

# WEIRD TALES

*The Unique Magazine*

EDWIN BAIRD, *Editor*

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# JACK O' MYSTERY

## *A Modern Ghost Story*

By EDWIN MacLAREN

THE LIMOUSINE came to a glistening stop before an office building in Monroe Street, and a handsome woman of thirty, expensively and stylishly gowned, emerged from the car and entered the building, her mien bespeaking nervousness.

Furtively, as one who fears pursuit, she hastened across the marble rotunda, edged hurriedly into an elevator and ascended to the ninth floor, where she approached a door bearing upon its opaque glass panel the gilt lettering:

### BARRY DETECTIVE AGENCY

She paused here for a moment, in an effort to recover her equanimity; and then, with a brave assumption of self-assurance, she opened the door and entered the room and closed the door behind her.

The room was quite deserted; but promptly from an adjoining chamber there came a lean-faced young man of inquiring blue eyes, who courteously greeted her.

"Is Mr. Barry in?" she asked. "Mr. Herbert Barry?"

"I am Herbert Barry," he said.

"Oh!" Surprised, she eyed the slim young man half incredulously. He seemed scarcely more than a boy. "Mrs. Franklin Parker told me about you—recommended you very highly. Perhaps that is why," she added, with a smile, "I expected to find an older man. . . . I suppose most of the people who come to see you are in trouble of some sort. I am not in trouble, exactly, but—" She glanced around the office. "May I have a word with you in privacy?"



He held open the door to the adjoining room. "Suppose we step in here? My stenographer is at lunch. There's no danger of our being disturbed."

Preceding him into the inner office, she bade him lock the door; and, thus assured of their safety from interruption, she sat nervously on the edge of a chair and faced him across the flat-top desk. There clung to her, somehow, a subtle suggestion of wealth and luxury, and her well-chiseled features denoted good breeding. Subtle, too, was the delicate odor of violets that fragrantly touched his nostrils as she leaned toward him across the desk. Then he noticed she wore a rich cluster of the flowers upon her mauve silk waist.

He observed, also, the purplish shadows beneath her large brown eyes, her half-frightened, half-worried demeanor and her air of suppressed excitement, as though she were struggling to control some inner perturbation.

"Perhaps I've made a mistake," she began, "in coming here. I don't know. But I've been so perplexed, so utterly mystified, by some strange things that have happened lately—Did you ever hear of Willard Clayberg?" she broke off suddenly to ask.

Barry knitted his brows. The name had a familiar sound.

"Yes," he said, after a pause, "I seem to remember him. Wasn't he the North Shore millionaire who went insane last winter and killed his wife and himself?"

She nodded. Her elbows were resting on the desk and her slender fingers, interlaced beneath her small white chin, were twitching.

"Exactly. They lived, as you probably recall, in a quaint old-fashioned home near Hubbard Woods—just the two of them; no children. Following the tragedy, the house was closed up and for a long while remained unoccupied. Despite the scarcity of dwelling places, nobody apparently cared to live there. For one thing, it is not a modern residence, and for another—and this really seemed the most serious objection—it it had acquired a reputation of being 'haunted.'

"Of course," she went on, with a nervous little laugh, "you will say—just as I said—that such a thing is perfectly absurd. You'd think that no normal person would take it seriously. And yet there were so many strange things told about the house—creepy stories of weird sounds in the dead of night and unearthly things seen through the windows—that people, ordinarily level-headed, began to shun the place.

"I have never believed in ghosts, Mr. Barry, and I've always ridiculed people who did; but now—Do you know my husband, Scott Peyton?"

"I've heard of him," said Barry. "Architect, isn't he?"

"A very successful one. He has designed some of the finest buildings in Chicago. But he's the most superstitious man alive! He's a Southerner, born in Georgia, and at childhood his negro 'mammy' filled his mind with all manner of silly superstitions, including a deathly fear of 'ha'nts.' He has never been able to overcome this, although both of us have tried.

"About three weeks ago," Mrs. Peyton continued, her voice betraying her agitation, "he and I were motoring along the North Shore when we espied this old Clayberg estate. The quaint charm of the old-fashioned place at once enchanted me; and when we alighted and strolled through the grounds my enchantment grew. It seemed as if Nature had outdone herself in lavishing picturesque beauty there. Mr. Peyton was as fascinated as I.

