

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

SEPTEMBER, 1948

Cover by Lee Brown Coye

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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The Follower

BY ALLISON V. HARDING

DR. CHARLES G. ADAMS, JR., maneuvered his car to the curb, braked it and snapped off the ignition. He checked the brick and clapboard suburban house. It said 117. Then he locked the red, two-door sedan and went up the walk, bag in hand.

Adams was young enough to still feel a small sense of anticipation when he met a new patient for the first time. The suburb of Fayette was small enough and classical enough in its medical symptoms to become, after a while, something of a bore.

One-seventeen's occupants, the Turnbells, were new in town. He'd heard about them through old Dr. Bragg, the senior physician of the community. Edwin Bragg had phoned him earlier in the evening.

"Some new people up River Avenue have called me. Couldn't get a line on just what it was. I'd just as soon not make a night call. This rheumatism of mine isn't feeling too good. Would you mind dropping in?"

You didn't say no to Dr. Bragg.

Adams thumbed the bell at 117 and waited. There was a quick step from inside, almost as though they'd been expecting him. The door opened a crack and then widened hastily at the sight of the figure with the black bag.

"Is this Doctor—?"

"Doctor Adams. Mrs. Turnbull?"

"Yes. Do come in!"

The speaker was a worn little woman of about fifty, thin, with fluttery nervous hands. She led the physician into the living room of the two-story house.

"This is my husband, Doctor Adams. Did Doctor Bragg tell you. . . .?"

"I make many of his night calls for him," Adams supplied.

Mr. Turnbull was a mere counterpart of his wife. Adams recognized in their faces the same harrassed and beseeching look that one sees so often in the relatives and friends of the sick. There was an awkward silence

for a moment, and then the woman said, "George is upstairs."

She showed the way, her thin cotton-clad legs trudging up the steps ahead of him. Almost reluctantly, Adams thought. Almost fearfully.

WHEN they reached the upper landing and paused outside a closed door, he said quickly, "What seems to be wrong with George? Your son, I suppose?"

She nodded absently at the second half of his question. "I . . . we don't know what's wrong with him; Doctor!"

And with that and as though it took a great effort, she reached worn fingers for the doorknob and plucked it open.

"This is Doctor Adams, George," she said hesitantly to the figure sitting bolt upright in the bed set on the far side of the chamber. She stood uncertainly on the threshold after Adams had walked in, and then as abruptly as she'd entered, Mrs. Turnbull retreated, shutting the door behind her.

The man in the four-poster bed was thirty-ish. He was making flapping, irritable efforts to get his pajama sleeve back over his shoulder. In the moment that Adams saw it exposed, he noticed the angry redness of an ugly wound. There was scratches on the man's face, bruises.

"What's the trouble, Mister Turnbull?" Adams questioned, placing his bag down carefully and drawing a chair up to the bed.

At first glance, his new patient appeared to be rather a surly fellow. The pleading light in the eyes of the Turnbull parents was not in evidence here. Adams set his face in the prescribed stern professional countenance and the other glared back. Finally the man in the bed averted his gaze and stated, "I don't want a doctor!"

"Your parents called me."

The only reaction to that was a shake of the head. The bruises and scratches were ap-

Your greatest enemy is within yourself. Beware if it ever gets loose!



Heading by Boris Dolgov

parent. On the bedtable was some cotton and a small bottle of witch hazel. Apparently George had been treating himself.

"How about that shoulder?"

"Nothing the matter with it," George Turnbull replied angrily.

Adams weighed the possibilities in his mind. Turnbull could have been in some sort of brawl or mixup, and resented his family's criticism and interference. Bruises and cuts from such carryings-on rarely killed anybody.

He was debating with himself the chance of making a dignified retreat from what appeared to be an unfortunate situation when there was a slight sound outside the window, as though the branch of a tree, thrown against the eaves by the wind, had scraped along the shingles.

ADAMS would hardly have noticed it except that Turnbull's reaction was so immediate and so drastic. He jumped, literally jumped. His lean hands came up over the coverlet, and for a moment, Adams saw the clawlike tension of the fingers. Fleetingly Turnbull's eyes sought the physician's as though he were saying, "Did you hear it too?" And in those eyes there was something that a doctor learns early to recognize. Something that he sees from the earliest days of his training till his last case. Something which takes many forms, and yet to those who know how to unmask it is always the same.

It was there in George Turnbull's eyes. Stark, terrible fear! That broke the ice somewhat. Adams brought out his smile of fatherly reassurance although he could not have been more than a few years the senior.

He bandaged up the wound on George Turnbull's shoulder, cleaned the scratches on the side of the man's head, all the while talking busily of other matters, for he decided that the worst approach here would be to make some ineptitude like, "Hmm. Looks like you've been in a fight."

He checked Turnbull's pulse, found it rapid, but the man was not feverish, and as Adams left the room, he celebrated with himself the small triumph that at least those dark eyes following him to the door, even if not cordial, were grateful.

