tile floor.

Mr. Pierce rose and looked at the bathtub. At the water that was not water any longer but, instead, bright red ink, burning red against the glistening white porcelain sides. At the pale things floating in the bright red water, the pale soft things, floating, drifting, turning, the pieces of lamb in a simmering stew.

"Hey, Eddie!" The voice came muffled from behind the knockings. "Anybody home?"

The little man let some air come out of his lungs. He tried to swallow and then started from the bathroom. "Just a minute, will you!" He was almost to the door when he stopped, returned and washed his hands and removed the oilcloth apron that had once been yellow and was now other colors. He dropped the apron to the floor, pulled the shower curtain across the tub—or very nearly across; it had never fit quite snug—inspected himself for stains and went out, closing the door.

Be logical, he told himself. Be calm. And quiet. And cool. Everything is all right. Nothing has happened. Nothing whatever. Emma is... visiting friends. Yes.

He opened the door.

"Wie Geht's!"

Two grinning men of nearly middle years stood at the threshold. Mr. Pierce eyed them, closely.

It was Lew Hoover, in a soup-and-fish and a new mustache, and someone else whom Mr. Pierce had never seen before.

"Was ist los mit der gesundheit?"

"My God, Lew!" How long had it been? A year?

"Eddie, you old son-of-a-gun!" Hoover turned to his companion and delivered a sharp elbow. "This is him, pal. Greatest guy there is. Eddie Pierce. God damn. Eddie, want you to meet—man, what's your name?"

"Vernon," the other said. "Vernon F. Fein. I've told you that seventy-three times."

"All right; don't get smart." Hoover leaned forward and whispered hoarsely, "Just met him tonight. At the bar. Square."

Mr. Peirce said nothing. His throat was calcified. He felt a pressure on his hand.

"Didn't get you up or anything, did we?" Hoover asked.

"Oh, no. No. I was just sort of cleaning up a little."

"We come in for a few minutes?"

"Well..." Mr. Pierce dropped his eyes. He thought of the times he had prayed to see the face of Lew Hoover, or Len Brooks, or Jimmy Vandergrift, or any of the

old gang. How many times. He thought of all the lonely nights, alone, with Emma, here ... "Well, isn't it kind of late, fellows?"

"Shank of the evening! Fein, I want you to look at a guy that didn't used to even know what late was. Three o'clock, four o'clock, five— God, Eddie, remember?"

Mr. Pierce smiled and nodded.

"Then come on—for old time's sake, what do you say? One drink. Then we'll blow. All right?"

"It's awfully late, Lew."

Hoover giggled and belched. His breath smelled strongly of gin. Vernon F. Fein looked pleasantly noncommittal.

"Eddie, I promised my pal here, George, that we'd all have one short one together. I promised him. Don't make me out a liar, huh? Or"—Hoover's voice lowered—"would it disturb the little woman?"

"No, as a matter of fact that isn't it at all. Emma's away, visiting. She's not here."

"Not here!" Hoover pushed past and weaved across the room to the couch. He made a face and said, *"Was ist los mit der gesundheit?"*

Mr. Pierce fought down the hysteria. He beckoned the stranger in and closed the door. "Well," he said, "just a short one, Lew. Got to rise and shine in the morning."

"That's what I was talking about, one short one, isn't it?"

Mr. Pierce went into the kitchen and quickly made three Scotch and waters. When he returned, his visitors were laughing.

"Eddie," Hoover c h u c k l e d. "Lordy— I can't believe it's been so long." He stopped chuckling. "Man, what happened?"

"I don't know what you mean, Lew."

"Don't know what I mean! George, what your bloodshot orbs envisage tonight is a miracle in the flesh. You wouldn't believe it, George."

Vernon F. Fein took a large swallow and shifted uncomfortably.

"You see that dried-up mess of bones there?" Hoover renewed his giggling. "That, Fred, was once the sweetest bastard that ever walked on two legs. Fun? Oh my God. Just two years ago. Two stinking years. Every night, a ball. Right, Eddie? Am I right or wrong, every night a ball?"

Mr. Pierce threw down some Scotch.

"No loot in his pocket, all right. No job, all right. You want to get cheered up, who do you see? Eddie Pierce, that's who. Then— whammo!"

"Whammo?" Fein finished his drink and hiccoughed.

"It all goes bust. You know what?" Hoover grabbed the beefy man's lapels, roughly. "He wanted to be a writer. Like me: I'm a writer. Movies. Anything wrong

with movies?"

"I've always like Claudette Colbert," Fein said.

"Yeah. Well, Eddie could have had it all. But he was going to write novels. And—you want to know something, stupid? He was good. I'm telling you."

"I wonder," Fein said, dreamily, "what ever happened to Laird Cregar. There was a real actor."

"Shut up, Fred. Are you listening to me or not? Eddie, here, was *good* is what I'm trying to get through that hog's head of yours. He would have made it, too. Right on the damn brink. He—what the living *hell* is this?" Hoover was contorted on the couch. His hand reached up to touch the fringe of a greenly floraled lampshade. "Eddie, how come you let her keep such crap in the house?"

"Mr. Pierce," Fein interrupted, cordially. "May I inquire as respects the sort of work you do? I mean your line of business. Do you—"

Hoover howled. "I'll tell you, Jim. He's a goddamn butcher. Yah! That's right, all right. His wife's uncle got him a real nice spot in a meat market. Ham hocks and sides of beef—the greatest writer, the sweetest son of a—oh, hell!"

Mr. Pierce felt suddenly ill. He could hear the ice cubes rattling in his glass.

"Maybe we ought to leave," Fein said. "Maybe we're keeping people up."

"Then he got married," Hoover went on, his words slurred and indistinct. "A Suth'n belle: very nice, oh my. Course, you can't expect him to spend so much time with the old gang now he's married, right? And, what the hell, you can't expect a wife to get out and work and support her husband while he's slaving over a hot typewriter trying to get ahead, now can you?"

"I understand," Fein said.

"The hell you do, George, the hell you do."

"Lew..." Mr. Pierce stepped forward.

"Eddie, listen, remember the party over at Len's where you and me went to sleep in the bathtub? And what's-her-name, Dotty, came in and turned on the water. God damn, we almost drowned!" Hoover chuckled; he was sinking farther down in the couch. "And that trip to Tiajuana—huh? How long were we drunk? Was it really a week? Hey, and how about the ball we tossed when you sold your first story—"

"I wonder," Vernon F. Fein said, "if I could please have another drink."

"Damn right," Hoover said. He rose and stumbled into the kitchen.

Mr. Pierce sat remembering it all. His wonderful little bachelor

apartment and all his things, just so; the parties; and, most important, his friends. Lew and Jimmy and Len and Paul and Ron .... the best, the loyalest, closest gang of buddies that ever was.

And then, as Lew had said, Emma. Sweet Emma, who'd caught him when the novel wasn't going right and he was feeling low for no reason, low and—at this he smiled—lonely.

What had made him do it, finally? he wondered for perhaps the first time. Exactly how had it happened? he asked himself....

Things had been strange, that's all he'd known right at the moment.

There had been a wind and it blew city-breath into the branches of the outside elms and made them groan like broken flutes; it plucked up tumbleweeds from empty lots and sent them rolling ponderously down the night-darkened streets like fat brown ghosts; it made the windows and screens of every house quiver together with its small fury.

But it wasn't the wind alone that had made things strange.

Work, perhaps? It hadn't been a heavy day, especially. Oh, sure, he'd caught the tip of his finger in the grinder, but that wasn't anything new. He'd cut and sawed and weighed the meat and hated it no more and no less than ever before.

The apartment? That clump of dust beneath the record cabinet and that half-nibbled melting block of chocolate on the couch arm....

No. Not the wind, not the job, not the apartment. Not singly, anyway.

Then what?

Mr. Pierce got up and picked a cigarette from the coffee-table humidor and eased back into the dust-heavy chair, carefully, uncertainly, as if he half expected someone to strap him in, attach electrodes to his wrists and ankles and throw a switch.

He remembered.

How he had sat just so many hours earlier, and listened to the nasal voice...

"Eddie. Sweetheart!"

He had felt his heart come to life, his head begin to throb.

"Eddie, be a lamb and come sit with me."

And he had let the held-in breath rush away, realizing then that the strangeness was not so strange.

"Just a second, honey!" he had called back.

The stubbed-out cigarette uncoiled in the brass ashtray like a dying animal. Mr. Pierce watched it and yielded, while Hoover talked on and on, to the memories...

"Eddieeee, baby!"

"Okay; coming."

He had stood up and listened to the splashing sounds. And then

walked quickly across the naked living-room floor, past the spit-shine whiteness of ceramic ducks and ceramic geese afloat on the varnished tops of his bookcases; past the tinted Buddha—a gift from Emma's mother—grinning with the ignorance of the ages hidden in that bare white bursting belly, past Emma's gold-framed "Floral Group" and his Matisse "Odalisque," past and through all the freakish unbalance, the mixture of cheap and expensive, her things, and his things, he walked, and into the bathroom.

She was reading.

"Hi."

"Emma, I—"

But—she was reading. How he loved that! No matter what, Donald Duck, Henry Miller, she became hypnotized.

"I hate you," he said.

Her expression remained serene. She turned a page, smiling.

"I think," he said, "of all the females in the world as a vast regatta—full sails, trim white hulls, sleek, frail, swift. Thousands—millions! And there, in the midst of them all, you, my darling, my dearest: a great untidy barge, filled with rotting fruit and the ghosts of fled rats, chugging, straining, sinking; a gross smudge on the clear water . . ."

Emma waved one of her hands. "In a minute, dear," she said. "Just a couple more pages."

"Read on, until you putrefy and have to be gotten up with a vacuum cleaner," Mr. Pierce said in a soft, reedy voice.

"I love you," Emma said.

But even "the game" did no good. Mr. Pierce laid his horn-rims on the medicine cabinet and hoisted his trousers and rubbed his eyes. The steam floated like layers of mold in the room. He began to perspire. Coldly.

He watched his wife. In the gray water parts of her rose like little pink islands. She studied the pages of her magazine intensely as always, as a rabbit stares in paralyzed fascination at a cobra.

Then, suddenly, without thinking or questioning or wondering, Mr. Pierce snatched the magazine, hurled it across the small room and stood up.

"Why . . . Eddie!"

He then leaned over, took ahold of Emma's legs and pulled hard. Her massive body shot forward in the tub. Mr. Pierce put one foot on her throat and pushed her head beneath the soapy water: she thrashed and squirmed and bubbled, and splashed, but soon it was quiet.

Then Mr. Pierce shook and trembled for almost half an hour. A full hour had passed before he returned from the kitchen with certain utensils—

"I'm going to clear the air now!" Hoover was weaving uncertainly: his face seemed utterly like warm plastic. "Never had the

guts to say it all. But I've got a little under my belt now, and I don't care. Get sore. Get tee'd off! Fein—we were all for him when he married this chick. Really. Hell, she had us all snowed. Pretended to be understanding—see, she loved him just the way he was, no changes. *His* friends? *Her* friends. And that's the way it went—for the first two months. Then it starts. And like magic, kid, like *magic,* this sweet-talking chubby li'l gal turns a goddamn—I don't know what. Shrew, fishwife, harridan: you name it. Any of us, the minute we found out she was what she was, we'd of booted her out on her ear. But that's not Eddie. No-o-o! He wants to do the right thing. So instead, we get booted out. And it's all over. His buddies aren't welcome any more. He gives up his ambitions, his friends, and every other goddamn thing. Kaput. Schluss."

Listening, Mr. Pierce relived the transformation of his life; all of it, over two years. He relived it in those minutes. How his unconsciously ordered existence had been slowly uprooted and destroyed. How Emma had changed into a new person, one he'd never known. A fat, candy-eating, movie-magazine-reading, dirty-bathrobe-wearing *wife,* with a million nauseating habits. She squeezed his pimples. She made patterns with her feet. She fixed breakfast eggs that glistened with mucus. She threatened to leave—and never did. Refused to, stood adamant. And then, just yesterday, how she had crept up and put her viselike thumbs upon a tender neck-boil and pressed and cooed (her very words!), "Honey, what would you think about having a little stranger in the house?" Oh, how she had murdered him, by inches, centimeters, by days and nights, each time with a new weapon . . . .

Well, it was all right now. He had made it all right. He'd say she ran off with a Turk or an Italian—no one else knew how he had hated her, he'd always been so polite. And if it were done a little at a time, just a little: parts in the freezer, put through the grinder, distributed to a hundred customers over a hundred days . . . who would notice? Who would guess? And without a corpus delecti, of course . . .

Hoover had poured new drinks. He was standing now, weaving like a movie comic. "I'm sorry, Eddie," he said. "Didn't mean to run off at the mouth like that, honest. She'd drive me crazy, personally, but she's your baby I—well, sorry."

"That's okay, Lew," Mr. Pierce said, graciously.

"Mosey along now. I was a jerk to think we could get it back, I guess."

"No, Lew—" Mr. Pierce hesi-

tated. "It'll come back, some day. You wait and see."

Hoover slapped the face of his companion, who had fallen asleep. "Come on, Max. Let's go talk about Claudette Colbert."

Mr. Fein opened his eyes. Hoover picked up his white silk scarf and started for the door. He turned, then, and there was an expression of great sorrow on his face. "And you don't even know what tonight is," he said.

"Who—me?" Fein asked.

"Tell him, Eddie. Or have you forgotten?"

Mr. Pierce shook his head. "I don't think I follow you, Lew."

"Like I told you," Hoover said to Fein, "he's forgotten. Fred, tonight used to be the biggest in the year for us. All Fools Day. For years. And he didn't even remember. It's why I came by in the first place, and I was waiting, just hoping there that he would—but, Eddie, Eddie! You're dead, kid. Dead." He wheeled, snorted and stopped. "Wait. Got to use the bathroom," he said.

Mr. Pierce pulled himself from his regret and from his memories of the parties they had all thrown on this memorable date so many times in the past. He jumped up. "You can't do that, Lew."

"Huh?"

"It's—broken, Lew. Some trouble with the pipes."

Fein had wandered back to the kitchen.

"But," Hoover said, "I've got to."

"It doesn't work. I'm sorry."

Hoover grinned bitterly. "I got people to round up," he muttered. "People that's friends, that remember what the hell tonight is. Time and tide, besides . . ."

"It is out of order," Mr. Pierce said, firmly.

"Okay, then I'll wash my hands. Can I wash my hands?"

"The sink is stopped up."

"Eddie, you're telling me the sink is stopped up?"

"Yes, that's right!" Mr. Pierce almost shouted.

"What are you so jumpy about?"

"I'm not jumpy, Lew. I'm tired. It's all broke, that's all. Can't you understand a simple fact like that?"

Hoover sobered slightly, or seemed to. He looked closely at his friend. "I'm not sure," he said, and pushed forward, stumbling into the bedroom.

"Stop!" Mr. Pierce blanched and threw out his arms. But the tall man in evening dress had already crossed the room.

"Lew, don't spoil everything! It'll be okay. Just leave, will you?"

Hoover paused at the bathroom door. His hand slipped on the knob, crept back upon it and revolved.

Mr. Pierce spoke in a strong, soft voice now. "Don't go in there." He looked terribly small,

terribly frail, terribly helpless.

"When you gotta go," Hoover grinned, "you gotta go. If you don't think so, Eddie, you're all wet. Anyway, I feel a little sick. Sick. *Verstay?*"

As the tall man turned and started in, Mr. Pierce sighed and followed.

Hoover had a glass partially filled with water when he happened to glance at the curtained tub.

His eyes moved to the slit.

"Holy God! Eddie, what—"

Mr. Pierce's arm traveled in a wide arc. The cleaver, which he had plucked off the medicine shelf, sank deep. He wrenched it loose and swung it another time.

Then he pulled open the shower curtain and lifted the now crumpled figure and tumbled it into the tub and did not look at it.

With a soft rag he wiped his hands, thinking, *Lew!* Thinking. Well, that leaves Jimmy, anyway, and Len and . . . It would still be all right.

Trembling, Mr. Pierce surveyed himself in the mirror and returned to the living room.

Mr. Fein was not asleep any more. He was holding a Miro reproduction upside down and making confused sounds.

"How'd it go?" Fein inquired.

"Well," Mr. Pierce said, "Lew isn't feeling so good. He's decided to stay a while."

"I mean about the toilet."

"It's still broken."

Fein got up, staggered, giggled and quickly regained himself. "Take a look at it," he said.

"No—no need. Thanks anyway. I think it'll probably be all right until tomorrow. I've got a plumber coming—"

"Save you money. That's my business, plumbing. Don't have a snake here, do you? What's she do, back up on you?"

"Who?"

"Toilet."

"Oh. Yes, backed up on me."

"Well, we'll take a look-see."

"Ah—have a drink first."

"All righty. Say, tough about Mr. Hoover."

"Too much liquor."

"Uh-huh. It's okay, though, we came in my car."

Mr. Pierce poured two stiff ones and handed a glass to the red-faced man. "You two just met tonight, is that it?" he asked, hopefully.

" 'S right. Fine fella, Hoover. Speaks very high of you. Made a bet you'd remember what tonight was. Well, bottoms up! Over the lips and past the gums, look out, stomach, here it comes!"

"Cheers."

"Shame about it, you ask me. No woman is worth losing your friends over, Mr. Fierst."

"I suppose not. Uh—you just decided on the spur of the moment to vist me? I mean, Lew—he

didn't happen to mention to anybody else you were coming over here?"

"Didn't exactly know it myself till we were here. Crazy fella, what he told me was we were goin' to see some broads. I mean, you know, girls. Then," Fein giggled, "we turn up here. I think—say, you got a snake? Take a jiffy if you do. See, I'm on vacation now, otherwise I'd have my tools."

"I think perhaps I do."

"Well, let's get at it. Maybe a plunger would do the trick."

"We'll find something for you," Mr. Pierce said, and led the way.

"Must really be nice," Fein said, "to have buddies. Little town where I hail from, not too many friends. That Hoover fella, he told me you got more buddies than anybody he ever knew."

"I had a lot of friends once, yes," Mr. Pierce said. "I will again."

"Sure you will," Fein said.

He had taken no more than two steps inside the bathroom when he gasped, wheeled, gasped again and fell, clawing, to the pink tile floor.

Mr. Pierce steadied himself, removed from Mr. Fein's neck the long thin knife used for trimming fat, and lifted and pulled and strained and at last managed to get the heavy figure into the bathtub.

Water sloshed over the sides, now, but it was not even like red ink any more, but deeper red, and gummy.

Mr. Pierce sighed, permitted one short spasm to shake his body, sighed two more times, and slipped on the oilcloth apron.

He had it almost tied, when:

There was a knock. Only one, but the glass-squared door shook in its poor-fitting jamb and sent sharp sounds trembling throughout the apartment.

Mr. Pierce froze.

Then there was another sound; a latch opening, a squeak, a voice, "Happy All Fools Day! Hey—anybody home? Eddie, you old sea-dog, where the devil are you? Hey! It's Len! Just dropped in to say howdy."

"Hi!" Mr. Pierce called out. He removed the apron. "Be with you in a second."

"Jimmy get here yet?"

"No. Not yet."

Mr. Pierce stood erect in the tiny bathroom, looked about, and washed his hands.

Then he walked out with a brand-new sort of smile and a brand-new look in his eyes.

"Good to see you, Len. It's been a long time," he said, wearily. ■ ■

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Everybody knows that. But too much knowledge is more dangerous—it's often fatal.

THE MAN WHO KNEW EVERYTHING

by EDWARD D. HOCH

THE FIRST TIME I EVER MET HIM was in France, just before the war. I was attached to the *Tribune's* Paris office then, and the sleepless virility of youth often led me to the dimness of the Left Bank cafes when night had drifted over the city.

It was in one of these places that I saw him, doing an act as part of a third-rate floor show that barely managed to keep the audi-

ence awake. He came on just after the sequined, nearly-nude girls, and quite often only a handful of drunks stayed around to watch him.

He was billed then as *Mantayna, The Man Who Knows Everything,* and it was a pretty fair memory act as such things went. One night over a drink I got talking to him, and I realized with a bit of a start that he was really an educated man. He knew a lot more than just the population of India or the Kings of England or the velocity of a falling object. And we'd sit there by the hour sometimes, talking of the war that was then almost upon us, and of what might follow it.

"My friend," he'd say, sipping at his glass of wine, "I sometimes think that an educated man—a *really* educated man—is the greatest evil in the world today."

"Evil? How can intelligence and knowledge ever be evil?"

"Haven't you ever realized that evil—at least in its principal forms—is founded upon knowledge? A poor ignorant fellow can practice the simpler forms of sin, but the more advanced vices are unknown to him."

At the time it was just conversation, and I never thought too much about it.

It wasn't until some sixteen years later that our paths were destined to cross again. I was older, and perhaps a bit wiser—though I was still a foreign correspondent. The place this time was Cairo, in the middle of the Suez trouble, and my mind was on far different things when I came upon the mention of a Professor Mantayna in a news dispatch.

He'd been living in Egypt, apparently for a number of years, and teaching at the University of Cairo. I was happy to hear the news, and one night after the excitement of my current assignment had died down, I hired a car to take me to his house on the outskirts of Cairo.

"Well," he welcomed me with a familiar smile, "my old friend from Paris!"

"Your memory is as good as ever, Professor."

He led me through a pink painted arch and down a wide curving flight of stairs to a lower-level living room.

"Memory and knowledge are my business," he answered.

"I know—*Mantayna, The Man Who Knows Everything.* But really, I'm glad to see you're teaching now. It's a bit more respectable—and profitable, too—from the looks of this house."

Mantayna smiled, a thin, tired smile. Perhaps it was only an older smile.

"More profitable, but more tiring, too. I sometimes feel completely drained of all energy. Would you care for a drink?"

I accepted his offer and he poured a single glass of wine.

"Aren't you joining me?" I asked.

"No, I've given it up."

I sipped the warming liquid with unconcealed pleasure.

"Well, it certainly tastes good. But tell me, what have you been doing in Egypt besides teaching?"

"Learning. Always learning."

"I thought you knew everything already."

He closed his eyes and leaned back on the pink-cushioned couch. "There are always new things to learn. Things buried and forgotten by the passage of time. That was the main reason for my coming to Egypt. Here, more than anywhere else on earth, is the burial ground for the mysteries of the distant past."

I puzzled a bit over this. "Mysteries of what kind? Certainly we've discovered everything important about ancient civilizations, if that's what you mean."

"Ah, but we haven't! Take Egypt, for example. We know the names of their rulers, and the location of their tombs. We know that women often shaved their heads and wore colored wigs. We know that they worshipped cats and sacred birds like the ibis. But what do we know of the intimate details of their private lives? Do we know their particular virtues... and their vices?"

This last was spoken almost in a whisper, and I had to lean toward him a bit to catch it.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I said once, long ago, that knowledge and evil often go hand in hand. I, for example, have increased my knowledge of the world's good, only to learn also of its evil. I know things...." His voice trailed off into nothing.

"Are you well, Professor?" I asked, not without a bit of alarm. "Can I get you anything?"

"No, nothing. Stay with me, though, old friend. Stay, and I will give you a story bigger than Suez."