"We were planning, at that time, to give up our town apartment and buy a suburban home; and this seemed to be just the thing we were looking for. We inquired of the neighbors concerning it, and it was then we discovered its tragic history. When my husband was told of the hideous thing that had happened there last winter, and of its evil reputation since, his enthusiasm vanished, and I immediately saw he would never consider buying it.

"But I had set my heart on having that place; and later—after I had pleaded and argued with him in vain—I decided to buy it myself and, by compelling him to live there, perhaps cure him permanently of his superstitious fear. I saw the agent next day, learned the old home could be bought at a bargain, and had my father buy it and deed it to me.

"My husband was furious when I told him what I had done. He declared he would never enter the house and urged me to sell it forthwith. But I was as firm as he; and finally, after a rather violent argument and by taunting him with being a coward, I contrived to get his reluctant consent to make our home in the 'haunted house'."

"WE MOVED in last Thursday," said Mrs. Peyton sitting nearer the desk and lowering her voice, "and on Thursday night, and every night since then—" She exhaled audibly, her lip quivering.

"What happened?" asked Barry.

"It's been a nightmare!" she exclaimed with sudden vehemence. "Ever since that first night the most peculiar things have happened. I don't know what to make of it, or what to think, or do. It's baffling! I'm not in the least superstitious; and yet—"

"Start at the beginning," suggested Barry, "and tell me exactly what happened."

"Well, the first night we slept in the master's bedroom—a large front room on the second floor—and about midnight I was awakened by my husband, who was sitting up in bed, gasping and trembling with terror. Before I could speak, he sprang from bed and switched on the light and began frantically searching the room, looking into the closets and under the bed and peering into the hall.

"For heaven's sake!" I cried. "What's the matter?"

"He pointed to the corridor door. His hand was trembling and his face was as white as paper. For a moment he seemed unable to speak.

"It came right through that door!" he said at last. "I woke up just as it came in the room—a ghastly-looking old man with white hair and a long beard. It didn't open the door, but came right through it!"

"Nonsense!" I laughed. "You've been thinking about ghosts until you imagine you're seeing them. Now come back to bed and go to sleep."

"But he indignantly insisted he had actually seen the thing."

"I saw it cross the room," he declared, "and stop at the bed and stand there looking down at me. When I sat up it disappeared—vanished into air."

"I couldn't believe such a preposterous thing, of course, but, to humor him, I offered to get up and help him search the house."

"What good would that do?" he objected. "I tell you the thing was a spirit!"

"Finally he went back to bed. But he slept no more that night. At breakfast next morning I could see he hadn't closed his eyes.

"On the following night I again was awakened by my husband, who seemed even more frightened than before.

"It came back again!" he whispered hoarsely. "It was puttering around your desk over there."

"Then he jumped out of bed and ran to the desk and lit the lamp there. A moment later he uttered a sharp cry and came hurrying back to my bed, with a sheet of writing paper in his hand.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed, and thrust the paper before my eyes.

"I saw written on the paper, in a sprawling hand, the words, '*Leave this House!*' and I knew then that somebody had been in the room."

"I got up and tried the door. It was still locked and the key was in the hole, just as I had left it. The windows hadn't been touched, apparently. How, then, had the person entered our room?"

"My husband, of course, insisted it was not a living being, but a ghost, who could pass through a locked door as though it didn't exist. And, as before, he refused to look for it."

"Next day, however, with our cook and houseman, I thoroughly searched the house from top to bottom—and found nothing. No trace of anybody having entered the house. Nothing wrong anywhere."

"On Saturday night I was awakened again—this time by a frantic knocking on our bedroom door. I sat up, startled. My husband was sleeping soundly, exhausted after two sleepless nights."

"I slipped quietly from bed, without disturbing him, and tiptoed to the door and whispered through the panel:

"Who's there?"

"The cook's voice answered, and I could tell by her tone she was terribly frightened:

"It's me, ma'am. I'm leavin' this house tonight. I won't stay here another minute!"

"I opened the door and stepped out in the hall—taking care not to awake Mr. Peyton—and found Clara fully dressed and holding her traveling-bag. It was evident she had dressed in considerable haste, and it was equally plain that she was almost paralyzed with fear.