Downstairs he reassured them.

"That assortment of cuts and bumps and bruises. There's nothing serious about any of them. Nothing to worry about as far as I can see."

Mr. Turnbull pursed his lips. A look passed between the two parents.

"Then he didn't tell you?"

"Tell me what, Mister Turnbull?"

"About this . . . this idea he has?"

The mother put in, her hands fluttering with an attempt to depreciate the urgency of her words.

"I think he's just nervous, Doctor, but he has this idea that somebody—and who in the world would want to, anyway?—that somebody's trying to harm him! He thinks somebody's pursuing him!"

The secret was out and they were both glad. Adams could tell that it was something that was hard to be said.

"He didn't say anything to me about that."

"No. No, of course he probably wouldn't," Mr. Turnbull nodded.

"He doesn't like to talk about it," quivered the wife. "And those awful cuts and bruises! They must have happened somehow. Maybe there is someone following him!"

"Now Edna!"

DR. ADAMS stood slightly at the outskirts of this purely family discussion. When in doubt—silence; it was one of his personal rules.

"Would you mind coming in tomorrow?" the mother pleaded.

The physician bobbed his head in agreement, wished them goodnight and left.

A doctor with the ordinary endowments which have helped him along the long trail of his medical education can, in many instances, win the confidence of the most reluctant patient if he has sufficient time and sufficient interest. A young doctor but a few years from medical school is seldom, if ever, in the turn-them-away-from-the-door position of an older and long-established practitioner.

Many of his calls and contacts are, as a matter of fact, obtained through these very same elderly physicians whose practices have outgrown their strength. Many run-of-the-mill doctors are quite satisfied with the

routine run-of-the-mills' flu, appendicitis, broken bones, rheumatism and pregnancy. They do their job much as a plumber does his or an engineer his. Performing with adequate efficiency and being paid for it.

But Adams was not run-of-the-mill. He was that paradox in present-day medical practice—the man who should have been a doctor . . . and was! Not somebody who would have fitted in just as well behind the shirt counter of a department store or as an attorney or a business executive. He was thought well of by the older physicians of the county, who invariably judge their young successors-to-be with a critical eye.

It was typical, therefore, that Adams attended George Turnbull with a greater enthusiasm than that which many of his contemporaries might have had for such a refractory case. The red two-door sedan could be seen often parked in front of the walk at 117 River Avenue.

And in time, the young doctor's patience was rewarded. If George Turnbull still refused to be completely candid—for young Adams felt sure he had some dark unmentionable secret behind those brooding eyes—he at least tolerated the physician's visits with better grace and growing cordiality.

They talked of many things. Of common interests like photography and travel and art. Never by so much as a word or insinuation did Dr. Adams attempt to force Turnbull into the subject that was surely most prominent in both their minds.

The parents were pathetically grateful, although Adams, at the conclusion of each visit, would admit frankly that he knew no more than previously. The two would look at him helplessly and ask that question that people do about a loved one. A question that is so often unanswerable, "But what's *wrong* with him, Doctor?"

AT TIMES, Adams would feel a slight prick of conscience. Here was involved no question of a bacteriological condition, of a virus or of any physical pathology whatsoever. Adams knew what other of his confreres would do under the circumstances: A young man in adequate, if not robust, physical health and yet a self-sentenced prisoner in his room and in his house for long periods of time for reasons which were not

at all plain, reasons which he did not care to elaborate on. And yet reasons which concerned themselves with some supposedly mysterious being he had, in times past, claimed to his parents "followed" him and "attacked" him.

These confreres, Adams knew, would shake their heads, suggest that the young man be taken to a psychiatrist in the city, and wash their hands of the whole affair.

Adams was not yet positive that this problem was a psychiatrist's. The innuendos about people following George in the street—granted, a classical symptom of mental irrationality—had come not from George Turnbull but from his parents. The original bruises and cuts on the young man at the time of Adam's first visit to the house, the physician reasoned, could have been caused by a variety of strictly *normal* and average occurrences. An accidental fall, an overly boisterous argument in a beer tavern, and so on. The possibilities were limitless.

There was one factor of which he felt certain. Young Turnbull carried with him constantly a burden of fear. It showed in a thousand ways that had manifested themselves since that first time when something brushing against the eaves of the house had made George jump with an exaggerated reaction to a trivial commonplace.

But on a soft, early twilight Saturday in July, there was so much to think about besides medical cases. Adams was returning from the outskirts of Fayette where he had prescribed heat and salicilates for the Flower's boy with his suspiciously rheumatic joints. Only this morning the young physician had been notified that office space he'd applied for in the city nearby was now available.

THIS urban location had been an objective of his for some time. The city, with its wider opportunities for practice and research, with its elaborate hospital facilities and clinics. Adams was understandably excited. Of course he would regret leaving Fayette: Even in the short time he'd been in town, he'd made many friends. It always interested him to see how the pattern of people's lives worked out through the years. But there would be new people and new lives and new patterns.

