

WEIRD TALES

The Unique Magazine

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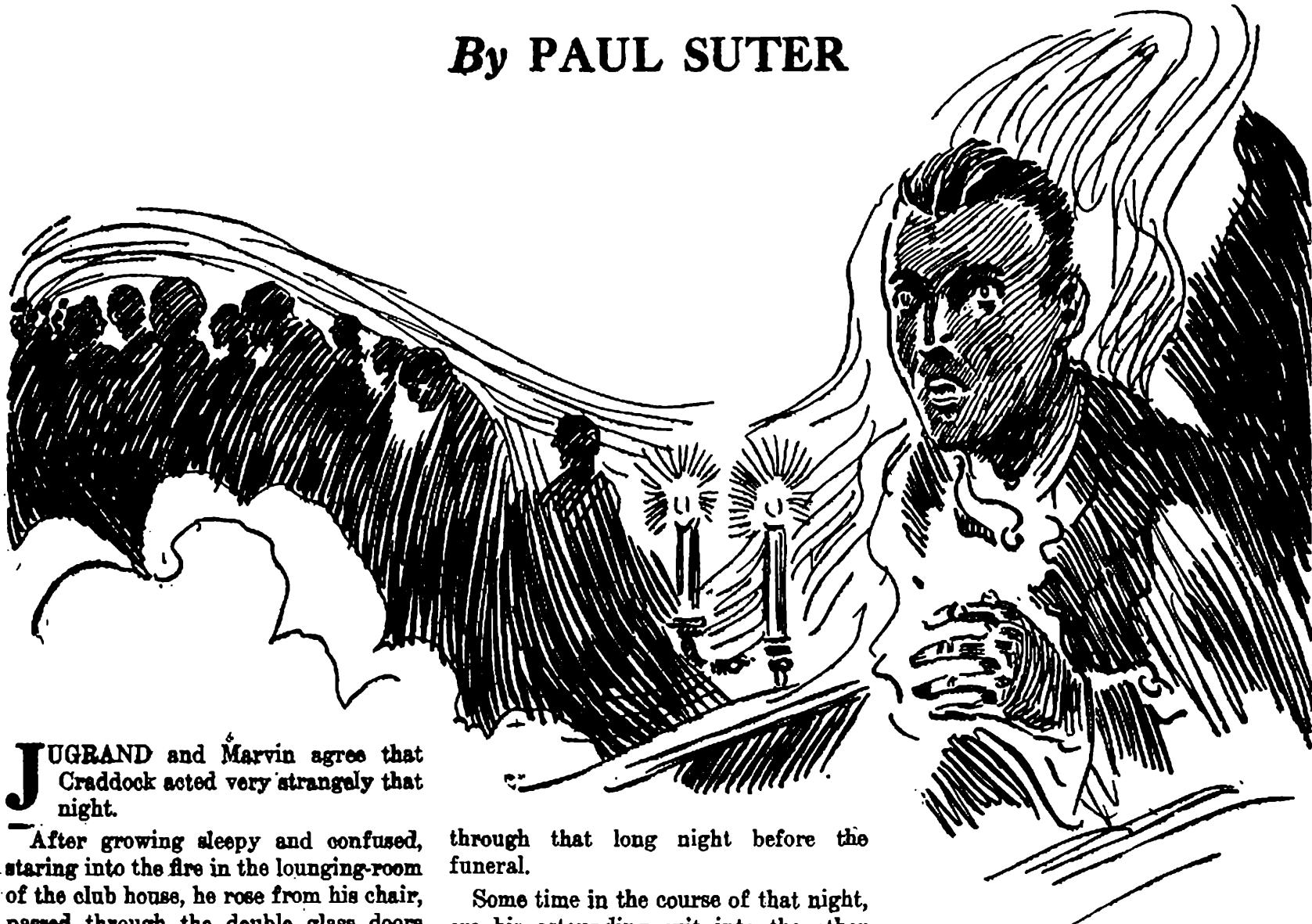
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The Author of "Beyond the Door" Spins Another Eerie Tale in His Masterful Style

The Guard of Honor

By PAUL SUTER



JUGRAND and Marvin agree that Craddock acted very strangely that night.

After growing sleepy and confused, staring into the fire in the lounging-room of the club house, he rose from his chair, passed through the double glass doors into the next room, and reclined beside Doctor Wilford Sawyer. Doctor Sawyer lay in his coffin.

Against the wall, paralleling the coffin, was a leather couch. It was on this couch that Craddock stretched himself out and went to sleep.

