SHUDDERS IN THE DARK

Edited by Ruskin Bond
Those who believe in the cold light of reason and its certain triumph over darkness are in for a surprise. These select tales are meant to arouse nervousness not to be overcome by simple rationality. There are situations, occurrences, images that will take the reader to the very extremes of his imagination, and he will be inevitably drawn in to play the perverse game of excitement-by-fright with the writer. Written by the best in the genre, this collection has some of the most incredible tales of panic and thrill, horror and alarm. The reader will find himself grappling with the mystery about an incredible ghost, the terror of a perfect murder, the adventures in cold stormy nights, the guile of cunning spirits, and the fearful wrath of the dead.

Free reign has been given to the wild elements of the night to make each reader shudder in the dark!

**Ruskin Bond**, well-known as one of India’s best-loved and most prolific writers, has been writing novels, poetry, essays and short stories for almost half a century now. Apart from this, over the years he has expertly compiled and edited a number of anthologies. For his outstanding literary contribution, he was awarded the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957, the Sahitya Akademi award in 1992 (for English writing in India) and the Padma Shri in 1999.
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Shudders in the Dark

Edited by
Ruskin Bond
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INTRODUCTION

The 'unknown' is the most inexhaustible theme of story writing for the simple reason that mystery is an inextricable part of human life. Anything even slightly unusual easily stirs up considerable interest. Readers always enjoy delving into a story that has an element of wonder. Yet, it takes talent to create occurrences that are entirely new and original, to think up something different each time. I have always delighted in the range of the human imagination and the infinite number of visions it can conjure up.

Most of the writers of this collection wrote at the high point of scientific revolution in the west. Paradoxically, or perhaps because of that, the irrational aspect— that part of human experience that could not be proven scientifically—caught the fancy of many readers of the time. The hidden, ungraspable world that was pooh-poohed in the Age of Reason nevertheless kept countless readers addicted. And death was given its pleasurable aspect in literature, where writers attempted to maintain not only its obscurity but also its terror. A few masters of the genre are Ambrose Bierce, Thomas Burke and the Heron brothers.

The story by the Herons in this book is a web of bizarre details that bewilders and fascinates long after the story is over. The vivid description of the ghost that is disgusting even before it is scary is one of the most remarkable among those I have ever read. Then, the diabolic nature of spirits comes alive in the story by H. Russell Wakefield. A few simple and seemingly harmless sentences at the end contain a shock not easy to recover from.

Scary stories are like roller coaster rides—the reader is teased, is suddenly brought face to face with the possibility of death, or death itself is called back to life! The pounding heartbeat, a growing chill, the feeling of being utterly alone—all sensations associated with imminent danger excite us in a way that has no parallel. The Marryat fantasy of a werewolf in the icy Hartz Mountains is one such terrifying tale of isolation and fear.

Besides the supernatural, in which one's interest can never wane, suspense in the realm of rationality too has numerous possibilities and continues to provide much pleasure. Crime and detective fiction have had their share of influence on me, though not in real life.... The perversity of reading about the unnatural crime of murder—that we all surely wished to commit at some point or the other!—is aided
by our furtive admiration for the murderer. Yet, a cold-blooded act carried out methodically can give us a jolt traceable to our innermost being. Here, the witty humorist Stacy Aumonier brilliantly conveys the frightening aspect of a murder perfectly executed—for none other than the murderer himself!

The stark epic theme of man's struggle against the fury of the elements is another one that keeps the reader on edge and makes him identify with the protagonist's vulnerabilities and (mis)fortunes. 'The Last Match' by this relatively unheard of writer is the story of one such fated woman who is caught in a life-or-death situation caused by the silliest of reasons and the most trivial of objects.

So, buckle up and get ready for a thrilling journey of horror and dread, adventure and panic. And remember, the fun is not in conquering one's fears, but in giving in to them!

Ruskin Bond
One evening in November two brothers were seated in a little café in the Rue de la Roquette discussing murders. The evening papers lay in front of them, and they all contained a lurid account of a shocking affair in the Landes district, where a charcoal-burner had killed his wife and two children with a hatchet. From discussing this murder in particular they went on to discussing murder in general.

'I've never yet read a murder case without being impressed by the extraordinary clumsiness of it,' remarked Paul, the younger brother. 'Here's this fellow who murders his victims with his own hatchet, leaves his hat behind in the shed, and arrives at a village hard by with blood on his boots.'

'They lose their heads,' said Henri, the elder. 'In cases like that they are mentally unbalanced, hardly responsible for their actions.'

'Yes,' replied Paul, 'but what impresses me is—what a lot of murders must be done by people who take trouble, who leave not a trace behind.'

Henri shrugged his shoulders. 'I shouldn't think it was so easy, old boy; there's always something that crops up.'

'Nonsense! I'll guarantee there are thousands done every year. If you are living with anyone, for instance, it must be the easiest thing in the world to murder them.'

'How?'

'Oh, some kind of accident—and then you go screaming into the street, "Oh, my poor wife! Help!" You burst into tears, and everyone consoles you. I read of a woman somewhere who murdered her husband by leaving the window near the bed open at night when he was suffering from pneumonia. Who's going to suspect a case like that? Instead of that, people must always select revolvers, or knives, or go and buy poison at the chemist's across the way.'

'It sounds as though you were contemplating a murder yourself,' laughed Henri.

'Well, you never know,' answered Paul; 'circumstances might arise when a murder would be the only way out of a difficulty. If ever my time comes I shall take a lot of trouble about it. I promise you I shall leave no trace behind.'

As Henri glanced at his brother making this remark he was struck by the fact that
there was indeed nothing irreconcilable between the idea of a murder and the idea of Paul doing it. He was a big, saturnine-looking gentleman with a sallow, dissolute face, framed in a black square beard and swathes of untidy grey hair. His profession was that of a traveller in cheap jewellery, and his business dealings were not always of the straightest. Henri shuddered. With his own puny physique, bad health, and vacillating will, he was always dominated by his younger brother. He himself was a clerk in a drapery store, and he had a wife and three children. Paul was unmarried.

The brothers saw a good deal of each other, and were very intimate. But the word friendship would be an extravagant term to apply to their relationship. They were both always hard up, and they borrowed money from each other when every other source failed.

They had no other relatives except a very old uncle and aunt who lived at Chantilly. This uncle and aunt, whose name was Taillandier, were fairly well off, but they would have little to do with the two nephews. They were occasionally invited there to dinner, but neither Paul nor Henri ever succeeded in extracting a franc out of Uncle Robert. He was a very religious man, hard-fisted, cantankerous, and intolerant. His wife was a little more pliable. She was in effect an eccentric. She had spasms of generosity, during which periods both the brothers had at times managed to get money out of her. But these were rare occasions. Moreover, the old man kept her so short of cash that she found it difficult to help her nephews even if she desired to.

As stated, the discussion between the two brothers occurred in November. It was presumably forgotten by both of them immediately afterwards. And indeed, there is no reason to believe that it would ever have recurred, except for certain events which followed the sudden death of Uncle Robert in the February of the following year.

In the meantime, the affairs of both Paul and Henri had gone disastrously. Paul had been detected in a dishonest transaction over a paste trinket, and had just been released from a period of imprisonment. The knowledge of this had not reached his uncle before his death. Henri’s wife had had another baby, and had been very ill. He was more in debt than ever.

The news of the uncle’s death came as a gleam of hope in the darkness of despair. What kind of will had he left? Knowing their uncle, each was convinced that, however it was framed, there was likely to be little or nothing for them. However, the old villain might have left them a thousand or two. And in any case, if the money was all left to the wife, here was a possible field of plunder. It need hardly be said that they repaired with all haste to the funeral, and even with greater alacrity to the lawyer’s reading of the will.

The will contained surprises both encouraging and discouraging. In the first place the old man left a considerably larger fortune than anyone could have anticipated. In
the second place all the money and securities were carefully tied up, and placed under the control of trustees. There were large bequests to religious charities, whilst the residue was held in trust for his wife. But so far as the brothers were concerned the surprise came at the end. On her death this residue was still to be held in trust, but a portion of the interest was to be divided between Henri and Paul, and on their death to go to the Church. The old man had recognised a certain call of the blood after all!

They both behaved with tact and discretion at the funeral, and were extremely sympathetic and solicitous towards Aunt Rosalie, who was too absorbed with her own trouble to take much notice of them. It was only when it came to the reading of the will that their avidity and interest outraged perhaps the strict canons of good taste. It was Paul who managed to get it clear from the notary what the exact amount would probably be. Making allowances for fluctuations, accidents, and acts of God, on the death of Mme Taillandier the two brothers would inherit something between eight and ten thousand francs a year each. She was eighty-two and very frail.

The brothers celebrated the good news with a carouse up in Montmartre. Naturally their chief topic of conversation was how long the old bird would keep on her perch. In any case, it could not be many years. With any luck it might be only a few weeks. The fortune seemed blinding. It would mean comfort and security to the end of their days. The rejoicings were mixed with recriminations against the old man for his stinginess. Why couldn't he have left them a lump sum down now? Why did he want to waste all this good gold on the Church? Why all this trustee business?

There was little they could do but await developments. Except that in the meantime —after a decent interval—they might try and touch the old lady for a bit. They parted, and the next day set about their business in cheerier spirits.

For a time they were extremely tactful. They made formal calls on Aunt Rosalie, inquiring after her health, and offering their services in any capacity whatsoever. But at the end of a month Henri called hurriedly one morning, and after the usual professions of solicitude asked his aunt if she could possibly lend him one hundred and twenty francs to pay the doctor who had attended his wife and baby. She lent him forty, grumbling at his foolishness at having children he could not afford to keep. A week later came Paul with a story about being robbed by a client. He wanted a hundred. She lent him ten.

When these appeals had been repeated three or four times, and received similar treatment—and sometimes no treatment at all—the old lady began to get annoyed. She was becoming more and more eccentric. She now had a companion, an angular, middle-aged woman named Mme Chavanne, who appeared like a protecting goddess. Sometimes when the brothers called, Mme Chavanne would say that Mme Taillandier was too unwell to see anyone. If this news had been true it would have been good news indeed, but the brothers suspected that it was all pre-arranged. Two
years went by, and they both began to despair.

'She may live to a hundred,' said Paul.

'Ve shall die of old age, first,' grumbled Henri.

It was difficult to borrow money on the strength of the will. In the first place their friends were more of the borrowing than the lending class. And, anyone who had a little was suspicious of the story, and wanted all kinds of securities. It was Paul who first thought of going to an insurance company to try to raise money on the reversionary interest. They did succeed in the end in getting an insurance company to advance them two thousand francs each, but the negotiations took five months to complete, and by the time they had insured their lives, paid the lawyer's fees and paid for the various deeds and stamps, and signed some thirty or forty forms, each man only received a little over a thousand francs, which was quickly lost in paying accrued debts and squandering the remainder. Their hopes were raised by the dismissal of Mme Chavanne, only to be lowered again by the arrival of an even more aggressive companion. The companions came and went with startling rapidity. None of them could stand for any time the old lady's eccentricity and ill-temper. The whole of the staff was always being changed. The only one who remained loyal all through was the portly cook, Ernestine. Even this may have been due to the fact that she never came in touch with her mistress. She was an excellent cook, and never moved from the kitchen. Moreover, the cooking required by Mme Taillandier was of the simplest nature, and she seldom entertained. And, she hardly ever left her apartment. Any complaints that were made were made through the housekeeper, and the complaints and their retaliations became mellowed in the process; for Ernestine also had a temper of her own.

Nearly another year passed before what appeared to Paul to be a mild stroke of good fortune came his way. Things had been going from bad to worse. Neither of the brothers was in a position to lend a sou to the other. Henri's family was becoming a greater drag, and people were not buying Paul's trinkets.

One day, during an interview with his aunt—he had been trying to borrow more money—he fainted in her presence. It is difficult to know what it was about this act which affected the old lady, but she ordered him to be put to bed in one of the rooms of the villa. Possibly she jumped to the conclusion that he had fainted from lack of food—which was not true. Paul never went without food and drink—and she suddenly realised that after all he was her husband's sister's son. He must certainly have looked pathetic, this white-faced man, well past middle age, and broken in life. Whatever it was, she showed a broad streak of compassion for him. She ordered her servants to look after him, and to allow him to remain until she countermanded the order.

Paul, who had certainly felt faint, but quickly seized the occasion to make it as dramatic as possible, saw in this an opportunity to wheedle his way into his aunt's
favours. His behaviour was exemplary. The next morning, looking very white and shaky, he visited her, and asked her to allow him to go, as he had no idea of abusing her hospitality. If he had taken up the opposite attitude she would probably have turned him out, but because he suggested going she ordered him to stop. During the daytime he went about his dubious business, but he continued to return there at night to sleep, and to enjoy a good dinner cooked by the admirable Ernestine. He was in clover.

Henri was naturally envious when he heard of his brother's good fortune. And, Paul was fearful that Henri would spoil the whole game by going and throwing a fit himself in the presence of the aunt. But this, of course, would have been too obvious and foolish for even Henri to consider seriously. And, he racked his brains for some means of inveigling the old lady. Every plan he put forth, however, Paul sat upon. He was quite comfortable himself, and he didn't see the point of his brother butting in.

'Besides,' he said, 'she may turn me out any day. Then you can have your shot.'

They quarrelled about this, and did not see each other for some time. One would have thought that Henri's appeal to Mme Taillandier would have been stronger than Paul's. He was a struggling individual, with a wife and four children. Paul was a notorious ne'er-do-well, and he had no attachments. Nevertheless, the old lady continued to support Paul. Perhaps, it was because he was a big man, and she liked big men. Her husband had been a man of fine physique. Henri was puny, and she despised him. She had never had children of her own, and she disliked children. She was always upbraiding Henri and his wife for their fecundity. Any attempt to pander to her emotions through the sentiment of childhood failed. She would not have the children in her house. And, any small acts of charity which she bestowed upon them seemed to be done more with the idea of giving her an opportunity to inflict her sarcasm and venom upon them than out of the kindness of heart.

In Paul, on the other hand, she seemed to find something slightly attractive. She sometimes sent for him, and he, all agog—expecting to get his notice to quit—would be agreeably surprised to find that, on the contrary, she had some little commission she wished him to execute. And, you may rest assured that he never failed to make a few francs out of all these occasions. The notice to quit did not come. It may be—poor deluded woman!—that she regarded him as some kind of protection. He was in any case the only 'man' who slept under her roof.

At first she seldom spoke to him, but as time went on she would sometimes send for him to relieve her loneliness. Nothing could have been more ingratiating than Paul's manners in these circumstances. He talked expansively about politics, knowing beforehand his aunt's views, and just what she would like him to say. Her eyesight was very bad, and he would read her the news of the day, and tell her what was happening in Paris. He humoured her every whim. He was astute enough to see
that it would be foolish and dangerous to attempt to borrow money for the moment.
He was biding his time, and trying to think out the most profitable plan of campaign.
There was no immediate hurry. His bed was comfortable, and Ernestine's cooking
was excellent.

In another year's time he had established himself quite as one of the permanent
household. He was consulted about the servants, and the doctors, and the
management of the house, everything except the control of money, which was
jealously guarded by a firm of lawyers. Many a time he would curse his uncle's
foresight. The old man's spirit seemed to be hovering in the dim recesses of the
over-crowded rooms, mocking him. For the old lady, eccentric and foolish in many
ways, kept a strict check upon her dividends. It was her absorbing interest in life,
that and an old grey perroquet, which she treated like a child. Its name was Anna,
and it used to walk up and down her table at meal-times and feed off her own plate.
Finding himself so firmly entrenched, Paul's assurance gradually increased. He
began to treat his aunt as an equal, and sometimes even to contradict her, and she
did not seem to resent it.

In the meantime, Henri was eating his heart out with jealousy and sullen rage. The
whole thing was unfair. He occasionally saw Paul, who boasted openly of his strong
position in the Taillandier household, and he would not believe that Paul was not
getting money out of the old lady as well as board and lodging. With no additional
expenses Paul was better dressed than he used to be, and he looked fatter and better
in health. All—or nearly all—of Henri's appeals, although pitched in a most pathetic
key, were rebuffed. He felt a bitter hatred against his aunt, his brother, and life in
general. If only she would die! What was the good of life to a woman at eighty-five
or six? And, there was he—four young children, clamouring for food, and clothes,
and the ordinary decent comforts. And, there was Paul, idling his days away at cafes
and his nights at cabarets—nothing to do, and no responsibilities.

Meeting Paul one day he said:
'I say, old boy, couldn't you spring me a hundred francs? I haven't the money to
pay my rent next week.'
'She gives me nothing,' replied Paul.
Henri did not believe this, but it would be undiplomatic to quarrel. He said:
'Aren't there—isn't there some little thing lying about the villa you could slip in
your pocket? We could sell it, see? Go shares. I'm desperately pushed.'
Paul looked down his nose. Name of a pig! Did Henri think he had never thought
of that? Many and many a time the temptation had come to him. But no; every few
months people came from the lawyer's office, and the inventory of the whole
household was checked. The servants could not be suspected. They were not selected
without irreproachable characters. If he were suspected—well, all kinds of
unpleasant things might crop up. Oh, no, he was too well off where he was. The
game was to lie in wait. The old lady simply must die soon. She had even been complaining of her chest that morning. She was always playing with the perroquet. Somehow this bird got on Paul's nerves. He wanted to wring its neck. He imitated the way she would say: 'There's a pretty lady! Oh, my sweet! Another nice grape for my little one. There's a pretty lady!' He told Henri all about this, and the elder brother went on his way with a grunt that only conveyed doubt and suspicion.