As he turned the red sedan around a corner, his tires squeegeed on the heat-softened tar. It reminded him to have some air put in, and he thought with amused speculation as he looked over the stubby snout of the car that perhaps, who knows, a few years in the city and he'd have that Cadillac he'd always wanted.

He'd been driving through the humid, early twilight immersed in his own thoughts, and then he noticed where he was. And that made him think of George Turnbull—because he was only a few blocks from 117 River.

It followed from that that he thought, "I have several weeks more here. That's not much time. But maybe I can help him before I go."

That was the coincidence of it. Where he suddenly was, where it made him think of, and then his headlights, just turned on, picking up the fleetingly running figure on the walk at roadside! As he drew abreast—still no recognition although the furiously running man spelled some kind of trouble—a white, strained face turned, highlighted by the outer cone of the doctor's headlamps.

IT WAS young Turnbull, and Adams, startled by the tableau, guided his car quickly to the side of the road.

"Hey! George!"

The figure staggered toward him.

"Why, man, you must have been running a marathon! Get in here!"

Turnbull clutched at the sedan's door, got in as though all the demons of hell were behind him in the shadowy headlighted walk he'd been running along. His breathing came in great gasps, but the white, strained look of his face was not alone from exercise. He turned his head twice, thrice, and looked out the back window of the car as they accelerated slowly away before Adams said, "What's the matter? Think the hound of the Baskervilles is after you?"

It was meant as a weak joke. But there was no laughter anywhere in George. The words were choked as he said, "I wish to God it were something like that! I mean, a dog or something—natural!"

Adams felt an uncomfortable premonition. Better press his advantage.

"What do you mean?"

BUT Turnbull's only reply was to put his head in his hands and sob with the hopeless desperation of someone whose nervous endurance has been completely drained. Only when they stopped in front of 117 did Turnbull straighten up. Even then, his first act, as though instinctive, was to look carefully out the car window back in the direction from whence they'd come.

"What in heaven's name are you looking for?" the physician asked irritably as he guided his patient up the path. But Turnbull had sunk into a sullen, unreachable silence.

Adams saw him to bed, forced a sedative on him. But he could see that the young man was more determined than ever to keep his own counsel. He decided against elaborating on the story to the parents.

They told him, "You know, George hasn't been out of the house for weeks! Well, Doctor Adams, we practically forced him to take a walk this evening! It's been such nice weather. Do him good."

The physician merely mentioned that he'd seen George and given him a lift home.

Adams made a U-turn and started back along the way he'd come earlier with George. Yes, and not too many blocks away was the portion of the walk where he'd first seen the young man running frantically. It was a somewhat lonely stretch. Here on this side a house set well back from the road, giving no twinkling evidence of any human habitation. On the other, the long high hedge bordering the narrow walk.

Adams became impatient with himself for staring hard into the shadows, as though this "whatever-it-was" that George seemed to think was following him, was real enough to be seen!

On the way home Adams reviewed the earlier episode with George Turnbull. The exaggerated fear of something which he believed was following him. There was, too, the young man's unsociability, his secretiveness. These, the physician was forced to admit to himself, were characteristic manifestations of the schizoid makeup; and if this supplied the answer to the Turnbull situation, he, Adams, an ordinary practitioner of internal medicine, had no right to treat the man but should recommend him to psychiatric care.

Of this he was still not convinced, although he told himself that within his last couple of weeks here in Fayette, he would know better.

IT WAS precariously close to his last day in town when it happened. Adams had made his usual visits rather regretfully, and Turnbull, upon his urging and with additional coaxing from the family, was taking walks and an occasional drive down to the village on errands.

It was an accident case that caused the delay. A fractured leg to be cared for, a temporary splint to be set, and a youngster who would know better now the ominous meaning of that phrase about not "crawling way out on a limb" to be transported to the County Hospital.

So it was dark as Charles Adams made the turn into River Avenue and parked midway down its length in front of 117. The house, ground and upper floors, was ablaze with light! Light that pushed back the blackness of the night in all directions. For a moment the doctor wondered if there were a party going on and hesitated about entering, thinking that some such festivity would be better therapeutics than anything he carried in his black bag.

But there was no sound from the house even though he could see the upstairs windows opened. As his heels clicked solidly against the paved walk, he noticed absently that the one-car garage gaped black, open, and empty. Perhaps they were all out, but why would they have left all the lights on?

Then, although he had no more than slightly slackened his stride, he thought he noticed a head for a moment in one of the lighted upstairs windows. Adams strode to the door. He was enough of a regular visitor now to this house so that, instinctively, he felt for the knob to let himself in. The Turnbulls usually left it unlatched, but tonight it was locked!

He frowned and thumbed the bell. From somewhere inside the house, its thin chimes sounded, breaking a stillness that was accentuated by the night sounds of crickets from beyond the circle of light thrown out through the windows. He heard then the sound of someone running down the inside-stairway. Thumping, thumping, two at a

time, he guessed. Steps hurried to the front door, and a voice, unmistakably George Turnbull's, but hoarse with fear, said, "Who is it!"