These three—Craddock, Marvin, and Jugrand—had been Wilford Sawyer's closest friends. In the course of years they had penetrated, though but slightly, behind the veil of his odd, aloof personality; witnessing gladly his rise to fame; standing by him now in death.

One of them—Craddock, the surgeon—had brought him back from the far-away spot where he had been found, dead; that spot to which he had fled madly, yet perhaps with a wisdom beyond sanity. Through the offices of all, he had been laid in state in the club house, rather than in his own formal bachelor apartments. They were paying final homage to him as Guard of Honor,

through that long night before the funeral.

Some time in the course of that night, ere his astounding exit into the other room, Craddock began to talk. Before that, nothing much beyond gloomy monosyllables had entered into the conversation.

Marvin, the artist, had been pacing up and down the room, or sitting, bowed, in a Morris chair. Jugrand, professor of psychology for unreckoned years in the university, was crumpled inelegantly in a Turkish rocker. When he opened his half-shut eyes, the firelight glistened from their faded blue, bristled his white moustache to the point of grotesqueness, made his red cheeks seem frightfully puffy. All three of them were uneasy.

Something extraordinary hovered above their heads; a sense, it seemed, of some tremendous event hesitating on the threshold. Whatever they said took on significance and authority in proportion as it bore upon the breathless presence on the farther side of the glass doors. So it was that they listened intently—painfully—when Craddock started to

tell of an informal party which he and Doctor Wilford Sawyer had attended together.

"In this room—a year ago. There must have been a dozen of us, more or less. Someone suggested that each of us tell something he did as a boy—some adventure—something out of the ordinary."

"As a boy—yes!" Marvin prompted, nervously.

He untwisted his lean legs from the Morris chair where he happened to be coiled, just then. He was suddenly on the alert.

"Someone suggested it; I don't remember who. And, without a word of explanation, Sawyer took his hat and coat and left the house."

Craddock paused and peered into the fire, as if the scene were reenacting and clarifying itself there.

"I followed," he went on. "We walked together back to his apartment.

I can't recall his saying half-a-dozen words to me, the whole way. When we reached his place, we threw ourselves into chairs, with the lamp between us. We must have sat there half an hour before he began to talk."

"And then—?" It was Marvin again, sitting on the edge of the Morris chair, propping himself precariously with his long legs.

"Then he told me everything—everything that he knew, himself. It was not much; but it explained a good deal. I had suspected something of the sort."

Jugrand nodded, without interrupting. Craddock supported his absurdly delicate chin on his hand, still staring into the fire with tired eyes.

"It seems simple. I could tell it in ten words, and I suppose there is no reason why I should not—now. Yet, it's devilish, too. I thought, after he told it to me, sitting there by the lamp, that he was like the man in the New Testament—the one with the evil spirits. He was even worse off, for in his case the spirits had taken his life and ripped it squarely across."

Talk is infectious. Let one man, in a silent company such as that, start it, and soon all the others are eager to follow his example. Craddock paused, communing a little too long with memory; the uneasy atmosphere of expectancy settled lower over them; then, abruptly, the artist began to speak. Jugrand watched him, curiously.

"I remember an odd thing, now we're on the subject. It was one night when I was having a studio party. Sawyer dropped in. He put a queer question to me, that night. I was showing him a picture of mine—that one of Orpheus, with the rocks and trees in the background. He said to me, 'Suppose you forgot the background—what effect would that have on the picture?'"

"Are you sure he said, 'forgot'—not, 'omitted,' or 'left out'?" Jugrand cut in.

"I remembered the word because it was unusual for him," the artist returned. "He almost never used slang, you know."

"What did you tell him?"

Marvin shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't recall. He didn't carry the discussion any further. What puzzled me was the question, itself. Why should he have asked a question like that?"

No one answered. After a time, Jugrand rose, with an air of heavy resolution, ponderously adapted himself to a standing position, and walked over to the double glass doors. He looked through them, intently. The lines of thought gave his face something of power and charm, despite its fatness. The others

stared at him, as he stared through the glass.

When he resumed his chair, which still rocked gently, he addressed himself to the surgeon:

"I like to play sometimes with a theory—a fanciful theory—that the brain cells continue to work for a while after what we call death. Why do we call it that? Simply because our crude instruments can no longer detect signs of life. We have no proof but that decay—even embalming, perhaps—may precede absolute death by an appreciable interval."

He stopped, with his eyes on the surgeon. It was as if he were feeling for some unthinkable result, grotesque, like his own fat cheeks. Craddock's narrow face looked pale and tired. He groped for a rocker, and fell into it, chin on hand. He stared steadfastly into the fire.

Jugrand asked him a quiet question:

"Do you suppose he was thinking of this trouble when he talked to Marvin about 'background'?"