Professor Mantayna rose slowly to his feet and led me deeper into the confines of his house. We passed down a long hall, subdued in lighting and lined with bookshelves. The titles, many of them, were strange to me—*Fountainhead of Knowledge, Mysteries of the East, Before Adam*. The books stood in neat, dusty rows, many of their spines old and faded, showing the ravages of time.

Presently we reached another room, which I supposed to be Mantayna's bedroom. But the walls were covered with a strange writing that seemed to my untrained eye like some sort of hieroglyphics.

"What is this place?" I asked him.

"You noticed that we went

downstairs when we entered my house? And the hallway out there also is slightly graded. We are now some thirty feet below ground, in a room over four thousand years old...."

"You found this? Was there a mummy or something here?"

"Nothing. Only the writings you see on these walls of stone. But they told me the last secret—the final bit of knowledge."

He gestured toward the walls and I studied them for a moment, but the ancient markings meant nothing to me.

"What does it say?" I asked.

He sighed, the sound of an old man. "Today there are only a certain number of actual vices known to man—sex, drink, drugs, gambling.... Here, from long ago, is the record of another way toward pleasure—a vice lost in the pages of history."

"An unknown vice," I said. "It seems impossible. What is it?"

Mantayna only shook his head. "By our Twentieth Century standards it would be unspeakable. Yet I believe it was once the major vice of half the known world."

"An ultimate vice," I mused, "lost to mankind and now rediscovered. I think there's a story in it, all right."

He nodded slowly. "A story that can never be printed in full, of course. A vice that helped destroy Egypt, Greece and Rome—and could be just as fatal to the modern world."

"You mean you don't intend to publish your findings?"

"That's right," he said.

"But you said you had a story for me."

"I have, but no details. You may report as much as I've told you. No more." Even as we talked Mantayna's face seemed to grow more tired and wrinkled. It was almost as if he were fighting off a great sleep that threatened to envelop him at any moment.

"Listen, Professor," I persisted. "Civilization has progressed a great deal in four thousand years. How do you know that modern men and women would even find pleasure in this long-lost vice of your ancient Egyptians?"

He looked at me for a long moment before he replied. "I know," he said simply. "I know." And then he was silent, his eyes slowly closing as the great sleep seemed about to overcome him again.

"I'd better be going, Professor," I said gently. "Perhaps I can come again tomorrow?"

"Perhaps," he mumbled. "You can find your way out."

"Of course."

As I left the ancient stone room and started back along the dim hallway he seemed to stagger to his feet. I left the house and went into the cooling night air, and breathed deeply of its fresh, unmusted smell....

For two days I was busy at the port, watching shiploads of troops moving in and out with a decreasing sense of urgency. The worst of the Suez crisis was over now, and finally I had time again to remember my strange conversation with Professor Mantayna. On Friday I returned to my hotel room to find a letter from him awaiting me.

It was a single sheet of paper, one of his old letterheads from the Paris days.

"Dear friend," it began, "I must write to you just once after our conversation. You must have noticed that I seemed to tire as the evening wore on, and I feel that I must tell the horrible truth you must already suspect. I, Mantayna, am in the grip of the ultimate horror—the most vicious form of degeneration ever practiced by man. It is now too late for anything to save me. Already death is very near, the same hideous dissolution that has claimed millions all through history. The ultimate pleasure, horrible as it is, is beyond human resistance. I only pray that the few to whom I have entrusted the secret will never attempt its practice."

The letter ended there, without even a signature, and that last sentence sent a brief chill through my bones.

I left the hotel at once and headed for Mantayna's house on the edge of the city. When I reached it, all was silent, and only the movement of the warm desert air through the date palms reminded me that life still existed here. I pushed the buzzer and waited, but no one came. Then I tried the door and it opened at my touch—he must have known I'd come after receiving his letter.

I went in, and down the steps to his living room, then down the long hallway he must have cut from the ancient rock. Down the hallway, lined with books that held all the world's knowledge. To the room at the end.

And there I found Mantayna, what was left of him, in ancient splendor. He had draped his body in a flowing robe of many colors, and with his last breath of life he had covered his face with a wicker basket.

I lifted it, and saw the wrinkled, eternally old face of a mummy. But in the glazed eyes, there was a look of indescribable ecstasy. Even through the horror I recognized it....

After the funeral I went back to the house, and I searched among the mountains of personal documents for some further clue to this strange vice. What was this pleasure that drove Mantayna to destroy himself so completely—and to whom had he revealed the secret?

I found the answer on the sec-

ond day of searching, among his notes for the classes he taught at the university. His students! They had been the "few" he'd told. And in turn they might have told others...

I looked further, and presently I came upon Mantayna's secret, the instructions written in a neat, flowing hand. It is before me now as I put down these facts on paper.

Mantayna died because he knew too much, because he knew everything. Now, as the months have passed since his funeral, I see frequently in the Cairo papers the little boxed items reporting still another death—the victim's wrinkled body with the dreadful glazed look of unutterable joy. The knowledge is spreading, and the evil.

But when I remember the look in Mantayna's eyes, I know that it will not be long before I pick up the sheet of instructions and follow in the fatal footsteps of The Man Who Knew Everything.

And I am still among the first. Soon the whole world will know it again—the pleasure....and the pain....and the terrible, terrible end. ■ ■

Are your bones starting to ache? Think it's just a twinge of rheumatism? Heh-heh. After you read this story, you won't be so sure.

THE SKELETON

by RAY BRADBURY

IT WAS PAST TIME FOR HIM TO SEE the doctor again. Mr. Harris turned palely in at the stair-well, and on his way up the flight he saw Dr. Burleigh's name gilded over a pointing arrow. Would Dr. Burleigh sigh when he walked in? After all, this would make the

tenth trip so far this year. But Burleigh shouldn't complain; after all he got money for the examinations!

The nurse looked him over and smiled, a bit amusedly, as she tiptoed to the glazed glass door and opened it to put her head in. Harris thought he heard her say, "Guess who's here, Doctor?" And didn't the doctor's acid voice reply, faintly, "Oh ~~my~~ God, *again?*" Harris swallowed uneasily.

When Harris walked in, Dr. Burleigh snorted thinly. "Aches in your bones again! Ah!" He scowled at Harris and adjusted his glasses. "My dear Harris, you've been curried with the finest tooth-combs and bacteria-brushes known to science. You're only nervous. Let's see your fingers. Too many cigarettes. Let me smell your breath. Too much whiskey. Let's see your eyes. Not enough sleep. My response? Go home to bed, stop drinking, stop smoking. Ten dollars, please."

Harris stood there, sulking.

Dr. Burleigh looked up from his papers. "You still here? You're a hypochondriac! That's *eleven* dollars, now."

"But why should my bones ache?" asked Harris.

Dr. Burleigh addressed him like a child. "You ever had a pained muscle, and keep at it, irritating it, fussing with it, rubbing it? It gets worse, the more you bother it. Then you leave it alone and the pain vanishes. You realize you caused most of the soreness. Well, son, that's what's with you. Leave yourself alone. Take a dose of salts. Get out of here now! Take that business trip to Phoenix you've been stewing about for months. Do you good to get away!"

Mr. Harris riffled through a classified phone directory five minutes later, at the corner druggists. A fine lot of sympathy one got from blind fools like Burleigh! He passed his finger down a list of BONE SPECIALISTS, found one named M. Munigant. Munigant lacked an M.D. or any other academical lettering behind his name, but his office was easily reached. Three blocks down, one block over....

M. Munigant, like his office, was small and dark. Like his office, he smelled of iodoform, iodine and other odd things. He was a good listener, though, and listened with eager, shiny eyes, and when he talked to Harris, he had an accent and seemed to whistle every word, undoubtedly due to imperfect dentures. Harris told all.

M. Munigant nodded. He had seen cases like this before. The bones of the body. Man was not aware of his bones. Ah, yes, the

bones. The skeleton. Most difficult. Something concerning an imbalance, an unsympathetic coordination between soul, flesh and bone. Very complicated, softly whistled M. Munigant. Harris listened, fascinated. Now, *here* was a doctor who understood his illness! Psychological, said M. Munigant. He moved swiftly, delicately to a dingy wall and rattled down half a dozen X-rays and paintings of the human skeleton. He pointed at these. Mr. Harris must become aware of his problem, yes. He pointed at this and that bone, and these and those, and some others.

The pictures were quite awful. They had something of the grotesquerie and off-bound horror of a Dali painting. Harris shivered.

M. Munigant talked on. Did Mr. Harris desire treatment of his bones?

"That all depends," said Harris.

M. Munigant could not help Harris unless Harris was in the proper mood. Psychologically, one had to NEED help, or the doctor was of no use. But (shrugging) Mr. Munigant would "try."

Harris lay on a table with his mouth open. The lights were off, the shades drawn. M. Munigant approached his patient. Something touched Harris' tongue. He felt the jawbones forced out. They cracked and made noises. One of those pictures on the dim wall seemed to leap. A violent shivering went through Harris and, involuntarily, his mouth snapped shut.

M. Munigant cried out. He had almost had his nose bitten off! It was no use. Now was not the time. M. Munigant raised the shades. He looked dreadfully disappointed. When Mr. Harris felt he could cooperate psychologically, when Mr. Harris really *needed* help and trusted M. Munigant to help him, then maybe something could be done. M. Munigant held out his little hand. In the meantime, the fee was only two dollars. Mr. Harris must begin to think. Here was a sketch for Mr. Harris to study. It would acquaint him with his body. He must be aware of himself. He must be careful. Skeletons were strange, unwieldy things. M. Munigant's eyes glittered. Good day to Mr. Harris. Oh, and would he have a bread-stick? He proffered a jar of long hard salty breadsticks to Harris, taking one himself to chew on, and saying that chewing breadsticks kept him in—ah—practice. See you soon, Mr. Harris. Mr. Harris went home.

The next day was Sunday, and Mr. Harris started the morning by feeling all sorts of new aches and pains in his body. He spent some time glancing at the funny

papers and then looking with new interest at the little painting, anatomically perfect, of a skeleton M. Munigant had given him.

His wife, Clarisse, startled him at dinner when she cracked her exquisitely thin knuckles, one by one, until he clapped his hands to his ears and cried, "Don't do that!"

The remainder of the day he quarantined himself in his room. Clarisse was seated at bridge in the living room with three other ladies, laughing and conversing. Harris himself spent his time fingering and weighing the limbs of his body with growing curiosity. After an hour of this he suddenly stood up and called:

"Clarisse!"

She had a way of dancing into any room, her body doing all sorts of soft, agreeable things to keep her feet from ever quite touching the nap of a rug. She excused herself from her friends and came to see him now, brightly. She found him reseated in a far corner and she saw that he was staring at that anatomical sketch. "Are you still brooding, darling?" she asked. "Please don't." She sat upon his knees.

Her beauty could not distract him now in his absorption. He juggled her lightness, he touched her knee-cap, suspiciously. It seemed to move under her pale, glowing skin. "Is it supposed to do that?" he asked, sucking in his breath.

"Is what supposed to do what?" she laughed. "You mean my knee-cap?"

"Is it supposed to run around on top your knee that way?"

She experimented. "So it *does,*" she marveled. "Well, now, so it does. Icky." She pondered. "No. On the other hand—it doesn't. It's only an optical illusion. The skin moves over the bone; not vice-versa. See?" She demonstrated.

"I'm glad yours slithers too," he sighed. "I was beginning to worry."

"About what?"

He patted his ribs. "My ribs don't go all the way down, they stop *here*. And I found some confounded ones that dangle in mid-air!"

Beneath the curve of her small breasts, Clarisse clasped her hands. "Of course, silly, everybody's ribs stop at a given point. And those funny little short ones are floating ribs."

"I just hope they don't float around too much," he said, making an uneasy joke. Now, he desired that his wife leave him, he had some important discovering to do with his own body and he didn't want her laughing at him

and poking fun.

"I'll feel all right," he said. "Thanks for coming in, dear."

"Any time," she said, kissing him, rubbing her small pink nose warm against his.

"I'll be damned!" He touched his nose with his fingers, then hers. "Did you ever realize that the nose bone only comes down so far and a lot of gristly tissue takes up from there on?"

She wrinkled hers. "So what?" And, dancing, she exited.

He felt the sweat rise from the pools and hollows of his face, forming a salten tide to flow down his cheeks. Next on the agenda was his spinal cord and column. He examined it in the same manner as he operated the numerous push-buttons in his office, pushing them to summon the messenger boys. But, in these pushings of his spinal column, fears and terrors answered, rushed from a million doors in Mr. Harris' mind to confront and shake him. His spine felt awfully—bony. Like a fish, freshly eaten and skeletonized, on a china platter. He fingered the little rounded knobbins. "My God."

His teeth began to chatter. "God All-Mighty," he thought, "why haven't I realized it all these years. All these years I've gone around the world with a—SKELETON—inside me!" He saw his fingers blur before him, like motion films triply speeded in their quaking apprehension. "How is it that we take ourselves so much for granted. How is it we never question our bodies and our being?"

A skeleton. One of those jointed, snowy, hard things, one of those four, dry, brittle, goudge-eyed, skull-faced, shake-fingered, rattling things that sway from neck-chains in abandoned webbed closets, one of those things found on the desert all long and scattered like dice!

He stood upright, because he could not bear to remain seated. Inside me now, he grasped his stomach, his head, inside my head is a—skull. One of those curved carapaces which holds my brain like an electrical jelly, one of those cracked shells with the holes in front like two holes shot through it by a double-barreled shotgun! With its grottoes and caverns of bone, its rivetments and placements for my flesh, my smelling, my seeing, my hearing, my thinking! A skull, encompassing my brain, allowing it exit through its brittle windows to see the outside world!

He wanted to dash into the bridge party, upset it, a fox in a chickenyard, the cards fluttering all around like chicken feathers burst upward in clouds! He stopped himself only with a vio-

lent, trembling effort. Now, now, man, control yourself. This is a revelation, take it for what it is worth, understand it, savor it. BUT A SKELETON! screamed his subconscious. I won't stand for it. It's vulgar, it's terrible, it's frightening. Skeletons are horrors, they clink and tinkle and rattle in old castles, hung from oaken beams, making long, indolently rustling p e n d u l u m s on the wind ....

"Darling, will you come in and meet the ladies?" called his wife's sweet, clear voice.

Mr. Harris stood upright. His SKELETON was holding him upright. This thing inside him, this invader, this horror, was supporting his arms, legs and head. It was like feeling someone just behind you who shouldn't be there. With every step he took he realized how dependent he was upon this other Thing.

"Darling, I'll be with you in a moment," he called weakly. To himself he said, "Come on, now, brace up. You've got to go back to work tomorrow. And Friday you've got to make that trip to Phoenix. Quite a drive. Over six hundred miles. Got to be in shape for that trip or you won't get Mr. Creldon to put his money into your ceramics business. Chin up, now."

Five minutes later he stood among the ladies being introduced to Mrs. Withers, Mrs. Abblematt and Miss Kirthy, all of whom had skeletons inside them but took it very calmly, because nature had carefully clothed the bare nudity of clavicle, tibia and femur with breasts, thighs, calves, with coiffure and eyebrow satanic, with bee-stung lips and—LORD! shouted Mr. Harris inwardly—when they talk or eat part of their skeleton shows—their *teeth!* I never thought of that.

"Excuse me," he said, and ran from the room only in time to drop his lunch among the petunias over the garden balistrade.

That night, seated on the bed as his wife undressed, he pared his toenails and fingernails scrupulously. These parts, too, were where his skeleton was shoving, indignantly growing out. He must have muttered something concerning this theory, because next thing he knew his wife, in negligee, slithered on the bed in animal cuddlesomeness, yawning, "Oh, my darling, fingernails are *not* bone, they're only hardened skin growths."

He threw the scissors away with relief. "Glad to hear that. Feel better." He looked at the ripe curves of her body, marveling. "I hope all people are made the same way."

"If you aren't the darndest

hypochrondriac I ever. saw," she said. She snuggled to him. "Come on, what's wrong, tell mama."

"Something inside me," he said. "Something I ate."

The next morning and all afternoon at the office downtown, Mr. Harris found that the sizes, shapes and construction of various bones in his body displeased him. At ten a.m. he asked to feel Mr. Smith's elbow one moment. Mr. Smith obliged but gave forth a suspicious scowl. And after lunch Mr. Harris asked to touch Miss Laurel's shoulderblade and she immediately pushed herself back against him, shutting her eyes in the mistaken belief that he wished to examine a few other anatomical delicacies. "Miss Laurel!" he snapped. "Stop that!"

Alone, he pondered his neuroses. The war, the pressure of his work, the uncertainty of the future, probably had much to do with his mental outlook. He wanted to leave the office, get into his own business, for himself. He had more than a little talent at artistic things, had dabbled in ceramics and pottery. As soon as possible, he'd go to Phoenix, Arizona and borrow that money from Mr. Creldon. It would build him his kiln and set up his own shop. It was a worry. What a hypochrondriac he was. But it was a good thing he had contacted M. Munigant, who had seemed to understand and be eager to help him. He would fight it out with himself. He wouldn't go back to either Munigant or Dr. Burleigh unless he was forced to. The alien feeling would pass. He sat staring into nothing.

The alien feeling did not pass. It grew. On Tuesday and Wednesday it bothered him terrifically that his outer dermis, epidermis, hair and other appendages were of a high disorder, while the integumented skeleton of himself was a slick, clean structure of efficient organization. Sometimes, in certain lights while his lips were drawn morosely d o w n w a r d, weighted with melancholy, he imagined he saw his skull grinning at him. *It had its nerve, it did!*

"Let go of me!" he cried. "Let go of me! You've caught me, you've captured me! My lungs, you've got them in a vise! Release them!"

He experienced violent gasps as if his ribs were pressing in, chocking the breath from him.

"My brain, stop squeezing it!"

And terrible hot headaches caught his brain like a bivavle in the compressed clamp of skullbones.

"My vitals! All my organs, let

them be, for God's sake! Stay away from my heart!" His heart seemed to cringe from the fanning nearness of his ribs, like pale spiders crouched and fiddling with their prey.

Drenched with sweat he lay upon the bed one night while Clarrise was out attending a Red Cross meet. He tried to gather his wits again, and always the conflict of his disorderly exterior and this cool calciumed thing inside him with all its exact symmetry continued.

His complexion, wasn't it oily and lined with worry?

Observe the flawless snow-white perfection of the skull.

His nose, wasn't it too large?

Then observe the small tiny bones of the skull's nose before that monstrous nasal cartilege begins forming Harris' lopsided proboscis.

His body, wasn't it a bit plump?

Well, then, consider the skeleton; so slender, so svelte, so economical of line and contour. Like exquisitely carved oriental ivory it is, perfected and thin as a reed.

His eyes, weren't they protuberant and ordinary and numb looking?

Be so kind as to note the eyesockets of the skeleton's skull; so deep and rounded, sombre, quiet, dark pools, all knowing, eternal. Gaze deeply into skull sockets and you never touch the bottom of their dark understanding with any plumb line. All irony, all sadism, all life, all everything is there in the cupped darkness.

Compare. Compare. Compare.

He raged for hours, glib and explosive. And the skeleton, ever the frail and solemn philosopher, quietly hung inside of Harris, saying not a word, quietly suspended like a delicate insect within a chrysalis, waiting and waiting.

Then it came to Harris.

"Wait a minute. Hold on a minute," he exclaimed. "You're helpless, too. I've got you, too! I can make you do anything I want you to, and you can't prevent it! I say put up your carpels, metacarpels and phalanges and—swift!—up they go, as I wave to someone!" He giggled. "I order the fibula and femur to locomote and HUMM two three four, Humm, two three four—we walk around the block. There!"

Harris grinned.

"It's a fifty-fifty fight. Even-steven. And we'll fight it out, we two, we shall. After all, I'm the part that thinks!" That was good, it was a triumph, he'd remember that. "Yes. By God, yes. I'm the part that thinks. If I didn't have you, even then I could still think!"

Instantly, he felt a pain strike his head. His cranium, crowding in slowly, began giving him some of his own treatment right back.

At the end of the week he had postponed the Phoenix trip because of his health. He weighed himself on a penny scales and watched the slow glide of the red arrow as it pointed to: "164."

He groaned. "Why I've weighed 175 for ten years. I can't have lost ten pounds." He examined his cheeks in the fly-dotted mirror. Cold primitive fear rushed over him in odd little shivers. "Hold on! I know what're you're about, *you.*"

He shook his finger at his bony face, particularly addressing his remarks to his superior maxillary, his inferior maxillary, to his cranium and to his cervical vertebrae. "You rum thing, you. Think you can starve me off, make me lose weight, eh? A victory for you, is it? Peel the flesh off, leave nothing but skin on bone. Trying to ditch me, so you can be supreme, ah? No, no!"

He fled into a cafeteria immediately.

Ordering turkey, dressing, potatoes, cream, three desserts he soon found he could not eat it, he was sick to his stomach. He forced himself. His teeth began to ache. "Bad teeth, is it?" he wanted to know, angrily. "I'll eat in spite of every tooth clanging and banging and rotting so they fall in my gravy."

His head ached, his breathing came hard from a constricted chest, his teeth pulsed with pain, but he had one small victory. He was about to drink milk when he stopped and poured it into a vase of nasturtiums. "No calcium for you, my boy, no more calcium for you. Never will I eat foods again with calcium or other bone-fortifying minerals in them. I'll eat for one of us, not both, my lad."

"One hundred and fifty pounds," he wailed the following week to his wife. "Do you see how I've changed?"

"For the better," said Clarisse. "You were always a little plump, for your height, darling." She stroked his chin. "I like your face, it's so much nicer, the lines of it are so firm and strong now."

"They're not MY lines, they're his, damn him! You mean to say you like him better than you like me?" he demanded indignantly.

"Him? Who's him?"

In the parlor mirror, beyond

Clarisse, his skull smiled back at him behind his fleshy grimace of hatred and despair.

Fuming, he popped malt tablets into his mouth. This was one way of gaining weight when you couldn't eat other foods. Clarisse noticed the malt capsules. "But, darling, really, you don't have to regain the weight for me," she said.

"Oh, shut up!" he felt like saying.

She came over to him and sat down and made him lie so his head was in her lap. "Darling," she said, "I've watched you lately. You're so—badly off. You don't say anything, but you look—hunted. You toss in bed at night. Maybe you should go to a psychiatrist. But I think I can tell you everything he would say. I've put it all together, from hints you've dropped. I can tell you that you and your skeleton are one and the same, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. United you stand, divided you fall. If you two fellows can't get along like an old married couple in the future, go back and see Dr. Burleigh. But, *first,* relax. You're in a vicious circle, the more you worry, the more your bones stick out, the more your bones stick out, the more you fret. After all, now, who picked this fight—you or that anonymous entity you claim is lurking around behind your alimentary canal?"

He closed his eyes. "I did. I guess I did. Oh, my darling I love you so."

"You rest now," she said softly. "Rest and forget."

Mr. Harris felt buoyed up for half a day, then he began to sag again. It was all right to say everything was imagination, but this particular skeleton, by God, was fighting back.