"I just seen a spook!" she gasped. "An old man with white hair and whiskers. He come right in my room while I was asleep. I woke up and seen 'im. And he writ somethin' on my dresser. You c'n see for yerself, ma'am, what he writ there."

**F**EARFUL of awakening my husband, I had drawn her away from the bedroom door; and now, with some difficulty, I persuaded her to follow me to her room, where I found, written in white chalk across the bureau mirror, the command: '*Leave here at once!*'

"Clara was determined to obey this 'message from the dead' by leaving instantly. I couldn't induce her even to stay until morning. Despite my protests and entreaties, she fled from the house and passed the remainder of the night, as I later discovered, in the Hubbard Woods railroad station, taking an early train for Chicago.

"I tried to keep the occurrence from my husband, inventing an excuse for Clara's hasty departure, but he wormed the truth from me, and of course that further harassed his already overwrought nerves. Also, it gave him the right to say, 'I told you so!'

"He renewed his pleading to abandon the house; but I still refused to give it up—still refused to admit that it was 'haunted,' or that there was anything supernatural in what he and Clara had seen."

"It didn't end there, unhappily. On the very next night—that was night before last—the houseman was visited by the mysterious 'thing.' He said he saw it in his room, after midnight, stooping over his table, that he shouted at it and it disappeared. Then, so he told us, he got up and struck a light and discovered the 'ghost' had been trying to send a message to him by arranging some matches on the table."

"He showed us these matches, saying he had left them just as they were found. They were so placed as to spell the word, '*LEAVE*', in capital letters. Evidently the 'ghost' was frightened away before he could finish his sentence. Needless to say, the houseman left us."

"Well, in spite of all these things, I simply couldn't bring myself to believe that the mysterious visitations were supernatural. I was sure there must be some logical explanation. But *last night!*"

"What happened last night?" asked Barry, as Mrs. Peyton paused.

Mrs. Peyton, still sitting forward in her chair, was searching in her reticule. Barry noticed her fingers were unsteady and that her underlip was caught between her teeth to still its quivering.

"Last night," she went on, with a transparent effort at lightness, "I saw the 'ghost'! Please don't smile! I was quite wide awake when I saw it—as wide awake as I am this moment—and in full possession of all my wits. And I can't understand yet how it got in my room, or how it got out, or even what it was."

"I was alone in the house, too," she continued, taking a photograph from the reticule and placing it, face down, on the desk. "Yesterday afternoon Mr. Peyton telephoned from his office that he must stay downtown rather late to attend a meeting of building contractors and suggested that I come in to the city for dinner, and bring a friend and 'take in a show,' and meet him afterward. But I wasn't in the mood and told him I'd prefer to stay at home."

"But I won't be home before twelve o'clock," he said, 'and I don't like the

idea of your being all alone in that house at night, without even a servant on the place.'

"I reminded him that the chauffeur and gardener were still with us (they sleep in the garage and hadn't been alarmed by the 'spook'), and with these two and Mitch, our Scotch collie, to guard me I felt perfectly safe. As for the 'ghost,' I laughingly told him, I really would enjoy meeting it and having a chat on its astral adventures."

"He declined to unbend from his seriousness and became irritated when I refused to leave the house. We had quite a tiff, but I finally had my way, and the best he could get was a promise from me to lock myself in before going to bed. He said he would sleep in one of the guest chambers."

"After a pick-up meal in the kitchen, I went upstairs to our room and wrote letters until ten o'clock. Then I prepared for bed."

"For a moment I regretted not having done as my husband asked. The house *did* seem eerie; no denying that—big and dark and silent, and not a living creature in it except myself."

"But I quickly shook off this feeling, assuring myself there was no such thing as a ghost, and, even if there was, that it couldn't possibly harm me. However, remembering my promise, I locked the door and put the key under my pillow, and bolted all the windows, and, as an additional precaution, I looked under the bed and inspected both closets. And I knew *absolutely*, when I put out the light and got into bed, that I was the only person in that room."

"I was soon asleep," said Mrs. Peyton, again feeling in her handbag, "and it seemed only a few minutes later—though I know now it was several hours—when I found myself wide awake. I suppose it was the lack of fresh air that awoke me. I'm accustomed to sleeping with the windows open."