In view of this position, it seemed strange that in the end it was Paul who was directly responsible for the dénouement in the Taillandier household. His success went to his rather weak head like wine. He began to swagger and buster and abuse his aunt's hospitality. And, curiously enough, the more he advanced the further she withdrew. The eccentric old lady seemed to be losing her powers of resistance so far as he was concerned. And, he began to borrow small sums of money from her, and, as she acquiesced so readily, to increase his demands. He let his travelling business go, and sometimes he would get lost for days at a time. He would spend his time at the races, and drinking with doubtful acquaintances in obscure cafes. Sometimes he won, but in the majority of cases he lost. He ran up bills and got into debt. By cajoling small sums out of his aunt he kept his debtors at bay for nearly nine months.

But one evening he came to see Henri in a great state of distress. His face, which had taken on a healthier glow when he first went to live with his aunt, had become puffy and livid. His eyes were bloodshot.

'Old boy,' he said, 'I'm at my wits end. I've got to find seven thousand francs by the twenty-first of the month, or they're going to foreclose. How do you stand? I'll pay you back.'

To try to borrow money from Henri was like appealing to the desert for a cooling draught. He also had to find money by the twenty-first, and he was overdrawn at the bank. They exchanged confidences, and in their mutual distress they felt sorry for each other and for themselves. It was a November evening, and the rain was driving along the boulevards in fitful gusts. After trudging a long way they turned into a little cafe in the Rue de la Roquette, and sat down and ordered two cognacs. The cafe was almost deserted. A few men in mackintoshes were scattered around reading the evening papers. They sat at a marble table in the corner and tried to think of ways and means. But after a time a silence fell between them. There seemed nothing more to suggest. They could hear the rain beating on the skylight. An old man four tables away was poring over La Patrie.

Suddenly, Henri looked furtively around the room and clutched his brother's arm. 'Paul!' he whispered. 'What is it?'

'Do you remember—it has all come back to me—suddenly—one night, a night something like this—it must be five or six years ago—we were seated here in this
same café—do you remember?'

'No. I don't remember. What was it?'

'It was the night of that murder in the Landes district. We got talking about—don't you remember?'

Paul scratched his temple and sipped the cognac. Henri leant closer to him.

'You said—you said that if you lived with anyone, it was the easiest thing in the world to murder them. An accident, you know And, you go screaming into the street —'

Paul started, and stared at his brother, who continued:

'You said that if ever you—you had to do it, you would guarantee that you would take every trouble. You wouldn't leave a trace behind.'

Paul was acting. He pretended to half-remember, to half-understand. But his eyes narrowed. Imbecile! Hadn't he been through it all in imagination a hundred times? Hadn't he already been planning and scheming an act for which his brother would reap half the benefit? Nevertheless, he was staggered. He never imagined that the suggestion would come from Henri. He was secretly relieved. If Henri was to receive half the benefit, let him also share half the responsibilities. The risk in any case would be wholly his. He grinned enigmatically, and they put their heads together. And so, in that dim corner of the cafe was planned the perfect murder.

Coming up against the actual proposition, Paul had long since realised that the affair was not so easy of accomplishment as he had so airily suggested. For the thing must be done without violence, without clues, without trace. Such ideas as leaving the window open at night were out of the question, as the companion slept in the same room. Moreover, the old lady was quite capable of getting out of bed and shutting it herself if she felt a draught. Some kind of accident? Yes, but what? Suppose she slipped and broke her neck when Paul was in the room. It would be altogether too suspicious. Besides, she would probably only partially break her neck. She would regain sufficient consciousness to tell. To drown her in her bath? The door was always locked or the companion hovering around.

'You've always got to remember,' whispered Paul, 'if any suspicion falls on me, there's the motive. There's strong motive why I should—it's got to be absolutely untraceable. I don't care if some people do suspect afterwards—when we've got the money.'

'What about her food?'

'The food is cooked by Ernestine, and the companion serves it. Besides, suppose I got a chance to tamper with the food, how am I going to get hold of—you know?'

'Weed-killer?'

'Yes, I should be in a pretty position if they traced the fact that I had bought weed-killer. You might buy some and let me have a little on the quiet.'

Henri turned pale. 'No, no; the motive applies to me, too. They'd get us both.'
When the two pleasant gentlemen parted at midnight their plans were still very immature, but they arranged to meet the following evening. It was the thirteenth of the month. To save the situation the deed must be accomplished within eight days. Of course, they wouldn't get the money at once, but, knowing the circumstances, creditors would be willing to wait. When they met the following evening in the Café des Sentiers, Paul appeared flushed and excited, and Henri was pale and on edge. He hadn't slept. He wanted to wash the whole thing out.

'And, sell up your home, I suppose?' sneered Paul.

'Listen, my little cabbage. I've got it. Don't distress yourself. You proposed this last night. I've been thinking about it and watching for months. Ernestine is a good cook, and very methodical. Oh, very methodical! She does everything every day in the same way exactly to the schedule. My apartment is on the same floor, so I am able to appreciate her punctuality and exactness. The old woman eats sparingly and according to routine. One night she has fish. The next night she has a soufflé made with two eggs. Fish, soufflé, fish, soufflé, regular as the beat of a clock. Now, listen. After lunch every day Ernestine washes up the plates and pans. After that she prepares roughly the evening meal. If it is a fish night, she prepares the fish ready to pop into the pan. If it is a soufflé night, she beats up two eggs and puts them ready in a basin. Having done that, she changes her frock, powders her nose, and goes over to the convent to see her sister who is working there. She is away an hour and a half. She returns punctually at four o'clock. You could set your watch by her movements.'

'Yes, but—'

'It is difficult to insert what I propose in fish, but I don't see any difficulty in dropping it into two beaten-up eggs, and giving an extra twist to the egg-whisk, or whatever they call it.'

Henri's face was quite grey.

'But—but—Paul, how are you going to get hold of the—poison?'

'Who said anything about poison?'

'Well, but what?'

'That's where you come in.'

'I!'

'Yes, you're in it, too, aren't you? You get half the spoils, don't you? Why shouldn't you—some time to-morrow when your wife's out—'

'What?'

'Just grind up a piece of glass.'

'Glass!'

'Yes, you've heard of glass, haven't you? An ordinary piece of broken wine-glass will do. Grind it up as fine as a powder, the finer the better, the finer the more—effective.'

Henri gasped. No, no, he couldn't do this thing. Very well, then; if he was such a
coward Paul would have to do it himself. And perhaps, when the time came Henri would also be too frightened to draw his dividends. Perhaps, he would like to make them over to his dear brother Paul? Come, it was only a little thing to do. Eight days to the twenty-first. To-morrow, fishday, but Wednesday would be soufflé. So easy, so untraceable, so safe.

'But you,' whined Henri, 'they will suspect you.'

'Even if they do they can prove nothing. But in order to avoid this unpleasantness I propose to leave home soon after breakfast. I shall return at a quarter-past three, letting myself in through the stable yard. The stables, as you know, are not used. There is no one else on that floor. Ernestine is upstairs. She only comes down to answer the front-door bell. I shall be in and out of the house within five minutes, and I shan't return till late at night, when perhaps—I may be too late to render assistance.'

Henri was terribly agitated. On one hand was—just murder, a thing he had never connected himself with in his life. On the other hand was comfort for himself and his family, an experience he had given up hoping for. It was in any case not exactly murder on his part. It was Paul's murder. At the same time, knowing all about it, being an accessory before the fact, it would seem contemptible to a degree to put the whole onus on Paul. Grinding up a piece of glass was such a little thing. It couldn't possibly incriminate him. Nobody could ever prove that he'd done it. But it was a terrible step to take.

'Have another cognac, my little cabbage.'

It was Paul's voice that jerked him back to actuality. He said: 'All right, yes, yes,' but whether this referred to the cognac or to the act of grinding up a piece of glass he hardly knew himself.

From that moment to twenty-four hours later, when he handed over a white packet to his brother across the same table at the Café des Sentiers, Henri seemed to be in a nightmarish dream. He had no recollection of how he had passed the time. He seemed to pass from that last cognac to this one, and the interval was a blank.

'Fish to-day, soufflé to-morrow;' he heard Paul chuckling. 'Brother, you have done your work well.'

When Paul went he wanted to call after him to come back, but he was frightened of the sound of his own voice. He was terribly frightened. He went to bed very late and could not sleep. The next morning he awoke with a headache, and he got his wife to telegraph to the office to say that he was too ill to come. He lay in bed all day, visualising over and over and over again the possible events of the evening.

Paul would be caught. Someone would catch him actually putting the powder into the eggs. He would be arrested. Paul would give him away. Why did Paul say it was so easy to murder anyone if you lived with them? It wasn't easy at all. The whole thing was chock-a-block with dangers and pitfalls. Pitfalls! At half-past three he started up in bed. He had a vision of himself and Paul being guillotined side by side!
He must stop it at any cost. He began to get up. Then he realised that it was already too late. The deed had been done. Paul had said that he would be in and out of the house within five minutes at three-fifteen—a quarter of an hour ago! Where was Paul? Would he be coming to see him? He was going to spend the evening out somewhere, 'returning late at night'.

He dressed feverishly. There was still time. He could call at his aunt's. Rush down to the kitchen, seize the basin of beaten-up eggs, and throw them away. But where? How? By the time he got there Ernestine would have returned. She would want to know all about it. The egg mixture would be examined, analysed. God in Heaven! It was too late! The thing would have to go on, and he suffer and wait.

Having dressed, he went out after saying to his wife:

'It's all right. It's going to be all right,' not exactly knowing what he meant. He walked rapidly along the streets with no fixed destination in his mind. He found himself in the cafe in the Rue de la Roquette, where the idea was first conceived, where he had reminded his brother.

He sat there drinking, waiting for the hours to pass.

Soufflé day, and the old lady dined at seven! It was now not quite five. He hoped Paul would turn up. A stranger tried to engage him in conversation. The stranger apparently had some grievance against a railway company. He wanted to tell him all the details about a contract for rivets, over which he had been disappointed. Henri didn't understand a word he was talking about. He didn't listen. He wanted the stranger to drop down dead or vanish into thin air. At last he called the waiter and paid for his reckoning, indicated by a small pile of saucers. From there he walked rapidly to the Café des Sentiers, looking for Paul. He was not there. Six o'clock. One hour more. He could not keep still. He paid and went on again, calling at cafe after cafe. A quarter to seven. Pray God that she threw it away. Had he ground it fine enough?

Five minutes to seven. Seven o'clock. Now. He picked up his hat and went again. The brandy had gone to his head. At half-past seven he laughed recklessly. After all, what was the good of life to this old woman of eighty-six? He tried to convince himself that he had done it for the sake of his wife and children. He tried to concentrate on the future, how he could manage on eight or ten thousand francs a year. He would give notice at the office, be rude to people who had been bullying him for years—that old blackguard Mocquin!

At ten o'clock he was drunk, torpid, and indifferent. The whole thing was over for good or ill. What did it matter? He terribly wanted to see Paul, but he was too tired to care very much. The irrevocable step had been taken. He went home to bed and fell into a heavy drunken sleep.

'Henri! Henri! Wake up! What is the matter with you?'

His wife was shaking him. He blinked his way into a partial condition of
consciousness. November sunlight was pouring into the room.

'It's late, isn't it?' he said, involuntarily.

'It's past eight. You'll be late at the office. You didn't go yesterday. If you go on like this you'll get the sack, and then what shall we do?'

Slowly the recollection of last night's events came back to him.

'There's nothing to worry about,' he said. 'I'm too ill to go to-day. Send them another telegram. It'll be all right.'

His wife looked at him searchingly. 'You've been drinking,' she said. "Oh, you men! God knows what will become of us."

She appeared to be weeping in her apron. It struck him forcibly at that instant how provoking and small women are. Here was Jeannette crying over her petty troubles. Whereas he—

The whole thing was becoming vivid again. Where was Paul? What had happened? Was it at all likely that he could go down to an office on a day like this, a day that was to decide his fate?

He groaned, and elaborated rather pathetically his imaginary ailments, anything to keep this woman quiet. She left him at last, and he lay there waiting for something to happen. The hours passed. What would be the first intimation? Paul or the gendarmes? Thoughts of the latter stirred him to a state of fevered activity. About midday he arose, dressed, and went out. He told his wife he was going to the office, but he had no intention of doing so. He went and drank coffee at a place up in the Marais. He was terrified of his old haunts. He wandered from place to place, uncertain how to act. Late in the afternoon he entered a cafe in the Rue Alibert. At a kiosk outside he bought a late edition of an afternoon newspaper. He sat down, ordered a drink, and opened the newspaper. He glanced at the central news page, and as his eye absorbed one paragraph he unconsciously uttered a low scream. The paragraph was as follows:

**Mysterious Affair At Chantilly**

A mysterious affair occurred at Chantilly this morning. A middle-aged man, named Paul Denoyel, complained of pains in the stomach after eating an omelette. He died soon after in great agony. He was staying with his aunt, Mme Taillandier. No other members of the household were affected. The matter is to be inquired into.

The rest was a dream. He was only vaguely conscious of the events which followed. He wandered through it all, the instinct of self-preservation bidding him hold his tongue in all circumstances. He knew nothing. He had seen nothing. He had a visionary recollection of a plump, weeping Ernestine, at the inquest, enlarging
upon the eccentricities of her mistress. A queer woman, who would brook no contradiction. He heard a lot about the fish day and the soufflé day, and how the old lady insisted that this was a fish day, and, and that she had had a soufflé the day before. You could not argue with her when she was like that. And, Ernestine had beaten up the eggs all ready for the soufflé—most provoking! But Ernestine was a good cook, of method and economy. She wasted nothing. What should she do with the eggs? Why, of course, Mr Paul, who since he had come to live there was never content with a café complet. He must have a breakfast, like these English and other foreigners do. She made him an omelette, which he ate heartily.

Then the beaten-up eggs with their deadly mixture were intended for Mme Taillandier? But who was responsible for this? Ernestine? But there was no motive here. Ernestine gained nothing by her mistress's death. Indeed she only stood to lose her situation. Motive? Was it possible that the deceased...The inquiry went on a long while. Henri himself was conscious of being in the witness-box. He knew nothing. He couldn't understand it. His brother would not be likely to do that. He himself was prostrate with grief. He loved his brother.

There was nothing to do but return an open verdict. Shadowy figures passed before his mind's eye—shadowy figures and shadowy realisations. He had perfectly murdered his brother. The whole of the dividends of the estate would one day be his, and his wife's and children's. Eighteen thousand francs a year! One day—

One vision more vivid than the rest—the old lady on the day following the inquest, seated bolt upright at her table, like a figure of perpetuity, playing with the old grey perroquet, stroking its mangy neck.

There's a pretty lady! Oh, my sweet! Another nice grape for my little one. There's a pretty lady!
'Well, I guess we'd better be hitting for home. I don't like the smell of that wind. She's going to blizz before long, or I miss my guess.'

'By golly, I believe you're right. A dollar, fifty. That's right. Good-bye, Mr Mawson. Good-bye, Mrs Mills.'

The owner of the feed company dumped the sack of corn meal behind the seat, Mawson clicked his tongue to his horse and the cutter moved off up the one street of Sunset with a merry jingling of sleigh bells.

The little prairie town was half asleep under its mantle of snow, for it was the third winter since the slump in wheat. For three years the price of No. 1 Northern had hovered round sixty cents on the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, and times were hard: harder than anyone could remember, butter being used for axle grease and eggs fed direct to the pigs for lack of a better market.

The neighbouring farmers no longer thronged into Sunset on Saturdays in their cars. One of the two garages was closed, and the other only employed one man instead of four. The cinema gave one performance a week, and the Rex Café and the Good Eats Café had an occasional customer. The stores were listless, and Ed Wilson's barber's shop and pool-room were nearly empty. This latter fact proved the severity of the depression beyond any doubt, for when the pool-room is empty, times are hard indeed. Not even the farmers themselves scanned the news of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange with greater eagerness than did the storekeepers and merchants of Sunset. Wheat was no longer king when No.1 Northern was only sixty cents a bushel.

Within a minute or two the cutter had left the little town behind, and the main street of Sunset had given place to a long straight road, stretching endlessly and always perfectly straight across the bald prairie. Behind them the grain elevator reared its white height into the air, watching over Sunset as the church spire watches over the villages of older lands.

For some time the man and woman drove in silence, wrapped in the warm buffalo robe which keeps out any draughts. The noise of the horse's hoofs was deadened by
the snow, and the only sound was the jingling of the sleigh bells. Talk held no attraction for either of them; talk meant discussion of the price of wheat, and No. 1 Northern was only sixty cents in Winnipeg.

At last Mawson spoke:

'Seems queer to be driving in a cutter again. Takes me back to before the war. I guess we'd all have been better off if we'd never had any cars; but once you've had one, you kind a seem lost without it. A rig seems so slow.'

'It certainly does,' she answered, and they drove on in silence.

The winter had been extraordinarily mild without one sub-zero spell. For the last two days it had been snowing with a slight south wind: a steady fall of what the prairie calls wet snow (though, even so, far drier than any which ever falls in England). The air was still full of white flakes, falling silently and yet at the same time making a gentle, almost imperceptible, patter as they settled on their hats and on the buffalo robe, which was now altogether white where it covered their knees.

The trail they had made driving into Sunset was vague and nearly obliterated. It was hard work for the horse breaking a fresh track, and progress was slow. The flakes of snow seemed to be growing smaller and falling faster, and, though they had blown into their faces during the drive into Sunset, now on the return trip they still blew slantwise against them.