Harris set out for M. Munigant's office late in the day. He walked for half an hour until he found the address, and then, at the sight of the name M. Munigant initialled in gold on a glass sign outside, Harris' bones seemed to explode from their moorings, blasted and erupted with pain. He could hardly see in his wet, pain-filled eyes. So violent were the pains that Harris staggered away, and when he opened his eyes again, he had rounded a corner, and M. Munigant's office was out of sight. The pains ceased.

M. Munigant, then, was the man to help him. He must be! If the sight of his gilt-lettered name could cause so titanic reaction in the deepness of Harris' body, why, or course, M. Munigant *must* be just the man.

But, not today. Each time he

tried to return to that office, the terrible pains layed him low. Perspiring, he had to give up, and stagger into a beer saloon for respite.

Moving across the floor of the beer palace, he wondered briefly if a lot of blame couldn't be put on M. Munigant's shoulders; after all, it was Munigant who'd first drawn his attention to his skeleton, and brought home the entire psychological impact of it! Could M. Munigant be using him for some nefarious purpose? But what purpose? Silly to even suspect him. Just a little doctor. Trying to be helpful. Munigant and his jar of bread-sticks. Ridiculous. M. Munigant was okay, okay.

But there was a sight within the beer parlor to give him hope. A large fat man, round as a butterball stood drinking consecutive beers at the bar. Now here was a successful fellow for you. Harris momentarily repressed a desire to go up, clap him on his shoulder and enquire as to how he'd gone about impounding his bones. Yes, the fat man's skeleton was luxuriously closeted. There were pillows of fat here, resilient bulges of it there, with several round chandeliers of fat under his chin. The poor skeleton was lost, it could never fight clear of that blubber; it may have tried once—but now, overwhelmed, not a bony echo of the fat man's supporter remained.

Not without envy, Harris approached the fat man as one might cut across the bow of an ocean liner.

"Glands?" inquired Harris.

"You talking to me?" asked the fat man.

"Or is there a special diet?" wondered Harris. "I beg your pardon, but, as you see, I'm down to the marrow. Adding weight seems an impossibility. I'd like a belly like that one of yours, it's tops. Did you grow it because you were afraid?"

"You," announced the fat man, "are drunk. But I like drunkards." He ordered more drinks. "Listen close. I'll tell you—"

"Layer by layer," said the fat man, "twenty years, man and boy, I built this." He held his vast stomach like a globe of the world, teaching his audience its gastronomical geography. It was no overnight circus. The tent was not raised before dawn on the wonders installed within. I have cultivated my inner organs as if they were thoroughbred dogs, cats and other animals. My stomach is a fat pink Persian tom slumbering, rousing at intervals to purr, mew, growl and cry for chocolate titbits. I feed it well, it will most sit up for me. And, my dear fellow, my intestines are the rarest pure-

bred Indian anacondas you ever viewed in the sleekest, coiled, fine and ruddy health. Keep 'em in prime, I do, all my pets. For fear of something? Perhaps?"

This called for another drink for everybody.

"Gain weight?" The fat man savored the words on his tongue. "Here's what you do. Get yourself a quarreling bird of a wife, a baker's dozen of relatives who can flush a covey of troubles out from behind the veriest molehill; add to these a sprinkling of business associates whose prime motivation is snatching your last lonely quid, and you are well on your way to getting fat. How so? In no time you'll begin subconsciously building fat betwixt yourself and them. A buffer epidermal state, a cellular wall. You'll soon find that eating is the only fun on earth. But one needs to be bothered by outside sources. Too many people in this world haven't enough to worry about, then they begin picking on *themselves,* and they lose weight. Meet all of the vile, terrible people you can possible know, and pretty soon you'll be adding the good old fat."

And with that advice, the fat man launched himself out into the dark tide of night, swaying mightily and wheezing.

"That's exactly what Dr. Burleigh told me, slightly changed," said Harris thoughtfully. "Perhaps that trip to Phoenix at this time—"

The trip from Frisco to Phoenix was a sweltering one, crossing, as it did, the Death Valley on a broiling yellow day. It was only to be hoped that Mr. Creldon the man in Phoenix with the money would be in an inspired mood about lending an amount necessary to setting Mr. Harris up in his ceramics business.

The car moved in the hot sluice of desert wind. The one Mr. H. sat inside the other Mr. H. Perhaps both perspired. Perhaps both were miserable.

On a curve, the inside Mr. H. suddenly constricted the outer flesh, causing him to jerk forward on the hot steering wheel.

The car ran off the road into deepest sand. It turned half over.

Night came on, a wind rose, the road was lonely and silent with no traffic, and Mr. Harris lay unconscious until night roused a sandstorm out of the empty valleys.

Morning found him awake and gritty-eyed, wandering in circles, having somehow gotten away from the road, perhaps because sand had layered it over. At noon he sprawled in the poor shade of a bush, and the sun struck at him with a keen sword edge, seeping into his bones. A buzzard circled.

Harris' parched lips cracked open weakly. "So that's it," he whimpered, red-eyed, bristle-cheeked. "One way or another you'll wreck me, walk me, starve me, thirst me, kill me." He swallowed dry burrs of dust. "Sun cook off my flesh so you can peek forth. Vultures lunch and breakfast from me, and then there you'll lie, grinning. Grinning with victory. Like a bleached xylophone strewn and played by vultures with an ear for odd music. You'd like that, eh? Freedom."

He walked on and on through a landscape that shivered and bubbled in the direct pour of sunlight; stumbling, falling, lying to feed himself little mouths of flame. The air was blue alcohol flame; and vultures roasted and steamed and glittered as they flew in glides and circles. Phoenix. The road. Car. Safety. Water.

"Hey!" somebody called from way off in the blue alcohol flame.

Mr. Harris propped himself up.

"Hey!" somebody called again. A crunching of footsteps, quick.

With a cry of unbelievable relief, Harris rose, only to collapse again into a park ranger's arms.

The car tediously repaired, Phoenix reached, Harris found himself in such an unholy state of mind that any business transaction would have to wait. This business of the Thing within him like a hard white sword in its scabbard tainted his eating, colored his love for Clarisse, made it unsafe to trust an automobile; all in all it must be settled before he could have any love for business or anything! That desert incident had brushed too closely. Too near the bone, one might say with an ironic twist of one's mouth. Harris grimly phoned Mr. Creldon, apologized, turned his car around and motored along a safer route to Los Angeles, thence up the coast to Frisco. He didn't trust that desert. But—careful! Salt waves boomed, hissing on the beach as he drove through Santa Barbara. Sand, fish and crustacia would cleanse his bones as swiftly as vultures. Slow down on the curves over the surf.

If anything happened, he desired casket burial. The two of them'd rot together, that way! Damn Him! And what about this little man—M. Munigant? Bone specialist. Oh God, where was one to turn?

"Darling!" trilled Clarisse, kissing him so he winced at the solidness of her teeth and jaw behind the passionate exchange.

"Darling," he said slowly, wiping his lips with his wrist, trembling.

"You look thinner; oh, darling,

the business deal—it didn't go through!"

"I have to go back again. Yes, I have to go back again. That's it."

She kissed him again. Lord, he couldn't even kiss her any more and enjoy it because of this obsession. They ate a slow, unhappy dinner, with Clarisse trying to cheer him. He studied the phone, several times he picked it up indecisively, then laid it aside. His wife walked in, putting on her coat and hat. "I'm sorry to have to leave now, when you're feeling so low. But I'll be back in three hours from the Red Cross. I simply *have* to go."

When Clarisse was gone, Harris dialed the phone, nervously.

"Mr. Munigant?"

The explosions and the sickness in his body after he set the phone down were unbelievable. His bones were racked with every kind of pain, cold and hot, he had every thought of, or experienced in wildest nightmare. He swallowed as many aspirin as he could find in an effort to stave off the assault; but when the door-bell finally rang an hour later, he could not move, he lay weak and exhausted, panting, tears streaming down his cheeks, like a man on a torture rack. Would M. Munigant go away if he didn't answer the door?

"Come in!" he tried to gasp it out. "Come in, for God's sake!"

M. Munigant came in. Thank God the door had been unlocked.

Oh, but Mr. Harris looked terrible. Harris nodded. The pains rushed through him, hitting him with large iron hammers and hooks. Mr. Munigant's eyes glittered as he saw Harris' protuberant bones. Ah, he saw that Mr. Harris was now psychologically prepared for aid. Was it not so? Harris nodded again, feebly, sobbing. Through his shimmering eyes he seemed to see M. Munigant shrink, get smaller. Imagination of course. Harris sobbed out his story of the trip to Phoenix. M. Munigant sympathized. This skeleton was a—traitor! They would FIX him once and for all! "Mister Munigant," sighed Harris, faintly. "I never noticed before, you have such an odd tongue. Round. Tube-like. I'm ready. What do I do?"

If Mr. Harris would relax in his chair, and open his mouth? M. Munigant whistled softly, appreciatively, coming closer. He switched off the lights, peering into Harris' dropped jaw. Wider, please? It had been so hard, the first time, to help Harris, with both body and bone in rebellion. Now, he had cooperation from the flesh of the man anyway, even if the skeleton was acting up some-

what. In the darkness M. Munigant's voice got small, small, tiny, tiny. The whistling became high and shrill. Now. Relax, Mr. Harris. NOW!

Harris felt his jaw pressed violently in all directions, his tongue depressed as with a spoon, his throat clogged. He gasped for breath. Whistle. He could not breathe. He was corked. Something squirmed, corkscrewed his cheeks out, bursting his jaws. Like a hot water douche, something squirted into his sinuses, his ears clanged! "Ahhhh!" shrieked Harris, gagging. His head, its carapaces riven, shattered, hung loose. Agony shot into his lungs, around.

Harris could breathe again. His watery eyes sprang wide. He shouted. His ribs, like sticks picked up and bundled, were loosened in him. Pain! He fell to the floor, rocking, rolling, wheezing out his hot breath.

Lights flickered in his senseless eyeballs, he felt his limbs unloosened swiftly, expertly. Through steaming eyes he saw the parlor. The room was empty.

"Mr. Munigant? Where are you? In God's name, where are you, Mr. Munigant! Come help me!"

M. Munigant was gone!

"Help!"

Then he heard it.

Deep down in the subterranean fissures of his bodily well, he heard the minute, unbelievable noises; little smackings and twistings little dry chippings and grindings and nuzzling sounds—like a tiny hungry mouse down in the red blooded dimness, gnawing ever so earnestly and expertly at what may have been, but was not, a submerged timber . . . !

Clarisse, walking along the sidewalk, held her head high and marched straight toward her house on Saint James Place. She was thinking of the Red Cross and a thousand other things as she turned the corner and almost ran into this little man standing there.

Clarisse would have ignored him if it were not for the fact that as she passed he took something long, white and oddly familiar from his coat and proceeded to chew on it, as on a peppermint stick. Its end devoured, his extraordinary tongue darted within the white confection, sucking out the filling, making contented noises. He was still crunching his goodie as she proceeded up the sidewalk to her house, turned the doorknob and walked in.

"Darling?" she called, smiling around. "Darling, where are you?"

She shut the door, walked down the hall into the living room.

"Darling . . ."

She stared at the floor for twenty seconds, trying to understand.

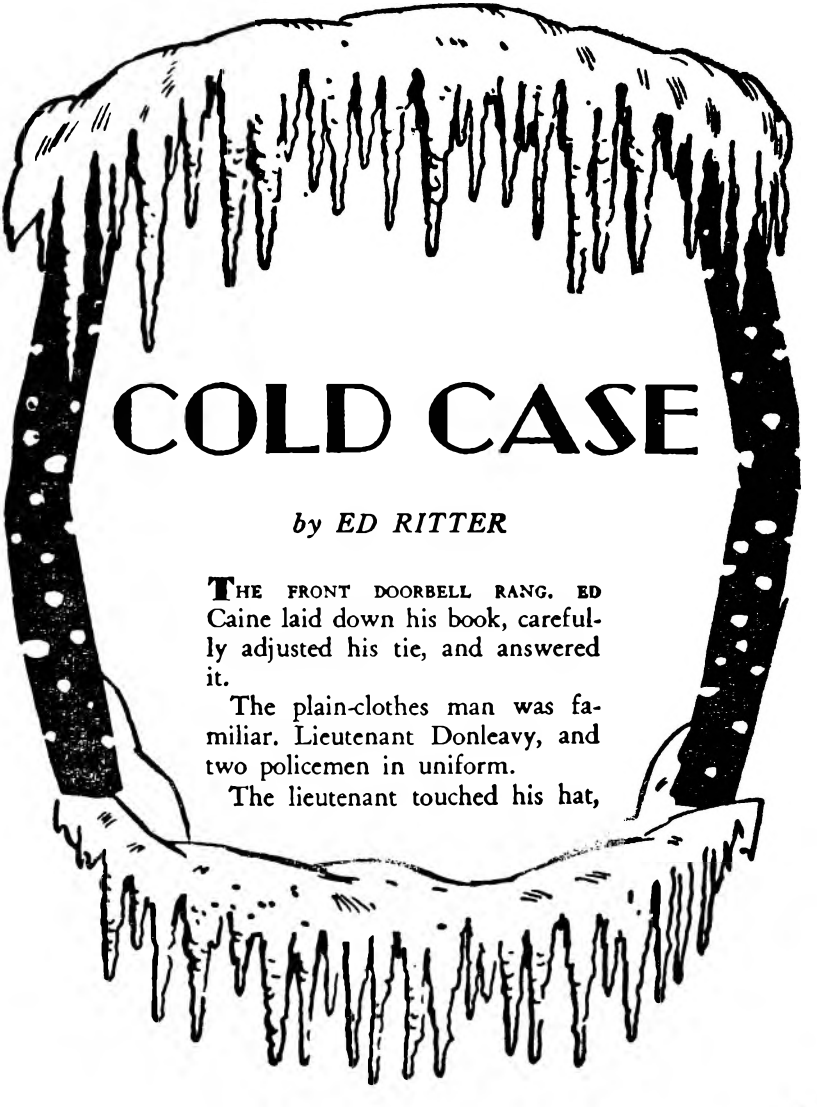
She screamed. That scream came from her like a ghastly white fish torn from her vitals by some ungodly fisherman.

Outside in the sycamore darkness, the little man, pierced a long white stick with intermittent holes, then softly, sighing, lips puckered, played a little sad tune upon the improvised instrument to accompany the shrill and awful singing of Clarisse's voice as she stood in the living room.

Many times as a little girl Clarisse had run on the beach sands, stepped on a jelly fish and screamed. It was not so bad, finding an intact, gelatin-skinned jelly-fish in one's living room. One could step back from it.

It was when the jelly-fish *called you by name....* ■ ■

Why did the snooping police officers suspect that he had murdered his wife? He hated her, to be sure. He was glad she was gone. But how could there have been a murder when there was no body?



COLD CASE

by ED RITTER

THE FRONT DOORBELL RANG. ED Caine laid down his book, carefully adjusted his tie, and answered it.

The plain-clothes man was familiar. Lieutenant Donleavy, and two policemen in uniform.

The lieutenant touched his hat,

and smiled a genial smile that seemed to say he knew Mr. Caine was innocent, innocent as a bird, but they were just passing through the neighborhood, and thought to drop in to chat.

What he actually said was, "Good afternoon, Mr. Caine, mind if we come in?"

"Again?" said Mr. Caine peevishly, "and what good would it do me if I did?"

The lieutenant remained amiable. "Just one of these routine things you know." He seemed as big as the doorframe as he stepped through it, and the two men in dark blue who followed were scarcely any smaller. They filled Mr. Caine's tiny living room to overflowing, leaving hardly any room for the furniture or for air to breathe.

Donleavy pulled up a straight backed chair and straddled it, pushed back his hat, and smiled. "Mr. Caine, I understand how you must feel . . . ."

"You don't at all," Ed Caine replied. "The only thing that worries me is that she might come back. I don't care where she's gone, or who with, or if she's murdered or alive or dead. I just don't give a damn!"

"Pretty harsh words," said Donleavy softly.

"It's my business how I feel about my wife. I've had nothing but a living hell with her for fifteen years." He glared at the lieutenant. "Do I have to love my wife? Tell me, do you love yours?"

Lieutenant Donleavy's face reddened. He looked hard at Ed Caine. Finally, he said, "We're here on business. We don't have a warrant, but we want to search the place. Do we have your permission?"

"Wait a minute," said Caine. "What's going on; what's the idea anyhow?"

"Your wife's folks are raising quite a stink down at headquarters, Mr. Caine. Mr. Mason says his daughter just isn't the kind of girl to run off like this!"

"Girl!" snorted Ed Caine.

"He says she's had her troubles with you, but she's the type that sticks. He says she's an honest, faithful girl who just wouldn't run off like this."

"That's what *he* says, does he?"

"Yes, although he told us he didn't understand why, because if she'd left fifteen years ago she'd have been a lot better off."

"That a fact, huh?"

"No, Mr. Caine, that's just what Mr. Mason says. He also says that he suspects foul play on your part."

"Well, he'd just better watch where he shoots his mouth off like

that," said Ed Caine, glowering darkly. "I don't give a damn for his dear daughter, but I didn't have nothing to do with her disappearance!"

"It's been about ten days now, hasn't it, Mr. Caine?"

"Ten best days I've had in years."

"And you didn't, uh . . . harm her in any way?"

"Huh!" said Mr. Caine.

"Now tell me again. The last time you saw her?"

"It was Thursday evening, a week. She was going to shop because the stores were open. So she went out the door, oh about seven o'clock. Just after dark."

"You give her a ride down to the shopping center?"

"I did not. She could walk. She spent enough without my helping her."

Donleavy let his gaze wander about the room, seeing the cheap lace curtains, the worn brown rug, the faded, fly-specked lampshade. Even he, on his salary, with all his kids, had better things than these. It didn't look like Mrs. Caine had been squandering money, not on the house anyhow.

"So she walked out of the house wtih seven dollars in her pocket, and hasn't been back since."

Caine didn't bother to answer.

Donleavy scratched his head, watching this short, dark-haired, middle-aged man standing awkwardly before him, anxious for him to go.

"I tell you what, you mind if we search this place?"

"No, I don't care. Search all you like. What do you hope to find?"

"Nothing," said Donleavy. "I hope to find nothing. Then we can go back and tell Mr. Mason we didn't find his daughter all hacked to pieces, and she probably just took off, and it's a wise man who understands his own daughter."

"Do you think if I uh-hacked her up as you say, I'd keep the pieces here on permanent display, waiting for the police to come and observe them?"

"Well," said Donleavy, "people have been known to do very strange things. Mind if we look then?"

"Hell, no," said Ed Caine. "Have a ball. I don't care. Just don't mess up the house. I got to clean it."

Patrolman O'Brien took the dusty and unfinished second floor. Blum did the first floor, the living quarters. That left the dreary basement to Donleavy.

Caine sat in the living room, smoking one cigarette after another. He heard footsteps upstairs, someone opening trunks. In the

kitchen the oven door was pried open and slammed shut, then the cabinets, the flour bin. In the basement he heard the eerie creak of the furnace door, the scratch-scratch of ashes being scraped into a can, the faint swish of the opening of the deep freeze lid, the soft squish as it was closed again.

He was perspiring, and mashing out half-lit cigarettes, and half-lighting fresh ones.

After what seemed like hours, but was only ten minutes by the desk clock, he got up and stamped through the kitchen and down into the basement, just in time to see the lieutenant pull his head out of the washer.

"Look," he said, "this silliness has gone far enough. What do you say you and your men pack up and get out?"

"Sure," asid Donleavy, "I guess we're just about through. Just one more thing though." He opened the cracked wooden door to the coal bin, reached in, and flipped the light switch. The glare revealed an almost empty bin, just a few chunks left over from last year, hardly enough to conceal the body of a tom cat, let alone that of a full-grown woman.

"Okay," Donleavy said, picking up the rusty can of ashes, "sorry we disturbed you. Just part of the job. You know, we like to clear the innocent, too."

"I'll bet," said Mr. Caine.

They talked it over in the squad car, during the slow drive back to headquarters.

"I couldn't find anything," said Blum. "The knives were clean. Plastic handles. Don't think the lab would find much."

"Nothing in the attic either. Old books, dust, junk. Closest thing to a body I found was the dressmaker's dummy. Pretty cold case."

"J' ever see such a cold-blooded character?" asked Blum.

"Lots of 'em," said Donleavy wearily, as they pulled into the lot back of City Hall.

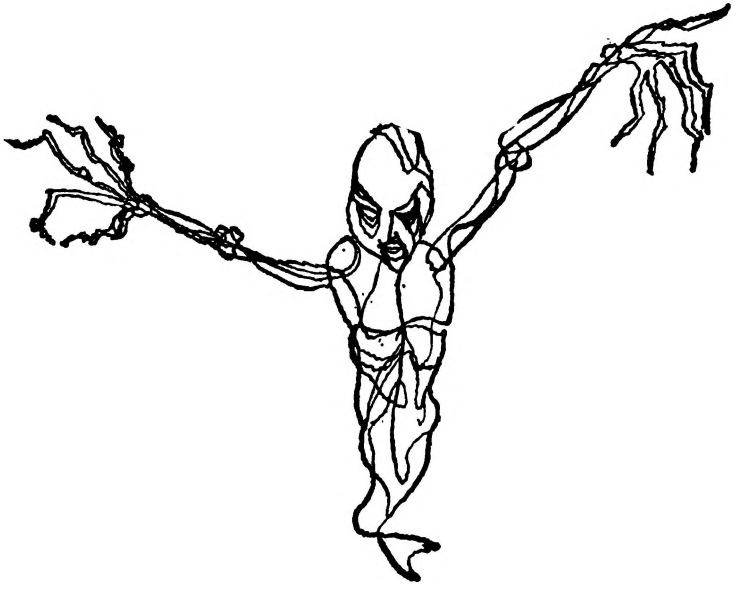
Caine sat quietly for a long time, to make sure they were really gone. He was shaking just a little. Slight tremors played around his face, danced through his stomach. He managed to get up and peer out the side and front windows. They hadn't come back.

He looked at the clock on the desk. Six p.m. the hands said. Dinner time.

He went down into the basement and opened the deep freeze. He looked at the stacked cartons of frozen corn and beans and squash. At the neatly wrapped packages of meat and bone, gristle and skin and hair. He picked out one of vegetables and one of meat. He closed the lid and slowly

walked back up the steps, into the kitchen. He sat down on a kitchen chair and stared dully at the frozen packages he held in his big hands.

He'd *have* to eat. Everyday, until it was all gone. There was no other way. ■ ■



If you've read the previous story by Ray Bradbury, then you're a little worried about that skeleton of yours. It isn't just an innocent bag of bones hanging inside your skin, is it? Well, now another master of the horrific wants to give you a warning: don't get too smug about your skin, either. It can serve a lot of different purposes—other than covering your bones.

SKIN

by ROALD DAHL

THAT YEAR—1946—WINTER WAS A long time going. Although it was April, a freezing wind blew through the streets of the city, and overhead the snow clouds moved across the sky.

The old man who was called Drioli shuffled painfully along the sidewalk of the Rue de Rivoli. He was cold and miserable, huddled up like a hedgehog in a filthy black coat, only his eyes and the top of his head visible above the turned-up collar.