"I think he must have been," Craddock answered, slowly. "Yes—'background' expresses it very well."

"Then 'forgot' was not slang."

The artist leaned forward. His sharp face was vivid with eagerness. In his excitement, he fished a gold case from a pocket, and had a cigarette between his lips before he recollects and threw it ruefully into the fire. Sawyer had not been a smoker.

The psychologist spoke again, gutturally:

"I am the only one of us who was here before he came. That was thirty years ago. His mother was with him—a tall, slender, silent lady. She died that same year."

"You knew them then?" the surgeon asked. His voice was drowsy.

Jugrand nodded.

"I attended her funeral. He looks very much like her. The clergyman had a hard time getting enough information for his address."

Marvin relaxed in a brief smile. There is grim humor in the professional funeral eulogy. Then, as if fulfilling a difficult duty, Craddock palpably roused himself and launched into the remainder of what he had to say.

"He told me, that night, of an illness he had had. I think he knew nothing himself of the details. In fact, I am not sure he would have been aware of the main event, even, but for his mother. She had told him. He had been desperately ill; and he had come out of the illness with his mind sponged clean, as a child wipes a slate. There was this difference,

though: the slate is no more susceptible after the wiping than if nothing had ever been written upon it; his mind became very susceptible.

"I think, from what he told me, he must have performed prodigies of learning. He had to start from the beginning, you understand—he remembered nothing; but his mother seems to have picked just the right instructors for him. She must have been rather wonderful, too—just as I maintain that he was. He traveled through his book learning at express train speed. At thirty, he had finished college, and had served his year in a hospital. He could not have been more than forty when he came to us, and even then, I believe, he had an enviable reputation."

Jugrand nodded.

"He had it from the first. He is not of common clay with the rest of us. He is one of the immortals."

"And this in spite of the fight that never ceased for a moment," Craddock emphasized.

The artist jerked his head, impatiently.

"What fight? I don't understand. Loss of memory is bad enough, of course; but his mother must have told him a good deal; he must have revisited the places he had forgotten."

"She told him this—" Craddock ticked off the points on his long forefinger—"that he had been desperately ill; that it would be best for him not to try to remember."

Jugrand quietly smiled, with the enjoyment of a connoisseur in oddities. Marvin started, and his eyes rounded.

"Do you mean to say—?" he began.

Craddock inclined his head.

"He made that perfectly clear to me, as we sat there with the lamp between us. She told him those two things. Never anything more. He must have tried desperately to learn more. From what he implied, I think there may have been painful scenes between them. But she died without telling."

"Then he never knew who he was, where he came from—anything?" The artist fairly shot his questions.

"No."

JUGRAND spoke, deliberately choosing his words:

"I am interested in what he learned from himself—from his own mind. A man of his mentality can not have let such a matter rest. He must have employed the various expedients of psychoanalysis."

"He did. That, in fact, was the fight I referred to. He told me. Also, he took the more obvious course of trying

to find the hospital where he had been ill. But if he ever succeeded, no hospital admitted it. Possibly the right one had been enjoined to secrecy, through his mother's influence."

Craddock stopped, with the dejection of a man whose emotions weigh upon him. The others waited silently until he resumed:

"I must not go into all the details he confided. He had never disclosed his secret to anyone else, you see. When he did speak, he had forty years' silence to offset in one evening. But I can suggest this much to you, who knew him. You will agree with me that he had one of the great minds of his generation. Well, picture this man fighting desperately, with his back to the wall. Picture him in bed at night, after his day's practice. His identity—the thing he had lost which all other men had—possessed tremendous value for him. He fought for forty years, trying to recover it; and all the while, as he told me, it seemed that the key he wanted was only just beyond his reach. He believed that it appeared to him, sometimes, in dreams. He would waken just as the dreams slipped away. The thing must have become an obsession. And yet—he did his work. And then—"

"Yes!" the artist interjected, involuntarily.

"Then came the incident of two months ago. You are fairly familiar with it. He was operating; I assisting. He fainted, and I finished the operation. That was the beginning of his illness. He was more or less unconscious for the first month, and then the humiliating ending came. You know what I mean: while he was convalescing in the hospital—under the very eyes of us all—he walked out of the front door and disappeared."

"We know all that," Jugrand stated.

"Not quite all. You do not know that I received a letter from him. It was a bewildered, incoherent sort of letter. He must have written it on the train, and mailed it, which gave him time for what he wished to do. I was able to recover his body because of what he wrote in that letter. But there was other information in it, too. I learned from it that he had fainted at the operation because there had burst suddenly into his mind the name of a little village in the Blue Ridge. As soon as he was able, he escaped from the hospital and took train to that village. Near it, lying across the threshold of a ruined, charred house, I found him."