'I don't like the smell of it,' Mawson muttered. 'The wind's backed to the north and that sure means something.' He raised his voice and called, 'Git on there, Pete.'

Pete shook his ears and settled his shoulders into the traces. He needed no urging, for he, too, had felt the change of wind and wanted to get back to his stable.

Gradually the gusts increased in force. On the drive in it had been pleasant to feel the south wind driving the soft flakes against their faces. They had felt almost warm as they touched the cheek.

But there was a bite in this new wind. There was no doubt now that the flakes had grown much smaller. They grew smaller every minute until they were tiny atoms blowing straight against them in a line almost parallel with the ground. The wind, coming in a sweep across hundreds of miles of barren tundra in the Arctic Circle, without a single obstacle in the way to lessen its force, brought a wave of cold that made them shiver.

Already the mercury in thermometers on the international boundary was beginning to fall. By midnight it would be falling in the cities of the middle United States, and by midnight, twenty-four hours later, workers on cotton plantations in the Mississippi Valley, 2,000 miles to the south, would be shivering as the tail end of the storm reached them, tamed at last after its swoop across the prairies.

Presently the tiny flakes of snow began to sting their faces. As the gusts increased, the snow came in swirling clouds, rather as though someone was shaking the folds of a gigantic white carpet. During these gusts it was impossible to see more than a
few yards ahead, and the sense of direction was lost as in a fog. It almost seemed that the snow was a fog, so dry it was, filtering like a fog into tiny gaps in the clothing. It crept between the top of the gloves and the sleeve of the overcoat and down the gap between the muffler and coat collar.

The wind, devoid of moisture, dried the snow which had already fallen, whirling it up into twisting spirals to join the horizontal sweep of the driven flakes. It drove the light powder against the slightest obstacles, so that each fence post was covered for a few inches on its windward side. By morning they would be nearly buried in the drifts, whose nucleus they were forming.

The man and woman sat closer together on the seat of the cutter, their heads thrust forward so that the snow would have less chance of seeping down their necks. He raised his hands to pull down his ear-flaps, and the snow fell off his mittens like powdered salt. Not a single flake had stuck to them, it was so dry.

At length Mawson indulged in the gloomy satisfaction of a prophet whose words have come true.

'I knew I could smell a blizzard coming,' he said. 'It's lucky we weren't two hours late. I guess your husband ought to be safely in the shack by now.'

She turned to answer him, and the movement allowed the wind to blow all the snow from her hat.

'Yes, he'll be all right. Reckoned he'd reach there by three.'

She bent her head to face the wind again, and they drove in silence. Her husband had left home at four o'clock that morning to drive to the bush, which began in sheltered bluffs to the north of them. The northern prairie gives way to belts of semi-stunted trees where the ground holds more moisture.

With No.1 Northern only sixty cents a bushel in Winnipeg the farmer cannot afford to buy coal, and her husband and a neighbour had gone to cut a year's supply of fuel in the poplar bluffs. Later they would have to haul it thirty miles to their homes, sitting on top of their loads as the sleighs crossed the snowy plain, the thermometer below zero and as likely as not a bitter wind numbing them in body and mind.

The cutter was approaching a house standing a little back from the road; a gaunt, unpainted, wooden house without any pretensions to adornment. It was simply an enclosed rectangle, with a front door and a back door and four rooms, and the necessary windows to admit light: a house rather than a home, a place in which to eat and sleep and take shelter from the weather, like most of the other houses on prairie farms.

It rose straight from the flat field. There was no hedge, no railings, no lawn, no flower garden, to separate it from the wheat-land. Close beside it was a huge barn, dwarfing the house as the farm dwarfed the human beings who worked it.

Mawson drove up to the back door, and the woman got out, taking with her a
shallow, open, wooden box which had once contained cans of condensed milk. It was now piled with brown-paper parcels, the groceries for which she had traded her butter, and underneath was her mail. The parcels were covered with a thick powder of snow which had filtered in under the buffalo robe, filling up the spaces between them till they looked like one amorphous lump.

'Thanks for driving me in,' she shouted.

'Aw, shucks, that's nothing. You're sure you'll be all right alone?'

'Yes, Jim fixed up everything before he left.'

'Have you got everything?' he asked.

'Yes,' she shouted as a gust, fiercer than any which had come before, enveloped them in swirling white.

It blew the tiny flakes into their eyes and ears and down their necks, and lifted a cloud from the box that for a minute blinded them. She had a fleeting impression that one of the top parcels had blown into the drift already forming; but when she was able to see again and looked at the box, it was once more covered white. And the snow round them looked just as it had done.

She was half frozen and wanted to gain the warmth of the house; Pete was pawing his feet, longing to be on the way to his stable, and she knew it was not wise for Mawson to linger. He had three more miles to go before he reached home, and if he did not go quickly he might be badly frostbitten, as the blizzard was increasing every minute.

She looked at her box again. It seemed just the same. She must have been mistaken in thinking that anything had been blown out of it. Even if it had, it would make no difference. She would never find it until the spring, and in any case there was plenty of food in the house.

Mawson, plainly anxious to be off, again asked: 'You're sure you're all right?'

'Yes,' she shouted, 'and thanks a lot for the lift.'

He waved his hand, and Pete seized the opportunity to dash forward. In a moment the cutter was lost to view in the driving snow, and she turned hurriedly to the door.

From the uncovered rafters of the veranda hung quantities of meat impaled on hooks, cuts of veal and pork, for her husband had lately killed a calf and a pig.

That is one good thing about the prairie winter, she thought, as she ran up the three steps. You killed a pig, simply hung up the meat and then it froze immediately, and stayed frozen until you wanted it. Pretty convenient, and they were lucky to have so much in hard times.

The snow had drifted against the back door, half hiding the washing-machine and brooms leaning against the wall. All the rest of the veranda floor was bare, every particle of dirt dried into dust and swept away by the wind; the boards looked as if they had been scrubbed.

She had no need to search for a key. You do not lock your door on the prairie
when you go away for the day. She kicked the drift with a sweep of her foot, and it disappeared in a fine mist, which swirled up into her face and vanished as the wind sucked it away.

She pulled the door open quickly, and almost jumped into the kitchen in her haste to enter before another drift could accumulate and blow in after her.

What a relief to be out of that biting wind! The kitchen was almost eerie with its comparative warmth and silence after the buffeting outside. It felt curious to be there alone without her husband, even frightening with the blizzard increasing in fury. For a moment the prospect appalled her, but she was the wife of a prairie farmer and resolutely thrust off her depression.

A gust of wind, which seemed as if it would carry away the whole house, sent an icy blast under the door and through the keyhole. It was a warning not to waste time. She had to milk yet, and it would not be safe to cross the corral in the dark. A second gust roused her to action.

Lifting the lid of the stove, she saw there was a little pile of embers. She snatched two sticks of wood from the box and thrust them into the opening, pulling back the draught as she did so. The two bedrooms and the sitting-room were warmed by a box heater, but owing to the warm weather of the two previous days, she had not lighted it in her efforts to economise.

She looked hesitantly at it, for it would be so comforting to come back to a thoroughly warm house after the frozen barn, but another roar of wind made her resist the temptation. The intensity of the storm was terrifying, and she knew both from experience and from warning that she must be back in the house before it was dark, The heater would have to wait.

She took off her good coat and hat, shook the snow off them and flung them on a chair. The loneliness of the empty room began to affect her nerves. It was more lonely than she had thought it would be, and the noises of the blizzard intensified the loneliness until she felt flustered and a little panic-stricken at the thought of the solitary vigil before her.

Her one idea now was haste—haste to get done with the milking and then to come back to the task of keeping the house warm, and its precious supply of vegetables in the cellar.

She put on her woollen blizzard-cap so that it reached halfway down her neck, and left only a tiny opening for the eyes and nose. Next she put on an old farm overcoat, fastening the collar over the lower part of her blizzard-cap so that there was no chance of her neck being frozen. Then her woollen mittens, and over them the buckskin outer mittens.

No fear of frostbite now for a little while; but she had to hurry. Every second was of importance. Should she leave the draught on in the stove to make sure of the wood catching? If she did, it would probably have burnt away by the time she came
back. She could not wait to give it more time. It would soon be dark. The wood was dry and must have caught by this time, and it always burnt easily in zero weather.

Without pausing to look in her flurry, she thrust back the damper with her thumb. It closed with a clang and she hurried to the door, taking a kettle with her.

It was all she could do to open the door. The wind and cold made her gasp for breath, and a cloud of snow like the finest powder blew past her into the room. The door slammed behind her, and she picked up her milk-pail from beside the washing-machine.

For a moment she almost quailed. It was still light, but she could hardly see the huge barn although it was only fifty yards away. The air seemed to be a mass of tiny, white missiles flying towards her at the speed of an express train. They stung like needles on her eyes and nose, and she could feel them whipping past her legs. Mercifully she had put on her felt boots before going to Sunset. Her feet would have been frozen in leather ones.

She must hurry! If she let it get dark before she finished milking, she would never find the house on the way back.

The well was in a straight line between the house and the barn door, otherwise she would not have found it. She stumbled forward with her shoulders thrust in front and her head bent downward to protect her eyes from the stinging snow. Her breath came in painful gasps.

Her milk bucket knocked against the pump handle before she saw the well. She lifted the handle, and, pouring the warm water from her kettle down the pipe, pumped vigorously. Even above the wind she could hear the noise of the suction as her warm water primed the pump and drew the water upwards from the well.

She filled her milk bucket and the other bucket beside the pump. Then she lifted the handle again, and the trip action allowed the water to sink to the bottom of the well so that the pump could not freeze and burst. Her cows could only have one bucket each that night, for there was no time to go back to the house for another kettle.

With her kettle and the two buckets she staggered to the barn, buffeted by the storm and desperately afraid of spilling the water. She was gasping by the time she reached shelter. It was ecstasy to draw breath out of that wind.

There was a drift nearly three feet deep by the barn, where the snow had blown back in an eddy and come to rest in the calm. She ploughed her way through it, holding her buckets high, and the snow fell away from her boots. It was almost like going into an oven after the cold of the wind. The cows looked round from their stalls and lowed at her.

She set one bucket before the first cow, and, in spite of her urge for haste, held it while the animal drank. It would be sure to knock it over if left. Already, during the time she had walked twenty-five yards, a film of ice had formed on top of the water.
The cow sniffed and snorted and blew through its nose with exasperating deliberation before it would drink. She wanted to scream to make it hurry, but she forced herself to wait patiently. At last it thrust out an exploring tongue, and after splashing the water for a minute sucked the bucket dry without lifting its head.

When she took the bucket away the cow lowed for more. She spoke soothingly to it and watered the other cow. It drank with equally maddening deliberation, and then she ran to the pile of oat hay her husband had set in readiness for her. She placed several sheaves in the mangers, so that they should not go hungry in case she were late in the morning.

Next she took the heavy scoop shovel and prepared to clean out the gutters; but when she pushed it against the manure the handle jarred against her hands as though she had struck a granite rock. During the short time the storm had been raging the manure had frozen solid. It would take a pick-axe to move it now.

She gave up the attempt, and placed forkfuls of bedding round the cows' legs. They would need it all before the night was through. Already tiny icicles had formed on their nostrils. She could feel the wool of her blizzard-cap as solid as a board where her own breath had caught when she gasped in the wind. It rubbed against her lip irritatingly, and made her all the more conscious of the need to hurry. She snatched the milking-stool, and, tearing off her mittens, put them in her pocket, picked up the milk bucket and hurried to the first cow, but suddenly cried out with pain.

The metal of the handle had torn all the skin from the fingers of her left hand where they had grasped it. She cried with pain and vexation at her mistake. Fool that she was! As if she did not know enough to remember that any metal would tear off the skin in zero weather!

She carried the bucket on the crook of her arm and sat down beside the cow. It was good to thrust her head into its flank and feel the warmth coming from its body.

She could not wash the udder, as she usually did, or it would be covered with icicles. With her right hand she pulled away the scraps of bedding adhering to it, and then began to milk. The skin was torn from the fingers of her left hand just where she used them to squeeze the teats, and every movement hurt excruciatingly. When she lifted them for a moment to ease them, there was a smear of blood on the teat. She felt dizzy at the sight of it, but forced herself to begin again.

Gradually she absorbed some warmth from the cow's body and felt the icy teats grow warmer under her fingers. The milk streamed into the bucket between her knees, and the homely, everyday sound of it was soothing. It encouraged her to tell herself that she would only have to do what she had to do every day when her husband was at home; but all her reasoning could not exorcise the terrors suggested by her subconscious mind. What she had to do was not the same as usual, for the simple reason that she was all alone and no one nearer to her than the Mawsons in
the next house three miles away.

The sound of the milk streaming into her bucket was becoming drowned by the noise of the wind, and, though the front of her body and her hands were fairly warm, being close to the cow, her back was freezing where the draught from the door and windows struck her.

She shivered a little, and, having milked the rear teats dry, started on the front ones. With the change of position her skinned fingers hurt worse than ever, and the pain increased the tension of her nerves. It was beginning to grow dusk inside the barn. In spite of her injured fingers she milked furiously; for the idea that she must regain the house before it was dark was all the more terrifying because she knew it was justified and not a mere product of her fears. But the knowledge that it was justified made her still more highly strung.

At last! She had milked the cow dry. She gave a sigh of relief and crooked her arm under the handle of the bucket.

She could not bring herself to milk the other cow. It was going dry soon in any case. It would not hurt to be missed this once.

She pulled on her mittens, wincing as the wool pressed against her injured fingers, then unfastened the chains from the cows' necks that they might lie down against each other when they had finished eating, and so keep warm.

Now to gain the house and her own cosy kitchen once more. There were the papers to read and the letters from her husband's English relations, whom she would never see unless wheat was worth a great deal more than sixty cents a bushel for No.1 Northern.

She felt she could not wait another minute. The chickens had a self-feeding hopper and enough to eat till morning. In any case they would be huddled shivering on their perches. She had finished! Now for a roaring fire in the stove and the heater. She would sit close to the stove and eat her supper, and read her letters and the papers, and be so comfortable that she would forget the terror of being alone. Above all, she would be warm. She would be warm even if she had to sit on top of the stove.

With the kettle and the pail of milk she hurried to the door. Cold as it was in the barn, it was far colder outside. The noise of the wind, which had been muffled inside the building, made her gasp with fear at its fury. It was not so dark, though, as she had expected, and she gave a sigh of thankfulness for this, because the house was practically invisible through the whirling maelstrom of snow. All the usual landmarks were changed, and if she had been twenty minutes late she would never have found her way.

The first two feet of ground by the barn door were still bare, but the drift had formed again where the snow blew back in the eddy. It had re-formed into a bank exactly like a wave with the crest as sharp as a knife. There was not the slightest sign
of her footmarks where she had walked twenty minutes earlier.

She ploughed her way homeward, the wind at her back. It almost lifted her off her feet, the bucket of milk tugged forward at her arm, and she could hear the unceasing rustle of the snow as it rushed past her legs like an incredibly swift river. She knew she could never have walked a hundred yards against it.

It was unspeakable relief to feel her feet once more on the veranda steps. She had regained the house after all, and before her eyes floated a vision of a red-hot stove, with the kettle boiling and the teapot warming and a joint of pork sizzling in the oven. She would eat hot pork and drink boiling tea and heap the butter on her bread, and the fat would keep her warm—warm right through her shoulders and the back of her knees where the wind was cutting.

In the centre of the veranda steps the snow had drifted into a cone a foot high, but on both sides the boards were absolutely bare. Half of the veranda was still bare, but against the wall and the door there was a bank of snow. As she reached the door she glanced at the thermometer hanging on the wall. It showed twenty degrees below zero. From that she knew it would be forty below at six o'clock the next morning. Seventy-two degrees of frost! An idle fancy made her wonder how she could convey an idea of that cold to her husband's relations in England. Seventy-two degrees above freezing meant a hundred and four in the shade, hotter than it ever was in London even on the hottest day of the hottest summer. Could they imagine a temperature the same number of degrees below freezing?

At this fancy she smiled for the first time since Mawson had left her, and swept her foot at the pile of snow by the door. It was sucked up past her face and out beyond the angle of the house as if it had been a cloud of smoke from a bonfire.

With thankfulness she heard the door slam behind her. She was home. In a few minutes the stove would be roaring and red-hot, and then she would be warm. Warm! At the thought of it her tautened nerves relaxed.

She set down her bucket and ran to the stove. It did not feel as warm as it should. She took the lifter and prised off the lid, and then uttered an exclamation of vexation.

She had been in such a hurry to put in the two sticks of wood before she milked that they had jammed together at the top of the fire-box and the embers had burnt themselves out without setting them alight.

It was a mere trifle such as frequently happened when you were in a hurry, but the momentary upset to her plans for a speedy supper banished her incipient cheerfulness. Somehow it seemed to her ill-omened, and made her feel nervous again. It was different when you were all alone in a blizzard. The ordinary things were not as easy to do as when someone else was there to keep you company.

The house shook to its foundations with each gust. She could feel the cold being blown through the walls into the room as though it were something alive and
The cold had taken all the moisture with which the steam from her kettles had filled the air earlier in the day, and frozen it on the inside of the windows. They were covered with an opaque thickness of ice in a formation almost like the scales of a fish.

It was nearly dark, but she was so cold that she could not wait to light the lamp. She took the two pieces of wood out of the firebox, and, snatching a newspaper from a chair, laid her fire anew. She used plenty of kindling, for she had to have the fire in a hurry.

At last it was ready! She pulled off her mittens, hurting her skinned fingers, took the box of matches from the dresser and struck one of them. Soon she would be warm and able to attend to her hand. She shivered nervously when she found that the match had no head.