"I was on the point of getting up to open a window when, all at once, my blood seemed to freeze. I discovered, quite suddenly, *I was not alone in the room!*"

**M**R. PEYTON paused and drew from the handbag a sheet of blue linen notepaper. Nervously creasing the paper in her slender white fingers, she continued, with heightening agitation, her large brown eyes earnestly watching the detective's face: "I won't deny, Mr. Berry, that I was frightened. In fact, I confess that I was so terrified I seemed utterly powerless to move or speak. I had always supposed if I ever should see a ghost I would feel no fear

whatever. But now that I found myself actually looking at one—or at least looking at what, in that frightful moment, I potently believed to be one—I was petrified with terror.

"It was sitting at my desk, right where I'd been sitting all evening, and its back was toward me. The moon had risen and was shining through the windows, brightening the room with a pale half-light.

"The figure at the desk appeared to be writing. In fact, I could hear the scratching of the pen. I could also hear the ticking of a small clock on the desk. That's how still everything was.

"Well, it sat there writing—a blurred, shapeless object in the silvery moonlight—for I don't know how long. It seemed an age! And all the time I was conscious—terrifyingly so—that I was alone in that great house with it!"

Mrs. Peyton paused and took the photograph from the desk.

"Instinctively, I tried to scream," she went on, "but my throat was parched and I seemed unable to utter a sound. However, I must have made some sort of noise, for the thing suddenly turned and looked at me over its shoulder. And for the first time, I saw its face."

"What was the face like?" asked Barry.

She handed him the photograph.

"That's a picture of it," she said.

It was a kodak "snapshot" of an aged man with flowing white hair and a patriarchal beard. Turning it over, Barry saw written on the back, "Willard Clayberg, December, 1922."

"It's Mr. Clayberg's last picture," said Mrs. Peyton. "I obtained it this morning from one of his grandsons. It was taken last winter, shortly before the dreadful tragedy at our house."

"Getting back to last night?" reminded Barry.

"Oh, yes! Well, the thing sat there, quite silent and motionless, staring at me through the moonlight. Its face was the same as the one in that picture, only, somehow, it didn't seem *real*. It was peculiarly pallid and lifeless—like the face of a dead person.

"Finally I found my voice and cried out: 'Who are you? What are you doing here?'

"Instantly the thing rose from the desk, without making a particle of sound, and glided swiftly and silently across the room—and disappeared!

"That seemed to revive my courage—the thought that I had frightened it away—and I sprang from bed and ran to the door.

"The door was still locked! I tried the windows. They were still bolted.

Neither the door nor the windows had been touched. Everything in the room, in fact, was just as I had left it upon going to bed.

"Then I crossed to my desk and lit the lamp there and found—this!" Mrs. Peyton offered the sheet of note paper, which she had been nervously fingering.

Barry unfolded it and read the words scrawled upon its blue surface:

*"Again I warn you to leave this house. This is the last—"*

"When I interrupted him," explained Mrs. Peyton, "he apparently had just written the word, 'last.' "

Barry nodded and narrowly examined the handwriting. It was old-style script, angular and shaky, indicative of a very aged and infirm person.

"Have you the notes received by Mr. Peyton and the cook?"

"No; but I saw them. Both were written in the same hand as that," indicating the sheet of blue paper.

Barry again looked at the photograph, holding it to the light and inspecting it closely. Suddenly he asked:

"What sort of clothing did your visitor wear?"

"Why, as I remember, he wore a sort of long gray robe and a queer little cap—a skullcap, maybe. But it was all very blurred and indistinct. He seemed to be enveloped in a kind of gray mist. With his white hair and beard, the effect was quite 'creepy.' "

"Anything else happen last night?"

"Nothing—except that I passed the rest of the night trying to solve the riddle. The first thing I did, after finding the note, was to try the door and windows again—and I again made sure they hadn't been touched. I knew positively that nobody could get in the room except through the door or windows, so how had the old man entered?"

"I was still hunting an answer to that question, and growing more perplexed than ever, when I heard a heavy footfall on the front porch; then the front door opened and closed with a *bang*, and my husband came bounding noisily upstairs. I knew from this he had seen the light at my window, even before he called to me reprovingly through the bedroom door: 'Haven't you turned in yet? It's 'way after one o'clock.'

"It was then I decided to say nothing to him about what happened. And I haven't."