"That village was the place?" Jugrand suggested.

"I think it was the place he had been trying to recollect through forty years."

"How much besides the mere name did he remember?" pursued the psychologist.

"That, I fear, we shall never know," the surgeon answered.

Having said this, Craddock, who had been talking with a sort of forced, unnatural coherence, abruptly crumpled in his chair. His head dropped forward, and it appeared that he was about to faint. But before the others could assist him, he straightened, as suddenly as he had given way. He rose, holding to the mantel with one hand.

"I am tired," he said, simply.

He walked to the glass doors; opened them, slowly; passed into the other room. They heard his footsteps crossing the floor. The steps ceased, and there was a slight creaking sound.

Jugrand and Marvin sprang to their feet and ran to the doors. They stared for a space, in silence. It was Jugrand, at last, who took the artist by the arm and led the way back to the chairs before the fire. His heavy voice shook with excitement.

"You could see them both, in spite of the poor light?" he demanded.

Marvin nodded.

"Did you observe anything?"

The artist searched Jugrand's face for a hint of his meaning.

"I thought they looked very much alike, lying there," he said, at length.

Jugrand softly clapped his hands.

"That is it. They are alike! They are the same type—that sensitive, yet cold type, from which great surgeons are made. I have often thought that. I am gratified that you noticed it."

"How Craddock could lie down there—!" The artist broke off, shuddering.

Jugrand laughed.

"It seems to you the living beside the dead—therefore bizarre. In his normal moments, it would seem so to him. Tonight, he is not normal. I am not so sure that he is even asleep—as we understand sleep. Perhaps he has been staring rather too steadily into the fire."

He went on, in a moment:

"I should like to have heard Craddock's theories. I, myself, have but one. Of course, I have suspected the truth for some time."

"What truth?" demanded Marvin.

"That this friend of ours—this dear and wonderful friend, who lies in his coffin—was suffering from loss of memory. My theory relates to the cause. That must have been an emotional catastrophe of the first order. There are only two such—love and death. Now, you will note that he never married;

that he never seemed to consider the opposite sex, at all, except scientifically. That points to a subconscious inhibition—something in his original life which dried up the springs, so to speak. Maybe he had loved once, before memory left him—when he was, perhaps, eighteen or nineteen—and could not love again. There you have my theory."

Marvin was silent, staring moodily into the flames. Jugrand rose, and, walking to the glass doors, slowly pushed them open. He spoke, softly:

"The one breathes heavily, and mutters in his dreams. The other is still; he would react to no test at present available to science. Yet, if the brain cells die last of all—"

He paused to laugh—the mirthless, sardonic laugh of the enthusiast, who covers his inward fire, away from the eyes of men:

"So many 'ifs'—if' Craddock be self-hypnotized, as I think—if' telepathy exist, independently of our thoughts concerning it—if' the brain cells die last—"

His voice trailed into silence. Presently, he turned to the artist.

"Come!" he commanded.

Together, the two of them passed through the doorway. They stood beside the dead man, looking down at him who slept.

Outside, the wind before the dawn was rising.

DAWN.

Dr. Craddock moaned in his sleep, struggled a little, opened his eyes. Jugrand and Marvin stood at the foot of the couch, as they had been standing, tensely, ever since they had come through the double doors. In that time, they had not spoken; but as words muttered by the sleeper had impinged upon their senses, they had looked at each other. There was that which was inexplicable in some of the words; that which Craddock, the surgeon, could not normally have dreamed.

The psychologist came forward. To do so, he had to pass between the couch and that place of more profound repose which was temporarily in the room. He laid his hand on the surgeon's forehead.

"All right, Craddock?" he inquired, softly.

The awakening man trembled, slightly.

"Yes, yes—of course," he answered. "I fell asleep; and dreamed."

The artist was about to say something, but Jugrand held up a warning finger. Craddock went on, a petulant half-sob in his voice:

"I can't understand it. I wasn't here, at all. I wasn't myself. I was . . ."

He stopped and sat up, one long hand covering his eyes. Jugrand waited. It was very still.

Suddenly, the wind awakened. Craddock started, and rose unsteadily to his feet.

"I fear I have been very discourteous," he said, in his natural tones. "I seem to have been asleep. I must have dreamed, too."

"How much of your dream do you remember?" the psychologist asked.

The surgeon stared fixedly ahead of him. At last, he shook his head.

"None; none, whatever," he declared. "Before you questioned me, I could have sworn it was in my mind. But there's not a thing now that I can lay hold of."