It was a second portent of ill-omen. She glanced round the darkening room with a little quiver of fear. Everything seemed vaguely hostile in that bitter cold, and the very familiarity of the room only served to emphasise her loneliness.

There was only one more match in the box. Her hands were so numb with the cold that she could scarcely hold it, and her injured fingers were a torture. She trembled, partly from nervousness and partly from cold, as she struck it.

Just as it flared into light there was a tremendous gust of wind, which blew into the room through the crack under the door and through the very walls, where the boards had contracted from the dryness of the cold. She was afraid that the draught would put out the flame, and as soon as the edge of the paper had caught alight she slammed the door of the firebox with her elbow. She was taking good care not to touch any more metal with her fingers.

She had no fear that the fire would not go this time. Canadian stoves are far superior to an English range, and there is never any difficulty in getting the fire to go if you lay it properly, especially in zero weather. She thought no more about it, and hurried to the dresser to put some cold cream on her fingers. They were hurting so much that she felt it wiser to dress them before lighting the lamp.

The cream eased the pain a little, and she went back to the stove to see how the fire was going. Strange. There was not the roar from the stove pipe that there should have been in such a weather. Once more she felt a quiver of fear. It was positively eerie the way everything was going wrong. If only her husband had been there to chaff her for taking such a long time! At the thought of it she felt sick with loneliness.

She put on her right mitten and opened the fire-box. As she had feared, the fire had not caught. It must be bewitched, she thought, for she had laid it properly and the wood was dry enough in all conscience. There was not a vestige of moisture within hundreds of miles in that blizzard. It must be another portent of ill-omen, and in her tension she felt that the fates must indeed be against her.
She took out the sticks of wood and the kindling, and straightaway understood. The paper itself had not burnt. She held it up to the remnants of the daylight, and once more uttered an exclamation of anger. It was just possible to make out the heading, 'The Sunday Times'.

The paper which her husband's English relations sent to them every week. A good solid paper, she knew, but not the least bit of use for lighting the fire. No English papers seemed to be much good for that purpose, and from past experience she knew that the Sunday Times was easily the worst of the lot.

She bit her lip with vexation. It really did seem as if the fates were against her, or was it just because she was alone? Again she glanced fearfully round the room. It was horrible to be alone like that. Why on earth had she not taken a bit more care and used a Canadian paper? There were the Winnipeg Free Press and the Family Herald on the table. If only she had used them, she would have been warm by this time.

She flung the offending Sunday Times into the wood box, stuffed some pages of the Family Herald into the stove and once more set her fire. Now for another box of matches and then at last she would be warm.

But her groping fingers found no matches on their accustomed shelf. Growing more nervously excited every minute, she moved her hand over every inch of that shelf. Then over the one below it. And then over the one above it. She was gasping a little now; for though her fingers encountered cups and plates, bottles of essences and tins of salt and pepper, and all the other appliances of the kitchen, they did not close round the familiar box of matches.

She gave a little cry of alarm, for it did seem as if the place were bewitched and that something dreadful was going to happen to her. It was horrible to be so alone. Just when she thought she was going to have hysterics, she suddenly remembered, and laughed aloud from sheer relief.

Of course! What an idiot she was! It was simply absurd the way your nerves played tricks with you when you were alone.

Her husband had taken the other three boxes with him for his stay in the shack. She sighed with relief when she remembered how they had laughed over it that very morning when he put them in his pocket just before he left. How he had said it was a good thing she did not smoke, or else he could only have taken two boxes with him, and that she must not forget to buy a packet in Sunset that afternoon.

Of course, everything had a rational explanation if you did not get rattled and start thinking the house was bewitched just because you were alone. And she had bought a packet of matches in Sunset. You did not forget things like that when you only went shopping once in a blue moon and if there was enough butter made to trade with the store. She laughed once more as she stepped to the table where the box of groceries was lying. All she had to do was to open the packet, take out a box of
matches, strike one and then all would be well. The stove would get red-hot, and the whole house would be warm, and she could laugh at the blizzard raging outside.

But when her hands rummaged among the paper parcels in the box, they did not feel a packet of matches. Thinking it must be because of her mittens, she took them off. She shivered as her bare fingers touched the snow between the parcels. She felt every one deliberately, expecting each time she touched one to find it was the packet she wanted.

Her heart thumped with excitement and fear when she came to the end of the box and still she had not found the packet. The house must be bewitched after all, or else she would have found it by this time. For a moment she stood in irresolution, and then, sobbing with anxiety, she turned the box upside down on the table and blew the snow away from the parcels.

It was dark and she could only see a blurred outline where they rested. She wanted to snatch at them in her search, but she knew she must be calm or she really would have hysteric. The loneliness was more terrifying than ever now, and the blizzard seemed to be threatening to carry away the whole house. She bit her lip and forced herself to stand still until she had got her nerves under control once more.

After a minute's wait she sat on a chair, put the box in her lap and methodically picked up each parcel one by one from the table and laid it in the box. Her heart began to thump again as she was nearing the end, and still she could not find that packet. At last there were no more parcels on the table, and the matches were not there!

At first she could not believe it, and moved her arms backwards and forwards over the table in ever wider sweeps, until finally she knocked two plates on the far side on to the floor. Then she was forced to believe. She was alone and she had no matches. It was dark and she would not get warm now.

It must have been the packet of matches the wind had blown away when she said good-bye to Mawson. Why, oh why, had she not stopped to look? They were past finding now. Why had she not taken more care when she set the fire? Why had she not lit the lamp first? Why...?

Her nerves got the better of her, and she screamed with terror. She was experienced enough to understand her plight. She knew that she would certainly freeze to death before morning if she went to sleep, and was more than likely to do so even if she kept herself awake. She had been on the move from two that morning, getting things ready for her husband's early start, and after that making butter to trade for their groceries, seeing to the stock, and then going to Sunset. She had eaten nothing since eleven, she was dog-tired and ravenously hungry, and above all else she was cold—cold right inside to the innermost part of her body. She did not know if she could keep awake till morning, and, even if she did, the blizzard was very unlikely to have died down.
It was hopeless to think of trying to reach her neighbours. Along the straight prairie roads she would never find her way in that maelstrom of whirling snow. And if she could find her way, she would probably die of cold before she had gone a mile. And there was nothing in the house to warm her.

Ah! She straightened with a faint hope as she thought of the barn. If she could reach it, she could snuggle between the two cows and perhaps keep life in her that way. She half started up from her chair and then sank down again despondently. There was not the slightest hope of her being able to reach the barn without a lantern.

She knew that even with lanterns, and warmed after a good meal, men had gone out in a blizzard to attend to their stock and never been seen alive again: had just set out to walk the fifty or hundred yards which they walked four times every day of their lives, and had missed their way in that bewildering fury of powdered snow. There was nothing for her to do except walk up and down the room and try to keep awake till morning came.

The loneliness, and the darkness, and the cold, weighed upon her like tangible enemies. It was so dark that she blundered into the wall at the far end of the room, and her head bumped into something. Her nerves almost made her jump from it, but when she put out her hand she felt a familiar outline, and her stifled cry turned into an exclamation of joy.

The telephone! Why had not she thought of it before? Even in that awful storm, when her plight was known, somehow or other they would form an expedition in Sunset and bring help to her.

But as she turned the handle to ring up Central, her joy gave way once more to despair, all the more bitter for the momentary ray of hope. As if she could not have remembered! The telephone had been disconnected months ago, because they could not afford the expense, and the telephone company had not bothered to take the instrument away. When No. 1 Northern was only sixty cents a bushel in Winnipeg, the telephone company would not be asked to install it anywhere else. They had more disconnected instruments than they could handle as it was.

With a sigh of utter despair she pulled her overcoat closer round her shoulders and resumed her walk. Fifteen paces to the door and fifteen paces back to the telephone. Back and forward. Back and forward, and all the time her brain flayed by the tortures of Tantalus.

She was cold, and she knew that there was a great pile of wood in the box by the stove; she was hungry, and she knew that there was bread and butter and jam and pork and veal in plenty; she was afraid of the dark, and there was a lamp on the table filled with coal oil; she was lonely, and there was a telephone. But none of these things was any good to her, and as she paced slowly up and down she found herself babbling incoherently: 'Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink.'
Her woollen blizzard-cap was stiff against her face where her breath had frozen, and her injured fingers were throbbing. Before her eyes swam visions of a red-hot stove and a hot supper on the table and a light in the lamp, until she could stand them no longer. Even though she knew it to be useless she simply had to do something different.

If only she were not so hungry! She stumbled to the pantry and automatically caught up the bread tin. With trembling fingers she opened it and took out a loaf. She found a knife and tried to cut a slice, but it would not make the slightest impression. The loaf was frozen as hard as a stone.

'Ask for bread and ye give them a stone.' The words danced before her eyes until she knew she was nearly hysterical again. She ran her hand aimlessly along the shelf until it encountered a pat of butter. That alone, out of all her supply of food, would not be frozen like a stone. She gouged out a lump from the pat with her knife and had almost put it to her lips when she remembered her hurt fingers. If the knife touched her lips it would take all the skin off them.

She stuck the lump on her mittens and bit off a piece, but, famished as she was, it was so greasy that it nearly made her sick. She moaned with despair and idly ran her hand along the shelf again. It encountered a long, round object, and for a moment she could not think what it was. Her half-frozen fingers in their clumsy mittens could not feel, and she fidgeted with it until with a shock of surprise she saw a ray of light.

She was holding the electric torch they had bought in case they had a breakdown in their car when driving at night, and it had been put on the shelf when they could no longer afford the car. Not much good to her now, but the light was a little bit of company.

She returned to the kitchen and flashed it over the room. The walls and roof of the house cracked at intervals almost like a pistol shot as the timber contracted. She did not like the colour of the little bit of her cheek showing in the opening of her blizzard-cap. It was a dirty white and she knew she had a touch of frostbite there.

She must do something! Her despairing brain caught at the hope that there might be an odd match lying somewhere. She knew it was hopeless, but any sort of action was better than aimless pacing up and down. With the aid of her torch she searched every nook and cranny of the house, but there was no match. She turned out the drawers and all the pockets of her husband's clothes.

How she wished that she had not lectured him on his habit of leaving loose matches in his pockets, in case they set the house on fire; and how she wished he had remained firm in his contention that there was no danger in that! If only he had gone on laughing at her, and had not conquered his habit simply to please her and turned out his pockets every time he took off his clothes!

She closed the last drawer and returned to the kitchen to resume her walk. Up and
down. Back and forward. Till her brain was mesmerised and her legs ached with fatigue and cold. She was so tired that she could keep going no longer.

At any cost she must sit down and rest for a little while. She found her chair and sat down. Her head began to nod and her eyes closed, but she fought against the temptation. That way led to certain death. She began to count the minutes to help herself keep awake, but once more her eyes closed. She tried desperately to think of some possible place she might have overlooked in her search for an odd match, some possible garment of her husband's which perhaps she had missed.

Her brain swam with visions of overalls and pairs of trousers. She could not think of one she had missed, and they made her dizzy like the sheep she counted when she lay awake at night sometimes. Her head nodded again, and this time she did fall into a doze.

The electric torch slid from her nerveless fingers on to the floor, and the bang awoke her with a start. If it had not been for that torch, she would soon have been dead. Thoroughly frightened at her near escape, she picked it up and once more began her walk. But the brief period of sleep had given her subconscious mind a chance to work, and suddenly she remembered.

There was an old pair of blue denim overalls hanging on a nail on the veranda wall. They had been there for over a year. She had been meaning to cut them up for clothes to wash the milk pails with and was always forgetting. There was just one chance in a million that he left them there before he had started to turn out his pockets.

One chance in a million. There might be a match in them. Anyway she would see, and then if there was not she might just as well walk towards the barn and the warmth of the cows' bodies. She would never reach them, but it was better to die quickly attempting something than to die slowly trying to keep awake in the kitchen.

With her breath coming in sobs, she went to the door. There was a pile of snow where it had drifted through the key-hole. She caught hold of the door handle and began to turn it. But before she opened the door she glanced back and looked round the darkened room in which she had toiled and eaten and, in spite of the drudgery, been happy with her husband. She knew that it was a thousand to one she would never see it again.

With an effort she tore her eyes away and pushed open the door. It slammed behind her as the wind and snow swooped down like a million knives cutting at her body. She flashed her torch along the veranda wall. The beam of light wavered and then fastened on a tattered pair of blue overalls. There was still a chance!

She crept towards them and pulled off her right mitten with her teeth. Surely after all the misfortunes of the last few hours it was too much to expect him to have left any matches in the pockets. And if he had, supposing the pockets had holes in them. And if....
She had no more time to think, for her fingers were inside the first pocket. As she had feared, it was empty. She sobbed as she tried the second—and then the third. They, too, were empty.

She drew in her breath and paused. There was only one more pocket—the right hip-pocket—and she could not bring herself to try it. If it was empty too, then she was done for.

She could hardly move her bare fingers and knew that if she waited another minute or two they would be frost-bitten. There was nothing for it but to try, and then, if she drew a blank, that last walk to the barn. With the impatience of desperation she thrust her fingers in the pocket. They felt nothing, and with a gasp of despair she was about to withdraw them when they touched a little hard object in one corner.

It was scarcely worth trying, but she picked at it with the nail of her forefinger. It seemed to be round, and she caught her breath with excitement and fear. She was sure now that it was the head of a match, but her fingers were so cold, and she trembled so in her eagerness, that for a moment she could not move it.

Finally her reawakening hope gave her the wit to push the torch underneath the outside of the pocket. She clawed and picked at the object with her nail, and then at last she knew that it was a match, a whole match which had slipped down a tiny hole in the pocket.

Slowly and with infinite care she drew it upward with her fingernail while the torch in her left hand held the cloth steady. Higher and higher it came until at last she was able to close the other fingers of her right hand round it. She cried aloud with joy as she clutched it, and her head swam from the reaction. She stood thus trying to pull herself together, for she had yet to regain the kitchen and light the match. Her hand was almost useless from the cold, and if she was not careful she would drop the match as she took it out of the pocket.

Salvation was so near, and yet it was so fatally easy to make a mistake. With infinite caution she put her mouth against the overalls and slowly drew her lips away from the mitten she had been holding in her teeth. She pressed her cheek against the end of it to keep it against the overalls and then slowly edged her lips into the pocket.

In her excitement she almost bit the match in two as her teeth closed over it, but with a great effort she restrained herself and at last stood erect with the end of it in her mouth. Her right hand felt dead as she wriggled it into her mitten again, but the match was still between her teeth as she turned and made for the door.

She had won, and the knowledge made her calm and confident in her purpose. She knew what she had to deal with, and this time she would not fail. While she stumbled the three yards to the door her brain reviewed what she must do.

She must find the match-box she had dropped on the floor and then open the door
of the fire-box, sprinkle a little coal oil from the bottle in the pantry on the wood just in case of accident; and when she had done that, and not before, she could take off her right mitten. She had just enough feeling left in her right hand to strike that one match, and after that she would have to rub snow on it to guard against frostbite. And after that on her face, and then after that light the heater and fasten up her other hand, and chop the frozen milk and water out of the buckets with the little bench axe by the wood box, and then....

With the match between her teeth she opened the door and once more stood in the kitchen. It no longer seemed hostile, and she no longer feared the loneliness, for now she had hope and something definite to do. Her head was clear and she knew that she would not fail as she switched on the torch, which was beginning to wane but ought to last until she had lighted the lamp.

The match-box was covered with snow dropped from her coat, but it was so powdery that she blew it off with one puff through her clenched teeth. Her hand did not shake until she had opened the door of the fire-box and sprinkled the coal oil over the wood.

But when she had wriggled out of her right mitten and knelt down on the floor by the fire-box, she had to work her fingers like a pianist before she could trust them to take the match from her teeth. Gingerly she transferred the match to her fingers, propped the torch up against the leg of the stove, and then took the match-box from the top, where she had laid it.

Now that the crucial moment had come she was nervous again. She was afraid to look around. Her brain told her there was no other preparation to make, but it took her a terrible, seemingly endless minute before she could bring herself to make the final move. Her life depended on that match, and if she failed....

But she would not fail. With an unconscious gesture of defiance against fate she held the match-box inside the fire-box with her left hand right up against the paper, forced her deadened right hand slowly and carefully inside the opening, and with drawn breath struck the match.

The paper, sodden with coal oil, burst into flame which scorched her left mitten and made her frozen right hand throb with pain, but she scarcely noticed it.

The fire roared up the chimney in a deafening crescendo, and she shut the door of the fire-box with a gasp of ecstasy.

Soon she would be warm.
THE STORY OR YAND MANOR HOUSE

E. AND H. HERON

Looking through the notes of Mr Flaxman Low, one sometimes catches through the steel-blue hardness of facts, the pink flush of romance, or more often the black corner of a horror unnameable. The following story may serve as an instance of the latter. Mr Low not only unravelled the mystery at Yand, but at the same time justified his life-work to M. Thierry, the well-known French critic and philosopher.

At the end of a long conversation, M. Thierry, arguing from his own standpoint as a materialist, had said:

'The factor in the human economy which you call "soul" cannot be placed.'

'I admit that,' replied Low. 'Yet, when a man dies, is there not one factor unaccounted for in the change that comes upon him? Yes! For though his body still exists, it rapidly falls to pieces, which proves that that has gone which held it together.'

The Frenchman laughed, and shifted his ground.

'Well, for my part, I don't believe in ghosts! Spirit manifestations, occult phenomena—is not this the ashbin into which a certain clique shoot everything they cannot understand, or for which they fail to account?'