"It's Doctor Adams! That you, George? Let me in!"

The portal was thrown back so suddenly and violently that the physician almost started.

"Come in! Come in!" young Turnbull fairly chattered, "I'm so glad it's you!"

THE physician stopped inside the entrance, noticing the pains George was taking relocking the door. Noticing, too, his patient's strained, fearful face and the way the hands shook on the brass bolt.

"What is the matter?"

"The family's out!" George retorted as though an explanation had been asked. "They went to a movie or something. I . . . I was afraid, but I didn't want to say anything to them. I only *thought* he followed me back here! I wasn't sure! Until after they'd gone."

"Want to sit down here in the living room and tell me about it?"

"No, let's go upstairs. I'd . . . I'd rather."

George peered around fearfully at the windows facing out onto the grounds. He led the way up the steps. Adams followed silently, until they were both in young Turnbull's room.

The first thing George did was to cross to the window and look out. He stood there for so long that Adams came over to stand beside him.

"What is it? Do you see anything?"

Turnbull shook his head.

"No. Not now. But it's hard to see out there in the darkness. He stays just beyond the rim of the light."

"Who?"

"Gregor!"

Adams placed a reassuring hand on George's shoulder.

"Hadn't you better tell me all about it?"

THE young man sat down in his room, but his eyes kept finding the window. He moistened his lips several times as though he were going to speak, but when he did, it was to say:

"I know you've probably got a lot to do, but could you wait just a little while longer? Until the family gets back?"

Adams nodded his head thinking to himself that of course this was absurd. He began to doubt his own first and lasting impression that here was not a case of mental aberration, but something else that he, as an internist could cope with. George's appearance of near-fragility that Adams had noticed on his first visits had certainly intensified. Maybe. . . .

Some of the unspoken doubt and incredulity must have come to his face, for George looked at him and said finally:

"I shall tell you! I shall tell you the whole thing, Doctor, if you'll . . . if you'll let me."

"You know . . ." young Turnbull's words and his desire to speak seemed to gather momentum. ". . . I've never told anyone, not *anyone*, the whole story just as it was from the very beginning. Because . . . well, because of a lot of reasons. I didn't want to hear myself use the words that would give it reality, although I've known now for a long time that there *was* reality to it.

"You see, in the beginning I doubted, and in that doubt, there was a certain measure of security. And then, I'm afraid to talk about it. Perhaps it should always be *my secret!*" He looked at Adams, and his attempt to smile was a pathetic effort. He spread his hands wide.

"I . . . I sort of don't know where to start!"

"Start at the beginning," the physician urged.

"The beginning was nearly twelve years ago. I was eighteen. The same sort of eighteen, I think, as a million other boys throughout the country. Nothing had been different. Not medically—oh, the usual measles and mumps—but nothing up here!" Turnbull tapped his head significantly.

"I thought about sports and girls and going away to college in the fall. It was as simple as . . . well, as eighteen is!"

Adams nodded at the right time. His face was sympathetic, receptive. After a while, Turnbull's eyes stopped drifting towards the window. They took on a reminiscent look. There also seemed to be the

early signs of some relief on that strained, fear-ridden face. The young man told his story well, expressively, and Adams found himself listening with full attention.

"It all started on a spring day not many months after my eighteenth birthday. Father had bought, only a few years previously, a small cottage . . . well, cabin, really upstate. We used to go up for holidays when he was free from his work and I from school. It was lonely, and yet not too inaccessible to the city. I think that fact and a nearby trout stream were the big selling points to Dad. Mother liked it least of all, I suppose because it was so deserted, as though you were in another world!

"There was an old stableman a few miles away, and I used to rent a horse from him and ride. That was quite an enthusiasm of mine at eighteen. I had had no experience, but I was learning."

"**A** NYWAY . . . this spring day—it was a Saturday, I remember—we'd all gone up to the cabin Friday night. Dad was off early the next morning with his highboots and trout flies. Mother had some sewing to do and magazines to read and our little cocker spaniel, Fury, to keep her company.

"I headed for the stable, accomplishing the couple of miles hike through pretty much of a trackless wilderness with the pleasant anticipation of getting a good bit of horse-flesh under me! When I got to the horse barn, old Ben, the stableman, told me that my usual mount, Sherry, was ailing. When I heard that news, I guess my face looked like a kid who's just seen Santa Claus' whiskers fall off and his father underneath, for old Ben said dubiously, 'There's Thunder, my other horse. But, George, you're kinda new to this ridin' business to take him on, I think.'

"I worked for ten minutes on the old man. Finally, I persuaded him to let me take Thunder for my ride. I guess I needed my head examined, all right. Because Thunder was a big horse, bigger than Sherry. A black gelding with a deep chest and powerful flanks. I mounted, and we were off. Rather more quickly than I expected, I guess, but I did manage something of a grin and a wave to Ben, as though

to say, 'I planned it this way,' as we galloped off at a furious pace into the forest.