"But this morning, as soon as he'd left for the office, I called on Mrs. Parker and told her everything. She suggested that I see you. I hesitated at first to do this, because only yesterday I spoke to Mr. Peyton about

calling in the police or employing a detective to investigate the mystery, and he vigorously objected. He really believed the thing was supernatural and declared that no living person could overcome it. The only thing to do, he said, was to leave the house as the 'spirit' commanded.

"I finally decided, however, to follow Mrs. Parker's suggestion, particularly as she recommended you so highly—and so, quite unknown to my husband, here I am!"

"And now, Mr. Barry," said Mrs. Peyton, sitting back in her chair for the first time and moving her white hands in a pretty gesture of relief, "what do you make of it all?"

BARRY, examining the feeble handwriting beneath a reading-glass, discerned what appeared to be a startling solution of the mystery; but, deeming it best for the moment to say nothing of this, he offered an obvious answer to her question:

"From what you have told me, Mrs. Peyton, it would seem that an unknown person, concealed in your house, is bent on frightening you away."

"But I've thoroughly searched the house," she protested, "not once, but several times; and I know positively that nobody is hidden there—and that nobody has broken in. Besides, even if the old man was in the house, or had broken in, how did he enter my room last night?"

"Perhaps, after I've inspected the room—"

"Can you do it, without Mr. Peyton knowing?"

"Quite easily, I think, with our help. Since you are in need of servants, my presence can readily be explained—"

"Why, of course!" she eagerly interrupted. "Our new houseman! It will seem quite plausible, too," she added, rising and glancing at her watch, "particularly since I've just engaged a new cook—who is waiting for me now, by the way, in my car. We had best start at once, Mr. Barry. It's nearly one, and my husband is usually home before six."

. . . . A little later, as the Peyton limousine smartly threaded its way through the downtown streets, Barry, sitting on the front seat beside the chauffeur, planned a procedure that would either substantiate, or explode, his tentative explanation of the white-bearded "ghost."

His first step was taken immediately: At a State Street department store he secretly bought a pad of cheap writing paper, a package of unguammed envelopes, ten two-cent stamps, a thick lead

pencil, a jar of mucilage and an oblong carton of sterilized gauze.

Later still, upon reaching the "haunted house," he saw no cause to revise his plan, and no reason to doubt that the solution he already had formed, although amazing, was essentially correct.

With the new cook installed in the kitchen, Mrs. Peyton conducted him to the second-floor front bedroom—a commodious south chamber—where she had seen the "ghost" last night. Barry looked at the small mahogany desk, surveyed the white-enameled twin beds, measured their distance from the corridor door and carefully examined the lock thereon.

Then, swiftly though systematically, he searched the rest of the house and afterward strolled outdoors. Sauntering across the velvety lawns, beneath the aged trees, he casually approached the garage some two hundred feet from the house. He had found nothing in the house, and now saw nothing in the surrounding grounds, to suggest the weird things he had heard. Here, to all appearance, was only an old-fashioned suburban home dozing peacefully in the mellow sunshine of a midsummer afternoon.

At the garage, which aforetime had been a stable, he engaged in back-stairs gossip with Frank Dominick, the chauffeur—in the presence of the gardener, John Hart, an uncommunicative person—and learned that both were preparing to "give notice."

"We ain't actually seen old Clayberg's ghost—at least not yet," said Dominick, "but we've heard enough about 'im and I guess he'll be callin' on us next. I guess the only reason we ain't seen 'im before is because we sleep up there," pointing to the upper floor of the garage. "Take my advice, friend, and don't stay here over night. Am I right, John?"

John Hart, a senile man, shifted his end of tobacco and expectorated lavishly, thus contributing a fresh stain to his ragged white beard.

"You're right," said he, and spoke no more.

Returning to the house, Barry was given a white jacket and a pair of blue trousers by Mrs. Peyton; and at six o'clock, wearing these garments and a servile mien, he was laying the dinner table when the master of the house arrived. Barry, with a plate and napkin in his hands, observed him through the doorway—a trim-looking man of thirty-five—and remarked the harrowing fear that sat upon his countenance.

His haggard eyes, like those of his wife, denoted loss of sleep; and he

evinced no interest in her "luck in finding two perfect servants." In the same troubled preoccupation, he acknowledged the introduction of Barry, who was presented as Thomas Field. Clearly, he was too frightened and worried to be conscious of his environment.