The door of a cafe opened and the faint whiff of roasting chicken brought a pain of yearning to the top of his stomach. He moved on, glancing without any interest at the things in the shopwindows—perfume, silk ties and shirts, diamonds, porcelain, antique furniture, finely bound books. Then a picture gallery. He had always

liked picture galleries. This one had a single canvas on display in the window. He stopped to look at it. He turned to go on. He checked, looked back; and now, suddenly there came to him a slight uneasiness, a movement of the memory, a distant recollection of something, somewhere, he had seen before. He looked again. It was a landscape, a clump of trees leaning madly over to one side as if blown by a tremendous wind, the sky swirling and twisting all around. Attached to the frame there was a little plaque, and on this it said: "CHAIM SOUTINE (1894-1943)."

Drioli stared at the picture, wondering vaguely what there was about it that seemed familiar. Crazy painting, he thought. Very strange and crazy—but I like it... Chaim Soutine... Soutine... "By God!" he cried suddenly. "My little Kalmuck, that's who it is! My little Kalmuck with a picture in the finest shop in Paris! Just imagine that!"

The old man pressed his face closer to the window. He could remember the boy—yes, quite clearly he could remember him. But when? When? The rest of it was not so easy to recollect. It was so long ago. How long? Twenty—no, more like thirty years, wasn't it? Wait a minute. Yes—it was the year before the war, the first war, 1913. That was it. And this Soutine, this ugly little Kalmuck, a sullen brooding boy whom he had liked—almost loved—for no reason at all that he could think of except that he could paint.

And how he could paint! It was coming back more clearly now—the street, the line of refuse cans along the length of it, the rotten smell, the brown cats walking delicately over the refuse, and then the women, moist fat women on the doorsteps with their feet upon the cobblestones of the street. Which street? Where was it the boy had lived?

The City Falguiere, that was it! The old man nodded his head several times, pleased to have remembered the name. Then there was the studio with the single chair in it, and the filthy red couch that the boy had used for sleeping; the drunken parties, the cheap white wine, the furious quarrels, and always, always the bitter sullen face of the boy brooding over his work.

It was odd, Drioli thought, how easily it all came back to him now, how each single small remembered fact seemed instantly to remind him of another.

There was that nonsense with the tattoo, for instance. Now, *that* was a mad thing if ever there was one. How had it started? Ah, yes

—he had got rich one day, that was it, and he had bought lots of wine. He could see himself now as he entered the studio with the parcel of bottles under his arm—the boy sitting before the easel, and his (Drioli's) own wife standing in the center of the room, posing for her picture.

"Tonight we shall celebrate," he said. "We shall have a little celebration, us three."

"What is it that we celebrate?" the boy asked, without looking up. "Is it that you have decided to divorce your wife so she can marry me?"

"No," Drioli said. "We celebrate because today I have made a great sum of money with my work."

"And I have made nothing. We can celebrate that also."

"If you like." Drioli was standing by the table unwrapping the parcel. He felt tired and he wanted to get at the wine. Nine clients in one day was all very nice, but it could play hell with a man's eyes. He had never done as many as nine before. Nine boozy soldiers —and the remarkable thing was that no fewer than seven of them had been able to pay in cash. This had made him extremely rich. But the work was terrible on the eyes. Drioli's eyes were half closed from fatigue, the whites streaked with little connecting lines of red; and about an inch behind each eyeball there was a small concentration of pain. But it was evening now and he was wealthy as a pig, and in the parcel there were three bottles —one for his wife, one for his friend, and one for him. He had found the corkscrew and was drawing the corks from the bottles, each making a small plop as it came out.

The boy put down his brush. "Oh Christ," he said. "How can one work with all this going on?"

The girl came across the room to look at the painting. Drioli came over also, holding a bottle in one hand, a glass in the other.

"No!" the boy shouted, blazing up suddenly. "Please—no!" He snatched the canvas from the easel and stood it against the wall. But Drioli had seen it.

"I like it."

"It's terrible."

"It's marvellous. Like all the others that you do, it's marvellous. I love them all."

"The trouble is," the boy said, scowling, "that in themselves they are not nourishing. I cannot eat them."

"But still they are marvellous." Drioli handed him a tumbler full of the pale-yellow wine. "Drink it," he said. "It will make you happy."

Never, he thought, had he known a more unhappy person, or one with a gloomier face. He had spotted him in a cafe some seven months before, drinking

alone, and because he had looked like a Russian or some sort of an Asiatic, Drioli had sat down at his table and talked.

"You are a Russian?"

"Yes."

"Where from?"

"Minsk."

Drioli had jumped up and embraced him, crying that he too had been born in that city.

"It wasn't actually Minsk," the boy had said. "But quite near."

"Where?"

"Smilovichi, about twelve miles away."

"Smilovichi!" Drioli had shouted, embracing him again "I walked there several times when I was a boy." Then he had sat down again, staring affectionately at the other's face. "You know," he had said, "you don't look like a western Russian. You're like a Tartar, or a Kalmuck. You look exactly like a Kalmuck."

Now, standing in the studio, Drioli looked again at the boy as he took the glass of wine and tipped it down his throat in one swallow. Yes, he did have a face like a Kalmuck—very broad and high-cheeked, with a wide coarse nose. This broadness of the cheeks was accentuated by the ears which stood out sharply from the head. And then he had the narrow eyes, the black hair, the thick sullen mouth of a Kalmuck; but the hands—the hands were always a surprise, so small and white like a lady's, with tiny thin fingers.

"Give me some more," the boy said. "If we are to celebrate, then let us do it properly."

Drioli distributed the wine and sat himself on a chair. The boy sat on the old couch with Drioli's wife. The three bottles were placed on the floor between them.

"Tonight we shall drink as much as we possibly can," Drioli said. "I am exceptionally rich. I think perhaps I should go out now and buy some more bottles. How many shall I get?"

"Six more," the boy said. "Two for each."

"Good. I shall go now and fetch them."

"And I will help you."

In the nearest cafe Drioli bought six bottles of white wine, and they carried them back to the studio. They placed them on the floor in two rows, and Drioli fetched the corkscrew and pulled the corks, all six of them; then they sat down again and continued to drink.

"It is only the very wealthy," Drioli said, "who can afford to celebrate in this manner."

"That is true," the boy said. "Isn't that true, Josie?"

"Of course."

"How do you feel, Josie?"

"Fine."

"Will you leave Drioli and marry me?"

"No."

"Beautiful wine," Drioli said. "It is a privilege to drink it."

Slowly, methodically, they set about getting themselves drunk. The process was routine, but all the same there was a certain ceremony to be observed, and a gravity to be maintained, and a great number of things to be said, then said again—and the wine must be praised, and the slowness was important too, so that there would be time to savour the three delicious stages of transition, expecially (for Drioli) the one when he began to float and his feet did not really belong to him. That was the best period of them all—when he could look down at his feet and they were so far away that he would wonder what crazy person they might belong to and why they were lying around on the floor like that, in the distance.

After a while, he got up to switch on the light. He was surprised to see that the feet came with him when he did this, especially because he couldn't feel them touching the ground. It gave him a pleasant sensation of walking on air. Then he began wandering around the room, peeking slyly at the canvases stacked against the walls.

"Listen," he said at length. "I have an idea." He came across and stood before the couch, swaying gently. "Listen, my little Kalmuck."

"What?"

"I have a tremendous idea. Are you listening?"

"I'm listening to Josie."

"Listen to me, *please*. You are my friend—my ugly little Kalmuck from Minsk—and to me you are such an artist that I would like to have a picture, a lovely picture—"

"Have them all. Take all you can find, but do not interrupt me when I am talking with your wife."

"No, no. Now listen. I mean a picture that I can have with me always ... forever ... wherever I go ... whatever happens ... but always with me ... a picture by you. He reached forward and shook the boy's knee. "Now listen to me, *please*."

"Listen to him," the girl said.

"It is this. I want you to paint a picture on my skin, on my back. Then I want you to tattoo over what you have painted so that it will be there always."

"You have crazy ideas."

"I will teach you how to use the tattoo. It is easy. A child could do it."

"I am not a child."

"*Please* ..."

"You are quite mad. What is it you want?" The painter looked up into the slow, dark, wine-bright eyes of the other man. "What in heaven's name is it you

want?"

"You could do it easily! You could! You could!"

"You mean with the tattoo?"

"Yes, with the tattoo! I will teach you in two minutes!"

"Impossible!"

"Are you saying I don't know what I'm talking about?"

No, the boy could not possibly be saying that because if anyone knew about the tattoo it was he—Drioli. Had he not, only last month, covered a man's whole belly with the most wonderful and delicate design composed entirely of flowers? What about the client who had had so much hair upon his chest that he had done him a picture of a grizzly bear so designed that the hair on the chest became the furry coat of the bear? Could he not draw the likeness of a lady and position it with such subtlety upon a man's arm that when the muscle of the arm was flexed the lady came to life and performed astonishing contortions?

"All I am saying," the boy told him, "is that you are drunk and this is a drunken idea."

"We could have Josie for a model. A study of Josie upon my back. Am I not entitled to a picture of my wife upon my back?"

"Of Josie?"

"Yes." Drioli knew he only had to mention his wife and the boy's thick brown lips would loosen and begin to quiver.

"No," the girl said.

"Darling Josie, *please*. Take this bottle and finish it, then you will feel more generous. It is an enormous idea. Never in my life have I had such an idea before."

"What idea?"

"That he should make a picture of you upon my back. Am I not entitled to that?"

"A picture of me?"

"A nude study," the boy said. "It is an agreeable idea."

"Not nude," the girl said.

"It is an enormous idea," Drioli said.

"It's a damn crazy idea," the girl said.

"It is in any event an idea," the boy said. "It is an idea that calls for a celebration."

They emptied another bottle among them. Then the boy said, "It is no good. I could not possibly manage the tattoo. Instead, I will paint this picture on your back and you will have it with you so long as you do not take a bath and wash it off. If you never take a bath again in your life then you will have it always, as long as you live."

"No," Drioli said.

"Yes—and on the day that you decide to take a bath I will know that you do not any longer value my picture. It will be a test of your admiration for my art."

"I do not like the idea," the girl said. "His admiration for your art is so great that he would be unclean for many years. Let us have the tattoo. But not nude."

"Then just the head," Drioli said.

"I could not manage it."

"It is immensely simple. I will undertake to teach you in two minutes. You will see. I shall go now and fetch the instruments. The needles and the inks. I have inks of many different colors—as many different colors as you have paints, and far more beautiful . . . ."

"It is impossible."

"I have many inks. Have I not many different colors of inks, Josie?"

"Yes."

"You will see," Drioli said. "I will go now and fetch them." he got up from his chair and walked unsteadily, but with determination, out of the room.

In half an hour Drioli was back. "I have brought everything," he cried, waving a brown suitcase. "All the necessities of the tattooist are here in this bag."

He placed the bag on the table, opened it, and laid out the electric needles and the small bottles of colored inks. He plugged in the electric needle, then he took the instrument in his hand and pressed a switch. It made a buzzing sound and the quarter inch of needle that projected from the end of it began to vibrate swiftly up and down. He threw off his jacket and rolled up his left sleeve. "Now look. Watch me and I will show you how easy it is. I will make a design on my arm, here."

His forearm was already covered with blue markings, but he selected a small clear patch of skin upon which to demonstrate.

"First, I choose my ink—let us use ordinary blue—and I dip the point of my needle in the ink . . . so . . . and I hold the needle up straight and I run it lightly over the surface of the skin . . . like this . . . and with the little motor and the electricity, the needle jumps up and down and punctures the skin and the ink goes in and there you are . . . See how easy it is . . . see how I draw a picture of a greyhound here upon my arm . . . "

The boy was intrigued. "Now let *me* practice a little—on your arm."

With the buzzing needle he began to draw blue lines upon Drioli's arm. "It is simple," he said. "It is like drawing with pen and ink. There is no difference except that it is slower."

"There is nothing to it. Are you ready? Shall we begin?"

"At once."

"The model!" cried Drioli. "Come on, Josie!" He was in a bustle of enthusiasm now, tottering around the room arranging

everything, like a child preparing for some exciting game. "Where will you have her? Where shall she stand?"

"Let her be standing there, by my dressing table. Let her be brushing her hair. I will paint her with her hair down over her shoulders and her brushing it."

"Tremendous. You are a genius."

Reluctantly, the girl walked over and stood by the dressing table, carrying her glass of wine with her.

Drioli pulled off his shirt and stepped out of his trousers. He retained only his underpants and his socks and shoes, and he stood there swaying gently from side to side, his small body firm, white-skinned, almost hairless. "Now," he said, "I am the canvas. Where will you place your canvas?"

"As always, upon the easel."

"Don't be crazy. I am the canvas."

"Then place yourself upon the easel. That is where you belong."

"How can I?"

"Are you the canvas or are you not?"

"I am the canvas. Already I begin to feel like a canvas."

"Then place yourself upon the easel. There should be no difficulty."

"Truly, it is not possible."

"Then sit on the chair. Sit back to front, then you can lean your drunken head against the back of it. Hurry now, for I am about to commence."

"I am ready. I am waiting."

"First," the boy said, "I shall make an ordinary painting. Then, if it pleases me, I shall tattoo over it." With a wide brush he began to paint upon the naked skin of the man's back.

"Ayee! Ayee!" Drioli screamed. "A monstrous centipede is marching down my spine!"

"Be still now! Be still!" The boy worked rapidly, applying the paint only in a thin blue wash so that it would not afterward interfere with the process of tattooing. His concentration, as soon as he began to paint, was so great that it appeared somehow to supersede his drunkenness. He applied the brush strokes with quick short jabs of the arm, holding the wrist stiff, and in less than half an hour it was finished.

"All right. That's all," he said to the girl, who immediately returned to the couch, lay down, and fell asleep.

Drioli remained awake. He watched the boy take up the needle and dip it in the ink; then he felt the sharp tickling sting as it touched the skin of his back. The pain, which was unpleasant but never extreme, kept him from going to sleep. By following the track of the needle and by watching the different colors of ink

that the boy was using, Drioli amused himself trying to visualize what was going on behind him. The boy worked with an astonishing intensity. He appeared to have become completely absorbed in the little machine and in the unusual effects it was able to produce.

Far into the small hours of the morning the maching buzzed and the boy worked. Drioli could remember that when the artist finally stepped back and said, "It is finished," there was daylight outside and the sound of people walking in the street.

"I want to see it," Drioli said. The boy held up a mirror, at an angle, and Drioli craned his neck to look.

"Good God!" he cried. It was a startling sight. The whole of his back, from the top of the shoulders to the base of the spine, was a blaze of color—gold and green and blue and black and scarlet. The tattoo was applied so heavily it looked almost like an impasto. The boy had followed as closely as possible the original brush strokes, filling them in solid, and it was marvellous the way he had made use of the spine and the protrusion of the shoulder blades so that they became part of the composition. What is more, he had somehow managed to achieve—even with this slow process—a certain spontaneity The portrait was quite alive; it contained much of that twisted, tortured, quality so characteristic of Soutine's other work. It was not a good likeness. It was a mood rather than a likeness, the model's face vague and tipsy, the background swirling around her head in a mass of dark-green curling strokes.

"It's tremendous!"

"I rather like it myself." The boy stood back, examining it critically. "You know," he added, "I think it's good enough for me to sign." And taking up the buzzer again, he inscribed his name in red ink on the right-hand side, over the place where Drioli's kidney was.

The old man who was called Drioli was standing in a sort of trance, staring at the painting in the window of the picture-dealer's shop. It had been so long ago, all that—almost as though it had happened in another life.

And the boy? What had become of him? He could remember now that after returning from the war —the first war—he had missed him and had questioned Josie.

"Where is my little Kalmuck?"

"He is gone," she had answered. "I do not know where, but I heard it said that a dealer had taken him up and sent him away to Ceret to make more paintings."

"Perhaps he will return."

"Perhaps he will. Who knows?"

That was the last time they had mentioned him. Shortly afterward

they had moved to Le Havre where there were more sailors and business was better. The old man smiled as he remembered Le Havre. Those were the pleasant years, the years between the wars, with the small shop near the docks and the comfortable rooms and always enough work, with every day three, four, five sailors coming and wanting pictures on their arms. Those were truly the pleasant years.

Then had come the second war, and Josie being killed, and the German's arriving, and that was the finish of his business. No one had wanted pictures on their arms any more after that. And by that time he was too old for any other kind of work. In desperation he had made his way back to Paris, hoping vaguely that things would be easier in the big city. But they were not.

And now, after the war was over, he possessed neither the means nor the energy to start up his small business again. It wasn't very easy for an old man to know what to do, especially when one did not like to beg. Yet how else could he keep alive?

Well, he thought, still staring at the picture. So that is my little Kalmuck. And how quickly the sight of one small object such as this can stir the memory. Up to a few moments ago he had even forgotten that he had a tattoo on his back. It had been ages since he had thought about it. He put his face closer to the window and looked into the gallery. On the walls he could see many other pictures and all seemed to be the work of the same artist. There were a great number of people strolling around. Obviously it was a special exhibition.

On a sudden impulse, Drioli turned, pushed open the door of the gallery and went in.

It was a long room with a thick wine-colored carpet, and by God how beautiful and warm it was! There were all these people strolling about looking at the pictures, well-washed, dignified people, each of whom held a catalogue in the hand. Drioli stood just inside the door, nervously glancing around, wondering whether he dared go forward and mingle with this crowd. But before he had had time to gather his courage, he heard a voice beside him saying, "What is it you want?"

The speaker wore a black morning coat. He was plump and short and had a very white face. It was a flabby face with so much flesh upon it that the cheeks hung down on either side of the mouth in two fleshy collops, spanielwise. He came up close to Drioli and said again, "What is it you want?"

Drioli stood still.

"If you please," the man was saying, "take yourself out of my gallery."

"Am I not permitted to look at the pictures?"

"I have asked you to leave."

Drioli stood his ground. He felt suddenly, overwhelmingly outraged.

"Let us not have trouble," the man was saying. "Come on now, this way." He put a fat white paw on Drioli's arm and began to push him firmly to the door.

That did it. "Take your goddam hands off me!" Drioli shouted. His voice rang clear down the long gallery and all the heads jerked around as one—all the startled faces stared down the length of the room at the person who had made this noise. A flunky came running over to help, and the two men tried to hustle Drioli through the door. The people stood still, watching the struggle. Their faces expressed only a mild interest, and seemed to be saying, "It's all right. There's no danger to us. It's being taken care of."

"I, too!" Drioli was shouting. "I too, have a picture by this painter! He was my friend and I have a picture which he gave me!"

"He's mad."

"A lunatic. A raving lunatic."

"Someone should call the police."

With a rapid twist of the body Drioli suddenly jumped clear of the two men, and before anyone could stop him he was running down the gallery shouting, "I'll show you! I'll show you! I'll show you!" He flung off his overcoat, then his jacket and shirt, and he turned so that his naked back was toward the people.

"There!" he cried, breathing quickly. "You see? There it is!"

There was a sudden absolute silence in the room, each person arrested in what he was doing, standing motionless in a kind of shocked, uneasy bewilderment. They were staring at the tattooed picture. It was still there, the colors as bright as ever, but the old man's back was thinner now, the shoulder blades protruded more sharply, and the effect, though not great, was to give the picture a curiously wrinkled, squashed appearance.

Somebody said, "My God, but it is!"

Then came the excitement and the noise of voices as the people surged forward to crowd around the old man.

"It is unmistakable!"

"His early manner, yes?"

"It is fantastic, fantastic!"

"And look, it is signed!"

"Bend your shoulders forward, my friend, so that the picture stretches out flat."

"Old one, when was this done?"

"In 1913," Drioli said, without turning around. "In the autumn

of 1913."

"Who taught Soutine to tattoo?"

"I taught him."

"And the woman?"

"She was my wife."

The gallery owner was pushing through the crowd toward Drioli. He was calm now, deadly serious, making a smile with his mouth. "Monsieur," he said, "I will buy it." Drioli could see the loose fat upon the face vibrating as he moved his jaw. "I said I will buy it, Monsieur."

"How can you buy it?" Drioli asked softly.

"I will give two hundred thousand francs for it." The dealer's eyes were small and dark, the wings of his broad nose-base were beginning to quiver.

"Don't do it!" someone murmured in the crowd. "It is worth twenty times as much."

Drioli opened his mouth to speak. No words came, so he shut it; then he opened it again and said slowly, "But how can I sell it?" He lifted his hands, let them drop loosely to his sides. "Monsieur, how can I possibly sell it?" All the sadness in the world was in his voice.

"Yes!" they were saying in the crowd. "How can he sell it? It is a part of himself!"

"Listen," the dealer said, coming up close. "I will help you. I will make you rich. Together we shall make some private arrangement over this picture, no?"

Drioli watched him with slow, apprehensive eyes. "But how can you buy it, Monsieur? What will you do with it when you have bought it? Where will you keep it? Where will you keep it tonight? And where tomorrow?"

"Ah, where will I keep it? Yes, where will I keep it? Now, where will I keep it Well, now . . . " The dealer stroked the bridge of his nose with a fat white finger. "It would seem," he said, "that if I take the picture, I take you also. This is a disadvantage." He paused and stroked his nose again. "The picture itself is of no value until you are dead. How old are you, my friend?"

"Sixty-one."

"But you are perhaps not very robust, no?" The dealer lowered the hand from his nose and looked Drioli up and down, slowly, like a farmer appraising an old horse.

"I do not like this," Drioli said, edging away. "Quite honestly, Monsieur, I do not like it." He edged straight into the arms of a tall man who put out his hands and caught him gently by the shoulders. Drioli glanced around and apologized. The man smiled down at him, patting one of the old fellow's naked shoulders reassuringly with a hand encased in a canary-colored glove.

"Listen, my friend," the stranger

said, still smiling. "Do you like to swim and to bask yourself in the sun?"

Drioli looked up at him, rather startled.

"Do you like fine food and red wine from the great chateaux of Bordeaux?" The man was still smiling, showing strong white teeth with a flash of gold among them. He spoke in a soft coaxing manner, one gloved hand still resting on Drioli's shoulder. "Do you like such things?"

"Well—yes," Drioli answered, still greatly perplexed. "Of course."

"And the company of beautiful women?"

"Why not?"

"And a cupboard full of suits and shirts made to your own personal measurements? It would seem that you are a little lacking for clothes."

Drioli watched this suave man, waiting for the rest of the proposition.

"Have you ever had a shoe constructed especially for your own foot?"

"No."

"You would like that?"

"Well . . . "

"And a man who will shave you in the mornings and trim your hair?"

Drioli simply stood and gaped.

"And a plump attractive girl to manicure the nails of your fingers?"

Someone in the crowd giggled.

"And a bell beside your bed to summon a maid to bring your breakfast in the morning? Would you like these things, my friend? Do they appeal to you?"

Drioli stood still and looked at him.

"You see, I am the owner of the Hotel Bristol in Cannes. I now invite you to come down there and live as my guest for the rest of your live in luxury and comfort." The man paused, allowing his listener time to savor this cheerful prospect.

"Your only duty—shall I call it your pleasure—will be to spend your time on my beach in bathing trunks, walking among my guests, s u n n i n g yourself, swimming, drinking cocktails. You would like that?"

There was no answer.

"Don't you see—all the guests will thus be able to observe this fascinating picture by Soutine. You will become famous, and men will say, 'Look, there is the fellow with ten million francs upon his back.' You like this idea, Monsieur? It pleases you?"