His gaze wandered, and reached the face in the coffin. He advanced a few steps, and looked down, absorbedly. His pale, vivid countenance regarded one that was paler, though hardly more still; whose fire was gone.

Very gently, the psychologist touched him on the shoulder, his voice rumbling softly beneath the beating of the wind:

"You spoke at intervals in your sleep—an old man—brown smoke from a chimney—Lucia—Do you remember now?"

A shiver passed through the surgeon; a long, subtle undulation of the senses. He answered in a whisper, his gaze still bent on the unchanging features of Doctor Sawyer:

"I remember."

Jugrand's blue eyes gleamed. His voice was heavy with controlled emotion.

"Tell it!" he whispered.

His notebook was out. He drew up a chair and waited, saying no further word that might break the spell. Craddock's eyes had not left the face in the coffin. After a time, he began to talk. They did not leave it then.

Thus it was, in the far end of that strange night—in the windy dawn—that Craddock told his dream.

DOCTOR WILFORD SAWYER'S step tottered a little, as he left the train. He was a thin, tremulous old man, with eager eyes.

Though the weight of recent illness bore heavily upon him, the spirit had power to hold him to his purpose. He looked with a child's wide gaze at the village he was entering.

So far as his memory served, it was entirely unfamiliar. Yet no native could have proceeded with more apparent certainty. He barely hesitated by the railroad right-of-way, sizing up the crowd of houses huddled about the one general store, their back yards elbowing off the insistent forest; then he started forward

confidently, and struck into a little zig-zag path which led off among the trees.

He felt strangely buoyant. Something within him sang and shouted, so that he had to restrain himself from giving echoing expression to its exuberance. His feet, accustomed to city pavements, trod the live turf as if that were the one carpet they had always known. The trees seemed companionable; old friends, almost. When the path ran closely enough between them, he stretched out his hands to touch their trunks, one on each side, and thrilled with the feel of their shaggy bark.

Even the rapid twilight failed to shake his sense of comfortable security. He lost the path, but continued on between the trees. Night began to muffle them, but he kept on, breathlessly. Stars budded above their tops before his wanderings brought him definitely, at last, to the edge of a broad valley.

A nearly circular amphitheatre spread before him. It had been leveled of trees, but the giant forests rose, tier after tier, on the hills around it. From behind the uttermost of these hills, the moon had risen, and the nearer half of the valley's waving grass glistened in its light, though the farther portion still slept in the shadow.

The doctor gazed at this scene with an amazement which gripped him by the throat, as sometimes the first breath of ether had done, when he had hurried into an operating room, out of the cold air. The beauty and poetry of that dim landscape entered his blood. But at last his eyes broke with the subtle moonlight of the valley, and fixed themselves, instead, on that which lay in the valley's center. It was a house—a long, low mansion, of stately yet irregular design.

The place seemed entirely dark. While he stared, however, a chink of light appeared for an instant. And, as his gaze focused more precisely, he perceived a ribbon of brown smoke which twisted lazily upward in the moonlit haze, and dissolved into the background of the hills.

It may have been a moment that he stood motionless at the edge of the valley. It may have been an hour. For that space, whatever it was, he had shaken off the trammels of time. His heart was laid open, as if some super-surgeon had stolen upon him in the moonlight. He was waiting. When that which he awaited came, he felt it as a thrill within his breast, which compelled him to rush eagerly down the valley's slope, and to stop, breathless, before the door of the mansion. It moved him, then, to lift the ancient knocker, and send the echoes in a multitudinous, pry-

ing battalion down the dark hallways within.

He had sent them again before heavy footsteps responded. There was the scraping of a bar, and the sound of chains unloosing; and the door opened.

The doctor bowed, gravely, in the moonlight; and the old man in the doorway also bowed, with an even graver courtesy. He was a giant of a man, whose long, white beard and slightly bent shoulders proclaimed his years. In the yellow light of the candle he carried, his eyes gleamed with sombre vigor. Though the hand which held the candle shook, his voice was free from the cackling quality of age. It was deep and booming, rather, like the sea.

"You are welcome, sir," he said, simply after a moment's scrutiny. "Will you be pleased to enter?"

For the space of a breath, just at that instant, the doctor's sense of security failed him. He placed his hand on his heart, with the gesture of a very sick man, and began to apologize:

"I can't intrude upon you in this way. I can't—"

But the old man interrupted him, repeating:

"Be pleased to enter, sir."

With that, the thrill swept again through the doctor's soul. His pulses trembled. There was a solemn enthusiasm, very deep within him. He bowed, and stepped over the threshold.

"I will secure the door, if you will pardon me," the old man observed, punctiliously.