Dinner over, Barry went to his room. It was a tiny chamber tucked under the eaves at the rear of the top floor, and it was here that his predecessor had beheld the "apparition" night before last. Upon the small table, where the word, "LEAVE" had been spelled with matches, Barry spread the articles which he had bought this afternoon.

Then he drew the table to the window, and lighted the lamp, and sat down and began writing letters to mythical persons in Iowa. His door stood open, and so did the window, and anybody passing in the hall, or standing north of the house, could have watched him at his employment.

For upward of two hours he sat steadily writing, his back to the door, his face silhouetted against the window; and when he had written five letters, and had stamped and directed them to his imaginary correspondents, he uncorked the mucilage pot and sealed the flaps of the envelope.

And then, somehow, he awkwardly upset the bottle of mucilage, and the stuff oozed stickily over his pencil and paper.

It was at this moment, or perhaps a little earlier, that he heard a slight rustle in the hall behind him, as of somebody moving away from his door, but, apparently intent only upon cleaning the mucilage from the table, he never looked round or gave any sign that he heard.

Presently he extinguished the light and, disrobing in the darkness, looked from his window. The old Clayberg stable, now Peyton's garage, loomed like a great dusky shadow in the starlit night; and at a small upper window, almost on a direct line with his, a yellow light glowed.

Feeling through the dark, Barry removed the sterilized gauze from the carton, snipped off a ten-inch length, and returned the gauze and box to his pocket. Then he stretched his length on the narrow iron bed, his face to the window, his door ajar.

Wide awake, he lay staring into the darkness, his mind alert, sharpened by expectancy.

THE MOON rose in the southeast, bathing the outdoors in a silvery sheen and mitigating, somewhat, the darkness of his room. The minutes lengthened into hours; and as the hours

dragged slowly by Barry fought off the desire to sleep.

The fight became increasingly difficult; and finally—he judged it was long past midnight—it seemed as though he could no longer force himself to stay awake. His eyelids drooped. He dozed. . . .

And then, all at once, he was wide awake again, his pulse tingling. Somebody had entered his room and was standing now at the table, between the bed and window, so near that Barry could have touched him by reaching forth his hand.

Barry, however, remained motionless, simulating sleep; and beneath lowered lids he watched the intruder—a blurred gray figure—take up the pencil and start writing on the pad of paper. The moon had climbed to the zenith, and by its pale reflection Barry distinguished the salient marks of his visitor; the long gray robe, the flowing white hair and beard, the white skullcap.

Then the figure put down the pencil and vanished—gliding to the hall as swiftly and noiselessly, it seemed, as a shadow leaving the room.

Still Barry did not move. Silence ensued. Then, from some point down the hall, came a woman's piercing scream.

Barry rose, wrapped the lead pencil in the strip of gauze, and enclosed it in the cardboard box and replaced the box in his pocket.

Then, wearing coat and trousers, he stepped into the hall and lit a gas jet there—just as the new cook, screaming with terror, emerged from her room. Hysterical with fright, she frantically flourished a scrap of wrapping paper. And when she could speak coherently:

"I just seen a spook in my room—an old man wid white whiskers. I won't stay in this house! He writ somethin' here—"

She broke off to examine the bit of paper by the fluttering gas flame; and when she saw the words written on her paper she uttered another terrified shriek and, heedless of her scant attire, fled toward the front staircase. She was met at the head of the stairs by Mr. and Mrs. Peyton—he in pajamas and bathrobe, she in a peignoir, and both visibly alarmed—and to them she told, or tried to tell, the reason for her mad flight.

"Now lemme get outa here!" she ended, attempting to brush past them. "He told me to leave tonight—and I'm goin'!"

Barry, following sleepily in her wake, rubbing his eyes as one newly awakened from slumber, heard Peyton saying: "This is dreadful, dreadful!" and Mrs.

Peyton entreating the cook to "stay at least till morning."

Unable to persuade the cook to remain, Mrs. Peyton turned appealingly to Barry. "Did you see anything in your room, Field?"

"No, mem," said Barry, hiding a yawn. "I was fast asleep when she woke me up, mem."

This, however, exerted no influence on the cook. Like Clara who went before her, she departed immediately for the railroad station, there to pass the rest of the night.