Drioli looked up at the tall man in the canary gloves, still wondering whether this was some sort of a joke. "It is a comical idea," he said slowly. "But do you really mean it?"

"Of course I mean it."

"Wait," the dealer interrupted. "See here, old one. Here is the answer to our problem. I will buy

the picture, and I will arrange with a surgeon to remove the skin from your back, and then you will be able to go off on your own and enjoy the great sum of money I shall give you for it."

"With no skin on my back?"

"No, no, please! You misunderstand. This surgeon will put a new piece of skin in the place of the old one. It is simple."

"Could he do that?"

"There is nothing to it."

"Impossible!" said the man with the canary gloves. "He's too old for such a major skin-grafting operation. It would kill him. It would kill you, my friend."

"It would kill me?"

"Naturally. You would never survive. Only the picture would come through."

"In the name of God!" Drioli cried. He looked around aghast at the faces of the people watching him, and in the silence that followed, another man's voice, speaking quietly from the back of the group, could be heard saying, "Perhaps, if one were to offer this old man enough money, he might consent to kill himself on the spot. Who knows?" A few people sniggered. The dealer moved his feet uneasily on the carpet.

Then the hand in the canary glove was tapping Drioli again upon the shoulder. "Come on," the man was saying, smiling his broad white smile. "You and I will go and have a good dinner and we can talk about it some more while we eat. How's that? Are you hungry?"

Drioli watched him, frowning. He didn't like the man's long flexible neck, or the way he craned it forward at you when he spoke, like a snake.

"Roast duck and Chambertin," the man was saying. He put a rich succulent accent on the words, splashing them out with his tongue. "And perhaps a souffle aux marrons, light and frothy."

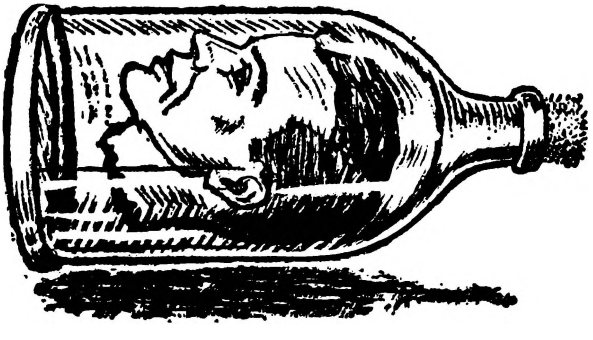
Drioli's eyes turned up toward the ceiling, his lips became loose and wet. One could see the poor old fellow beginning literally to drool at the mouth.

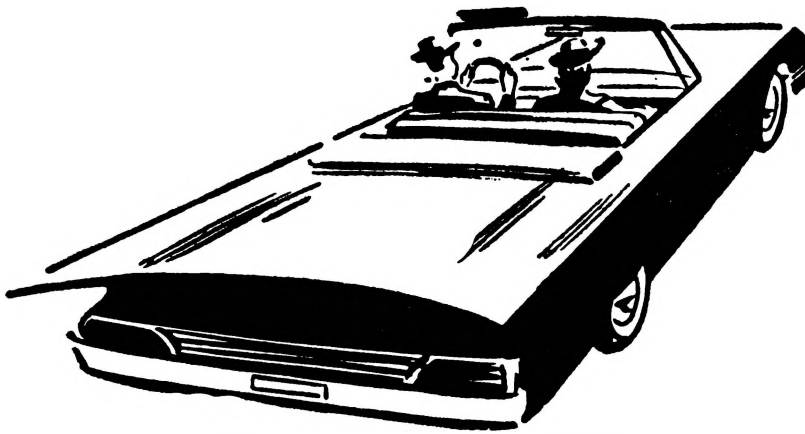
"How do you like your duck?" the man went on. "Do you like it very brown and crisp outside, or shall it be . . . "

"I am coming," Drioli said quickly. Already he had picked up his shirt and was pulling it frantically over his head. "Wait for me, Monsieur. I am coming." And within a minute he had disappeared out of the gallery with his new patron.

It wasn't more than a few weeks later that a picture by Soutine, of a woman's head, painted in an unusual manner, nicely framed and heavily varnished, turned up for sale in Buenos Aires. That—and

the fact that there is no hotel in Cannes called Bristol—causes one to wonder a little, and to pray for the old man's health, and to hope fervently that wherever he may be at this moment, there is a plump attractive girl to manicure the nails of his fingers, and a maid to bring him his breakfast in bed in the mornings. ■ ■





The moral: don't drive into a strange town. It may be almost impossible for you to ever get out again. Alive, that is.

CHANCEYVILLE

by JOHN ANTHONY WEST

IT WAS A BLUE SEDAN THAT STOPPED for him.

"Where y'all headin', Sonny?"

"New York."

"Kind a long way from there... two, three days hitchin'."

"That's what I figure. I'm in no hurry. How far are you going, Mister?"

"Well now, that depends."

The driver was a big man, unkempt, in grey trousers, khaki shirt and poplin jacket. His hair was shaved up a rough weathered

neck almost to the crown of his head.

"If you're going as far as Savannah I'd appreciate it . . ."

"Hop in, hop in, Sonny."

Galliano climbed in, tossed his rusksack in the back.

"Know what town you're in yhah?" the driver said.

"No. I didn't notice."

"Town of Chanceyville, Gawgia."

"I see."

"Fahn town, Chanceyville. Sort a small. Sort a quaht. Fahn town."

"You come from Chanceyville?"

"Yep. Honeycutt's the name. Henry Honeycutt."

"Well . . . thanks for the ride, Mr. Honeycutt."

He drove at twenty miles an hour. Galliano looked at him with just a shade of apprehension; the road was deserted, straight, dry; it was early morning.

"Speed limit's twenty mahls a hour, town of Chanceyville," Honeycutt explained. "Wouldn't seem raht to go tearin' round. Ah'm C o n s t a b l e round these parts."

"Oh . . . I see . . . I guess things must be pretty quiet most of the time." He could think of nothing else to say.

"Pretty quaht. Fight once in a while. Drunk driver . . ." He slowed to ten miles an hour.

"Y'all know that hitchhiking's 'gainst the law in Chanceyville?"

"Is it? No, I didn't know. I mean, I didn't see a sign or anything."

"There's a sahn."

"Oh! Sorry. I didn't see it. Must have missed it."

"Sahn blew down two, three years ago."

Galliano laughed. "I guess it wasn't my fault I missed it then, was it?"

"Guess not . . . Town of Chanceyville still don't 'low hitchhikers."

"Listen, Mr. Honeywell . . ."

"Honeycutt."

"Mr. Honeycutt. What's the game? I'm sorry I h i t c h e d through your town. If I'd seen a sign I'd have walked through."

"Town of Chanceyville don't 'low vagrants neither"

"I'm not a vagrant, Mister. I'm a guy hitching his way to New York. I don't make trouble for anyone. If I can't hitch through your town and I can't walk through it, I'd appreciate it if you'd drive me back to the town limits and I'll wait and catch a bus through."

"Couldn't do that, S o n n y. Picked you up insahd town limits."

The Constable pulled off the road and stopped the car; turned in his seat to face Galliano.

"Y'all American, Sonny?"

"Sure. Sure I'm American."

"Y'all don't look American. What's your name?"

"In New York it's as American as any other name."

"You ain't in New York, Sonny."

"Nobody knows it better than me."

The Constable bit off the end of a cheap cigar and lit it with the lighter from the car. "Folks round Chanceyville mostly Southern Methodist," he said, "Don't cotton much to popery round here."

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Honeycutt, I don't cotton much to popery myself. All I want is to get to New York without . . ."

"What you do for a livin', Sonny?"

"I'm a painter."

"Hell, Sonny, painter gets two, three dollahs a hour. No reason to be hitchin'. Ought to travel like a white man."

"Not that kind of painter. I paint pictures."

"Pitchers! Ah'll be damned . . . Don't seem like much of a occupation for a man."

"Maybe not in Chanceyville." Galliano reached for the door handle. "Look, Mr. Honeycutt, how about letting me go my way? I won't make any . . ."

The Constable patted a holster that Galliano had not noticed before. "That'd be resistin' arrest, Sonny. More serious charge than jest hitchin'."

Oh Lord! Galliano thought, a night in a southern jail. He had four dollars and sixty five cents with him, enough, he hoped, to keep him in hamburgers to New York. Certainly not enough to pay the fine he expected. The Constable blew cigar smoke at him.

"What you doin' round these parts, Sonny?"

"I was painting in Mexico and ran out of money. I thought I'd go back to New York to try for a show. I went to Florida to see a friend. That's why I'm coming up through Georgia."

"Hell. You get around, don't you, Sonny? Never been further than Atlanta myself . . . Didn't like it."

"Living's cheaper in Mexico," Galliano explained.

The Constable eyed him sharply. "Where you got all them pitchers you talk about?"

"I waited around the Greyhound terminal until I found a guy who'd check them on his ticket. I'll pick them up in New York."

"Right clever idea."

Galliano tried persuasion. "So you see, Constable. I have just enough money to get me to New York. I couldn't pay your fine for hitching and what's the point of

using Chanceyville money to feed a stranger in jail? Why don't you just let me on my way? I promise I won't ..."

"Jedge'll decide that, Sonny. Mah job's to uphold the law." He shifted the car into first and nosed back on the road.

"Mawnin' Henry."

"Mawnin' Jedge." Chanceyville's Justice of the Peace was a small paunchy man with watery eyes behind steel-rimmed glasses.

"Caught this fellah hitchin' in town, Jedge."

"Hitchin's 'gainst the law in Chanceyville, Young Fellah."

"So I've been told."

"Yew talk when the Jedge asks a question." The Constable's voice had a hard ring to it; it occurred to Galliano that this might turn out to be more than an amusing anecdote to tell at parties.

"Hitchin's twenty-fahve dollah fine in Chanceyville. Guilty or not guilty?"

"Look, Your Honer ..." The Constable cracked him across the mouth with the back of his hand. Galliano stifled the impulse to strike back. The slap sent blood rushing to his face.

"The Jedge ast guilty or not guilty. That means yes or no, Sonny. He don't want no stories."

Galliano thought quickly. Not guilty would come to the same thing and a bigger fine. He foresaw a week in some bug-infested jail.

"Guilty," he said.

"That means you owe the Town of Chanceyville twenty-fahve dollahs, Young Fellah."

Galliano said nothing. The Constable stood poised in front of him. He waited for someone to break the silence.

"You heard the Jedge, Sonny. Twenty-fahve dollahs."

"I told you before I don't have any money. I have four dollars and change. You can have that if you want it ... Your Honor, I don't want to make any trouble. I was on my way from Mexico to New York. All I want to do is get there."

"Sorry, Young Fellah. You broke the law. Twenty-fahve dollars an' you're back on your way."

The Justice was slightly palsied. Probably alcohol, Galliano guessed; the burst blood vessels in the nose, cheeks and earlobes.

"Young fellah like you ought to have twenty-fahve dollahs on him, seems to me."

"I told you, I don't have it." He saw that the Constable had his fists clenched and was staring at a point out the window.

"What you do for a livin', Young Fellah?"

"Says he's a painter, Jedge. Paints pitchers."

"Don't say! What kind a pit-

chers you paint?"

"I'm an abstract painter."

"That's them lahns and things?"

"I guess you could call it that."

"How much you get for one of them pitchers, Sonny?"

"Not enough." He spoke without thinking. The Constable hit him hard. He tasted blood in his mouth.

"Ah ast you a question, Sonny. You a wahse gah?"

Someday, somehow, Galliano vowed he would even the score.

"How much you get for one of them pitchers?"

"Hundred dollars or so. When I sell one. I don't sell many."

"Henert dollahs! Jes for a pitcher?"

"Why, hell, Young Fellah. Seems to me y'ought to have twenty-fahve dollahs for breakin' Chanceyville law."

The Constable had an almost boyish smile on his face. "Hey, Sonny! How much you want to paint me?"

Galliano knew it was not the time for schoolboy heroics. The words came in spite of himself. "I don't paint portraits."

The Constable doubled him over with a jab in the solar plexus. His grin had disappeared.

"I'll do it for nothing if you'll let me out of here."

"Trahn to bribe a officer of the law, Jedge. Yew hear that?"

"Twenty-fahve dollah fahn. That makes fifty, Young Fellah."

"What the hell kind of frame-up deal is this! I'm trying to do a simple thing like get to New York . . ." The Constable doubled his fist.

"Jedge, Ah'd call that 'Contempt o' court'."

"Contempt o' court costs fifty dollahs, Town o' Chanceyville. You're up to a hunderd, Young Fellah."

Galliano wondered if he could survive a month in Chanceyville jail. The Constable seemed lost in thought. He brightened suddenly.

"Hey, Sonny. Kin you draw me a naked woman?"

"If I feel like it." He had no idea why he had to say these things. The crack in the face came as no surprise. "Yeah. I'll draw you a naked woman."

The Justice got him pencil and paper. He waited for his hands to steady and drew a nude.

"Chrassake! That's no naked woman. Ah want to see what she looks lahk."

Galliano drew an obscenely naked woman. The Constable was smiling broadly. The Justice ran his tongue over his lips. Galliano watched them, pretending not to. It seemed as good a way as any to get out of a jam. He signed it with a flourish. *D. Galliano.*

"That's more like it, Sonny. Now put a man on top of her."

Galliano drew a man.

"Right purty job, Young Fellah."

They savored the picture a while. "Now draw us another one, Sonny." Galliano drew another; more grotesque than before.

He waited for them to tell him he could leave.

"Boys at the store'll sure 'preciate them things, eh, Henry?"

"Guess they will, Jedge . . . But yew know what Ah think. Ah think we better confiscate them goods."

"What do you mean, 'confiscatre'? I drew them for you. They're yours."

"Shut up, Sonny! Can't let this fellah go walkin' round Chanceyville with them there pitchers."

"Ah think Ah see what you're drivin' at, Henry. Possession o' obscene littiture. Twenty-fahve dollah fahn in Chanceyville."

Galliano had been frightened before; it was pure terror now. "Then let me make a phone call. I'll get the money for you. It'll be here in the morning. You *have* to let me make one call. That's the law, isn't it?"

"Not in Chanceyville, Sonny."

"I swear I'll get the money for you. Can I make one call?"

"What Ah think Jedge, is that a fellah that kin draw them kahnd o' pitchers is dangerous."

"I drew them for *you*. You know I did."

"Imagine if them pitchers went circ'latin' Chanceyville school. That'd be what Ah call a corruptin' influence."

"Don't quaht follow you, Henry."

"Ah mean that a fellah oughtn't be allowed to draw them kahnd o' pitchers."

He turned Galliano's chair around; pulled his manacled hands onto the desk. Galliano fought because there was nothing else to do. The Constable took out his pistol.

At first Galliano didn't believe his own eyes. Then he heard himself screaming.

"No! Christ! Not my hands! Leave my hands alone!"

He clenched his fists and the Constable brought the butt down on them. Then again. Through the pain he heard the Justice of the Peace weakly admonishing the Constable to go easy. He heard the bones crushing. Before the pain knocked him unconscious he realized that no one, anywhere. had the vaguest notion of his whereabouts. Then he passed out.

When the Constable was done with the hands, he started on the head. When he finished Galliano fell off the chair. The Justice had turned away some time ago but came to his senses and went for

a pail of water and towels. He listened at Galliano's heart for a while, then stood up and shrugged.

"You oughtn't have done that, Henry."

The Constable was staring out the window, clenching and unclenching his fists.

"Anyone see you with him?"

"No."

"Still, you oughtn't have done that, Henry."

The Constable turned on him with blue eyes focussing on nothing at all.

"That'll teach them bastards to mess around Chanceyville." ■ ■

Don't look back. Ever. Something evil might be catching up to you.

JOHNSON LOOKED BACK

by THOMAS BURKE

DON'T LOOK BEHIND YOU, JOHNson. There's a man following you, but don't look behind. Go on just as you are going, down that brown-foggy street where the lamps make diffuse and feeble splashes on the brown. Go straight on and don't look behind, or you might be sorry. You might see something that you'll wish you hadn't seen.

He's a blind man, Johnson, but that makes little difference to him, and is of no use to you. You can't hear the tapping of his stick because he hasn't got a stick. He can't carry a stick. He hasn't any hands. But he's been blind so long that he can walk the streets of this district without a stick. He can smell his way about, and he can feel traffic and other dangers through his skin.

You can turn and twist as you like, and use your mortal eyes as much as you like, but that man without eyes will be close on your trail. He's faster than you. He's not impeded by perception of the objects that reach you through the eyes. You are not used to the uncertain cloud of fog

and blears of light; you have to pick your steps. He can march boldly, for he marches always in clear, certain darkness. If you use cunning he can meet all your cunning. Without seeing you, or hearing you, he will know just where you go, and he will be close behind you. He will know what you are going to do the moment you have decided to do it; and he will be at your heels.

No; it won't help you at all to look behind you. It will only sicken you. It's not a pleasant spectacle —this man, blind and without hands, silently and steadfastly dogging you through the curling vapour. It's much better for you not to know that you are being pursued by this creature. The result will be the same anyway; you won't escape him, and it may save you a few minutes of misery not to know what is coming.

But why is he pursuing you? Why did he wait so long at the entrance to that dim street, whose very lamps seem to be ghosts of its darkness, to pick out your step from many others, and to follow you with this wolf-stride? You will not know that until you see him face to face. You have forgotten so many things; things that the strongest effort of memory will not recall, but your pursuer hasn't. He remembers; and all these years he has been seeking you, smelling about the streets of London, knowing that some day he is certain to strike the forbidding street down which you went when you first shook him off, and that he will find you there. And tonight he has found it and has smelt your presence there, and is with you once again.

Purpose is pursuing impulse. You are idle and at ease. He is in ferment. You are going to visit that abandoned house because it occurred to you to visit that abandoned house. He is following you because he has been waiting for nothing else. So there you go—he patient and intent; you, with free mind, picking your steps through the fog-smeared street. You have nothing to worry about. You walk through the fog with care, but with that sense of security which even the darkest streets of London cannot shake in Londoners familiar with them and with their people. You don't know what is catching up with you, and so long as you go straight ahead and don't look—

Oh, you fool! Johnson—you fool! I said—*"Don't* look behind you."

And now you've looked. And now you've seen. And now you know.

If you hadn't looked behind you would have escaped all the years of pain that are now coming upon you. It would have been all over in a few seconds. Now you've made it more dreadful. You've filled your mind with knowledge

of it, and you're going to increase your torment by trying to get away. And above those two pains will come the pain of a struggle.

You won't get away. You have no chance at all. The man behind you is blind, and has no hands; but he has arms and he has feet, and he can use them. Don't think you can escape by dodging down that alley... That was a silly thing to do. Alleys hold fear more firmly than open streets. Fear gets clotted in their recesses and hangs there like cobwebs. You thought you were doing something clever which would perplex him, but you won't perplex him. He is driving you where he wants you. You thought that if you could get into the alleys, and twist and turn and double along the deserted wharves, you could shake him off. But you can't. It's just in the alleys that he wants to have you, and you went there under his direction.

Already you're helping him because you're feeling the clotted fear which has been hanging in these alleys through the centuries. You're getting muddled. You've lost count of the turns you've taken, and you're not sure whether you're going away from him or fleeing breast to breast upon him. You saw him in all his maimed ugliness, and you see him now in every moving heap of fog that loiters at the mouth of each new alley. Long before he is upon you, he has got you.

If you hadn't looked back, doom would have fallen upon you out of nothing. But you looked back, and now you know the source of that doom.

You might as well give up padding through the alleys. Their universe of yellow-spotted blackness is only deluding you with hope of refuge. No corner is dark enough to hide you from eyes that live in darkness. No doors can cover you from senses as keen as air. No turn that you take will carry you farther from him; you are taking the turns he wants you to take.

There! You've turned into a little square which has no opening save that by which you entered. You're done. You can't hear him coming because he's wearing thin list slippers; but he's very near you. He's very near that entry. You've no hope of getting out. When he seizes you it would be better to yield everything, cat-like, and go with his desire and his attack. Better that than to fight. Only fools fight the invincible. But of course you *will* fight.

Hush—he's here. He's at the entry. He's in the square. You know that he's moving towards you; you know it as certainly as steel knows magnet. And then, though the fog-filled square gives you no more sight than your enemy, you know that he has halted; and you feel the silence dripping about your ears, spot by spot.

And now he has made his spring. He is upon you, and your fists fly against him. But you cannot beat him back. His blows fall upon you, and they wound and sting. You cannot fight him as you would fight another man. Your blood is cold but your brain is hot, and your nerves and muscles receive confused commands. They begin to act by themselves, automatically and without force. Your brain is preoccupied by this man.

It's no good, Johnson. Better to give in. You're only prolonging it. Your fists are useless against handless arms, or against feet. The fight is unequal. You have fists to fight with. He has none. And this lack of his puts all the advantage on his side. For a blow with the fist is painful and damaging; on the right point it may be fatal. But a blow with a stump, while equally painful and damaging, is something more. You're realizing that. It stains honest combat with something anomalous. Its impact on the face is not only a blow; it is an innuendo. It makes you think when you ought to be fighting.

And with the blows from those handless arms there are the blows from what seems to be an open hand. They tear along your face and about your neck, and each blow brings nausea. Not because it's a blow from an open hand, but because you know that this man has no hands, and because the feel of it is too long for a hand. And then you know what it is. The man with no hands is fighting you with his feet. You could put up with that if he were using feet as men do use them; if he were kicking you. What sucks the strength from your knees is that his feet are behaving like hands. You feel as a dreamer feels when fighting the dead. You are already beaten, not by superior strength, but by blows from handless arms and from feet behaving as hands. And you know that it was your work that robbed him of his hands and left him to use his feet as hands.