Having done so, he shuffled ahead into the soft, brown gloom of the hallway. They passed dark chambers on either side, into each of which the candle thrust a flitting yellow finger; but there was no other light until, still advancing, they turned into a room at the end of the passage.

The doctor paused a moment in the doorway. The thrill was beating rhythmically on his brain. He strained his eyes until they ached sharply, in an unreasonable effort to accomplish with them something which he could not have defined; but they merely registered, unforgettable, the details of the scene before him.

What he saw was a room, with a lofty, broad-beamed ceiling, and walls of shadowy paneled oak. Against the walls, in stiff attitudes, a trio of high-backed chairs stood guard. In a dark corner hid an idle spinning-wheel. A long, wooden bench stretched itself in the warmth before the fireplace—with a little, old lady sitting precisely in the middle of it. And over the whole, dividing the shadows from the mellow

glow, brooded the radiance of the crackling logs.

The old lady rose from the bench before the fire and advanced, smilingly, to meet him. She was a very ancient little dame. Her quaint, full dress might have been the fashion in the dim days of her girlhood. Her curtsey, too, retained a flavor of those days. The doctor found himself bowing even more ceremoniously than he had done for the old gentleman; and he felt that old-world formality very pleasing. It stirred no chord in his memory—the courtly old pair were strangers to him; yet, as he greeted them, something generous and glowing pulsed through his veins; something akin to that hot, soon-passing fire which is youth.

"You are late again," chided a soft voice, out of the shadows.

The doctor wheeled, suddenly. He had not seen this girl. She must have been sitting very quietly in the lee of the fireplace. She stood now in the ruddy glow, and regarded him with a pouting smile. Her eyes were deep violet, but the firelight darkened them to black. Her face was rose and ivory. As her gaze met his, her delicate under lip, which had been drawn inward with the pout, struggled into freedom; and let the smile have its way without hindrance.

"I suppose I must forgive you," she exclaimed, with a toss of her head. "Will you be pleased to sit beside me on the bench, and talk to me, sir? Waiting is weary work, you know and I have been practising it a long time."

"I must have been lost in the woods," the doctor defended, rather shame-facedly.

"You—lost in these woods?" She laughed, frankly, and, seizing his hand in her own firm little one, dragged him unresisting to the bench. There she plumped down, and took both of his hands in hers, the better to emphasize, by patting them, the fact that she was scolding him soundly.

"What will you say next? Each night you've the most ridiculous excuse in the world. Then, the very next time, you come with a worse. Don't you know, sir, that lovers should be ahead of their hour, and not tardy?"

The doctor was aware that the old couple had excused themselves. He was alone with the girl. Of other facts, however—even more obvious—he was strangely unaware. He had no feeling that the girl was speaking wildly. There was nowhere in his horizon any sense of incongruity. With the first of her words—at the mere sound of her voice—he had lost all possibility of that. The fire coursing through his veins was authentic.

He was a young man. Remembering nothing, he still knew that this was the place where he should be.

"Yet I was lost," he insisted, obstinately.

Her eyes sobered. She leaned toward him, until her warm breath was on his cheek, and looked up into his face, with a sort of fright.

"Wilford! Do you mean to tell me you're not joking? If you're not, then you are ill; for you know these woods better than I."

"I was lost; but I've found myself, now!" he answered her, with an abrupt burst of gayety. "I've found myself, Lucia!"

"Did you ever lose yourself, then, silly boy?" she retorted.

It was a simple question, but it shook the doctor. His mind, which had seemed very steady, swayed a little, and he saw the girl and the room and the crackling logs through a mist. Then the steadiness returned. She was regarding him with a mischievous smile, which had, withal, something of wonder in it. He smiled back into her violet eyes, and, with sudden deftness, imprisoned the hand that had been patting his.

"Lucia!"

She was silent; but her smile became deeper. There was a hint in it, too, of wistfulness and pain.

"Tell me—" he began; then he stopped. What was it he wished her to tell him? It was perfectly natural that he should be there on the bench with her. There was no mystery in that. Yet why, then, were they so strange toward each other? They should have been chatting unrestrainedly and gaily, as they always did. No two people in the world could be more intimate than they were. He knew the white soul behind those violet eyes. He knew—

Then he began to talk. It seemed that the realization of that constraint was all he had needed. He talked; and so did she—though mostly she listened, her ivory cheeks alternately suffused with color, and pale. That which they said was chiefly expressed in tones of the voice, in glances, in subtle interchange more delicate and evanescent than words. One fragment, only, remained of their constraint: which was, that he contented himself with looking into her quickened face, and with pressing her hands between both of his.