"Thunder had more tricks to him than the little horse, Sherry, I was accustomed to; but I felt I could stay with him, and there *was* a thrill to it. I remember, I lost my hat on that first dash from the stable, but I was a show-off to try and wave to Ben, anyway. I still held onto my riding crop. I must explain about that. My father had given it to me for my birthday. It was larger than the usual size with a much heavier stock. Weighted with lead like some of those the military use.

"Once, on Sherry we'd been attacked by an ugly brute of a dog. The horse had been as frightened as I was as she was used to the playful antics of our little cocker spaniel. Then there was another episode where I'd been walking home from the stable and had run across a large snake. The oversize riding crop was my father's idea and I'd become very accustomed to it.

"It had a good tough thong at one end for opening pasture gates, but the elongated and lead-weighted stock was its main feature. I felt I could take care of the biggest dog now or snake, and for that matter, a tap under Thunder's ear, I felt would subdue even that redoubtable mount!

"We cantered along on that spring Saturday until I lost all sense of direction. I was aware only that we were in a part of the hilly and wooded countryside I'd never visited before. There was no sign of human habitation anywhere! Once, I rode past the remains of a hunter's fire, probably days old.

FINALLY from the position of the sun in the sky, I realized it was getting on towards late afternoon and I turned in the direction I thought would be homeward bound. I'd had considerably less trouble with Thunder after the first hour or so. He had a young and powerful horse's disinclination to be commanded by anyone. He would rear and jounce me with stiff forelegs. He was erratic, but after a while, as I stuck in my saddle, he got accustomed to me, as horses do.

"There were times when I thought we were retracing our earlier course out from

old Ben's stable. There were other times when I felt sure we had worked even deeper into the now-desolate woodland. The position of the sun was something of a clue, for setting it at my back, I felt I was bound ultimately to come on the right trail.

"Also, I began to hurry Thunder, for I didn't particularly anticipate with joy the walk home from old Ben's in complete darkness! Besides, my parents might worry. Although I knew I still had several hours of daylight, I began to push Thunder more and more, rapping his flanks with the end of my crop. And that proved my undoing!

"We came to a small hillock, mounted its side, and then at a glance from the crest, I saw that it shaled off rather abruptly. The downward incline was uneven and treacherous, with loose small rock. Thunder hit that grade at almost full speed, and as luck would have it, one of his hooves slipped on a stone. The horse, in trying to recover his balance, gave a powerful lurch, and I, completely unawares, was jolted out of my saddle to sail completely over the animal's head!

"I landed at the bottom of that incline heavily and brutally. It was not—and I remember this distinctly—that I hit any one part particularly. Had I landed squarely on my head, life for me certainly would have ended then and there! But I took the fall all over. The impact was spread over my whole frame. It was the most unbelievably severe jolt I'd ever felt! Even as my stunnedness turned into unconsciousness, I heard the sounds of Thunder running off into the forest. And then I knew no more.

HOW long I lay there, I'm not sure. There were moments when I was partially conscious. When one or two of my senses seemed to function momentarily, then to stop, letting me down into the black abyss of nothingness.

"I remember several times looking up at the trees that seemed to form an arbor over me. Full spring hadn't come yet, and their winter-stark limbs were silhouetted against the deep blue of the late afternoon sky. And it was then that some of my other senses began to operate. It was then that I sensed rather than felt or saw—for I could

not move my arms or legs or turn my head—I sensed a presence beside me!

"I can't describe it any other way. I went off again into some sort of stupor, only to feel through the heavy darkness that befuddled my brain, a tugging and pulling at me as though Fury were playing with me at home, pulling me by my coat sleeve! But this seemed not as gentle as Fury's small dog tugs.

"I came to then again, and this time there was more of me awake and alive, for I felt coldness and noticed that the sky was purple, the light less. And I could move. It was reassuring to wiggle my toes and fingers.

"Then I heard a sound off to my left! The crunch of stones. Laboriously I forced my head to one side, and I saw a figure not ten yards distant, but retreating from me! I tried to call, but my tongue and throat would not yet work as well as my eyes.

"And there was something terribly familiar about that retreating figure! Or perhaps it was the suede riding jacket he wore! Or the oversized riding crop he carried in one hand! They were mine, and the indignant thought that I was being robbed as I lay helpless after my accident forced me upright on my elbows even as the figure disappeared into the underbrush.

"I shook in my thin cotton undershirt. Finally, after several tries, I stood up. I thought I heard a sound in the woods in the direction I'd seen him go and I called, 'Hello! Hello there.' But there was no reply and then no sound! I was completely alone!

"I started to walk as best I could, picking the right direction. My strength was low but I kept staggering forward. It grew darker and I would have to stop more often to rest.