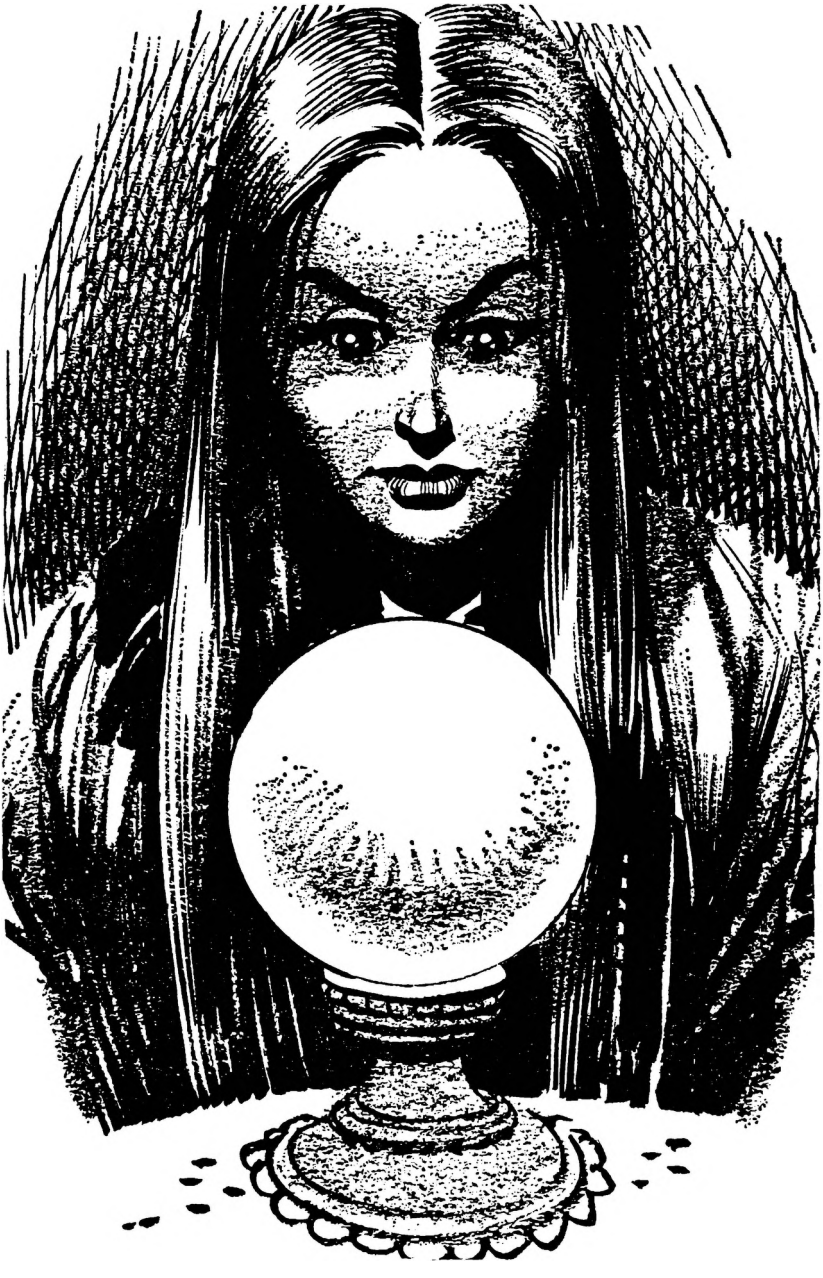
And now you're down. And now one of those feet, more flexible and more full of life than any common hand, is on your neck. And the fog in this little derelict square deepens from brown to black. The foot presses and presses, very softly and very heavily; and your eyes become black fog and your mind becomes black fog. Black upon black, increasingly, until with the last rush of breath you are swallowed into a black void and a black silence and a black cessation of being.

And so, Johnson, you destroyed yourself, and because you looked back you had the full bitterness of knowing that you destroyed yourself. For this blind and maimed

and ferocious creature of the velvet steps was, of course, yourself. This creature without sight and without hands was your other self, your innermost guide, whom you so constantly thwarted and denied and broke. It was you who blinded him that he might not see your deeds, and it was the things you did with *your* hands which corrupted his, until he was left with none, and at last turned upon you. And then you looked back, and you saw yourself stalking yourself to destruction; and in the last blackness of terror you understood.

Happier for you if you had not looked back, and had not understood. For then, after a sojourn in the still dusk of Devachan, you would have returned to amend a wasted life by another pilgrimage. You would have returned blind and maimed to a life of struggle and frustration, poverty and contumely and pain. And you would have called it, with a shrug, what most men call it—Luck.

But you looked back. You are one of the few who die with full knowledge of their pursuer. So, with the blindness and mutilation, and the poverty and the pain, you will carry yet another tribulation. You will carry the tribulation of remembering *why* you are suffering. ■ ■



He was a very logical man. So he knew she couldn't *come back.*

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

by R. A. LAFFERTY

STEPHEN KNIGHT HAD A HEALTHY digestion, an appetite of wide range, a tolerably clear conscience, and a measure of youth. His mind had a clarity and directness that was disconcerting to those who had fallen into illogical patterns. He had an almost automatic gift for coming up with the sensible answer, in the manner of a cat always landing on its feet.

His life was full of brimming small passions for all the direct and sudden things of the world. He was interesting, interested, and happy.

And he had Vivian.

At any one time (by the nature of a monogamous world) it is possible for only one man to have the finest wife in the world. That man at that particular time was Stephen Knight. It had been planned: a logical man sees the logic of having the best wife.

There are tools unsuited to certain tasks, and words are inadequate tools to describe Vivian Knight. She made her presence and her comings felt. Other men, friends or strangers, would lift their heads like colts before she was even in sight. She was the heart of any group. When she was gone she left nothing at all tangible; but O the intangibles

that surrounded that woman!

Actually, a Professor Schlauch had told Stephen, she was only a woman with a high vitality, brimming friendliness, and a magnetism that should have flicked instruments on Mars. But Stephen, who analyzed her as he did all things, knew that intelligence (like icebergs and the mounting of diamonds) should be four-fifths below the surface. With Vivian her intelligence was entirely below the surface, deeply hidden and of subliminal force.

On the surface she was a scatterbrain, a small intense cyclone with a curious calm at her center. Nobody who really understands such things could doubt that Stephen Knight had the finest wife in the world.

And she was coming now. Stephen could sense it from a distance as any man could sense it; but he could analyze the sensing of it, sorting out the complex of sounds that was her coming, dredging the subliminal up over the limin. He liked to break up sensations into their component parts and analyze them—logically.

On the two or three evenings a week when they were not together he was sometimes in before she was. Now he was in bed, for in four more hours he must be up and off on a field trip. He was a petroleum geologist with a peculiar flair for seeing below surface indications, five thousand feet below surface indications. His talent for preliminary visual survey was unequaled. Fine logic and sound information can reach very deep.

He was right, as always, as to her coming. Her small car turned in. He saw the sweep of the lights past his window, and heard the car crunch on the soft snow. Vivian, brimful and bubbling!

The bird downstairs broke into excited song; it always became excited when Vivian arrived. And just as her key was in the door its whistled song turned into 'Beautiful Dreamer' as she had taught it.

She was in with a loud rustle, and her footsteps like music as she started up the stairs (the ring of them at a frequency of 265, just above middle C, compounded with a vagrant, two harmonics, and a mute). Few men could so analyze their wives' footsteps. Everything about her was in tune, and she hummed the Dreamer as she ascended.

A ringing knife cut across the rustle, a frequency of 313 wedded to a false harmonic 30 vibrations higher. The phone. The extension was on the stairs and she would be right at it. It rang again and the rustle had stopped. But she did not answer it.

"Catch it, Vivian," he called. But she did not. It rang again and again and he rose grumbling to answer it.

"Knight here."

"Steady yourself, Mr. Knight. Something has happened to your wife. We will ask you to come down to the main station."

"My wife is here. She has just arrived."

"In that case there has been a misidentification, and another woman was carrying her credentials. Are you sure she is there?"

"Yes. Just a minute."

He left the phone and went to the top of the stairs and switched on the light. He called loudly for Vivian there, and down the hall, and downstairs. He went down, switched on the outside light, and went out on the front porch.

There were no footprints there but his own of an hour before now sifted over with a quarter of an inch of fresh snow. Her car was not in the drive, nor had any car turned in after his own. He went back in to the waiting phone.

"I was mistaken. She is not here. I will be down at once."

Vivian Knight was dead in a brutal and senseless murder. That was the fact that could not be undone. But that was not the fact that seemed primary to Stephen. Indeed, to his friends, he appeared to be a little callous about the whole thing. Such a shock does not affect all men the same, and an interior desolation may be covered by an outward dullness.

Still it was thought that he should have showed a little more emotion.

"It may be, Stephen, that you still do not realize that she is dead," one friend told him.

"No. I am not absolutely sure of it, but for reasons too formless to even try to voice."

"You surely do not doubt the identity?"

"Oh, no. That is her body. There is no doubt of that. What I feel is something else. I always knew that I would lose her."

"You did?"

"Yes. She was too good to be true. I never believed that she was real."

After that people began to think of Stephen Knight as a little odd.

He took no interest in the funeral arrangements.

"O, put her anywhere. She won't mind. Wherever she's gone she already has them charmed."

Nor was he vengeful nor even particularly curious as to who her killer might be.

"Any man might have done it. There's an impulse to take any perfect piece apart to see what motivates it, and to mar what is perfect. She hadn't a flaw in her. If she'd had any fault at all she might not have been killed. Can't you understand the feeling that nobody has the right to be perfect? I can understand it."

"Man, that was your *wife* who was murdered."

"I know that. I am not as far gone as you imagine. But I also understand that it had to happen: if not by that unknown, then by another; if not now, then at a later time."

From the funeral Stephen went directly to the doctor. He was not one to keep mysteries bottled up inside himself, and he knew that time is no ally in things like this. He told the whole story, completely and dully.

"Well, I don't pretend to understand this, Knight," the Doctor told him. "It isn't a new story to me in its essentials. An old doctor never hears anything new. In literature and lore there are a few hundred cases (none of them really authenticated by their very nature) of death-instant visitations of the Departed to the one closest. Are you sure you were fully awake when you heard Vivian coming in that last night?"

"Of course I'm not sure, in the light of what I now know to have happened. But I have never been mistaken in my state before. I have no history of hallucinations, and I have always been considered a well-balanced man. I realize that the latter is meaningless, and that there is no such thing."

"True enough, there is not. But a few come closer to what we believe should be the norm, and you come quite close. In other words you are less crazy than almost anyone I know. You are hardly crazy at all. In a long life in the practice (and I was born to the profession) I have never known a single human whom I could call unqualifiedly sane."

"Vivian was sane. That was the whole strange thing about her."

"Possibly. The Scatterbrain may be only another name for a wide-ranging intuitive comprehension. Now then, Knight, there is a set of things which you must say to yourself, and say over and over till you come to believe them. I do not know whether they are true, but you must accept them as true.

"On that night, three nights ago, you were asleep. You stirred to a feeling of anticipation, and you lay half-awake waiting. The bird (tuned to the life of you two) caught your anticipation and broke into song, and this served as a feed-back to your own sensations, for the bird only whistled the Dreamer when it felt that Vivian was nearing. It was a bright night with the snow mantle, and the light on your window might have been a more distant reflection. It was a gusty night, and the rustle that you thought was your wife was only the wind having its way with the wooden house, and her footsteps were likewise. But she was dead, and had been dead for at least a half hour. You are a logical man, and you

must go over that and over it until you believe it implicitly."

"But we do not know if it is actually true, do we, doctor?"

"No, we do not. But we turn that 'no' into a 'yes' by careful credulity. The world is built on such a system of credulities and we have no wish to pull it down. Now then, this is what happened, and there is no alternative. You may well have fifty years ahead of you, and there is no point in your making problems where there are none."

"I can see the logic of that. You can assure me that she is dead?"

"Yes. And, more important, you must also assure yourself of it. It is closed. You had a wonderful wife and you will have none but wonderful memories of her."

"I have not slept in the house since that night."

"Then you must sleep in it tonight. Even if you intend to sell the house and make other arrangements yet you cannot have it hanging over you that you were afraid to go back."

"Yes, I will stay there tonight."

He went home and opened the house again after dark. He had an ascetic's supper of tea and dry toast. The bird needed nothing, nothing that he could do for it. It essayed a few bars of the Dreamer, but its heart was not in it. Still, it was something to have the bird. Its voice was really an extension of that of Vivian.

Stephen played some of the stark dry fragments of Strilke. Stephen played the piano incomparably better than Vivian, yet he was sure that the playing that the piano would remember was that of Vivian and not his own measured, cerebral performance.

He went to bed. He wrote on the bedside pad the figure he would ask for the house. He slept fitfully, and when he woke he marked out that figure and wrote another one two thousand dollars lower. People would not understand that it had been a magic house; and vanished magis is not a marketable commodity.

Then later he woke to the sense of her distant approach.

If only it could be! If wishing could bring her back, then she would be here, he thought.

Her car turned in, and the bottom dropped out of his stomach. But what if I were not a craven? What if I were man enough to so want her back that it would not matter if it were impossible? But I am not that man, and to me such things do not happen. They are not logical.

He saw the sweep of the lights past his window, and heard the crunch of the car over the soft snow: I must be objective. That has always been natural for me. The doctor said that it was only a gusty night and that I mistook

the noises. He said that I had to believe it.

And for a moment he did believe it. Then he went cold and all the juice drained out of his heart: I *am* objective. And tonight is *not* gusty. Tonight is still.

The bird downstairs woke and broke into excited song. It always became excited when Vivian arrived.

Perhaps it is that I do not have an objective bird. That will be a little hard to remedy, he thought.

And just as her key was in the door, the whistled song of the bird turned into Beautiful Dreamer, clear and fine as she had taught it.

God, why didn't I bar the door? She has her key. But no, she does *not* have her key. It is with the rest of her effects locked in the deposit box. She is dead! I have to remember that she is dead! Let nothing confuse this issue. A logical man can account for every phenomenon. Somehow I will account for this.

She was in with a loud rustle, and her footsteps like music as she started up the stairs, the tone of them just above middle C. Everything about her was in tune, and she hummed the dreamer as she ascended.

But she is dead! Is it that I am afraid of my own wife? She never harmed anything in her life. But—but—she is not *in* her life. Am I really afraid of Vivian?

And for answer he piled chairs and desk and wardrobe in front of the door in frantic terror.

"Objective," he moaned. "What is more objective than a pile of furniture?"

And she came to the top of the stairs like music, humming the Dreamer.

"Vivian!! You're dead! You've got to believe that you're dead. Go back! Go! Go!"

Her hand was on the door. But in all reason her hand could not be on the door, dead or alive. And if she were a ghost, it would not matter what furniture was piled there. Still she would come in.

But in logic she could not be and could not come.

She came through the door.

"Vivian! No! No! You're dead! You've *got* to believe—"

A SHOCK CLASSIC

This fellow Bierce is a caution. He can make you laugh at murder, and even—heh-heh—at a corpse risen from its grave. But even while you're laughing he turns your blood to jelly in your veins.

A BOTTOMLESS GRAVE

by AMBROSE BIERCE

MY NAME IS JOHN BRENWALTER. My father, a drunkard, had a patent for an invention for making coffee-berries out of clay; but he was an honest man and would not himself engage in the manufacture. He was, therefore, only moderately wealthy, his royalties from his really valuable invention bringing him hardly enough to pay his expenses of litigation with rogues guilty of infringement.

So I lacked many advantages enjoyed by the children of unscrupulous and dishonorable parents, and had it not been for a noble and devoted mother, who neglected all my brothers and sisters and personally supervised my education, I should have grown up in ignorance and been compelled to teach school. To be the favorite child of a good woman is better than gold.

When I was nineteen years of age my father had the misfortune to die. He had always had perfect health, and his death, which occurred at the dinner table without a moment's warning, surprised

no one more than himself. He had that very morning been notified that a patent had been granted him for a device to burst open safes by hydraulic pressure, without noise.

The Commissioner of Patents had pronounced it the most ingenious invention that had ever been submitted to him, and my father had naturally looked forward to an old age of prosperity and honor. His sudden death was, therefore, a deep disappointment to him; but my mother was apparently less affected. At the close of the meal, when my poor father's body had been removed from the floor, she called us all into an adjoining room and addressed us as follows:

"My children, the uncommon occurrence that you have just witnessed is one of the most disagreeable incidents in a good man's life, and one in which I take little pleasure, I assure you. I beg you to believe that I had no hand in bringing it about. Of course," she added, after a pause, during which her eyes were cast down in deep thought, "of course it is better that he is dead."

She uttered this with so evident a sense of its obviousness as a self-evident truth that none of us had the courage to brave her surprise by asking an explanation. My mother's air of surprise when any of us went wrong in any way was very terrible to us. One day, when in a fit of peevish temper, I had taken the liberty to cut off the baby's ear, her simple words, "John, you surprise me!" appeared to me so sharp a reproof that after a sleepless night I went to her in tears, and throwing myself at her feet, exclaimed: "Mother, forgive me for surprising you."

So now we all—including the one-eared baby—felt that it would keep matters smoother to accept without question the statement that it was better, somehow, for our dear father to be dead. My mother continued:

"I must tell you, my children, that in a case of sudden and mysterious death the law requires the Coroner to come. For this the Coroner gets a large sum of money. I wish to avoid that painful formality in this instance; it is one which never had the approval of— of the remains. John" —here my mother turned her angel face to me— "you are an educated lad, and very discreet. You have now an opportunity to show your gratitude for all the sacrifices that your education has entailed upon the rest of us. John, go and remove the Coroner."

Inexpressibly delighted by this proof of my mother's confidence, and by the chance to distinguish myself by an act that squared with my natural disposition, I knelt before her, carried her hand to my lips and bathed it with tears. Before five o'clock that afternoon I

had removed the Coroner.

I was immediately arrested and thrown into jail, where I passed a most uncomfortable night, being unable to sleep because of the profanity of my fellow-prisoners, two clergymen. But along toward morning the jailer, who, sleeping in an adjoining room, had been equally disturbed, entered the cell and with a fearful oath warned the reverend gentlemen that if he heard any more swearing their sacred calling would not prevent him from turning them into the street. After that they moderated their objectionable conversation, and I slept the peaceful and refreshing sleep of youth and innocence.

The next morning I was taken before the Superior Judge, sitting as a committing magistrate, and put upon my preliminary examination. I pleaded not guilty, adding that the man whom I had murdered was a notorious Democrat. (My good mother was a Republican, and from early childhood I had been carefully instructed by her in the principles of honest government and the necessity of suppressing factional opposition.) The Judge, elected by a Republican ballot-box with a sliding bottom, was visibly impressed by the cogency of my plea and offered me a cigarette.

"May it please your Honor," began the District Attorney, "I do not deem it necessary to submit any evidence in this case. Under the law of the land you sit here as a committing magistrate. It is therefore your duty to commit. Testimony and argument alike would imply a doubt that your Honor means to perform your sworn duty. That is my case."

My counsel, a brother of the deceased Coroner, rose and said: "May it please the Court, my learned friend on the other side has so well and eloquently stated the law governing in this case that it only remains for me to inquire to what extent it has been already complied with. It is true, your Honor is a committing magistrate, and as such it is your duty to commit—what? That is a matter which the law has wisely and justly left to your own discretion, and wisely you have discharged already every obligation that the law imposes.

"Since I have known your Honor you have done nothing but commit. You have committed embracery, theft, arson, perjury, adultery, murder—every crime in the calendar and every excess known to the sensual and depraved, including my learned friend, the District Attorney. You have done your whole duty as a committing magistrate, and as there is no evidence against this worthy young man, my client, I move that he be discharged."

An impressive silence ensued. The Judge arose, put on the black

cap and in a voice trembling with emotion sentenced me to life and liberty. Then turning to my counsel he said, coldly but significantly:

"I will see *you* later."

The next morning the lawyer who had so conscientiously defended me against a charge of murdering his own brother—with whom he had a quarrel about some land—had disappeared and his fate is to this day unknown.

In the meantime my poor father's body had been secretly buried at midnight in the back yard of his late residence, with his late boots on and the contents of his late stomach unanalyzed. "He was opposed to display," said my dear mother, as she finished tamping down the earth above him and assisted the children to litter the place with straw; "his instincts were all domestic and he loved a quiet life."

My mother's application for letters of administration stated that she had good reason to believe that the deceased was dead, for he had not come home to his meals for several days; but the Judge of the Crowbait Court—as she ever afterward contemptuously called it—decided that the proof of death was insufficient, and put the estate into the hands of the Public Administrator, who was his son-in-law.

It was found that the liabilities were exactly balanced by the assets; there was left only the patent for the device for bursting open safes without noise, by hydraulic pressure and this had passed into the ownership of the Probate Judge and the Public Administraitor—as my dear mother preferred to spell it. Thus, within a few brief months a worthy and respectable family was reduced from prosperity to crime; necessity compelled us to go to work.

In the selection of occupations we were governed by a variety of considerations, such as personal fitness, inclination, and so forth. My mother opened a select private school for instruction in the art of changing the spots upon leopard-skin rugs; my eldest brother, George Henry, who had a turn for music, became a bugler in a neighboring asylum for deaf mutes; my sister, Mary Maria, took orders for Professor Pumpernickel's Essence of Latchkeys for flavoring mineral springs, and I set up as an adjuster and gilder of crossbeams for gibbets. The other children, too young for labor, continued to steal small articles exposed in front of shops, as they had been taught.

In our intervals of leisure we decoyed travelers into our house and buried the bodies in a cellar.

In one part of this cellar we kept wines, liquors and provisions. From the rapidity of their disappearance we acquired the superstitious belief that the spirits of the persons buried there came at

dead of night and held a festival. It was at least certain that frequently of a morning we would discover fragments of pickled meats, canned goods and such debris littering the place, although it had been securely locked and barred against human intrusion.

It was proposed to remove the provisions and store them elsewhere, but our dear mother, always generous and hospitable, said it was better to endure the loss than risk exposure: if the ghosts were denied this trifling gratification they might set on foot an investigation, which would overthrow our scheme of the division of labor, by diverting the energies of the whole family into the single industry pursued by me—we might all decorate the cross-beams of gibbets. We accepted her decision with filial submission, due to our reverence for her worldly wisdom and the purity of her character.

One night while we were all in the cellar—none dared to enter it alone—engaged in b e s t o w i n g upon the Mayor of an adjoining town the solemn offices of Christian burial, my mother and the younger children holding a candle each, while George Henry and I labored with a spade and pick, my sister Mary Maria uttered a shriek and covered her eyes with her hands.

We were all dreadfully startled and the Mayor's obsequies were instantly suspended, while with pale faces and in trembling tones we begged her to say what had alarmed her. The younger children were so agitated that they held their candles unsteadily, and the waving shadows of our figures danced with uncouth and grotesque movements on the walls and flung themselves into the most uncanny attitudes. The face of the dead man, now gleaming ghastly in the light, and now extinguished by some floating shadow, appeared at each emergence to have taken on a new and more forbidding expression, a maligner menace.

Frightened even more than ourselves by the girl's scream, rats raced in multitudes about the place, squeaking shrilly, or starred the black opacity of some distant corner with steadfast eyes, mere points of green light, matching the faint phosphorescence of decay that filled the half-dug grave and seemed the visible manifestation of that faint odor of mortality which tainted the unwholesome air.

The children now sobbed and clung about the limbs of their elders, dropping their candles, and we were near being left in total darkness, except for that sinister light, which slowly welled upward from the disturbed earth and overflowed the edges of the grave like a fountain.

Meanwhile my sister, crouching in the earth that had been thrown

out of the excavation, had removed her hands from her face and was staring with expanded eyes into an obscure space between two wine casks.

"There it is! —there it is!" she shrieked, pointing, "God in heaven! can't you see it?"

And there indeed it was! —a human figure, dimly discernible in the gloom—a figure that wavered from side to side as if about to fall, clutching at the wine-casks for support, had stepped unsteadily forward and for one moment stood revealed in the light of our remaining candles; then it surged heavily and fell prone upon the earth. In that moment we had all recognized the figure, the face and bearing of our father—dead these ten months and buried by our own hands! —our father indubitably risen and ghastly drunk!

On the incidents of our precipitate flight from that horrible place —on the extinction of all human sentiment in that tumultuous, mad scramble up the damp and mouldy stairs—slipping, falling, pulling one another down and clambering over one another's backs—the lights extinguished, babes trampled beneath the feet of their strong brothers and hurled backward to death by a mother's arm! —on all this I do not dare to dwell.