'Then what should you say to me, Monsieur, if I told you that I have passed a good portion of my life in investigating this particular ashbin, and have been lucky enough to sort a small part of its contents with tolerable success?' replied Flaxman Low.

'The subject is doubtless interesting—but I should like to have some personal experience in the matter,' said Thierry dubiously.

'I am at present investigating a most singular case,' said Low. 'Have you a day or two to spare?'

Thierry thought for a minute or more.

'I am grateful,' he replied. 'But, forgive me, is it a convincing ghost?'

'Come with me to Yand and see. I have been there once already, and came away for the purpose of procuring information from MSS, to which I have the privilege of access, for I confess that the phenomena at Yand lie altogether outside any former
experience of mine.'

Low sank back into his chair with his hands clasped behind his head—a favourite position of his—and the smoke of his long pipe curled up lazily into the golden face of an Isis, which stood behind him on a bracket. Thierry, glancing across, was struck by the strange likeness between the faces of the Egyptian goddess and this scientist of the nineteenth century. On both rested the calm, mysterious abstraction of some unfathomable thought. As he looked, he decided.

'I have three days to place at your disposal.'

'I thank you heartily,' replied Low. 'To be associated with so brilliant a logician as yourself in an inquiry of this nature is more than I could have hoped for! The material with which I have to deal is so elusive, the whole subject is wrapped in such obscurity and hampered by so much prejudice, that I can find few really qualified persons who care to approach these investigations seriously. I go down to Yand this evening, and hope not to leave without clearing up the mystery. You will accompany me?'

'Most certainly. Meanwhile, pray tell me something of the affair.'

'Briefly the story is as follows. Some weeks ago I went to Yand Manor House at the request of the owner, Sir George Blackburton, to see what I could make of the events which took place there. All they complain of is the impossibility of remaining in one room—the dining-room.'

'What then is he like, this M. le Spook?' asked the Frenchman, laughing.

'No one has ever seen him, or for that matter heard him.'

'Then how—'

You can't see him, nor hear him, nor smell him,' went on Low, 'but you can feel him and—taste him!'

'Mon Dieu! But this is singular! Is he then of so bad a flavour?'

'You shall taste for yourself,' answered Flaxman Low smiling. 'After a certain hour no one can remain in the room, they are simply crowded out.'

'But who crowds them out?' asked Thierry.

'That is just what I hope we may discover to-night or tomorrow.'

The last train that night dropped Mr Flaxman Low and his companion at a little station near Yand. It was late, but a trap in waiting soon carried them to the Manor House. The big bulk of the building stood up in absolute blackness before them.

'Blackburton was to have met us, but I suppose he has not yet arrived,' said Low. 'Hullo! The door is open,' he added as he stepped into the hall.

Beyond a dividing curtain they now perceived a light. Passing behind this curtain they found themselves at the end of the long hall, the wide staircase opening up in front of them.

'But who is this?' exclaimed Thierry.

Swaying and stumbling at every step, there tottered slowly down the stairs the
figure of a man. He looked as if he had been drinking, his face was livid, and his eyes sunk into his head.

'Thank Heaven you've come! I heard you outside,' he said in a weak voice.

'It's Sir George Blackburton,' said Low, as the man lurched forward and pitched into his arms.

They laid him down on the rugs and tried to restore consciousness.

'He has the air of being drunk, but it is not so,' remarked Thierry. 'Monsieur has had a bad shock of the nerves. See the pulses drumming in his throat.'

In a few minutes Blackburton opened his eyes and staggered to his feet.

'Come. I could not remain there alone. Come quickly.'

They went rapidly across the hall, Blackburton leading the way down a wide passage to a double-leaved door, which, after a perceptible pause, he threw open, and they all entered together.

On the great table in the centre stood an extinguished lamp, some scattered food, and a big, lighted candle. But the eyes of all three men passed at once to a dark recess beside the heavy, carved chimneypiece, where a rigid shape sat perched on the back of a huge, oak chair.

Flaxman Low snatched up the candle and crossed the room towards it.

On the top of the chair, with his feet upon the arms, sat a powerfully-built young man huddled up. His mouth was open, and his eyes twisted upwards. Nothing further could be seen from below but the ghastly pallor of cheek and throat.

'Who is this?' cried Low. Then he laid his hand gently on the man's knee.

At the touch the figure collapsed in a heap upon the floor, the gaping, set, terrified face turned up to theirs.

'He's dead!' said Low after a hasty examination. 'I should say he's been dead some hours.'

'Oh, Lord! Poor Batty!' groaned Sir George, who was entirely unnerved. 'I'm glad you've come.'

'Who is he?' said Thierry, 'and what was he doing here?'

'He's a gamekeeper of mine. He was always anxious to try conclusions with the ghost, and last night he begged me to lock him in here with food for twenty-four hours. I refused at first, but then I thought if anything happened while he was in here alone, it would interest you. Who could imagine it would end like this?'

'When did you find him?' asked Low.

'I only got here from my mother's half an hour ago. I turned on the light in the hall and came in here with a candle. As I entered the room, the candle went out, and—and—I think I must be going mad.'

'Tell us everything you saw,' urged Low.

'You will think I am beside myself; but as the light went out and I sank almost paralysed into an armchair, I saw two barred eyes looking at me!'
'Barred eyes? What do you mean?'
'Eyes that looked at me through thin vertical bars, like the bars of a cage. What's that?'

With a smothered yell Sir George sprang back. He had approached the dead man and declared something had brushed his face.

'You were standing on this spot under the overmantel. I will remain here. Meantime, my dear Thierry, I feel sure you will help Sir George to carry this poor fellow to some more suitable place,' said Flaxman Low.

When the dead body of the young gamekeeper had been carried out, Low passed slowly round and about the room. At length he stood under the old carved overmantel, which reached to the ceiling and projected bodily forward in quaint heads of satyrs and animals. One of these on the side nearest the recess represented a griffin with a flanged mouth. Sir George had been standing directly below this at the moment when he felt the touch on his face. Now alone in the dim, wide room, Flaxman Low stood on the same spot and waited. The candle threw its dull yellow rays on the shadows which seemed to gather closer and wait also. Presently a distant door banged, and Low, leaning forward to listen, distinctly felt something on the back of his neck!

He swung round. There was nothing! He searched carefully on all sides, then put his hand up to the griffin's head. Again came the same soft touch, this time upon his hand, as if something had floated past on the air.

This was definite. The griffin's head located it. Taking the candle to examine more closely, Low found four long black hairs depending from the jagged fangs. He was detaching them when Thierry reappeared.

'We must get Sir George away as soon as possible,' he said.

'Yes, we must take him away, I fear,' agreed Low. 'Our investigation must be put off till to-morrow.'

On the following day they returned to Yand. It was a large country-house, pretty and old-fashioned, with lattice windows and deep gables, that looked out between tall shrubs and across lawns set with beaupots, where peacocks sunned themselves on the velvet turf. The church spire peered over the trees on one side; and an old wall covered with ivy and creeping plants, and pierced at intervals with arches, alone separated the gardens from the churchyard.

The haunted room lay at the back of the house. It was square and handsome, and furnished in the style of the last century. The oak overmantel reached to the ceiling, and a wide window, which almost filled one side of the room, gave a view of the west door of the church.

Low stood for a moment at the open window looking out at the level sunlight which flooded the lawns and parterres.

'See that door sunk in the church wall to the left?' said Sir George's voice at his
elbow. 'That is the door of the family vault. Cheerful outlook, isn't it?'

'I should like to walk across there presently,' remarked Low.

"What! Into the vault?" asked Sir George, with a harsh laugh. 'I'll take you if you like. Anything else I can show you or tell you?'

'Yes. Last night I found this hanging from the griffin's head,' said Low, producing the thin wisp of black hair. 'It must have touched your cheek as you stood below. Do you know to whom it can belong?'

'It's a woman's hair! No, the only woman who has been in this room to my knowledge for months is an old servant with grey hair, who cleans it,' returned Blackburton. 'I'm sure it was not here when I locked Batty in.'

'It is human hair, exceedingly coarse and long uncut,' said Low; 'but it is not necessarily a woman's.'

'It is not mine at any rate, for I'm sandy; and poor Batty was fair. Good-night; I'll come round for you in the morning.'

Presently, when the night closed in, Thierry and Low settled down in the haunted room to await developments. They smoked and talked deep into the night. A big lamp burned brightly on the table, and the surroundings looked homely and desirable.

Thierry made a remark to that effect, adding that perhaps the ghost might see fit to omit his usual visit.

'Experience goes to prove that ghosts have a cunning habit of choosing persons either credulous or excitable to experiment upon,' he added.

To M. Thierry's surprise, Flaxman Low agreed with him.

'They certainly choose suitable persons," he said, "that is, not credulous persons, but those whose senses are sufficiently keen to detect the presence of a spirit. In my own investigations, I try to eliminate what you would call the supernatural element. I deal with these mysterious affairs as far as possible on material lines.'

'Then what do you say of Batty's death? He died of fright—simply.'

'I hardly think so. The manner of his death agrees in a peculiar manner with what we know of the terrible history of this room. He died of fright and pressure combined. Did you hear the doctor's remark? It was significant. He said: "The indications are precisely those I have observed in persons who have been crushed and killed in a crowd!"

'That is sufficiently curious, I allow. I see that it is already past two o'clock. I am thirsty; I will have a little seltzer.' Thierry rose from his chair, and, going to the side-board, drew a tumblerful from the syphon. 'Pah! What an abominable taste!'

'What? The seltzer?'

'Not at all?' returned the Frenchman irritably. 'I have not touched it yet. Some horrible fly has flown into my mouth, I suppose. Pah! Disgusting!'

'What is it like?' asked Flaxman Low, who was at the moment wiping his own
mouth with his handkerchief.

'Like? As if some repulsive fungus had burst in the mouth.'

'Exactly. I perceive it also. I hope you are about to be convinced.'

'What?' exclaimed Thierry, turning his big figure round and staring at Low. 'You don't mean——'

As he spoke the lamp suddenly went out.

'Why, then, have you put the lamp out at such a moment?' cried Thierry.

'I have not put it out. Light the candle beside you on the table.'

Low heard the Frenchman's grunt of satisfaction as he found the candle, then the scratch of a match. It sputtered and went out. Another match and another behaved in the same manner, while Thierry swore freely under his breath.

'Let me have your matches, Monsieur Flaxman; mine are, no doubt damp,' he said at last.

Low rose to feel his way across the room. The darkness was dense.

'It is the darkness of Egypt—it may be felt. Where then are you, my dear friend?' he heard Thierry saying, but the voice seemed a long way off.

'I am coming,' he answered, 'but it's so hard to get along.'

After Low had spoken the words, their meaning struck him. He paused and tried to realise in what part of the room he was. The silence was profound, and the growing sense of oppression seemed like a nightmare. Thierry's voice sounded again, faint and receding.

'I am suffocating, Monsieur Flaxman, where are you? I am near the door. Ach!'

A strangling bellow of pain and fear followed, that scarcely reached Low through the thickening atmosphere.

'Thierry, what is the matter with you?' he shouted. 'Open the door.'

But there was no answer. What had become of Thierry in that hideous, clogging gloom! Was he also dead, crushed in some ghastly fashion against the wall? What was this?

The air had become palpable to the touch, heavy, repulsive, with the sensation of cold humid flesh!

Low pushed out his hands with a mad longing to touch a table, a chair, anything but this clammy, swelling softness that thrust itself upon him from every side, baffling him and filling his grasp.

He knew now that he was absolutely alone—struggling against what?

His feet were slipping in his wild efforts to feel the floor—the dank flesh was creeping upon his neck, his cheek—his breath came short and labouring as the pressure swung him gently to and fro, helpless, nauseated!

The clammy flesh crowded upon him like the bulk of some fat, horrible creature; then came a stinging pain on the cheek. Low clutched at something—there was a crash and a rush of air—
The next sensation of which Mr Flaxman Low was conscious was one of deathly sickness. He was lying on wet grass, the wind blowing over him, and all the clean, wholesome smells of the open air in his nostrils.

He sat up and looked about him. Dawn was breaking windily in the east, and by its light he saw that he was on the lawn of Yand Manor House. The latticed window of the haunted room above him was open. He tried to remember what had happened. He took stock of himself, in fact, and slowly felt that he still held something clutched in his right hand—something dark-coloured, slender, and twisted. It might have been a long shred of bark or the cast skin of an adder—it was impossible to see in the dim light.

After an interval the recollection of Thierry recurred to him. Scrambling to his feet, he raised himself to the window-sill and looked in. Contrary to his expectation, there was no upsetting of furniture; everything remained in position as when the lamp went out. His own chair and the one Thierry had occupied were just as when they had arisen from them. But there was no sign of Thierry.

Low jumped in by the window. There was the tumbler full of seltzer, and the litter of matches about it. He took up Thierry's box of matches and struck a light. It flared, and he lit the candle with ease. In fact, everything about the room was perfectly normal; all the horrible conditions prevailing but a couple of hours ago had disappeared.

But where was Thierry? Carrying the lighted candle, he passed out of the door, and searched in the adjoining rooms. In one of them, to his relief, he found the Frenchman sleeping profoundly in an armchair.

Low touched his arm. Thierry leapt to his feet, fending off an imaginary blow with his arm. Then he turned his scared face on Low.

'What! You, Monsieur Flaxman! How have you escaped?'

'I should rather ask you how you escaped,' said Low, smiling at the havoc the night's experiences had worked on his friend's looks and spirits.

'I was crowded out of the room against the door. That infernal thing—what was it?—with its damp, swelling flesh, inclosed me!' A shudder of disgust stopped him. 'I was a fly in an aspic. I could not move. I sank into the stifling pulp. The air grew thick. I called to you, but your answers became inaudible. Then I was suddenly thrust against the door by a huge hand—it felt like one, at least. I had a struggle for my life, I was all but crushed, and then, I do not know how, I found myself outside the door. I shouted to you in vain. Therefore, as I could not help you, I came here, and—I will confess it, my dear friend—I locked and bolted the door. After some time I went again into the hall and listened; but, as I heard nothing, I resolved to wait until daylight and the return of Sir George.'

That's all right,' said Low. 'It was an experience worth having.'

'But, no! Not for me! I do not envy you your researches into mysteries of this
abominable description. I now comprehend perfectly that Sir George has lost his nerve if he has had to do with this horror. Besides, it is entirely impossible to explain these things.'

At this moment they heard Sir George's arrival, and went out to meet him.
'I could not sleep all night for thinking of you!' exclaimed Blackburton on seeing them; 'and I came along as soon as it was light. Something has happened.'
'But certainly something has happened,' cried M. Thierry shaking his head solemnly; 'something of the most bizarre, of the most horrible! Monsieur Flaxman, you shall tell Sir George this story. You have been in that accursed room all night, and remain alive to tell the tale!'

As Low came to the conclusion of the story, Sir George suddenly exclaimed:
'You have met with some injury to your face, Mr Low.'
Low turned to the mirror. In the now strong light three parallel weals from eyes to mouth could be seen.
'I remember a stinging pain like a lash on my cheek. What would you say these marks were caused by, Thierry?' asked Low.
Thierry looked at them and shook his head.
'No one in their senses would venture to offer any explanation of the occurrences of last night,' he replied.
'Something of this sort, do you think?' asked Low again, putting down the object he held in his hand on the table.
Thierry took it up and described it aloud.
'A long and thin object of a brown and yellow colour and twisted like a sabre-bladed corkscrew,' then he started slightly and glanced at Low.
'It's a human nail, I imagine,' suggested Low.
'But no human being has talons of this kind—except, perhaps, a Chinaman of high rank.'
'There are no Chinamen about here, nor ever have been, to my knowledge,' said Blackburton shortly. 'I'm very much afraid that, in spite of all you have so bravely faced, we are no nearer to any rational explanation.'
'On the contrary, I fancy I begin to see my way. I believe, after all, that I may be able to convert you. Thierry,' said Flaxman Low.
'Convert me?'
'To a belief in the definite aim of my work. But you shall judge for yourself. What do you make of it so far? I claim that you know as much of the matter as I do.'
'My dear good friend, I make nothing of it,' returned Thierry, shrugging his shoulders and spreading out his hands. 'Here we have a tissue of unprecedented incidents that can be explained on no theory whatever.'
'But this is definite,' and Flaxman Low held up the blackened nail.
'And how do you propose to connect that nail with the black hairs—with the eyes
that looked through the bars of a cage—the fate of Batty, with its symptoms of death by pressure and suffocation—our experience of swelling flesh, that something which filled and filled the room to the exclusion of all else? How are you going to account for these things by any kind of connected hypothesis?’ asked Thierry, with a shade of irony

'I mean to try,' replied Low.

At lunch time Thierry inquired how the theory was getting on.

'It progresses,' answered Low. 'By the way, Sir George, who lived in this house for some time prior to, say, 1840? He was a man—it may have been a woman, but, from the nature of his studies, I am inclined to think it was a man—who was deeply read in ancient necromancy, Eastern magic, mesmerism, and subjects of a kindred nature. And was he not buried in the vault you pointed out?'

'Do you know anything more about him?' asked Sir George in surprise.

'He was I imagine,' went on Flaxman Low reflectively, 'hirsute and swarthy, probably a recluse, and suffered from a morbid and extravagant fear of death.'

'How do you know all this?'

'I only asked about it. Am I right?'

'You have described my cousin, Sir Gilbert Blackburton, in every particular. I can show you his portrait in another room.'