"It was during those stops that I first noticed the other sound. If I stopped very suddenly, I could hear it. Someone else was walking off there somewhere in the underbrush! And they would stop when I stopped! But not quick enough if I did it suddenly, so I'd hear a moment's snapping of twigs and rustling of bushes!"

AS GEORGE TURNBULL told his story, it was as though he relived those long-ago moments. His face took on even

more the harried expression of the pursued, and he went on.

"That journey back to old Ben's stable was an eternity of nightmare stuff. I was groggy and sick from my fall, and only the growing fear that I was being followed by some sinister being who, for reasons best known to himself, refused to answer my shouts of help, spurred me on to a speed that was certainly beyond my strength.

"I remember collapsing in front of old Ben's door, smashing the knocker against metal as I fell. And then there were brief moments of lucidity that came and went. Fleetingly I can recall a trip in Ben's buggy. My father and mother and Fury coming out of our lighted cabin to crowd around while Ben explained what he knew. My father carried me to my bed, and Mother bathed my many scratches and cuts. I remember I begged them to leave the kerosene light burning.

"We got back to the city the next day and they rushed me to the doctor's. The careful examination showed that I'd suffered no broken bones, but there was some thought that possibly I'd had a mild concussion. The doctor said to take it easy for a couple of weeks and I'd be all right.

"But I never was from that time on. For the first time in my life, I'd come to know what real fear was! Not the trivial, passing pinpoints of fear that a child or an adolescent knows. But a deep-rooted terror like a pain! I tried to talk to people about the experience that night, but the doctor's interest ended with the precise medical potentialities of my fall.

"As to the other person I'd seen, and the someone or something that had followed me, old Ben told my parents simply, 'Taint nobody walks around in those woods! Leastwise 'ceptin' the huntin' season. And that weren't it!"

"I came to realize that everybody thought my story of the sense of someone beside me, of seeing the figure walk away in my suede jacket and carrying my crop, was some sort of hysterical projection of my own. When I argued, 'But you know I came home without my jacket and without my riding crop!', somebody, either the doctor or my parents, would say soothingly, 'Yes, of course, George. You lost them on the walk home!'

We'll see that you get others as soon as you feel like riding again.'

"But I did not feel like riding again. I became increasingly listless and preoccupied with my own thoughts, most of which centered around that unfortunate experience. I took less and less interest in school affairs and barely graduated.

"**T**HEN, five months from the night of my accident, I knew that the somebody I'd met there that night in the woods was still following me! I was coming home from my aunt's house, when I took a shortcut. The way led through some vacant lots and along some deserted streets. It was late and lonely. But I'm not quite sure which came first. This strange feeling or the sound of footsteps behind me! But when I heard them, I knew they were following me, and I connected it with the accident!

"I quickened my steps past refuse piles of junked automobiles in the vacant lots. I made the street and turned under a light to look back. But I could see nothing! Nothing at all! Just the darkness and innumerable shadows, which may have been no more than that.

"I started down the deserted avenue, hurrying even more. And behind me, ringing an echo from the flagstones, my pursuer's strides also quickened! I turned several times more, but there was never anything to see! That's important, mark!

"I got home, and when I'd shut the front door and leaned panting against it, I felt foolish. I said nothing to anybody. But my pursuer, whoever or whatever he was, was closing in! The experience was repeated in a week. The feeling and the sound. Again at night. And then three days later.

"And then the fourth time—I was thinking in terms of some crank now—I saw him! I turned my head quickly and there was someone behind me. A man. A figure. He dodged out of the line of my vision, but not before I recognized the suede jacket and the riding crop in his hand!

"I saw him more often then. Sometimes even in the daytime. Never in areas where it was crowded though. If I were in no hurry, he would be ambling along easily behind me swinging the crop. If I were in a hurry to get somewhere, my tracker would

also be in a hurry. And as time passed, he was less evasive. He stayed less far behind, and when I turned squarely to face him, he would merely sidle off to one side without the precipitous leap out of my line of vision he had first employed!

"Finally I spoke to my parents about him, and they looked at me with the startled expression that one uses with a daft child! I soon had to repeat my experiences to the doctor who'd examined me after the accident. Through a not-quite-closed door, I heard him reassuring my parents that 'The boy is still taken with that accident. It was, as we know, a great shock. That, and the slight concussion, affected him sufficiently to cause this aberration—of a temporary nature, I am sure.'

"**F**OR twelve years, Doctor Adams, this 'temporary aberration' has haunted my life! It has shaped and molded my behavior and my activities! I don't know whether this person wanted to communicate with me. It was simply the patient, eternal trailing that grew more persistent and less secretive as time passed.

"Sometimes I would make my parents walk with me, or a friend. And in those instances, my tracker never made himself evident. But I could never face any sort of a trip alone!

"My fear remained a vague one until a Fourth of July evening several years later. We had all gone to the seashore to visit Mother's sister, and I had walked to the beach club a few miles away to watch the fireworks. I must say I rather lost myself in the activities that night. There was a girl, a perfect stranger, I started talking to, and we got along so well it made me forget for a time.