My mother, my eldest brother and sister and I escaped; the others remained below, to perish of their wounds, or of their terror—some, perhaps, by flame. For within an hour we four, hastily gathering together, what money and jewels we had and what clothing we could carry, fired the dwelling and fled by its light into the hills. We did not even pause to collect the insurance, and my dear mother said on her death-bed, years afterward in a distant land, that this was the only sin of omission that lay upon her conscience. Her confessor, a holy man, assured her that under the circumstances Heaven would pardon the neglect.

About ten years after our removal from the scenes of my childhood I, then a prosperous forger, returned in disguise to the spot with a view to obtaining, if possible, some treasure belonging to us, which had been buried in the cellar. I may say that I was unsuccessful: the discovery of many human bones in the ruins had set the authorities digging for more. They had found the treasure and had kept it for their honesty. The house had not been rebuilt; the whole suburb was, in fact, a desolation. So many unearthly sights and sounds had been reported thereabout that nobody would live there.

As there was none to question nor molest, I resolved to gratify my filial piety by gazing once more upon the face of my beloved

father, if indeed our eyes had deceived us and he was still in his grave. I remembered, too, that he had always worn an enormous diamond ring, and never having seen it nor heard of it since his death, I had reason to think he might have been buried in it. Procuring a spade, I soon located the grave in what had been the backyard and began digging. When I had got down about four feet the whole bottom fell out of the grave and I was precipitated into a large drain, falling through a long hole in its crumbling arch. There was no body, nor any vestige of one.

Unable to get out of the excavation, I crept through the drain, and having with some difficulty removed a mass of charred rubbish and blackened masonry that choked it, emerged into what had been that fateful cellar.

All was clear. My father, whatever had caused him to be "taken bad" at his meal (and I think my sainted mother could have thrown some light upon that matter) had indubitably been buried alive. The grave having been accidentally dug above the forgotten drain, and down almost to the crown of its arch, and no coffin having been used, his struggles on reviving had broken the rotten masonry and he had fallen through, escaping finally into the cellar.

Feeling that he was not welcome in his own house, yet having no other, he had lived in subterranean seclusion, a witness to our thrift and a pensioner on our providence. It was he who had eaten our food; it was he who had drunk our wine—he was no better than a thief! In a moment of intoxication, and feeling, no doubt, that need of companionship which is the one sympathetic link between a drunken man and his race, he had left his place of concealment at a strangely inopportune time, entailing the most deplorable consequences upon those nearest and dearest to him—a blunder that had almost the dignity of crime. ■ ■

Here I am back again. The editor sent me on an errand to fetch something, and when I came back and gave him a friendly little nip on the hand, he turned the most peculiar blue color and fell over like a dead man. Maybe he is dead. I'll let you know when you come back for the next issue. Even if he survives, he'll never send anybody to fetch anything again. For that matter, neither will the lead character in this famous shock story by one of the world's best known writers . . .

MOON-FACE

by JACK LONDON

JOHN CLAVERHOUSE WAS A MOON-faced man. You know the kind, cheek-bones wide apart, chin and forehead melting into the cheeks to complete the perfect round, and the nose, broad and pudgy, equidistant from the circumference, flattened against the very centre of the face like a dough-ball upon the ceiling. Perhaps that is why I hated him, for truly he had become an offence to my eyes, and I believed the earth to be cumbered with his presence. Perhaps my mother may have been superstitious of the moon and looked upon it over the wrong shoulder at the wrong time.

Be that as it may, I hated John Claverhouse. Not that he had done me what society would consider a wrong or an ill turn. Far

from it. The evil was of a deeper, subtler sort; so elusive, so intangible, as to defy clear, definite analysis in words. We all experience such things at some period in our lives. For the first time we see a certain individual, one who the very instant before we did not dream existed; and yet, at the first moment of meeting, we say: "I do not like that man." Why do we not like him? Ah, we do not know why; we know only that we do not. We have taken a dislike, that is all. And so I with John Claverhouse.

What right had such a man to be happy? Yet he was an optimist. He was always gleeful and laughing. All things were always all right, curse him! Ah! how it grated on my soul that he should be so happy! Other men could laugh, and it did not bother me. I even used to laugh myself—before I met John Claverhouse.

But his laugh! It irritated me, maddened me, as nothing else under the sun could irritate or madden me. It haunted me, gripped hold of me, and would not let me go. It was a huge, Gargantuan laugh. Waking or sleeping it was always with me, whirring and jarring across my heart-strings like an enormous rasp. At break of day it came whooping across the fields to spoil my pleasant morning revery. Under the aching noonday glare, when the green things drooped and the birds withdrew to the depths of the forest, and all nature drowsed, his great "Ha! ha!" and Ho! ho!" rose up to the sky and challenged the sun. And at black midnight, from the lonely cross-roads where he turned from town into his own place, came his plaguey cachinnations to rouse me from my sleep and make me writhe and clench my nails into my palms.

I went forth privily in the nighttime, and turned his cattle into his fields, and in the morning heard his whooping laugh as he drove them out again. "It is nothing," he said; "the poor, dumb beasties are not to be blamed for straying into fatter pastures."

He had a dog he called "Mars," a big, splendid brute, part deerhound and part blood-hound, and resembling both. Mars was a great delight to him, and they were always together. But I bided my time, and one day, when opportunity was ripe, lured the animal away and settled for him with strychnine and beefsteak. It made positively no impression on John Claverhouse. His laugh was as hearty and frequent as ever, and his face as much like the full moon as it always had been.

Then I set fire to his haystacks and his barn. But the next morning, being Sunday, he went forth blithe and cheerful.

"Where are you going?" I asked him, as he went by the cross-roads.

"Trout," he said, and his face beamed like a full moon. "I just dote on trout."

Was there ever such an impossible man! His whole harvest had gone up in his haystacks and barn. It was uninsured, I knew. And yet, in the face of famine and the rigorous winter, he went out gayly in quest of a mess of trout, forsooth, because he "doted" on them! Had gloom but rested, no matter how lightly, on his brow, or had his bovine countenance grown long and serious and less like the moon, or had he removed that smile but once from off his face, I am sure I could have forgiven him for existing. But no, he grew only more cheerful under misfortune.

I insulted him. He looked at me in slow and smiling surprise.

"I fight you? Why?" he asked slowly. And then he laughed. "You are so funny! Ho! ho! You'll be the death of me! He! he! he! Oh! Ho ho! ho!"

What would you? It was past endurance. By the blood of Judas, how I hated him! Then there was that name—Claverhouse! What a name! Wasn't it absurd? Claverhouse! Merciful heaven, *why* Claverhouse? Again and again I asked myself that question. I should not have minded Smith, or Brown, or Jones—but *Claverhouse!* I leave it to you. Repeat it to yourself—Claverhouse. Just listen to the ridiculous sound of it —Claverhouse! Should a man live with such a name? I ask of you. "No," you say. And "No" said I.

But I bethought me of his mortgage. What of his crops and barn destroyed, I knew he would be unable to meet it. So I got a shrewd, close-mouthed, tight-fisted money-lender to get the mortgage transferred to him. I did not appear, but through this agent I forced the foreclosure, and but few days (no more, believe me, than the law allowed) were given John Claverhouse to remove his goods and chattels from the premises. Then I strolled down to see how he took it, for he had lived there upward of twenty years. But he met me with his saucer-eyes twinkling, and the light glowing and spreading in his face till it was as a full-risen moon.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed. "The funniest tike, that youngster of mine! Did you ever hear the like? Let me tell you. He was down playing by the edge of the river when a piece of the bank caved in and splashed him. 'O papa!' he cried; 'a great big puddle flewed up and hit me.' "

He stopped and waited for me to join him in his infernal glee.

"I don't see any laugh in it," I said shortly, and I knew my face went sour.

He regarded me with wonderment, and then came the damnable light, glowing and spreading, as I have described it, till his face

shone soft and warm, like the summer moon, and then the laugh —"Ha! ha! That's funny! You don't see it, eh? He! he! Ho! ho! ho! He doesn't see it! Why, look here. You know a puddle—"

But I turned on my heel and left him. That was the last. I could stand it no longer. The thing must end right there, I thought, curse him! The earth should be quit of him. And as I went over the hill, I could hear his monstrous laugh reverberating against the sky.

Now, I pride myself on doing things neatly, and when I resolved to kill John Claverhouse I had it in mind to do so in such fashion that I should not look back upon it and feel ashamed. I hate bungling, and I hate brutality. To me there is something repugnant in merely striking a man with one's naked fist—faugh! it is sickening! So, to shoot, or stab, or club John Claverhouse (oh, that name!) did not appeal to me. And not only was I impelled to do it neatly and artistically, but also in such manner that not the slightest possible suspicion could be directed against me.

To this end I bent my intellect, and, after a week of profound incubation, I hatched the scheme. Then I set to work. I bought a water spaniel bitch, five months old, and devoted my whole attention to her training. Had any one spied upon me, they would have remarked that this training consisted entirely of one thing—*retrieving*. I taught the dog, which I called "Bellona," to fetch sticks I threw into the water, and not only to fetch, but to fetch at once, without mouthing or playing with them. The point was that she was to stop for nothing, but to deliver the stick in all haste. I made a practice of running away and leaving her to chase me, with the stick in her mouth, till she caught me. She was a bright animal, and took to the game with such eagerness that I was soon content.

After that, at the first casual opportunity, I presented Bellona to John Claverhouse. I knew what I was about, for I was aware of a little weakness of his, and of a little private sinning of which he was regularly and inveterately guilty.

"No," he said, when I placed the end of the rope in his hand. "No, you don't mean it." And his mouth opened wide and he grinned all over his damnable moon-face.

"I—I kind of thought, somehow, you didn't like me," he explained. "Wasn't it funny for me to make such a mistake?" And at the thought he held his sides with laughter.

"What is her name?" he managed to ask between paroxysms.

"Bellona," I said.

"He! he!" he tittered. "What a funny name!"

I gritted my teeth, for his mirth

put them on edge, and snapped out between them, "She was the wife of Mars, you know."

Then the light of the full moon began to suffuse his face, until he exploded with: "That was my other dog. Well, I guess she's a widow now. Oh! Ho! ho! E! he! he! Ho!" he whooped after me, and I turned and fled swiftly over the hill.

The week passed by, and on Saturday evening I said to him, "You go away Monday, don't you?"

He nodded his head and grinned.

"Then you won't have another chance to get a mess of those trout you just 'dote' on."

But he did not notice the sneer. "Oh, I don't know," he chuckled. "I'm going up to-morrow to try pretty hard."

Thus was assurance made doubly sure, and I went back to my house hugging myself with rapture.

Early next morning I saw him go by with a dipnet and gunnysack, and Bellona trotting at his heels. I knew where he was bound, and cut out by the back pasture and climbed through the underbrush to the top of the mountain. Keeping carefully out of sight, I followed the crest along for a couple of miles to a natural amphitheatre in the hills, where the little river raced down out of a gorge and stopped for breath in a large and placid rock-bound pool. That was the spot! I sat down on the croup of the mountain, where I could see all that occurred, and lighted my pipe.

Ere many mintues had passed, John Claverhouse came plodding up the bed of the stream. Bellona was ambling about him, and they were in high feather, her short, snappy barks mingling with his deeper chest-notes. Arrived at the pool, he threw down the dip-net and sack, and drew from his hip-pocket what looked like a large, fat candle. But I knew it to be a stick of "giant"; for such was his method of catching trout. He dynamited them. He attached the fuse by wrapping the "giant" tightly in a peice of cotton. Then he ignited the fuse and tossed the explosive into the pool.

Like a flash, Bellona was into the pool after it. I could have shrieked aloud for joy. Claverhouse yelled at her, but without avail. He pelted her with clods and rocks, but she swam steadily on till she got the stick of "giant" in her mouth, when she whirled about and headed for shore. Then, for the first time, he realized his danger, and started to run. As foreseen and planned by me, she made the bank and took out after him. Oh, I tell you, it was great! As I have said, the pool lay in a sort of amphitheatre. Above and below, the stream could be crossed on stepping-stones. And around

and around, up and down and across the stones, raced Claverhouse and Bellona. I could never have believed that such an ungainly man could run so fast. But run he did, Bellona hot-footed after him, and gaining. And then, just as she caught up, he in full stride, and she leaping with nose at his knee, there was a sudden flash, a burst of smoke, a terrific detonation, and where man and dog had been the instant before there was naught to be seen but a big hole in the ground.

"Death from accident while engaged in illegal fishing." That was the verdict of the coroner's jury; and that is why I pride myself on the neat and artistic way in which I finished off John Claverhouse. There was no bungling, no brutality; nothing of which to be ashamed in the whole transaction, as I am sure you will agree. No more does his infernal laugh go echoing among the hills, and no more does his fat moon-face rise up to vex me. My days are peaceful now, and my night's sleep deep. ■ ■

Time was that when a man was dead they buried him. But that was in a different country. Customs do change, you know.

THE KENNEL

by MAURICE LEVEL

As TEN O'CLOCK STRUCK, M. DE Hartevel emptied a last tankard of beer, folded his newspaper, stretched himself, yawned, and slowly rose.

The hanging-lamp cast a bright light on the table-cloth, over which were scattered piles of shot and cartridge wads. Near the fireplace, in the shadow, a woman lay back in a deep armchair.

Outside the wind blew violently against the windows, the rain beat noisily on the glass, and from time to time deep bayings came from the kennel where the hounds had struggled and strained since morning.

There were forty of them: big mastiffs with ugly fangs, stiff-haired griffons of Vendee, that flung themselves with ferocity on the wild boar on hunting days. During the night their sullen bayings disturbed the country-side, evoking response from all the dogs in the neighborhood.

M. de Hartevel lifted a curtain and looked out into the darkness of the park. The wet branches shone like steel blades; the autumn leaves were blown about like whirligigs and flattened against the walls. He grumbled.

"Dirty weather!"

He walked a few steps, his

hands in his pockets, stopped before the fireplace, and with a kick broke a half-consumed log. Red embers fell on the ashes; a flame rose, straight and pointed.

Madame de Hartevel did not move. The light of the fire played on her face, touching her hair with gold, throwing a rosy glow on her pale cheeks and, dancing about her, cast fugitive shadows on her forehead, her eyelids, her lips.

The hounds, quiet for a moment, began to growl again; and their bayings, the roaring of the wind and the hiss of the rain on the trees made the quiet room seem warmer, the presence of the silent woman more intimate.

Subconsciously this influenced M. de Hartevel. Desires stimulated by those of the beasts and by the warmth of the room crept through his veins He touched his wife's shoulders.

"It is ten o'clock. Are you going to bed?"

She said "yes," and left her chair, as if regretfully.

"Would you like me to come with you?"

"No—thank you—"

Frowning, he bowed.

"As you like."

His shoulders against the mantelshelf, his legs apart, he watched her go. She walked with a graceful, undulating movement, the train of her dress moving on the carpet like a little flat wave. A surge of anger stiffened his muscles.

In this chateau where he had her all to himself he had in bygone days imagined a wife who would like living in seclusion with him, attentive to his wishes, smiling acquiescence to all his desires. She would welcome him with gay words when he came back from a day's hunting, his hands blue with cold, his strong body tired, bringing with him the freshness of the fields and moors, the smell of horses, of game and of hounds, would lift eager lips to meet his own. Then, after the long ride in the wind, the rain, the snow, after the intoxication of the crisp air, the heavy walking in the furrows, or the gallop under branches that almost caught his beard, there would have been long nights of love, orgies of caresses of which the thrill would be mutual.

The difference between the dream and the reality!

When the door had shut and the sound of steps died away in the corridor, he went to his room, lay down, took a book and tried to read.

The rain hissed louder than ever. The wind roared in the chimney; out in the park, branches were snapping from the trees; the hounds bayed without ceasing, their howling sounded through the creaking of the trees, dominat-

ing the roar of the storm; the door of the kennel strained under their weight.

He opened the window and shouted:

"Down!"

For some seconds they were quiet. He waited. The wind that drove the rain on his face refreshed him. The barkings began again. He banged his fist against the shutter, threatening:

"Quiet, you devils!"

There was a singing in his ears, a whistling, a ringing; a desire to strike, to ransack, to feel flesh quiver under his fists took possession of him. He roared: "Wait a moment!" slammed the window, seized a whip, and went out.

He strode along the corridors with no thought of the sleeping house till he got near his wife's room, when he walked slowly and quietly, fearing to disturb her sleep. But a ray of light from under her door caught his lowered eyes, and there was a sound of hurried footsteps that the carpet did not deaden. He listened. The noise ceased, the light went out .... He stood motionless, and suddenly, impelled by a suspicion, he called softly:

"Marie Therese ..."

No reply. He called louder. Curiosity, a doubt that he dared not formulate, held him breathless. He gave two sharp little taps on the door; a voice inside asked:

"Who is there?"

"I—open the door—"

A whiff of warm air laden with various perfumes and a suspicion of other odors passed over his face.

The voice asked:

"What is it?"

He walked in without replying. He felt his wife standing close in front of him; her breath was on him, the lace of her dress touched his chest. He felt in his pocket for matches. Not finding any, he ordered:

"Light the lamp!"

She obeyed, and as his eyes ran over the room he saw the curtains drawn closely, a shawl on the carpet, the open bed, white and very large; and in a corner, near the fireplace, a man lying across a long rest-chair, his collar unfastened, his head drooping, his arms hanging loosely, his eyes shut.

He gripped his wife's wrist:

"Ah, you ... filth! ... Then this is why you turn your back on me!" ...

She did not shrink from him, did not move. No shadow of fear passed over her pallid face. She only raised her head, murmuring:

"You are hurting me!—"

He let her go, and bending over the inert body, his fist raised, cried:

"A lover in my wife's bedroom! ... And ... what a lover! A friend ... Almost a son ... Whore!—"

She interrupted him:

"He is not my lover . . . "

He burst into a laugh.

"Ah! Ah! You expect me to believe that!"

He seized the collar of the recumbent man, and lifted him up towards him. But when he saw the livid face, the half-opened mouth showing the teeth and gums, when he felt the strange chill of the flesh that touched his hands, he started and let go. The body fell back heavily on the cushions, the forehead beating twice against a chair. His fury turned upon his wife.

"What have you to say? . . . Explain! . . . "

"It is very simple," she said. "I was just going to bed when I heard the sound of footsteps in the corridor . . . uncertain steps . . . faltering . . . and a voice begging, 'Open the door . . . open the door' . . . I thought you might be ill. I opened the door. Then he came, or rather, fell into the room . . . I knew he was subject to heart-attacks . . . I laid him there . . . I was just going to bring you when you knocked . . . That's all . . . "

Bending over the body, and apparently quite calm again, he asked, every word pronounced distinctly:

"And it does not surprise you that no one heard him come in? . . . "

"The hounds bayed . . . "

"And why should he come here at this hour of the night?"

She made a vague gesture:

"It does seem strange . . . But . . . I can only suppose that he felt ill and that . . . quite alone in his own house . . . he was afraid to stay there . . . came here to beg for help . . . In any case, when he is better . . . as soon as he is able to speak . . . he will be able to explain . . . "

M. de Hartevel drew himself up to his full height, and looked into his wife's eyes.

"It appears we shall have to accept your supposition, and that we shall never know exactly what underlies his being here tonight . . . for he is dead."

She held out her hands and stammered, her teeth chattering.

"It's not possible . . . He is . . . "

"Yes—dead . . . "

He seemed to be lost in thought for a moment, then went on in an easier voice:

"After all, the more I think of it, the more natural it seems . . . Both his father and his uncle died like this, suddenly . . . Heart disease is hereditary in his family . . . A shock . . . a violent emotion . . . too keen a sensation . . . a great joy . . . We are weak creatures at best . . . "

He drew an armchair to the fire, sat down, and, his hands stretched out to the flames, continued:

"But however simple and natural the event in itself may be,

nothing can alter the fact that a man has died in your bedroom during the night... Is that not so?"

She hid her face in her hands and made no reply.

"And if your explanation satisfies me, I am not able to make others accept it. The servants will have their own ideas, will talk... That will be dishonor for you, for me, for my family... That is not possible... We must find a way out of it... and I have already found it... With the exception of you and me, no one knows, no one will ever know what has happened in this room... No one saw him come in... Take the lamp and come with me..."

He seized the body in his arms and ordered:

"Walk on first..."

She hesitated as they went out at the door.

"What are you going to do?..."

"Leave it me... Go on..."

Slowly and very quietly they went towards the staircase, she holding high the lamp, its light flickering on the walls, he carefully placing his feet on stair after stair. When they got to the door that led to the garden, he said:

"Open it without a sound."

A gust of wind made the light flare up. Beaten on by the rain, the glass burst and fell in pieces on the threshold. She placed the extinguished lamp on the soil. They went into the park. The gravel crunched under their steps and rain beat upon them. He asked:

"Can you see the walk?... Yes?... Then come close to me ...hold the legs... the body is heavy..."

They went forward in silence. M. de Hartevel stopped near a low door, saying:

"Feel in my right-hand pocket... There is a key there... That's it... Give it to me... Now let the legs go... It is as dark as a grave... Feel about till you find the keyhole... Have you got it?—Turn..."

Excited by the noise, the hounds began to bay. Madame de Hartevel started back.

"You are frightened?... Nonsense... Another turn... That's it!—Stand out of the way..."

With a thrust from his knee he pushed open the door. Believing themselves free, the hounds bounded against his legs. Pushing them back with a kick, suddenly, with one great effort, he raised the body above his head, balanced it there a moment, flung it into the kennel, and shut the door violently behind him.

Baying at full voice, the beasts fell on their prey. A frightful death-rattle: "Help!" pierced their

clamor, a terrible cry, superhuman. It was followed by violent growlings.

An unspeakable horror took possession of Madame de Hartevel; a quick flash of understanding dominated her fear, and her eyes wild, she flung herself on her husband, digging her nails in his face as she shrieked:

"Fiend! . . . He wasn't dead . . ."

M. de Hartevel pushed her off with the back of his hand, and standing straight up before her, jeered:

"Did you think he was!" ■ ■

Anybody for a game of soccer? Those guys on the other team are a crazy bunch. When I say crazy, I mean just *what I say . . .*

PRISON BALL

by JOHN RUBLOWSKY

RUDOLF BAUMER SHUDDERED INwardly as he felt the first throb of migraine—a faint pulse above the left eye that would grow in intensity until each spasm seemed to tear the head from his shoulders. The third time, he thought bitterly, and the new warden's been here less than two weeks.

Sweat began to ooze from the loose folds of flesh that hung over his tightly buttoned collar. Rudolf Baumer wiped his neck nervously, leaving red welts where he rubbed with a coarse linen handkerchief.

By the time he climbed to the third tier, Rudolf's face was flushed and his heavy gasps echoed in the huge, square building. Save for the three tiers of cells built out from the walls, the structure was a hollow shell. An iron cat-walk ran the length of each tier and the single circular stairwell provided the only access to the three levels.

Each tier held 32 cells—cages really, arranged in four rows about the central square. The top and three sides of each cage were made up of iron bars; the floor—iron grate; the wall—dull, yellow institutional tile. Above the empty central wall was a skylight whose

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large panes, spotlessly clean, framed a panorama of sky and clouds.