As they stood looking at the painting of Sir Gilbert Blackburton, with his long, melancholy, olive face and thick, black beard, Sir George went on. 'My grandfather succeeded him at Yand. I have often heard my father speak of Sir Gilbert, and his strange studies and extraordinary fear of death. Oddly enough, in the end he died rather suddenly, while he was still hale and strong. He predicted his own approaching death, and had a doctor in attendance for a week or two before he died. He was placed in a coffin he had got made on some plan of his own, and buried in the vault. His death occurred in 1842 or 1843. If you care to see them I can show you some of his papers, which may interest you.'

Mr Flaxman Low spent the afternoon over the papers. When evening came, he rose from his work with a sigh of content, stretched himself, and joined Thierry and Sir George in the garden.

They dined at Lady Blackburton's, and it was late before Sir George found himself alone with Mr Flaxman Low and his friend.

'Have you formed any opinion about the thing which haunts the Manor House?’ he asked anxiously.

Thierry elaborated a cigarette, crossed his legs, and added:

'If you have in truth come to any definite conclusion, pray let us hear it, my dear Monsieur Flaxman.'

'I have reached a very definite and satisfactory conclusion,' replied Low. 'The Manor House is haunted by Sir Gilbert Blackburton, who died, or, rather, who
seemed to die, on the 15th of August, 1842.'

'Nonsense! The nail fifteen inches long at the least—how do you connect it with Sir Gilbert?' asked Blackburton testily.

'I am convinced that it belonged to Sir Gilbert,' Low answered.

'But the long black hair like a woman's?

'Dissolution in the case of Sir Gilbert was not complete—not consummated, so to speak—as I hope to show you later. Even in the case of dead persons the hair and nails have been known to grow. By a rough calculation as to the growth of nails in such cases, I was enabled to indicate approximately the date of Sir Gilbert's death. The hair too grew on his head.

'But the barred eyes? I saw them myself!' exclaimed the young man.

'The eyelashes grow also. You follow me?'

'You have, I presume, some theory in connection with this?' observed Thierry. 'It must be a very curious one.'

'Sir Gilbert in his fear of death appears to have mastered and elaborated a strange and ancient formula by which the grosser factors of the body being eliminated, the more ethereal portions continue to retain the spirit, and the body is thus preserved from absolute disintegration. In this manner true death may be indefinitely deferred. Secure from the ordinary chances and changes of existence, this spiritualised body could retain a modified life practically for ever.'

'This is a most extraordinary idea, my dear fellow,' remarked Thierry.

'But why should Sir Gilbert haunt the Manor House, and one special room?'

'The tendency of spirits to return to the old haunts of bodily life is almost universal. We cannot yet explain the reason of this attraction of environment.'

'But the expansion—the crowding substance which we ourselves felt? You cannot meet that difficulty,' said Thierry persistently.

'Not as fully as I could wish, perhaps. But the power of expanding and contracting to a degree far beyond our comprehension is a well-known attribute of spiritualised matter.'

'Wait one little moment, my dear Monsieur Flaxman,' broke in Thierry's voice after an interval; 'this is very clever and ingenious indeed. As a theory I give it my sincere admiration. But proof—proof is what we now demand.'

Flaxman Low looked steadily at the two incredulous faces.

'This,' he said slowly, 'is the hair of Sir Gilbert Blackburton, and this nail is from the little finger of his left hand. You can prove my assertion by opening the coffin.'

Sir George, who was pacing up and down the room impatiently, drew up.

'I don't like it at all, Mr Low, I tell you frankly. I don't like it at all. I see no object in violating the coffin. I am not concerned to verify this unpleasant theory of yours. I have only one desire; I want to get rid of this haunting presence, whatever it is.'

'If I am right,' replied Low, 'the opening of the coffin and exposure of the remains
to strong sunshine for a short time will free you for ever from this presence.'

In the early morning, when the summer sun struck warmly on the lawns of Yand, the three men carried the coffin from the vault to a quiet spot among the shrubs where, secure from observation, they raised the lid.

Within the coffin lay the semblance of Gilbert Blackburton, maned to the ears with long and coarse black hair. Matted eyelashes swept the fallen cheeks, and beside the body stretched the bony hands, each with its dependent sheaf of switch-like nails. Low bent over and raised the left hand gingerly.

The little finger was without a nail!

Two hours later they came back and looked again. The sun had in the meantime done its work; nothing remained but a fleshless skeleton and a few half-rotten shreds of clothing.

The ghost of Yand Manor House has never since been heard of.

When Thierry bade Flaxman Low good-bye, he said:

'In time, my dear Monsieur Flaxman, you will add another to our sciences. You establish your facts too well for my peace of mind.'
Before noon Philip and Krantz had embarked, and made sail in the peroqua.

They had no difficulty in steering their course; the islands by day, and the clear stars by night, were their compass. It is true that they did not follow the more direct track, but they followed the more secure, working up the smooth waters, and gaining to the northward more than to the west. Many times they were chased by the Malay proas, which infested the islands, but the swiftness of their little peroqua was their security; indeed, the chase was, generally speaking, abandoned as soon as the smallness of the vessel was made out by the pirates, who expected that little or no booty was to be gained.

One morning, as they were sailing between the isles, with less wind than usual, Philip observed—

'Krantz, you said that there were events in your own life, or connected with it, which would corroborate the mysterious tale I confided to you. Will you now tell me to what you referred?'

'Certainly,' replied Krantz; 'I have often thought of doing so, but one circumstance or another has hitherto prevented me; this is, however, a fitting opportunity. Prepare therefore to listen to a strange story, quite as strange, perhaps, as your own.

'I take it for granted that you have heard people speak of the Hartz Mountains,' observed Krantz.

'I have never heard people speak of them, that I can recollect,' replied Philip; 'but I have read of them in some book, and of the strange things which have occurred there.'

'It is indeed a wild region,' rejoined Krantz, 'and many strange tales are told of it; but strange as they are, I have good reason for believing them to be true.

'My father was not born, or originally a resident, in the Hartz Mountains; he was a serf of a Hungarian nobleman, of great possessions, in Transylvania; but although a serf, he was not by any means a poor or illiterate man. In fact, he was rich and his
intelligence and respectability were such that he had been raised by his lord to the stewardship; but whoever may happen to be born a serf, a serf must he remain, even though he become a wealthy man: such was the condition of my father. My father had been married for about five years; and by his marriage had three children—my eldest brother Caesar, myself (Hermann), and a sister named Marcella. You know, Philip, that Latin is still the language spoken in that country; and that will account for our high-sounding names. My mother was a very beautiful woman, unfortunately more beautiful than virtuous: she was seen and admired by the lord of the soil; my father was sent away upon some mission; and during his absence, my mother, flattered by the attentions, and won by the assiduities of this nobleman, yielded to his wishes. It so happened that my father returned very unexpectedly, and discovered the intrigue. The evidence of my mother's shame was positive: he surprised her in the company of her seducer! Carried away by the impetuosity of his feelings, he watched the opportunity of a meeting taking place between them, and murdered both his wife and her seducer. Conscious that, as a serf, not even the provocation which he had received would be allowed as a justification of his conduct, he hastily collected together what money he could lay his hands upon, and, as we were then in the depth of winter, he put his horses to the sleigh, and taking his children with him, he set off in the middle of the night, and was far away before the tragical circumstance had transpired. Aware that he would be pursued, and that he had no chance of escape if he remained in any portion of his native country (in which the authorities could lay hold of him), he continued his flight without intermission until he had buried himself in the intricacies and seclusions of the Hartz Mountains. Of course, all that I have now told you I learned afterwards. My oldest recollections are knit to a rude, yet comfortable, cottage in which I lived with my father, brother, and sister. It was on the confines of one of those vast forests which cover the northern part of Germany; around it were a few acres of ground, which, during the summer months, my father cultivated, and which, though they yielded a doubtful harvest, were sufficient for our support. In the winter we remained much indoors, for, as my father followed the chase, we were left alone, and the wolves during that season incessantly prowled about. My father had purchased the cottage, and land about it, off one of the rude foresters, who gain their livelihood partly by hunting and partly by burning charcoal, for the purpose of smelting the ore from the neighbouring mines; it was distant about two miles from any other habitation. I can call to mind the whole landscape now; the tall pines which rose up on the mountain above us, and the wide expanse of the forest beneath, on the topmost boughs and heads of whose trees we looked down from our cottage, as the mountain below us rapidly descended into the distant valley. In summer time the prospect was beautiful: but during the severe winter a more desolate scene could not well be imagined.
'I said that, in the winter, my father occupied himself with the chase; every day he left us, and often would he lock the door, that we might not leave the cottage. He had no one to assist him, or to take care of us—indeed, it was not easy to find a female servant who would live in such a solitude; but, could he have found one, my father would not have received her, for he had imbibed a horror of the sex, as the difference of his conduct towards us, his two boys, and my poor little sister Marcella, evidently proved. You may suppose we were sadly neglected; indeed, we suffered much, for my father, fearful that we might come to some harm, would not allow us fuel when he left the cottage; and we were obliged, therefore, to creep under the heaps of bears' skins, and there to keep ourselves as warm as we could until he returned in the evening, when a blazing fire was our delight. That my father chose this restless sort of life may appear strange, but the fact was that he could not remain quiet; whether from the remorse for having committed murder, or from the misery consequent on his change of situation, or from both combined, he was never happy unless he was in a state of activity. Children, however, when left so much to themselves, acquire a thoughtfulness not common to their age. So it was with us; and during the short cold days of winter, we would sit silent, longing for the happy hours when the snow would melt and the leaves burst out, and the birds begin their songs, and when we should again be set at liberty.

'Such was our peculiar and savage sort of life until my brother Caesar was nine, myself seven, and my sister five years old, when the circumstances occurred on which is based the extraordinary narrative which I am about to relate.

'One evening my father returned home rather later than usual; he had been unsuccessful, and as the weather was very severe, and many feet of snow were upon the ground, he was not only very cold, but in a very bad humour. He had brought in wood, and we were all three gladly assisting each other in blowing on the embers to create a blaze, when he caught poor little Marcella by the arm and threw her aside; the child fell, struck her mouth, and bled very much. My brother ran to raise her up. Accustomed to ill-usage, and afraid of my father, she did not dare cry, but looked up in his face very piteously. My father drew his stool nearer to the hearth, muttered something in abuse of women, and busied himself with the fire, which both my brother and I had deserted when our sister was so unkindly treated. A cheerful blaze was soon the result of his exertions; but we did not, as usual, crowd round it. Marcella, still bleeding, retired to a corner, and my brother and I took our seats beside her, while my father hung over the fire gloomily and alone. Such had been our position for about half an hour when the howl of a wolf, close under the window of the cottage, fell on our ears. My father started up, and seized his gun; the howl was repeated; he examined the priming, and then hastily left the cottage, shutting the door after him. We all waited (anxiously listening), for we thought that if he succeeded in shooting the wolf, he would return in a better humour; and,
although he was harsh to all of us, and particularly so to our little sister, still we loved our father, and loved to see him cheerful and happy, for what else had we to look up to? And I may here observe that perhaps there never were three children who were fonder of each other; we did not, like other children, fight and dispute together; and if, by chance, any disagreement did arise, between my elder brother and me, little Marcella would run to us, and kissing us both, seal, through her entreaties, the peace between us. Marcella was a lovely, amiable child; I can recall her beautiful features even now. Alas! poor little Marcella.'

'She is dead, then?' observed Philip.

'Dead! yes, dead! but how did she die?—But I must not anticipate, Philip; let me tell my story.

'We waited for some time, but the report of the gun did not reach us, and my elder brother then said, "Our father has followed the wolf, and will not be back for some time. Marcella, let us wash the blood from your mouth, and then we will leave this corner and go to the fire to warm ourselves."

'We did so, and remained there until near midnight, every minute wondering, as it grew later, why our father did not return. We had no idea that he was in any danger, but we thought that he must have chased the wolf for a very long time. "I will look out and see if father is coming," said my brother Caesar, going to the door. "Take care." said Marcella, "the wolves must be about now, and we cannot kill them, brother." My brother opened the door very cautiously, and but a few inches; he peeped out. "I see nothing," said he, after a time, and once more he joined us at the fire. "We have had no supper," said I, for my father usually cooked the meat as soon as he came home; and during his absence we had nothing but the fragments of the preceding day.

"And if our father comes home, after his hunt, Caesar," said Marcella, "he will be pleased to have some supper; let us cook it for him and for ourselves." Caesar climbed upon the stool, and reached down some meat—I forget now whether it was venison or bear's meat, but we cut off the usual quantity, and proceeded to dress it, as we used to do under our father's superintendence. We were all busy putting it into the platters before the fire, to await his coming, when we heard the sound of a horn. We listened—there was a noise outside, and a minute afterwards my father entered, ushered in a young female and a large dark man in a hunter's dress.

'Perhaps I had better now relate what was only known to me many years afterwards. When my father had left the cottage, he perceived a large white wolf about thirty yards from him; as soon as the animal saw my father, it retreated slowly, growling and snarling. My father followed; the animal did not run, but always kept at some distance; and my father did not like to fire until he was pretty certain that his ball would take effect; thus they went on for some time, the wolf now leaving my father far behind, and then stopping and snarling defiance at him, and
then, again, on his approach, setting off at speed.

'Anxious to shoot the animal (for the white wolf is very rare), my father continued the pursuit for several hours, during which he continually ascended the mountain.

'You must know, Philip, that there are peculiar spots on those mountains which are supposed, and, as my story will prove, truly supposed, to be inhabited by the evil influences: they are well known to the huntsmen, who invariably avoid them. Now, one of these spots, an open space in the pine forest above us, had been pointed out to my father as dangerous on that account. But whether he disbelieved these wild stories, or whether, in his eager pursuit of the chase, he disregarded them, I know not; certain, however, it is, that he was decoyed by the white wolf to his open space, when the animal appeared to slacken her speed. My father approached, came close up to her, raised his gun to his shoulder and was about to fire, when the wolf suddenly disappeared. He thought that the snow on the ground must have dazzled his sight, and he let down his gun to look for the beast—but she was gone; how she could have escaped over the clearance, without his seeing her, was beyond his comprehension. Mortified at the ill-success of his chase, he was about to retrace his steps, when he heard the distant sound of a horn. Astonishment at such a sound—at such an hour—in such a wilderness made him forget for the moment his disappointment, and he remained riveted to the spot. In a minute the horn was blown a second time, and at no great distance; my father stood still, and listened; a third time it was blown. I forget the term used to express it, but it was the signal which, my father well knew, implied that the party was lost in the woods. In a few minutes more my father beheld a man on horseback, with a female seated on the crupper, enter the cleared space, and ride up to him. At first, my father called to mind the strange stories which he had heard of the supernatural beings who were said to frequent these mountains; but the nearer approach of the parties satisfied him that they were mortals like himself. As soon as they came up to him, the man who guided the horse accosted him "Friend hunter, you are out late, the better fortune for us; we have ridden far, and are in fear of our lives, which are eagerly sought after. These mountains have enabled us to elude our pursuers; but if we find not shelter and refreshment, that will avail us little, as we must perish from hunger and the inclemency of the night. My daughter, who rides behind me, is now more dead than alive—say, can you assist us in our difficulty?"

"My cottage is some few miles distant," replied my father, "but I have little to offer you besides a shelter from the weather; to the little I have you are welcome. May I ask whence you come?"

"Yes, friend, it is no secret now; we have escaped from Transylvania, where my daughter's honour and my life were equally in jeopardy!"

'This information was quite enough to raise an interest in my father's heart. He
remembered his own escape: he remembered the loss of his wife's honour, and the
tragedy by which it was wound up. He immediately, and warmly, offered all the
assistance which he could afford them.

"There is no time to be lost, then, good sir," observed the horseman; "my
daughter is chilled with the frost, and cannot hold out much longer against the
severity of the weather."

"Follow me," replied my father, leading the way towards his home.

"I was lured away in pursuit of a large white wolf," observed my father; "it came
to the very window of my hut, or I should not have been out at this time of night."

"The creature passed by us just as we came out of the wood," said the female, in a
silvery tone.

"I was nearly discharging my piece at it," observed the hunter; "but since it did us
such good service, I am glad that I allowed it to escape."

'In about an hour and a half, during which my father walked at a rapid pace, the
party arrived at the cottage, and, as I said before, came in.

"We are in good time, apparently," observed the dark hunter, catching the smell of
the roasted meat, as he walked to the fire and surveyed my brother and sister and
myself. "You have young cooks here, Meinheer." "I am glad that we shall not have to
wait," replied my father. "Come, mistress seat yourself by the fire; you require
warmth after your cold ride." "And where can I put up my horse, Meinheer?"
observed the huntsman. "I will take care of him," replied my father, going out of the
cottage door.

'The female must, however, be particularly described. She was young, and
apparently twenty years of age. She was dressed in a travelling dress, deeply
bordered with white fur, and wore a cap of white ermine on her head. Her features
were very beautiful, at least I thought so, and so my father has since declared. Her
hair was flaxen, glossy, and shining, and bright as a mirror; and her mouth,
although somewhat large when it was open, showed the most brilliant teeth I have
ever beheld. But there was something about her eyes, bright as they were, which
made us children afraid; they were so restless, so furtive; I could not at that time tell
why, but I felt as if there was cruelty in her eye; and when she beckoned us to come
to her, we approached her with fear and trembling. Still she was beautiful, very
beautiful. She spoke kindly to my brother and myself, patted our heads and caressed
us; but Marcella would not come near her; on the contrary, she slunk away, and hid
herself in bed, and would not wait for the supper, which half an hour before she had
been so anxious for.

'My father, having put the horse into a close shed, soon returned, and supper was
placed on the table. When it was over, my father requested the young lady take
possession of the bed, and he would remain at the fire, and sit up with her father.
After some hesitation on her part, this arrangement was agreed to, and I and my
brother crept into the other bed with Marcella, for we had as yet always slept together.