"We made plans—it's laughable now to think of the way things turned out, for I never saw her again—to meet each other the next day. And when I left her to return to my aunt's place, it was very late. Or I should say, very early. One or two in the morning or thereabouts.

"I walked along the beach towards home with a happier heart than I can remember having had in years! The tide was ebbing and the lapping wavelets made small, reassuring sounds as they uncovered sand and

mud. I was out of sight of the beach club when I turned for some reason—possibly a night sound attracting my attention. There far behind me but silhouetted by the faint luminance there always is on a beach was a figure!

"I knew immediately who it was and a panic such as I'd never had before seized me, taking me by the throat! Always before there'd been home or a busy intersection ahead if I could only make a block or two. Here, I had a mile or more of lonely wasteland in the middle of the night!

"I began to run, not turning again or looking back, for I knew what was happening there! The sand sucked at me and impeded me. My heart grew and grew in my chest until its heavy throbbing weight was more than I could bear!

"A few more frantic steps and I had lost my balance! I tripped and plunged into the sand headlong, too exhausted to try and get up. Too exhausted to even turn my head! And in seconds, it seemed, there was another presence there with me! My follower!"

"**I** THINK until then, a part of my mind had tried to believe, to cling to what the doctor and my parents had said. That this was some figment of my imagination. But now—the thing was breathing! As it scuffed to a stop beside me, I felt a small shower of sand on my trousers' leg. I *could* hear it breathing!

"And then the worst horror of all! The strong hand that suddenly took me by the collar, jerking my head cruelly upward! The nails that scratched into my neck! I was flung over on my back. I think I was then too weak to put up any sort of a fight, particularly against the phenomenal strength of my attacker.

"I was too terrified to be terrified further or to think. But as I looked up at my assailant, my brain and nervous system suffered the ultimate shock! I looked, and not caring any longer, noticed the unrelenting cruelty of the face, the clawed hand withdrawn from my throat, the upraised other arm . . . with the heavy riding crop ready to smash down at me!

"That moment . . . that fractional second, looms large in my memory. But it could have been no more than an instant I waited for

the inevitable end. As the blow descended, some ancient instinct made me jerk my head as a cornered animal will.

"And then . . . as though the stroke with the crop was the baton of a conductor, a sound intruded on us. I likened it afterward to the singing of angels in Dante's *Inferno*! Familiar voices singing! And they were coming nearer! I even remember the melody. The song—some college tune—bellowed from a score of lusty young throats. Inharmonious, if you like, but it sounded better to me than "Ave Maria."

"As the roaring undergraduates approached arm in arm along the beach, I suddenly realized that the crop would not fall again. My assailant was abruptly gone!

"I struggled to my feet, the left side of my head throbbing where the heavy blow had glanced off, and murmuring a prayer of thankfulness to the carousing college men, I made my way back to the house.

"From then on, I realized this was no myth or flight of my imagination. The bruise on my temple and the gouges on my neck were too real. And yet, as I tried to understand what was going on . . . as I tried to explain it to myself and failed, I realized how poor was my chance to convince others. So I kept my own counsel more and more.

"**I** LEFT for the city the next morning and became very careful. I had to. I no longer went places alone, for that was the danger. I stayed away from lonely locations, and I kept trying to puzzle the thing out. I came to have a feeling about my follower. He acquired a name. It seemed very apt. I call him Gregor! And then because on the occasions that I was careless and went alone somewhere, I would always see him, I began to realize that he knew what was in my mind. He could anticipate my thoughts and actions. And his appearance had changed. He was larger, more . . . more *vital* looking than before. I wonder, Doctor Adams, can another person draw life and life's energy from you?"

Without waiting for the physician's reply, Turnbull continued.

"When you were called in a few weeks ago, he'd caught up with me only a few blocks from here. He means to destroy me, you see. Of that I am quite aware!"

George motioned in the direction of the window and the out-of-doors. "He's outside there somewhere now!"

Adams leaned back in his chair and cleared his throat. He felt both uncomfortable and regretful. He was a little disappointed in himself and his own judgment of the case. For here, in this story just revealed, were obvious symptoms of the schizoid personality. The suspicion, the obsession about being followed. They were, Adams knew, classical.

A car sounded in the drive, and by the time a latchkey turned in the front door, Dr. Adams was standing and had made up his mind. This case was really not in his province and he should therefore not assume responsibility for it. Perhaps it was just as well he was leaving Fayette. He'd say something to Turnbull's parents.

"I've got another call to make," he told George rather lamely.

The young man looked at him and smiled slightly.

"I know what you're thinking, Doctor Adams."

ADAMS left the room guiltily and told Mr. and Mrs. Turnbull that he was leaving Fayette and that he really did believe after this period of observation, that George might improve under systematic mental therapy. Yes, he'd call again—a last time before he left.