Each cage held one man.

Cell-block D, the maximum security section of the State Prison for the Criminal Insane, was designed by experts to be escape proof. Rudolf Baumer was making the final bedcheck after lights-out. His shadow leaped grotesquely from bar to bar as he walked in the eerie glow of the red safety-lights shining at intervals along the cat-walk.

The block appeared calm, almost still, but Rudolf felt the hairs along the back of his neck rise. Twenty-seven years as a prison guard had sharpened his sensitivity until he could detect even the slightest nuance of emotion from the inmates. Now he felt the wave of hate and hostility that emanated from each cell.

It was like this every time they appointed a new warden. The new man couldn't leave well enough alone. Each one had to make changes—senseless, stupid changes to demonstrate his authority. What did they know of the importance of routine in keeping order here? Everyday ritual formed a bond of habit and familiarity stronger than any shackle.

This one is no better, Rudolf Baumer thought bitterly. He doesn't understand and he doesn't care. All he wants is to make a good showing, and move on to a better appointment.

"Just once," he muttered to himself. "Why won't they appoint a man with experience who understands?"

As he waddled along the catwalk, Rudolf peered deliberately into each cage. Long ago, he had learned never to consider his charges human, to make no emotional attachment. Each cage housed a number, an impersonal entity for whose presence and behavior he, Rudolf Baumer, was responsible.

This was not an ordinary prison, and these were dangerous prisoners. Criminally i n s a n e. These in cell-block D were the worst. Killers whose crimes—hideous and unspeakable—read like a madman's tally sheet.

Most of the prisoners lay quietly in their beds, lost in whatever reverie their twisted minds summoned for the night. Some stared sullenly at the patch of sky that glowed through the central skylight.

One of the prisoners stood on his chair, his arms reaching up to the top of the cage. His hands gripped the cold iron bars and his head leaned against the crook of his elbow. The prisoner brood-

ed on the bright star that glimmered into a corner of his cell.

"Into bed," Rudolf hissed. "You know the rules."

The prisoner turned slowly, focusing two burning eyes on the guard, but said nothing.

"You can't hang there like an ape. You know that."

The prisoner climbed down and walked to his bed, slowly, never taking his eyes from the guard. Rudolf Baumer felt the familiar knot of fear in his stomach.

This prisoner had been in cellblock D for 23 years—almost as long as Rudolf—and during these years he never said one word to anyone.

There was only one thing that interested him—his plants. He had built a shelf in his cell that commanded the patch of sunlight that filtered down through the skylight. On this shelf he raised his collection of plants—cacti and succulents—desert plants, adapted to an arid, tortured environment. In their normal state they grow in weirdly grotesque shapes—prickly spines and fleshy, misshapen pads, with flowers that smell of putrid carrion and others that bloom, with extravagantly delicate beauty, only in the heart of the darkest night.

But the prisoner grew only cristates—malformed specimens of the normal plants that pass their deformities through cuttings. He begged specimens from Botanical Gardens all over the world and, over the years, his collection had developed into an impressive gallery.

When Mr. Kurtz, the new warden, made his first tour of inspection, he had ordered all of the plants removed.

"Mr. Baumer," he said in that precise, clipped way he had, "this is a cell, not a greenhouse. It houses a criminal, not a botanist."

The episode of the plants was only the beginning. Mr. Kurtz was a thorough man, and he discovered much to find fault with:

"Mr. Baumer, I see no reason why the State's money should be wasted by encouraging night reading. Lights-out will go into effect at 8:00 p.m., not 10."

Lunch was pushed up a half hour to 1:00 p.m.; morning recreation was eliminated.

"No need to wear out the State's equipment unnecessarily with two recreation periods. Is there, Mr. Baumer?"

Supper was cut short and library privileges were suspended. Reveille was moved up an hour earlier.

Mr. Kurtz explained. He spoke softly, in a monotone, to force the listener to close attention. "Mr. Baumer, it may seem that my actions are arbitrary and capricious, but they are carefully calculated. I have been assigned to administer this prison, and this I will do—efficiently and economically. I had expected a better post, but I

will do my best even here."

Hostility among the prisoners grew until it hung like a deadly fog about the prison. The guards walked warily along the corridors and cat-walks, and fingered the heavily leaded riot sticks they had not carried for seven years.

Even "Angel" had become morose and sullen, Rudolf Baumer noted, and he was always the most even-tempered and likable prisoner in cell-block D. He had a soft cherubic face, pink-skinned with red arched lips and clear blue eyes. This combination had inspired his fellow prisoners to bestow upon him his unlikely name.

"Angel" was the prison's star soccer player. Fast and resourceful with an uncanny ability to pick out weak spots in his opponents' defenses, he had sparked his team to five prison championships in a row. Tomorrow he was going to play in the final elimination for the cell-block D championship. The game was scheduled just after supper at 6:30 p.m.

When Rudolf Baumer passed his cell, Angel was awake. His cherubic face was drawn into a vicious scowl and he punched at the wall with a tightly clenched fist.

"Easy, Angel," Rudolf whispered. "Get some sleep. You'll need it for the game tomorrow."

When he finished the inspection, Rudolf checked out with the cell-block guard.

"All quiet," he said.

"Yeh," the guard agreed. "But you can cut the tension with a knife. If that new warden don't stop soon, they're gonna explode. Remember how it was the last time?"

"Joe Patterson and Mike Wiloski died," Rudolf muttered. "They both had children. Mike had only three more years to go for his pension. Poor Mike, we never did find enough of him for a decent funeral."

After saying goodnight, Rudolf walked into the yard. The night was warm and high-moving clouds obscured the moon. In the darkness, the prison looked bleak and inhospitable.

Rudolf Baumer waddled towards the administration building with his peculiar, rolling fat-man's gait. Lost in his thoughts, he didn't notice Mr. Kurtz.

"Mr. Baumer," the new warden said acidly. "A prison is no place to dream."

Rudolf flushed and looked up at Mr. Kurtz, towering thinly almost a foot above him.

"I am sorry," he stammered. "I didn't notice you in the dark."

Rudolf fidgeted nervously. Mr. Kurtz's height made him feel small and foolish.

"I understand there was trouble

in the mess-hall at supper, Mr. Baumer."

"No, Mr. Kurtz, no trouble. The prisoners are a little sullen. You push them too hard, Mr. Kurtz. They are disturbed, restless."

"Mr. Baumer, what happened during supper?"

"What happened?" Rudolf Baumer wiped his face nervously with the handkerchief. "Nothing happened. Some of the prisoners wouldn't eat and wouldn't get up from their chairs. Nothing."

Mr. Kurtz looked down at Rudolf. His small, oddly round head bobbed up and down on his long neck. "Nothing! You call that nothing? Mr. Baumer, these are madmen—criminally insane—and any breach of discipline is something. No matter how small."

As he spoke, a slight hysteria crept into his voice and little beads of perspiration gleamed on his forehead. Baumer thought with surprise: Kurtz is frightened, too. That may be why he does some of the things he does.

"Every breach of discipline must be dealt with," Mr. Kurtz continued, the bobbing of his head growing more pronounced. "We cannot coddle insane criminals, Mr. Baumer. They must be taught absolute, unquestioned discipline. I am canceling tomorrow's soccer game."

Rudolf Baumer's head was throbbing now in the full bloom of migraine. The pain from each spasm staggered him.

"Mr. Kurtz," he said, "they have been looking forward to this game for months. We cannot cancel it."

"These men must be taught discipline. They must learn to obey. They will pay for every infraction of prison rules."

Mr. Kurtz dabbed at the beads of perspiration on his forehead.

"Is that understood? No soccer game tomorrow."

"Yes," said Rudolf.

At lunch the next day, the mess-hall was charged with tension that almost crackled in the air. The prisoners ate sullenly. For the first time in years, the guards on the cat-walks overlooking the dining-room carried sawed-off shotguns.

Rudolf decided to talk to Mr. Kurtz once more. He would reason with him, show him why the men must play their soccer game. Perhaps he could make the warden change his mind.

At the warden's office, the secretary told Rudolf that Mr. Kurtz had left.

"He said something about the dining room," she said. "He might be there, but I'm not really sure."

"Look here, Mr. Kurtz," Rudolf muttered to himself on the way to the dining hall. He was rehearsing a speech he knew he would never deliver. "You must stop this nonsense. You cannot

destroy routine and expect things to run smoothly. This is a prison and it must be run along certain lines."

No one at the mess hall had seen Mr. Kurtz, but one of the guards thought he might be at the storehouse.

"I saw him walking that way," he said. "Must have been an hour ago."

"You have created an impossible situation, Mr. Kurtz," Rudolf continued his soliloquy as he walked, faster now, towards the storehouse. "I realize you are frightened. But you are doing everything wrong. You have destroyed routine. Routine, Mr. Kurtz, is the only thing that can control these men."

No one at the storehouse had seen the warden.

"That's strange," Rudolf said to the clerk. "Where can he be? I hope he hasn't gone into D-block. No telling what they're liable to do. No, he probably checked out. I'll try the gate."

He hurried to the big gate-block, but the guards there hadn't seen Mr. Kurtz, either.

"Nope," one of them said, "he's still in here, somewhere. He didn't check out—not this afternoon."

"Must be in one of the cell-blocks," Rudolf muttered.

"Yes," the guard agreed, "snooping around and looking for trouble."

The day-guards were returning to the gate to check out after being relieved by the new shift. One of them must know where the warden was.

"Seen Kurtz?" Rudolf asked.

"No," the men shook their heads.

Rudolf began to feel uneasy.

"Listen," one of the guards said. "What's that?"

There was a cheer from the athletic field. The guards rushed to the window. The prisoners, they saw, were lining up for the soccer match.

"He let them play!" Rudolf Baumer could hardly believe it. He went out of the gate-block and towards the field. The surge of relief that he felt was tempered by a curious anxiety. It was not like Mr. Kurtz to change his mind.

As he waddled towards the playing field, Rudolf Baumer felt the tension mounting again. It was as though a switch were pulled to turn on a dangerous electric current. But why? he wondered. They're playing the game and that is part of the ritual. Mr. Kurtz was using his head at last.

The store-clerk passed and stopped to talk to Rudolf.

"The warden changed his mind," he said.

"Looks like it."

"I thought sure we'd have another riot. They were in an ugly mood this afternoon."

They watched the prisoners line up.

"What did he say?" Rudolf asked. "When he changed his mind and agreed to let them play?"

There was another cheer as the prisoners started the game. Angel kicked off for his side. He ran towards the far goal, carefully booting the ball in front of him as he ran.

"I ain't seen Kurtz since lunch," the store-clerk said.

"You had to," Rudolf said. "You had to give him the ball."

The store-clerk was paying more attention to the game than to the conversation. "I didn't give the ball to Kurtz. I thought you did."

Angel had almost reached the far goal when one of the opposing players got in front of him and passed the ball towards the near goal with a powerful kick. With a roar the action headed now towards the two guards. A vicious kick sent the ball rolling past the boundary line. It rolled close enough to the guards for them to get a good look at it. Rudolf Baumer felt his migraine coming back—worse than he had ever known it. He heard the store-clerk's incredulous voice coming from a far, far distance:

"My God, Rudolf—look what they're using for a ball!" ■ ■

How do you feel about cats? They say that whether you like cats or not can be a clue to your character. Heh-heh. I like cats—especially ugly black ones, with yellow eyes, who prowl the tombstones at night. But I won't argue if you hate them. Every man to his own taste, I say, provided that, unlike Donald E. Westlake, he is able to foresee all *of the consequences . . .*

CAT KILLERS

by DONALD E. WESTLAKE

MORTY HATED CATS. THEY SLUNK along the ground and ate garbage. They hissed and scratched and their teeth were sharp. And their eyes were like devil's eyes, wide and cold and cruel and unblinking. Every time Morty saw a cat, he shivered and trembled and was afraid.

He hated that most of all, being afraid. He was fifteen, he belonged to the Forty-Fourth Street Avengers, he had once knifed a guy in the arm during a rumble. He wasn't scared of anything in the world, nobody he knew, not his old man or the teachers in school or the fuzz on the beat

with his lousy tin badge. He wasn't scared of anything except cats.

And that made him mad. He was mad at every cat in the world, for making him shiver and tremble and be afraid. He hated them, he wanted to kill them. *Cats!* He wanted them dead.

At first, he just threw rocks at them. Or beer cans, or whatever he could find. He'd be walking along, on his way home from the matinee at the movies because school was a drag and the teachers didn't care if he showed up or not, and he'd see a cat come slinking out of an alley. And he'd get scared. He'd want to turn around and run, he was so scared. But he'd get angry, too, and he'd look around for something to throw. A coke bottle out of a garbage can, a stone out of the gutter, anything. He'd throw it at the cat as hard as he could.

If he connected, the cat would yowl and hiss and jump around with his feet rigid and straight and the hair on his back standing up in the air, and Morty would keep throwing things until the cat took off and disappeared.

Only that wasn't enough. You throw a beer can at a cat, even if you hit him on the head, you don't kill him. You don't even hurt him very much. Cats have hard heads, hard solid heads. So Morty would holler and curse and throw things and wish he had a gun so he could blast the goddam cat right into the sidewalk.

The other guys couldn't figure out why Morty was so hopped up about cats. They'd say, "Come on, Morty, quit foolin' around with the goddam cat. Come on, we got a meetin'. Come on, whadaya so hot about cats for?"

And Morty would say, "I hate their lousy guts."

One day, it was a Saturday, Morty was sitting on the stoop, waiting for a couple of the guys to come around and maybe they'd sneak into the matinee, and this cat came out from the little passageway where the garbage cans were kept, and went *right by* Morty and up the stoop. Morty practically died. He shrank back against the railing and stared at the cat and he could feel his heart pounding away like a wild drum. The cat was tiger-striped and thin and filthy, and as it went up the steps its tongue came out and licked its chops.

Morty didn't even think. He just reached out and grabbed the cat by its tail and lifted it over his head and threw it down on the sidewalk. He threw it as hard as he could, and the cat didn't have time to get its feet under it. It landed on its back and head, and jumped right up. It staggered around for a couple of seconds, and then took off, back into the

passageway.

Morty stared after it, breathing hard. Then he looked at his hand, and he realized that he had touched a cat, *touched* one, with this hand. He ran upstairs and washed his hands, over and over again, and all of a sudden he threw up in the sink.

After that, he got madder than ever. The thing was, he was ashamed to even talk about it to anybody. He couldn't go up to one of the guys and say, "Look, I'm afraid of cats. I touched one and I threw up." The guy would look at him and say, "You're nuts." Or maybe, even worse, he'd say, "You're chicken."

And he couldn't tell his old man. Hell, he couldn't tell his old man anything. Six years ago, when Morty's mother died, his old man got drunk, and they were still waiting for him to sober up. If Morty said, "Pop, I'm scared of cats," his old man would say, "Open me a can of beer on your way out, will ya?"

And he couldn't tell any of his teachers in school. If he told one of them he was afraid of cats, they'd go off into that double-Dutch they talked to each other in, and he'd wind up on a couch in front of a nut doctor.

So there wasn't anybody he could talk to about it. He had to keep it inside, where it could fester and gnaw away at him and make him twist and turn in bed at night, staring at the ceiling and biting his lip. And sometimes, when the cats would be out in the alleys and the passageways, among the garbage cans, and they'd all start wailing and crying like damned souls in hell, Morty would lie in bed, soaking with sweat, and he'd get so terrified and so enraged he'd want to go out and rip them apart, rip their legs off, rip their tails off, rip their heads off, and he'd grab handfuls of sheet and thrash around in the bed, furious and afraid.

The next time he grabbed a cat, he didn't throw up. This one was sitting on the sidewalk, washing itself, and Morty grabbed it and threw it against a wall. The cat managed to leave a long red scratch on the back of his hand before he threw it, and as Morty stared with horror at the tiny drops of blood oozing out of the cut, the cat ran away under a car. Morty went home and washed his hands and put iodine on the cut and waited to see what would happen. After a while, the cut healed, but it left a thin pale scar on the back of his hand that wouldn't go away.

Morty wanted to kill them more than ever, now. They had cut him, they had put a mark on him. It

was the same as in a rumble. If a guy touched you with a knife, if he cut you, left a mark on you, you had to cut him back. You *had* to, some day, and until you did you were nothing. Once a guy cut you, you had to get him.

That's the way Morty felt about cats. They had cut him, and he had to get them. He had to.

Now he started looking for them, started prowling around the alleys and the passageways, poking around the garbage cans, crawling around the concrete-covered "yards" behind the apartment buildings. Practically all of his fear had been turned into rage. He was no longer afraid to touch cats. He wanted to touch them now, he wanted to get his hands on them.

At first, he'd just throw them, and if they were stunned the first time they hit, he'd pick them up and throw them again, and just keep throwing until they were dead. But most of the time the cat would get away after the first time he threw it, so he changed his tactics. Now, he'd grab a cat by the tail and swing it against a wall, smashing the cat's head against a wall, and he'd hold onto the tail and keep swinging until the cat's head was just a bloody pulp, and then he'd throw the dead thing away.

But that wasn't enough, either. They still yowled late at night, they still kept him awake when he should be sleeping, they still wandered around the neighborhood in the daylight. He wanted them dead, every one of them. No more cats, that's what he wanted. No more cats anywhere in the world.

And it wasn't enough any more to just kill them. He wanted to punish them, too, make them suffer, because they had made him suffer for so long.

So he found ways to punish them. He'd come up on a cat and he'd slam it into a wall to stun it. Then he'd take the pliers he always carried in his back pocket, and he'd break its legs, snap the bones with pliers. Then he'd sit down and wait for the cat to wake up. When the cat was awake and struggling to get up and get away, Morty would lift it high in the air and drop it onto the concrete. The cat would try to land on its legs, and would scream when the legs crumpled under it, and at the sound Morty would finally feel good. He'd feel relieved, freed, and he'd keep lifting the cat up in the air and dropping it, and the white bones would stick through the furred skin of the cat's legs, and the concrete would be spattered with the cat's blood, until finally it died.

He found other things to do, too. He'd pull out the cat's fur, hair by hair, with a pair of

tweezers. He'd take a thin metal rod and hold it over a match until the end was too hot to touch, and he'd shove the rod down the cat's throat.

He hated the eyes worst of all. Cat's eyes, huge and oval-shaped, staring at him with hate, no matter what he did. They never looked afraid, they never begged for mercy with their eyes. The eyes stared at him, and he could almost taste the hate. And he'd hold the cat's head with one hand and shove a stick into the eyes, grinding them into nothingness, leaving bloody holes where the terrible eyes had been.

And still they yowled at night, beneath his window, and he listened to their high shrieking and he thought he could see them looking in the window at him, and finally, one night, he'd had enough. He got out of bed, got dressed, took his pliers and his tweezers and the thin metal rod, and crept out of the apartment. It was after three o'clock in the morning, and the street was deserted, except for one fuzz in his blue uniform, walking along, swinging his billy.

Morty waited in the hallway for the fuzz to go by, and then he went out on the street. He listened. In an alleyway, off to his left, he heard the yowling of a cat; he heard a scuffling and a running, and then silence. He said, "All right, you bastard," and started after him.

It was dark in the alley, and he waited until his eyes were used to it, until he could make out the shapes of the garbage cans and the piles of rubbish. The cat was silent now, and he waited for it to make a noise, waited for it to let him know where it was.

He stood there for a couple of minutes, and then he heard a soft cat-wailing down at the end of the alley. Cautiously, silently, he worked his way down toward the sound.

When he got to the end of the alley, the cat was gone. There was a small square of concrete there, ringed by buildings, and another alleyway that went off to the right. Down in that alleyway, he heard movement, a sound like paper rattling, and then the soft catwail again. He went after it, moving slowly and carefully.

It kept ahead of him, moving through the alleys and passageways, the spaces behind and between the tenements. Once, Morty had to climb over a tall wooden fence after it. And the longer it took to catch up, the madder he got. And the madder he got, the more things he thought of to do to it.

Another alley, with a little bit of reflected light at the end, com-

ing from a streetlight somewhere. The cat called from down there, and he caught a glimpse of it as it scurried across the oval of light. It was a dead-end alley, and Morty smiled. He muttered, "I've got you now, you bastard," and he started down the alley.

He had to move slow, be careful the cat didn't get by him and escape. He had to be sure this time. And this time he was really going to give that cat the business. He had some ideas he'd never tried before.

He got down to the lighted place, at the end of the alley, and he saw it, peeking at him from behind a garbage can. He started for it, and heard a sound to his right. He turned. There was another one there, coming out from under a pile of old newspapers. Morty grinned. "You're next," he said.

But then another cat came out from the other side of the pile of papers, and when Morty looked back, there were three cats coming out from behind the garbage pail. A murmur came from behind him, and he looked down the alley. There were more cats there, more than he could count, they were pouring into the alley, they were coming down toward him.

He stared at them, too terrified to move or think or speak or do a thing. They came close to him, maybe three or four feet away, and stood there looking up at him. They were in a ring around him, looking at him out of their wide cold eyes. The last of them came into the alley and stopped, and there was silence.

Morty started to breathe again, a choking, rattling breathing. He had to get away. Cats, what could they do to him? He could get away. Run down the alley, turn, out to the street—which way? He was lost back here, it was a maze, he didn't know how to get to the street. But he could still get away from them. They couldn't do anything to him. He stared at them, the circle of cat faces and hate-filled cat eyes. He breathed deeply, and started to run. And they rose up in front of him, and he saw the claws come out, and as the bodies hit him, he screamed.

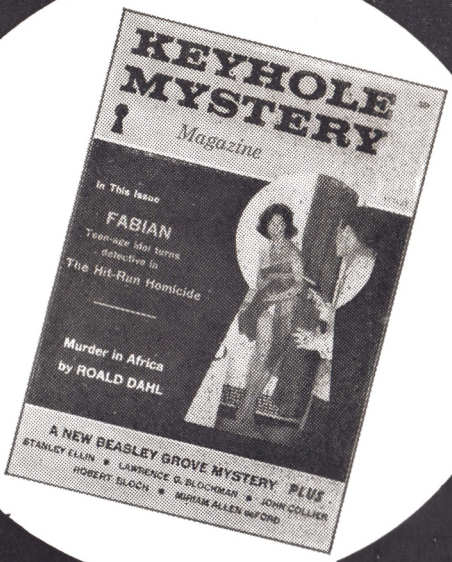
An hour later, the fuzz found him. Morty was crawling out of the alley when the fuzz came along, whistling, swinging his billy, and the fuzz stopped walking, stopped whistling, and stared down at him.

Morty was crawling. Not with his arms and legs, they were broken, and the bones were sticking ragged points through the bleeding flesh. He was squirming on his stomach, inching forward, painfully, blindly. Because he

didn't have eyes any more. Blood trickled down his scarred face from his mangled eye sockets. And out of his scorched and blackened throat there came a sound, a mewing, a mewing like a cat.

The cop stared down at Morty, and as he stared a cat ran out of the alley. The cat stopped for a minute and looked at Morty, and then it ran way. The cop looked after the cat. "Scared out of its wits," he said to himself. "And no wonder."

And Morty inched along the pavement, and from his mouth came the sound, the mewing, the mewing. ■ ■



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