Peace at last returned to the house—and Barry returned to his room, locked the door and observed on his pad the same angular scrawl, "*Leave this house tonight!*" which had frightened her away. Then he went to bed and slept soundly until after sunrise.

He was up and dressed at seven o'clock; and when the Peytons came downstairs about eight he had an appetizing breakfast awaiting them. As soon as her husband had left for his office, Mrs. Peyton, returning from the front door, looked at the detective with anxious inquiry in her large brown eyes.

"Have you discovered anything at all, Mr. Barry?"

Barry took a crumpled napkin from the breakfast table and folded it thoughtfully between his long fingers. He was thinking: "Yes, Mrs. Peyton; I've discovered the identity of your 'ghost,' and you alone have the power to 'kill' it." Aloud, however:

"I'll make a report today," he promised, and left the room with a stack of dishes and the folded napkin.

He deposited the dishes in the kitchen sink. The napkin went into his hip pocket. Then he started upstairs for his other clothes. At her bedroom door he paused, listening. The door stood open. Mrs. Peyton, downstairs, was sitting at the breakfast table, absently crumbling a bit of toast in her fingers, a faraway look in her eyes. Barry, at her bedroom door, was remarking the small mahogany desk, where, two nights ago, the "ghost" had written his warning to her.

In three swift strides he crossed to the desk, searched hurriedly among the papers there and neatly pocketed one of these. Then he continued to his room. Mrs. Peyton still sat at the breakfast table in a pensive reverie, her wistful brown gaze lost in the morning sunshine beyond the leaded casements.

**A**N HOUR later Barry alighted from a train in Chicago and forthwith called on a colleague, whose skill in analyzing handwriting and identifying finger prints had earned him the title of "expert." He spent considerable time with this man; and then he went to his office and wrote his report for Mrs. Peyton.

And when the report was finished he sat gazing at it musingly—somewhat as Mrs. Peyton had gazed from her breakfast-room window this morning.

With an energetic shrug, as if to shake off his odd mood, he sealed the report in an envelope, and put it in his pocket and started for an office building in lower Michigan Avenue.

Presently he entered a room in this building, luxuriously furnished and unoccupied, and abruptly halted. In the adjoining room he could hear the voices of Scott Peyton and his wife; and since the door between the two offices stood partly open, he could also see their faces. Himself unobserved, Barry stood silently watching and listening.

"I suppose you're right, Scott," she said, standing beside her husband's desk and looking down at him. "After what happened last night, I'm just about ready to do as you say—give the house up and move back to town. But I do so hate to leave that old place. I wish—"

"Why should you?" he interrupted, scowling at his desk and avoiding her eyes.

Mrs. Peyton looked down, biting a corner of her lip and twisting the wedding ring of her finger.

"It's not so much what I want," she faltered, her voice tremulously low, "but—the city is no place—not the best place for our—*Oh, Scott!*" she cried

passionately, and flung out her hands to him in appeal. "Can't you see?"

Scott Peyton looked up and met his wife's eyes; and the thing he saw in their liquid brown depths instantly chased the frown from his face and took him to his feet in a swift rush of remorse and gladness.

In the next instant she was sobbing in his arms; and he was tenderly patting her shoulders and saying soothingly:

"It's all right, honey. We won't give the place up. I don't think—the ghost—will bother us again . . ."

At this juncture Barry quietly departed.

**A**LITTLE LATER he again sat at his desk, gazing again at the report he had written. And he now knew that this report would never be seen by any eye save his.

But while he is sitting here suppose we look over his shoulder and glance at the thing before he tears it up:

"In Re Peyton 'ghost': . . . Using a King Lear costume, which he put on and off with lightning agility, the 'ghost' hoped, by his nocturnal prowling, to frighten Mrs. Peyton into abandoning the house as her husband desired. . . . Following his nightly appearances, he quickly removed and concealed his costume, and returned to his bed, careful to make no sound. He varied this procedure, however, night before last, when he visited Mrs. Peyton's room. Had she left her key in the lock that night, instead of hiding it under her pillow, he would have been unable to call upon her. As it was, he readily unlocked the door and entered. Leaving silently, he hid his costume, then left the house and returned, making considerable noise. . . . The finger prints he left in glue last night and those he left on his napkin this morning, as well as his real and disguised handwriting positively identify the 'ghost' as Mrs. Peyton's husband, Scott Peyton."