'But we could not sleep; there was something so unusual, not only in seeing strange people, but in having those people sleep at the cottage, that we were bewildered. As for poor little Marcella, she was quiet, but I perceived that she trembled during the whole night, and sometimes I thought that she was checking a sob. My father had brought out some spirits, which he rarely used, and he and the strange hunter remained drinking and talking before the fire. Our ears were ready to catch the slightest whisper—so much was our curiosity excited.

"You said you came from Transylvania?" observed my father.

"Even so, Meinheer," replied the hunter. "I was a serf to the noble house of——; my master would insist upon my surrendering up my fair girl to his wishes; it ended in my giving him a few inches of my hunting-knife."

"We are countrymen and brothers in misfortune," replied my father, taking the huntsman's hand and pressing it warmly.

"Indeed! Are you then from that country?"

"Yes; and I too have fled for my life. But mine is a melancholy tale."

"Your name?" inquired the hunter.

"Krantz."

"What! Krantz of——? I have heard your tale; you need not renew your grief by repeating it now. Welcome, most welcome, Meinheer, and, I may say, my worthy kinsman. I am your second cousin, Wilfred of Barnsdorf," cried the hunter, raising up and embracing my father.

'They filled their horn-mugs to the brim, and drank to one another after the German fashion. The conversation was then carried on in a low tone; all that we could collect from it was that our new relative and his daughter were to take up their abode in our cottage, at least for the present. In about an hour they both fell back in their chairs and appeared to sleep.

"Marcella, dear, did you hear?" said my brother, in a low tone.

"Yes," replied Marcella, in a whisper, "I heard all. Oh! brother, I cannot bear to look upon that woman—I feel so frightened."

'My brother made no reply, and shortly afterwards we were all three fast asleep.

'When we awoke the next morning, we found that the hunter's daughter had risen before us. I thought she looked more beautiful than ever. She came up to little Marcella and caressed her; the child burst into tears, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

'But not to detain you with too long a story, the huntsman and his daughter were accommodated in the cottage. My father and he went out hunting daily, leaving Christina with us. She performed all the household duties; was very kind to us children; and gradually the dislike even of little Marcella wore away. But a great
change took place in my father; he appeared to have conquered his aversion to the sex, and was most attentive to Christina. Often, after her father and we were in bed, would he sit up with her, conversing in a low tone by the fire. I ought to have mentioned that my father and the huntsman Wilfred slept in another portion of the cottage, and that the bed which he formerly occupied, and which was in the same room as ours, had been given up to the use of Christina. These visitors had been about three weeks at the cottage, when, one night, after we children had been sent to bed, a consultation was held. My father had asked Christina in marriage, and had obtained both her own consent and that of Wilfred; after this, a conversation took place, which was, as nearly as I can recollect, as follows:—

"You may take my child, Meinheer Krantz, and my blessing with her, and I shall then leave you and seek some other habitation—it matters little where."

"Why not remain here, Wilfred?"

"No, no, I am called elsewhere; let that suffice, and ask no more questions. You have my child."

"I thank you for her, and will duly value her but there is one difficulty."

"I know what you would say; there is no priest here in this wild country; true; neither is there any law to bind. Still must some ceremony pass between you, to satisfy a father. Will you consent to marry her after my fashion? If so, I will marry you directly."

"I will," replied my father.

"Then take her by the hand. Now, Meinheer, swear."

"I swear," repeated my father.

"By all the spirits of the Hartz Mountains—"

"Nay, why not by Heaven?" interrupted my father.

"Because it is not my humour," rejoined Wilfred. "If I prefer that oath, less binding, perhaps, than another, surely you will not thwart me."

"Well, be it so, then; have your humour. Will you make me swear by that in which I do not believe?"

"Yet many do so, who in outward appearance are Christians," rejoined Wilfred; "say, will you be married, or shall I take my daughter away with me?"

"Proceed," replied my father impatiently.

"I swear by all the spirits of the Hartz Mountains, by all their power for good or for evil, that I take Christina for my wedded wife; that I will ever protect her, cherish her, and love her; that my hand shall never be raised against her to harm her."

"My father repeated the words after Wilfred.

"And if I fail in this my vow, may all the vengeance of the spirits fall upon me and upon my children; may they perish by the vulture, by the wolf, or other beasts of the forest; may their flesh be torn from their limbs, and their bones blanch in the wilderness: all this I swear."
My father hesitated, as he repeated the last words; little Marcella could not restrain herself, and as my father repeated the last sentence, she burst into tears. This sudden interruption appeared to discompose the party, particularly my father; he spoke harshly to the child, who controlled her sobs, burying her face under the bedclothes.

'Such was the second marriage of my father. The next morning, the hunter Wilfred mounted his horse and rode away.

'My father resumed his bed, which was in the same room as ours; and things went on much as before the marriage, except that our new stepmother did not show any kindness towards us; indeed, during my father's absence, she would often beat us, particularly little Marcella, and her eyes would flash fire, as she looked eagerly upon the fair and lovely child.

'One night my sister awoke me and my brother.

"What is the matter?" said Caesar.

"She has gone out," whispered Marcella.

"Gone out!"

"Yes, gone out at the door, in her night-clothes," replied the child; "I saw her get out of bed, look at my father to see if he slept, and then she went out at the door."

'What could induce her to leave her bed, and all undressed to go out, in such bitter wintry weather, with the snow deep on the ground, was to us incomprehensible; we lay awake, and in about an hour we heard the growl of a wolf close under the window.

"There is a wolf," said Caesar. "She will be torn to pieces."

"Oh, no!" cried Marcella.

'In a few minutes our stepmother appeared; she was in her night-dress, as Marcella had stated. She let down the latch of the door, so as to make no noise, went to a pail of water, and washed her face and hands, and then slipped into the bed where my father lay.

'We all three trembled—we hardly knew why; but we resolved to watch the next night. We did so; and not only on the ensuing night, but on many others, and always at about the same hour would our stepmother rise from her bed and leave the cottage; and after she was gone we invariably heard the growl of a wolf under our window, and always saw her on her return wash herself before she retired to bed. We observed also that she seldom sat down to meals, and that when she did she appeared to eat with dislike; but when the meat was taken down to be prepared for dinner, she would often furtively put a raw piece into her mouth.

'My brother Caesar was a courageous boy; he did not like to speak to my father until he knew more. He resolved that he would follow her out, and ascertain what she did. Marcella and I endeavoured to dissuade him from the project; but he would not be controlled; and the very next night he lay down in his clothes, and as soon as
our stepmother had left the cottage he jumped up, took down my father's gun, and followed her.

'You may imagine in what a state of suspense Marcella and I remained during his absence. After a few minutes we heard the report of a gun. It did not awaken my father; and we lay trembling with anxiety. In a minute afterwards we saw our stepmother enter the cottage—her dress was bloody. I put my hand to Marcella's mouth to prevent her crying out, although I was myself in great alarm. Our stepmother approached my father's bed, looked to see if he was asleep, and then went to the chimney and blew up the embers into a blaze.

"Who is there?" said my father, waking up.

"Lie still, dearest," replied my stepmother; "it is only me; I have lighted the fire to warm some water; I am not quite well."

'My father turned round, and was soon asleep; but we watched our stepmother. She changed her linen, and threw the garments she had worn into the fire; and we then perceived that her right leg was bleeding profusely, as if from a gun-shot wound. She bandaged it up, and then dressing herself remained before the fire until the break of day.

'Poor little Marcella, her heart beat quick as she pressed me to her side—so indeed did mine. Where was our brother Caesar? How did my stepmother receive the wound unless from his gun? At last my father rose, and then for the first time I spoke, saying, "Father, where is my brother Caesar?"

"Your brother?" exclaimed he; "why, where can he be?"

"Merciful Heaven! I thought as I lay very restless last night," observed our stepmother, "that I heard somebody open the latch of the door; and, dear me, husband, what has become of your gun?"

'My father cast his eyes up above the chimney, and perceived that his gun was missing for a moment he looked perplexed; then, seizing a broad axe, he went out of the cottage without saying another word.

'He did not remain away from us long; in a few minutes he returned, bearing in his arms the mangled body of my poor brother; he laid it down, and covered up his face.

'My stepmother rose up, and looked at the body, while Marcella and I threw ourselves by its side, wailing and sobbing bitterly.

"Go to bed again, children," said she sharply. "Husband," continued she, "your boy must have taken the gun down to shoot a wolf, and the animal has been too powerful for him. Poor boy! He has paid dearly for his rashness."

'My father made no reply. I wished to speak—to tell all—but Marcella, who perceived my intention, held me by the arm, and looked at me so imploringly, that I desisted.

'My father, therefore, was left in his error; but Marcella and I, although we could
not comprehend it, were conscious that our stepmother was in some way connected with my brother's death.

'That day my father went out and dug a grave; and when he laid the body in the earth he piled up stones over it, so that the wolved should not be able to dig it up. The shock of this catastrophe was to my poor father very severe; for several days he never went to the chase, although at times he would utter bitter anathemas and vengeance against the wolves.

'But during this time of mourning on his part, my stepmother's nocturnal wanderings continued with the same regularity as before.

'At last my father took down his gun to repair to the forest; but he soon returned, and appeared much annoyed.

"Would you believe it, Christina, that the wolves—perdition to the whole race!—have actually contrived to dig up the body of my poor boy, and now there is nothing left of him but his bones."

"Indeed!" replied my stepmother. Marcella looked at me, and I saw in her intelligent eye all she would have uttered.

"A wolf growls under our window every night, father," said I.

"Ay, indeed! Why did you not tell me, boy? Wake me the next time you hear it."

'I saw my stepmother turn away; her eyes flashed fire, and she gnashed her teeth.

'My father went out again, and covered up with a larger pile of stones the little remains of my poor brother which the wolves had spared. Such was the first act of the tragedy.

'The spring now came on; the snow disappeared, and we were permitted to leave the cottage; but never would I quit for one moment my dear little sister, to whom, since the death of my brother, I was more ardently attached than ever; indeed, I was afraid to leave her alone with my stepmother, who appeared to have a particular pleasure in ill-treating the child. My father was now employed upon his little farm, and I was able to render him some assistance.

'Marcella used to sit by us while we were at work, leaving my stepmother alone in the cottage. I ought to observe that, as the spring advanced, so did my stepmother decrease her nocturnal rambles, and that we never heard the growl of the wolf under the window after I had spoken of it to my father.

'One day, when my father and I were in the field, Marcella being with us, my stepmother came out, saying that she was going into the forest to collect some herbs that my father wanted, and that Marcella must go to the cottage and watch the dinner. Marcella went; and my stepmother soon disappeared in the forest, taking a direction quite contrary to that in which the cottage stood, and leaving my father and me, as it were, between her and Marcella.

'About an hour afterwards we were startled by shrieks from the cottage—evidently the shrieks of little Marcella. "Marcella has burnt herself, father," said I,
throwing down my spade. My father threw down his, and we both hastened to the cottage. Before we could gain the door, out darted a large white wolf, which fled with the utmost celerity. My father had no weapon; he rushed into the cottage, and there saw poor little Marcella expiring. Her body was dreadfully mangled and the blood pouring from it had formed a large pool on the cottage floor. My father's first intention had been to seize his gun and pursue; but he was checked by this horrid spectacle; he knelt down by his dying child, and burst into tears. Marcella could just look kindly on us for a few seconds, and then her eyes were closed in death.

'My father and I were still hanging over my poor sister's body when my stepmother came in. At the dreadful sight she expressed much concern; but she did not appear to recoil from the sight of blood, as most people do.

"Poor child!" said she, "it must have been that great white wolf which passed me just now, and frightened me so. She's quite dead, Krantz."

"I know it!—I know it!" cried my father, in agony.

'I thought my father would never recover from the effects of this second tragedy; he mourned bitterly over the body of his sweet child, and for several days would not consign it to its grave, although frequently requested by my stepmother to do so. At last he yielded, and dug a grave for her close by that of my poor brother, and took every precaution that the wolves should not violate her remains.

'I was now really miserable as I lay alone in the bed which I had formerly shared with my brother and sister. I could not help thinking that my stepmother was implicated in both their deaths, although I could not account for the manner; but I no longer felt afraid of her; my little heart was full of hatred and revenge.

'The night after my sister had been buried, as I lay awake, I perceived my stepmother get up and go out of the cottage. I waited some time, then dressed myself, and looked out through the door, which I half opened. The moon shone bright, and I could see the spot where my brother and my sister had been buried; and what was my horror when I perceived my stepmother busily removing the stones from Marcella's grave!

'She was in her white night-dress, and the moon shone full upon her. She was digging with her hands, and throwing away the stones behind her with all the ferocity of a wild beast. It was some time before I could collect my senses and decide what I should do. At last I perceived that she had arrived at the body, and raised it up to the side of the grave. I could bear it no longer: I ran to my father and awoke him.

"Father, father!" cried I, "dress yourself, and get your gun."

"What!" cried my father, "the wolves are there, are they?"

'He jumped out of bed, threw on his clothes, and in his anxiety did not appear to perceive the absence of his wife. As soon as he was ready, I opened the door; he
went out, and I followed him.

'Imagine his horror, when (unprepared as he was for such a sight) he beheld, as he advanced towards the grave, not a wolf, but his wife, in her night-dress, on her hands and knees, crouching by the body of my sister, and tearing off large pieces of flesh, and devouring them with all the avidity of a wolf. She was too busy to be aware of our approach. My father dropped his gun; his hair stood on end, so did mine; he breathed heavily, and then his breath for a time stopped. I picked up the gun and put it into his hand. Suddenly he appeared as if concentrated rage had restored him to double vigour; he levelled his piece, fired, and with a loud shriek down fell the wretch whom he had fostered in his bosom.

"God of heaven!" cried my father, sinking down upon the earth in a swoon, as soon as he had discharged his gun.

'I remained some time by his side before he recovered. "Where am I?" said he, "what has happened? Oh!—yes, yes! I recollect now. Heaven forgive me!"

'He rose and we walked up to the grave; imagine our astonishment and horror to find that, instead of the dead body of my stepmother, as we expected, there was, lying over the remains of my poor sister, a large white she-wolf.

"The white wolf," exclaimed my father, "the white wolf which decoyed me into the forest—I see it all now—I have dealt with the spirits of the Hartz Mountains."

'For some time my father remained in silence and deep thought. He then carefully lifted the body of my sister, replaced it in the grave, and covered it over as before, having struck the head of the dead animal with the heel of his boot, and raving like a madman. He walked back to the cottage, shut the door, and threw himself on the bed; I did the same, for I was in a stupor of amazement.

'Early in the morning we were both roused by a loud knocking at the door, and in rushed the hunter Wilfred.

"My daughter—man—my daughter!—where is my daughter?" cried he in a rage.

"Where the wretch, the fiend should be, I trust," replied my father, starting up, and displaying equal choler: "where she should be—in hell! Leave this cottage, or you may fare worse."

"Ha—ha!" replied the hunter, "would you harm a potent spirit of the Hartz Mountains? Poor mortal, who must needs wed a werewolf."

"Out, demon! I defy thee and thy power."

"Yet shall you feel it; remember your oath—your solemn oath—never to raise your hand against her to harm her."

"I made no compact with evil spirits."

"You did, and if you failed in your vow, you were to meet the vengeance of the spirits. Your children were to perish by the vulture, the wolf——"

"Out, out, demon!"

"And their bones blanch in the wilderness. Ha—ha!"
'My father, frantic with rage, seized his axe and raised it over Wilfred's head to strike.

"All this I swear," continued the huntsman mockingly.

'The axe descended; but it passed through the form of the hunter, and my father lost his balance, and fell heavily on the floor.

"Mortal!" said the hunter, striding over my father's body, "we have power over those only who have committed murder. You have been guilty of a double murder: you shall pay the penalty attached to your marriage vow. Two of your children are gone, the third is yet to follow—and follow them he will, for your oath is registered. Go—it were kindness to kill thee—your punishment is, that you live!"

'With these words the spirit disappeared. My father rose from the floor, embraced me tenderly, and knelt down in prayer.

'The next morning he quitted the cottage for ever. He took me with him, and bent his steps to Holland, where we safely arrived. He had some little money with him; but he had not been many days in Amsterdam before he was seized with a brain fever, and died raving mad. I was put into the asylum, and afterwards was sent to sea before the mast. You now know all my history. The question is, whether I am to pay the penalty of my father's oath? I am myself perfectly convinced that, in some way or another, I shall.'

II

On the twenty-second day the high land of the south of Sumatra was in view: as there were no vessels in sight, they resolved to keep their course through the Straits, and run for Pulo Penang, which they expected, as their vessel lay so close to the wind, to reach in seven or eight days. By constant exposure Philip and Krantz were now so bronzed that with their long beards and Mussulman dresses, they might easily have passed off for natives. They had steered during the whole of the days exposed to a burning sun; they had lain down and slept in the dew of the night; but their health had not suffered. But for several days, since he had confided the history of his family to Philip, Krantz had become silent and melancholy; his usual flow of spirits had vanished, and Philip had often questioned him as to the cause. As they entered the Straits, Philip talked of what they should do upon their arrival at Goa; when Krantz gravely replied, 'For some days, Philip, I have had a presentiment that I shall never see that city.'

'You are out of health, Krantz,' replied Philip.

'No, I am in sound health, body and mind. I have endeavoured to shake off the presentiment, but in vain; there is a warning voice that continually tells me that I shall not be long with you Philip; will you oblige me by making me content on one point? I have gold about my person which may be useful to you; oblige me by
taking it, and securing it on your own.'