So it grew late; and, becoming aware of familiar heavy footsteps, the doctor glanced up, to find the old gentleman smiling down at him, while the little, old lady hovered hospitably in the rear.

"I have kindled a fire in your room," the old gentleman announced, in his

booming voice. "One trip up the stairs is enough for me. When you are ready, Lucia will show you there."

"He is ready now, grandfather," said the girl, rising; and, with her words, the doctor knew, suddenly, that he was, indeed, very tired.

His hand sought his heart again, and he smiled somewhat vaguely about him. Lucia lighted two candles which were on the mantel, and, giving him one, took the other, herself. He was tired; but, nevertheless, he felt unconquerably young. He responded to the stately leave-taking of the old gentleman and the old lady almost with the forced gayety of a boy bidding his elders good-night.

He followed Lucia through the doorway, her slender, white-clad figure tripping before him up the narrow stairs. When they reached the hallway above, broad and heavy-timbered, he walked beside her, and looked into her steady eyes; but in the flickering yellow light of the candle, she seemed unsubstantial. In spite of that evening's intimacy, there was a gulf between them. He yearned to speak, yet walked in silence.

She stopped, at length, before an open doorway near the far end of the hall, from which came the glow of a fire.

"This is your room," she said, quietly. "I hope you will sleep well, Wilford. Good-night."

He did not answer, at once. Instead, he stood in the doorway, and looked into her face. Very slowly, like a man in a dream, he advanced toward her. She trembled, but did not retreat. In the yellow circle of candle-light, she was more than ever like a figure in ivory.

He extended his arms. She leaned slightly toward him. Then an instantaneous change crossed her face. It seemed the expression of one who remembers a half-forgotten and terrible truth. She turned, with a little cry, and ran back down the passage.

He watched her candle-light, swiftly receding, until it was gone.

HE ENTERED the room, heavily; but the warm comfort of its greeting, as he looked slowly about it, revived him, and brought back something of the cheer of the evening he had spent on the bench before the fire.

It was a beautifully old-fashioned room with a four-poster bed, equally ancient, which stood at right angles to the wall on one side of the crackling fireplace. On the other was an oaken wardrobe, with a top higher than the doctor could reach. He essayed the feat, in youthful exuberance, and paid for it the next moment when he sank down upon the bed, hand on heart. The dis-

comfort was quickly gone, however, and he rose to look out of the broad-silled window at the valley below.

The grass waved and glistened in the moonlight. In the distance, the circle of woods enclosed it, like a dark horizon line. The moon had mounted higher, but its slanting rays were not yet entering his chamber. No living thing moved within sight. The quiet of the scene increased the drowsiness of which he had hardly been aware, so that he found it hard to keep awake until his sleepy fingers had performed their task of undressing, and he was in bed.

Strangely, however, he did not fall asleep. Instead, he lay with utter restfulness, watching the dance of firelight and shadows on the high ceiling. He was conscious of the slow approach of the moonlight, through the window. He was gratefully aware of the dark woods outside, the waving grass. . . .

His mind smoothed itself out. Emotion left him. Awake, tolerantly receptive of whatever might come, he seemed to himself at the pinnacle of the years, with life graciously falling away on either side. For the first time, it might have been said of the doctor that his mind was free. Nothing tapped at its door.

Gently, and with infinite gradation, then, into that free mind came memory—memory without emotion; memory which he had prayed and struggled for, in bitter night watches, but which he now received with calmness.

He knew this valley. Of course, he knew it. He had been a boy, not far from here. On his way to the village, he had passed regularly through the valley, had stopped at this house, had even spent the night here, many times. Surely, there was nothing in his after life as familiar as this place! It was curious—but he thought this apathetically—that he should not have remembered it until now.

That was as far as his mind would go, for the time. It pieced together a thousand incidents of his boyhood, and made them more real than the trees or the moonlight. It made them vivid, but declined to go beyond them. Instead, it took a prodigious jump, and began to associate itself with his later life—the life he had remembered all along.

Yet in this nemonic chamber there was a difference, too. He discovered within himself an astonishing new facility at pushing out its walls. His recollections had never extended to the days prior to his second school life. Now, he was able to proceed farther: He saw himself undergoing insistent coaching, at the hands of expert professors, until, bit

by bit, his early education was reestablished, though memory of early things had not come with it.

He made an effort—his mind seemed astonishingly acrobatic—and remembered long days and nights in a hospital, where he had been not a doctor but a patient. They were vague days and nights, merging on the nearer side into his phase of education, on the other, dwindling off into obscurity. No effort of his could bring light into that obscurity; but within it, at first dimly, then with sharper definition as he came into charted waters, he could see his mother's face.