Adams remembered that last visit well, although as he sat alone in his comfortable city office, it was several months ago.

His situation now was advantageous. He shared quarters with two other doctors, and the opportunities of urban practice already looked more attractive than he'd even hoped for. It was evening, and Adams had come back to the office to clear up a bit of paper work after his afternoon at the hospital. It was a period of the day that he enjoyed. The two other doctors were gone, as well as the usual entourage consisting of telephone operator and nurses. He was alone on the sixth floor of the medical building.

As he passed through the dark waiting room, he'd hooked one of the magazines from the reception table, and he settled in his leatherette chair to look it over. A side window looked out on a little court, and as

he glanced idly across, a square of light snapped off. It was a dentist's office . . . a man who often worked late. Now he was through.

Adams looked at his wristwatch. It was eight-thirty. He turned to the magazine again but found it hard to concentrate. His mind kept going back to the last visit at the Turnbulls. It was his final night in Fayette. George had been strangely upset by his leaving, and Adams was both sorry and touched by this. He reassured the young man as best he could, told him that he'd left a recommended name with the parents.

"A psychiatrist, I suppose," George had sneered.

Young Turnbull then had rushed on as though he had much to say in those last minutes before Adams left. He spoke of split personality and whether Dr. Adams thought that possibly split personality went even deeper than men of science now know.

In his haste to pour forth his innermost thoughts, George became almost incoherent, Adams thought. He spoke to the physician wildly of a conviction that he, Turnbull, had had since his fall twelve years before.

"Isn't it possible, Doctor, that someone receiving a terrible impact in just the right way at just the right time could split the thing we call the life force, split it in two the way science splits the atom? And isn't it possible that this 'other self' can draw life and life's energy from you?"

Adams tried to make a joke of this.

" . . . Because you see," George Turnbull persisted and went on, "my assailant . . . my follower, Doctor Adams . . . I saw him close up. First that time on the beach, but I have seen him again many times. It's not only that he wears my suede jacket and carries my riding crop from long ago. He looks like me! He is me! You see why his name has to be Gregor!"

ADAMS had turned his face away from a young Turnbull then, not because he felt any desire to leave but because there is a moment, as every physician knows, when he despairs in a case. He did not want that despair to show in his eyes and face now. But Turnbull had gone on, not noticing.

"Perhaps you have wondered why I have never talked this way to anyone else, Doctor

Adams. It's . . . because, you see, I know there's a kind of danger! A kind of danger to the person I tell this to. How do we know that this sort of thing doesn't happen more often? How do we know that many of the unsolved disappearances of our time and other times are not, in reality, situations like me and Gregor? He *is* me and yet so very different!"

Adams remembered the way the young man had talked on that evening and he remembered his final handshake with George and the conviction he tried to put into his voice when he said, "This doctor I've recommended ought to be able to help you."

The way he had said goodbye to the parents, downstairs and the way he left the house with some feeling of defeat and yet with relief. Then he recalled that late that night he was awakened by the phone. It was George Turnbull saying he'd forgotten to ask but he'd wanted to know precisely what Adam's address was to be in the city. The physician gave it to him, wondering the while. Impatient at being awakened, so that when George had anxiously asked, "Doctor Adams, you haven't seen Gregor since I talked to you, have you?" his answer had been a brusque "No!" and he had hung up rather abruptly.

IT ALL seemed rather pathetic now and more than a little strange, Adams thought as he sat in his city office dark and empty with evening. Pathetic that George should have asked so eagerly about his city address, for the young man never was destined to come here.

And strange, very strange—but then coincidences are—about this, this clipping here. He'd taken it only yesterday out of the paper. It had an upstate dateline, Fayette, October 3rd: "Police of this town and the

county are investigating the death of George Turnbull, 31, whose body was found yesterday morning on River Avenue. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred F. Turnbull of this place reported their son had gone out for a walk and could supply the authorities with no further details. Young Turnbull, lacerated and badly beaten, was killed, police say, by blows from a heavy instrument."

Adams put the clipping down and forced his attention back to the magazine.

It was then, far away through the dark office that he thought he heard the hall door of the physicians' quarters open and shut. There was silence then for a while, and the doctor found a cartoon in the periodical to laugh at.

A step down the long hall that ran from the reception room took him from the magazine again. Possibly one of the technicians come back to work out a blood report. It still seemed a little early for the charwomen.

He put the magazine on his desk and found himself, as he leaned forward in the leather chair, listening to the steps. They were coming down the hall, past the other rooms towards his office at the end. His desk lamp threw little light beyond his own room, and the hall was a black square.

The steps were near enough now and it was quiet enough so he could hear the breathing. He rose from his chair as the figure filled the doorway. Shocked, surprised; involuntarily the words came out. "Why George. . . !"

The physician would have said; "But the clipping! Your death. . . And you've put on weight. How well you're looking!"

But there wasn't time. The figure came towards him. And then Dr. Adams noticed the tight-fitting suede jacket and the heavy riding crop.