'What nonsense, Krantz.'

'It is no nonsense, Philip. Have you not had your warnings? Why should I not have mine? You know that I have little fear in my composition, and that I care not about death; but I feel the presentiment which I speak of more strongly every hour....'

These are the imaginings of a disturbed brain, Krantz; why you, young, in full health and vigour, should not pass your days in peace, and live to a good old age, there is no cause for believing. You will be better to-morrow.'

'Perhaps so,' replied Krantz; 'but you still must yield to my whim, and take the gold. If I am wrong, and we do arrive safe, you know, Philip, you can let me have it back,' observed Krantz, with a faint smile—'but you forget, our water is nearly out, and we must look out for a rill on the coast to obtain a fresh supply.'

'I was thinking of that when you commenced this unwelcome topic. We had better look out for the water before dark, and as soon as we have replenished our jars, we will make sail again.'

At the time that this conversation took place, they were on the eastern side of the Strait, about forty miles to the northward. The interior of the coast was rocky and mountainous, but it slowly descended to low lands of alternate forest and jungles, which continued to the beach; the country appeared to be uninhabited. Keeping close in to the shore, they discovered, after two hours' run, a fresh stream which burst in a cascade from the mountains, and swept its devious course through the jungle, until it poured its tribute into the waters of the Strait.

They ran close into the mouth of the stream, lowered the sails, and pulled the peroqua against the current until they had advanced far enough to assure them that the water was quite fresh. The jars were soon filled, and they were again thinking of pushing off, when enticed by the beauty of the spot, the coolness of the fresh water, and wearied with their long confinement on board of the peroqua, they proposed to bathe—a luxury hardly to be appreciated by those who have not been in a similar situation. They threw off their Mussulman dresses, and plunged into the stream, where they remained for some time. Krantz was the first to get out; he complained of feeling chilled, and he walked on to the banks where their clothes had been laid. Philip also approached nearer to the beach, intending to follow him.

'And now, Philip,' said Krantz, 'this will be a good opportunity for me to give you the money. I will open my sash and pour it out, and you can put it into your own before you put it on.'

Philip was standing in the water, which was about level with his waist.

'Well, Krantz,' said he, 'I suppose if it must be so, it must; but it appears to me an idea so ridiculous—however, you shall have your own way.

Philip quitted the run, and sat down by Krantz, who was already busy in shaking the doubloons out of the folds of his sash; at last he said—
I believe, Philip, you have got them all, now?—I feel satisfied.'

'What danger there can be to you, which I am not equally exposed to, I cannot conceive,' replied Philip: 'however——'

Hardly had he said these words, when there was a tremendous roar—a rush like a mighty wind through the air—a blow which threw him on his back—a loud cry—and a contention. Philip recovered himself, and perceived the naked form of Krantz carried off with the speed of an arrow by an enormous tiger through the jungle. He watched with distended eyeballs; in a few seconds the animal and Krantz had disappeared.

'God of heaven! Would that Thou hadst spared me this,' cried Philip, throwing himself down in agony on his face. 'O Krantz! my friend—my brother—too sure was your presentiment. Merciful God! Have pity—but Thy will be done.' And Philip burst into a flood of tears.

For more than an hour did he remain fixed upon the spot, careless and indifferent to the danger by which he was surrounded. At last, somewhat recovered, he rose, dressed himself, and then again sat down—his eyes fixed upon the clothes of Krantz, and the gold which still lay on the sand.

'He would give me that gold. He foretold his doom. Yes! Yes! It was his destiny, and it has been fulfilled. His bones will bleach in the wilderness, and the spirit-hunter and his wolfish daughter are avenged.'
The house was called 'Undercliff', because that's where it stood—under a cliff. The man who went away—the owner of the house—was Robert Astley. And the man who stayed behind—the old family retainer—was Prem Bahadur.

Astley had been gone many years. He was still a bachelor in his late thirties when he'd suddenly decided that he wanted adventure, romance, faraway places; and he'd given the keys of the house to Prem Bahadur—who'd served the family for thirty years—and had set off on his travels.

Someone saw him in Sri Lanka. He'd been heard of in Burma, around the ruby mines at Mogok. Then he turned up in Java, seeking a passage through the Sunda Straits. After that the trail petered out. Years passed. The house in the hill-station remained empty.

But Prem Bahadur was still there, living in an outhouse.

Every day he opened up Undercliff, dusted the furniture in all the rooms, made sure that the bedsheets and pillowcases were clean, and set out Astley's dressing-gown and slippers.

In the old days, whenever Astley had come home after a journey or a long tramp in the hills, he had liked to bathe and change into his gown and slippers, no matter what the hour. Prem Bahadur still kept them ready. He was convinced that Robert would return one day.

Astley himself had said so.

'Keep everything ready for me, Prem, old chap. I may be back after a year, or two years, or even longer, but I'll be back, I promise you. On the first of every month I want you to go to my lawyer, Mr Kapoor. He'll give you your salary and any money that's needed for the rates and repairs. I want you to keep the house tip-top!'

'Will you bring back a wife, Sahib?'

'Lord, no! Whatever put that idea in your head?'

'I thought, perhaps—because you wanted the house kept ready....'

'Ready for me, Prem. I don't want to come home and find the old place falling down.'

And so Prem had taken care of the house—although there was no news from
Astley. What had happened to him? The mystery provided a talking-point whenever local people met on the Mall. And in the bazaar the shopkeepers missed Astley because he was a man who spent freely.

His relatives still believed him to be alive. Only a few months back a brother had turned up—a brother who had a farm in Canada and could not stay in India for long. He had deposited a further sum with the lawyer and told Prem to carry on as before. The salary provided Prem with his few needs. Moreover, he was convinced that Robert would return.

Another man might have neglected the house and grounds, but not Prem Bahadur. He had a genuine regard for the absent owner. Prem was much older—now almost sixty and none too strong, suffering from pleurisy and other chest troubles—but he remembered Robert as both a boy and a young man. They had been together on numerous hunting and fishing trips in the mountains. They had slept out under the stars, bathed in icy mountain streams, and eaten from the same cooking-pot. Once, when crossing a small river, they had been swept downstream by a flash-flood, a wall of water that came thundering down the gorges without any warning during the rainy season. Together they had struggled back to safety. Back in the hill-station, Astley told everyone that Prem had saved his life; while Prem was equally insistent that he owed his life to Robert.

This year the monsoon had begun early and ended late. It dragged on through most of September, and Prem Bahadur's cough grew worse and his breathing more difficult.

He lay on his charpai on the veranda, staring out at the garden, which was beginning to get out of hand, a tangle of dahlias, snake-lilies and convolvulus. The sun finally came out. The wind shifted from the south-west to the north-west, and swept the clouds away.

Prem Bahadur had taken his charpai into the garden, and was lying in the sun, puffing at his small hookah, when he saw Robert Astley at the gate.

He tried to get up but his legs would not oblige him. The hookah slipped from his hand.

Astley came walking down the garden path and stopped in front of the old retainer, smiling down at him. He did not look a day older than when Prem Bahadur had last seen him.

'So you have come at last,' said Prem.
'I told you I'd return.'
'It has been many years. But you have not changed.'
'Nor have you, old chap.'
'I have grown old and sick and feeble.'
'You'll be fine now. That's why I've come.'
'I'll open the house,' said Prem, and this time he found himself getting up quite
easily.
'It isn't necessary,' said Astley.
'But all is ready for you!'
'I know. I have heard of how well you have looked after everything. Come then, let's take a last look round. We cannot stay, you know.'

Prem was a little mystified but he opened the front door and took Robert through the drawing-room and up the stairs to the bedroom. Robert saw the dressing-gown and the slippers, and he placed his hand gently on the old man's shoulder.

When they returned downstairs and emerged into the sunlight, Prem was surprised to see himself—or rather his skinny body—stretched out on the charpai. The hookah lay on the ground, where it had fallen.

Prem looked at Astley in bewilderment.
'But who is that—lying there?'
'It was you. Only the husk now, the empty shell. This is the real you, standing here beside me.'
'You came for me?'
'I couldn't come until you were ready. As for me, I left my shell a long time ago. But you were determined to hang on, keeping this house together. Are you ready now?'
'And the house?'
'Others will live in it. Nothing is lost for ever, everything begins again. ... But come, it's time to go fishing....'

Astley took Prem by the arm, and they walked through the dappled sunlight under the deodars and finally left that place for another.
'What a charming little house!' said Brinton, as he was walking in from a round of golf at Ellesborough with Lander.

'Yes, from the outside,' replied Lander.

'What's the matter with the inside—Eozoic plumbing?'

'No; the "usual offices" are neat, if not gaudy. Spengler would probably describe them as "contemporary with the death of Lincoln," but it's not that—it's haunted.'

'Is it, by Jove!' said Brinton, gazing up at it. 'Fancy such a dear little Queen Anne piece having such a nasty reputation. I see it's unoccupied.'

'It usually is,' replied Lander.

'Tell me about it.'

'During dinner I will. But you seem to find something of interest about those windows on the second floor.' Brinton gazed up for a moment or two longer, and then started to walk back in silence beside his host.

In a few minutes they reached Lander's cottage—it was rather more pretentious than that—an engaging two-storeyed structure added to and modernised from time to time, formerly known as 'the Old Vicarage', and rechristened 'Laymer's'. Black and white and creeper-lined, with a trim little garden of rose-trees and mellow turf, two fine limes, and a great yew, impenetrable and secret. This little garden melted into an arable expanse, and there was a lovely view over to some high Chiltern spurs. The whole place just suited Lander, who was—or it might be more accurate to say, wanted to be—a novelist; a commonplace and ill-advised ambition, but he had money of his own and could afford to wait.

James Brinton, his guest for a week and a very old friend, occupied himself with a picture gallery in Mayfair. A very small gallery—one rather small room, to be exact—but he had admirable taste and made it pay.

Two hours later they sat down to dinner. 'Now then,' said Brinton, as Mrs Dunkley brought in the soup, 'tell me about that house.'

'Well,' replied Lander, 'I have had, as you know, much more experience of such places than most people, and I consider Pailton the worst or the best specimen I have
heard or read of or experienced. For one thing, it is a "killer". The majority of haunted houses are harmless, the peculiar energy they have absorbed and radiate forth is not hostile to life. But in others the radiation is malignant and fatal. Pailton has been rented five times in the last twelve years; in each case the tenancy has been marked by a violent death within its walls. For my part, I have no two opinions concerning the morality of letting it at all. It should be razed to the ground.'

'How long do its occupants stick it out as a rule?'

'Six weeks is the record, and that was made by some person called Pendexter. That was three years ago. I knew Pendexter père, and he was a courageous and determined person. His daughter was hurled down the stairs one night and killed, and I shall never forget the mingled fury and grief with which he told me about it. Previous to that he had detected eighteen different examples of psychic action—appearances and sounds—several definitely malignant. The family had not enjoyed one single day of freedom from abnormal phenomena.'

'How long since it was last occupied?' asked Brinton.

'It has been empty for a year, and I am inclined to think it will remain so. Any one who comes down to look at it is given a pretty straight tip by one or other of us to keep away.'

'Does it affect you violently?'

'I have never set foot in it.'

'What? You, of all people!'

'My dear Jim, just for that very reason. When I first discovered I was psychic I felt flattered and anxious to experience all I could. I soon changed my mind. I found I experienced quite enough without any need for making opportunities. I do to this day. Several times I have had a visitor in the study here after dinner, an uninvited guest. And it has always been so. I have many times heard and seen things which could not be explained in places with perfectly clean bills of psychic health. And one never gets quite used to it. Terror may pass, but some distress of mind is invariable. Any person gifted or afflicted like myself will tell you the same. It seems to me sometimes as if I actually assist in evoking and materialising these appearances, that I help to establish a connection between them and the place I inhabit, that I am a most unpleasant kind of lightning conductor.'

'Is there any possible explanation for that?'

'Well, I have formed one, but it would take rather a long time to explain, and may be quite fallacious. Anyhow, there has never been any need for me to visit such places as Pailton, and I keep away from them if I can.'

'Would you very much object to going in for a minute or two?'

'Why?'

'Well, I have been bothered all my life about this business of ghosts. I have never seen one; in a sense I "don't believe in them", yet I am convinced you have known
many. It is a maddening dualism of mind. I feel if I could just once come in contact with something of the kind I should feel a sense of enormous relief.'

'And you'd like me to conduct you over Pailton?'

'Not if it would really upset you.'

'It would be at your own risk,' said Lander, smiling.

'I'll risk it!'

'You mustn't imagine that you can go into a disturbed spot such as this and expect to see about ten ghosts in as many minutes. Even in the case of such a busy hive as Pailton there are many quiet periods, and some people simply cannot see ghosts. The odds are very much against your desire being granted, though, if you are psychic, the atmosphere of the place would affect you at once.'

'How?'

'Well, you've often heard of people who know by some obscure but infallible instinct that there's a cat in the room. Just so. However, I'll certainly give you the chance. It won't seriously disturb me. I can get the key in the morning from the woman who looks after it, though I need hardly say she doesn't sleep there. There is no need for a caretaker. It was broken into once, but the burglar was found dead in the dining-room, and since then the crooks have given it a wide berth.'

'It really is dangerous, then?'

'Beginning to feel a bit prudent?'

'No, I shall feel safe with you.'

'Very well then. After coming back from golf we'll pay it a visit. It will be dark by five, and we'll make the excursion about six. The chances of gratifying your curiosity will be better after dark. I'd better tell you something else. I never quite know how these places are going to affect me. Before now, I have gone off into a kind of trance and been decidedly weird, my dear Jim. My sense of time and space becomes distorted, though for your assurance I may say,' he added smiling, 'I am never dangerous when in this condition. Furthermore, you must be prepared to make acquaintance with a mode of existence in which the ordinary laws of existence which you have always known abdicate themselves. Bierce called his famous book of ghost stories, Can These Things Be? Assuredly they can. Now I'm sounding pompous and pontifical, but some such warning is necessary. When I touch that front door tomorrow I may become, in a sense, a stranger to you; once inside we shall cross a frontier into a region with its own laws of time and space, and where the seemingly impossible can happen.... Do you understand what I mean and still want to go?'

'Yes,' replied Brinton, 'to all your questions.'

'Very well then,' said Lander, 'I will now get out the chessmen and discover a complete answer to Reti's opening which you sprang on me last night; so you shall have the white pieces.'
November 21st was a lazy, drowsy, cloudless day, starting with a sharp ground frost which, thawing unresistingly as the sun climbed, made the tees at Ellesborough like tiny slides. In consequence, neither Brinton nor Lander played very good golf. This upset Brinton not at all, for he was thinking much more of that which was beginning to impress him as a possible ordeal, the crossing of the threshold of Pailton a few hours later. As they finished their second round, a mist, spreading like a gigantic spider's web, was beginning to raise the level of the Buckinghamshire fields. As they walked homewards, it climbed with them, keeping pace with them like a dog; sometimes hurrying ahead, then dropping back, but always with them.

It was exactly five o'clock as they reached Laymer's. Tea was ready. 'Do you still want to go, Jim?' asked Lander abruptly.

'Sure, Bo!' replied Brinton lightly.

'Here's the key,' said Lander, smiling, 'the Open Sesame to the Chamber of Horrors. The electric light is turned off, so all the light we shall have will be produced by my torch. One last word of advice—if you want to get the best chance of a thrill, try to keep your mind quite empty—don't talk as I personally conduct this tour. Concentrate on *not* concentrating.'

'I understand what you mean,' said Brinton.

'Well, then, let's get a move on,' said Lander. An idea suddenly occurred to Brinton. 'How will you be able to show me over it if you've never been inside it?'

'You needn't worry about that,' replied Lander.

The fog was thick by now, and they waivered slightly as they groped their way down the lane, compressed by high hedges, which led to Pailton. When they reached it, Brinton's eyes turned up to observe the windows on the second floor. And then Lander stepped forward and placed the key in the lock.

As the door swung open, the fog, which seemed to have been crouching at his heels, leapt forward and entered with him and inundated the passage down which he moved. The moment he was inside, something advanced to meet him. He opened a door on the left of the passage and flashed his torch round it. The fog was in there too. Jim, he could feel, was at this elbow.

'This is where they found the burglar—it's the dining-room.'

His voice was not quite under control. 'Quite a pleasant room, smells a bit frowsty.' The little beam wandered from chair to desk, settling for a moment here and there. Then he shut the door and stepped along the passage until the little beam revealed a flight of stairs which he began to climb. He still heard Brinton's steps coming up behind him. Up on the first floor he opened another door. 'This is the drawing-room,' he said, 'the Proctors' cook was found dead here in 1921. Round swung the tiny beam, fastening on chairs, tables, desks, curtains. He shut the door and began to climb another flight of stairs. He could hear Jim's feet pattering up behind him. On the second floor he opened still another door. 'This, my dear Jim, is
the nasty one; it was from here Amy Pendexter fell and broke her neck.'

His voice had risen slightly, and he was speaking quickly. Once again he flashed his torch over chairs, tables, curtains, and ahead.

'Well, Jim, do you get any reaction? Do you? You can speak now.' As there was no answer, he turned, and swung the beam of his torch on to the person just behind him. But it wasn't Brinton who was standing at his elbow....

'What's the matter, Willie?' asked Brinton, 'can't you find the keyhole?' The figure in front of him remained motionless

'Can't you find the keyhole?' asked Brinton more urgently.

As the figure still remained motionless, Jim Brinton lit a match and peered forward.... And then he reeled back.

'Who, in God's name, are you?' he cried.