He saw it there, not with the expression of mingled pain and triumph it had worn in later years, but struggling, struggling. . . .

He spent freely of that restful period, between sleep and waking, in fascinated observance of her face; watching its incessant battling, as it fought its way through misery and despair to ultimate victory. He knew the battle had been for him, but why he could not tell. In one flash of vivid vision, he saw himself coping terrifically with the specter of insanity. He saw marching columns of dead men—ancestors of his, who had lived bravely—coming to fight by his side. They were conjured up by his mother, who agonized with him on her knees at his bedside.

He saw them, and knew that with their aid—with her aid—he had won; but these were his Pillars of Hercules on that side. He could not see beyond them.

There was a little period when he lay, with dulling thoughts, almost asleep. He shut his eyes, and communed pleasantly with his mind. He opened them to find his memory back at the boyhood days, working forward from the place where it had left him before.

Suddenly, emotion came with it—hot, palpitating emotion. Lucia! How could he have forgotten her for an instant? He sat up in bed, and stared about the room. This was the house. She had come to live with her grandparents. He had met her here.

Then, one after another, like silver bells, they returned to him: the hours he had spent with her. Nothing was omitted; her lightest words were not too trifling to be remembered. They came back with the brilliance of summer days, the glamour of moonlit nights. He recalled the very trees they had walked among. He remembered a path, back of the house, which they had used. Had there been more light, he could have found it then. He determined to look for it in the morning.

Once, he laughed aloud, when, recollecting a tall pine which had been a landmark with them, he saw its top through the window against the sky, towering above the black line of trees. Nothing was lost; nothing. The past was all his. There was one night, one lovely night. . . .

The vision ceased, and sleep came, like the snapping of a thread; but with it, dreams. They were vague, confused dreams, shot through with mystery. His sense of restfulness was gone. It was replaced by a murky foreboding.

Something began calling him, from far away; something terrible, though remote. It approached, with marching footsteps. He, too, was advancing, through the corridors of sleep to meet it. He struggled as he went, and averted his face. He awoke, at last, with the sweat of a chill horror upon him.

There was no transition stage. He was broad awake, at once—awake, and an old man again. He was an old man, whose bones ached, and he was staring, with eyes heavy with terror, at an incredible thing.

Moonlight flooded the room. It came through a great gap in the roof. There was no fire in the fireplace, no tapestry on the wall. The wardrobe doors had fallen from rusty hinges. He straightened painfully on one elbow, to find that the bed on which he had been lying was little more than a frame, spanned by worm-eaten slats. A tarnished candlestick, without a candle, stood on the mantel. *The room was in ruins.*

HALF-BLINDED by the staggering horror which enveloped him, he stumbled into his clothes and groped his way to the door. Though he had bolted it before going to bed, it was open, hanging from one hinge.

The moonlight entered the hall, for most of the roof was gone. Somehow, with great jumps down the broken stairway, he reached the lower floor, and his steps brought him to the room where the two of them had spent their pleasant evening.

The moon shone here, too. It showed him a ruined fireplace, a stone floor, four blackened walls.

For a moment, his eyes wandered to and fro, regarding the room with nightmare fascination; then he turned, mechanically, and walked down the ruinous hall, through the crumbling doorway, into the valley. He knew this for reality. He had come, the night before to this burned house; he had sat on that remnant of a bench, before that cold fireplace; he had lain, and felt that

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he was resting comfortably, on the charred slats of that bed. All the rest had been in his mind merely; all the rest. . . .

He clapped his hands to his head as the last shred of memory came. He saw the house in flames. He was within it again, tearing his way through fire and suffocation, to rescue her. He was calling her name, desperately, hysterically, with a voice that rose to a shriek. Now he was flinging himself into the flames, to die by her side. He recognized this for the memory his mother had kept from him; but he possessed it only for that supreme moment. Then mercy intervened.

For he was young again. The mad, hot fire of youth coursed exultantly

through his veins. Before him, in the dusk, the lights of illusion twinkled in the windows of the mansion. Brown smoke twisted lazily upward from its chimney—the smoke of long ago. With a cry, he ran back. He knocked at the door.

Though his hand clutched at his heart, the action was instinctive. He was not aware. He knocked again, until the echoes, an eager, hurrying throng, danced up and down the hallways. He thundered once more, and, with the other hand, tore away his collar.

Within, light, lilting footsteps responded. Chains were loosened. A bolt shot back. The door opened.

He was content merely to stand motionless a moment, and look; but it was his soul which looked. For that part of him which had been old and forgetful, subject to time and disease, had fallen heavily across the threshold.