

THE THING IN THE WOODS

BY
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**THE THING
IN THE WOODS**

THE THING IN THE WOODS

I

LENNOX SAYS GOOD-BYE

I HAD just made my rounds of the wards for the last time, that June evening, fifteen years ago, when Murchison, my chief, came to me with the open letter in his hand.

“Here’s the very chance to suit you, Haverill,” he said. “Read that! A chap named Lennox, in Pennsylvania, wants a substitute for three months. Small country practice—no work of any account, I imagine—and a good holiday thrown in. Just reached me to-night, by chance.”

I had finished my term as *interne*, and was leaving the hospital the next day. The whole summer was before me, for after three years of heavy work I owed myself one good vacation before settling to the task of building up a private practice, and I was glad enough of the chance to turn it to advantage. Every dollar I

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had saved I had put aside for the future struggle, and Murchison knew it. How to take a three months' vacation on next to nothing was no easy problem, and only such an opportunity as this, for which I had been searching vainly for weeks past, could solve it.

I glanced at the signature below the letter.

"George Lennox. . . . I used to know a George Lennox at college."

"Probably the same man. He asks me to recommend some one reliable. Funny idea. He can't have much opinion of his country colleagues, or he'd simply hand the patients over. There can't be so many of them, in a place like that. Rather fussy, I gather! Well, it might suit you. I thought I'd ask you before I spoke to anyone else."

It suited me so well, in prospect, that I sat down at Murchison's desk and wrote off my application then and there. Lennox's answer came promptly, dated from the small town in Pennsylvania where he had been settled for the past five years. Beyond a few details about the place, his letter told me very little. He was leaving for his health, to take a three months' holiday abroad, and he wanted a substitute as early as possible. The practice was that of the average country doctor in a not over-populous neighbourhood. It was a bracing district, not

far from the mountains; there was good fishing, and some shooting in the fall, and with the arrangements he offered it fell in perfectly with my own plans. He was urgent that I should take over the work as soon as I could, and after a brief correspondence I settled up my affairs in the city—they were not many—packed my few belongings, and went down.

It was a small and primitive station at which I was deposited, after a somewhat uninteresting train journey. The place struck me, even in those days, as a survival of an earlier age; one of those little backwaters left behind in the flow of progress. As I stood looking about me at the stretch of dusty road, the hotel, and the few clustered shops that marked the beginning of the village street, the station-master came up.

“You’re for Doctor Lennox, ain’t you?” he began. “His buggy’s there waitin’. I reckon Pete’s over at the saloon, puttin’ in time! I’ll step over an’ tell him.”

I put my valise in the solitary vehicle he indicated, with a smart roan mare in the shafts, and a moment later “Pete” appeared, drawing a furtive black hand over his mouth. I addressed him curtly; if he was to be my factotum during the next three months there would have to be less of these rather free-and-easy ways. He eyed me civilly, with some curiosity, muttering

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a darkie's invariable ready excuses; climbed to the buggy seat, tilting his straw hat over his eyes, and we set off.

The village was not large. It seemed that Lennox's place was some mile and a half out, and our road led for the most part through woods. It was pretty country. The trees were tall and close-growing, hickory and oak, with young saplings pushing a sturdy growth between. There were boulders everywhere, the sullen granite that in this district crops out through the earth's scant surface, making the small farmer's life a perpetual harvest of stone picking. To me, fresh from the city pavements, it was picturesque enough. Once a hare loped across our path, and I saw Pete shift the reins to scrabble in his coat pocket. He cast a half-sheepish glance at me as he did so.

"Have you lost something?" I asked.

"No, sah! I jest recollected suthin'. Raikon dat hyar remin' me!"

"Meeting a rabbit is supposed to be lucky, isn't it?" I remarked, lighting a cigarette. "It seems to me I've heard so."

He looked at me suspiciously, and I knew that I had divined correctly the reason of that sudden dive. "Dat so, sah?" he said guilelessly. "I 'spect all dem things jes' depend!"

A few yards further the road took a bend.

Along the narrow footpath at the side a girl was walking. She was dressed in a short golf-skirt and cotton blouse, with a man's Panama on her head, and from her look I took her for a chance summer visitor rather than a resident. I noticed her only casually, but as the buggy drew abreast she lifted her head, and instantly I felt Pete swerve against me on the seat. His clumsy action made the horse start. The girl laughed, a little mocking ripple—I heard her with a glow of annoyance—and we shot off at increased pace up the road.

I turned to the man angrily; he had drunk even more than I supposed. His face was actually pale, as pale as a darkie's can be. His hand was in his pocket again, and he turned my blame promptly on the horse.

"Yoh clumsy trash, ain' yoh look whar yoh goin' a-skeerin' folks that way! I'se larn yoh suthin' some day!"

"What's the matter with you?" I said. "Can't you drive steadily?"

He fell to muttering, apologetic, conciliatory.

"'Deed, sah, dat hoss ain' got no sainse! I done druv dat hoss two years, an' I *know* her, sah! Dere ain' no hoss round got less sainse. Sho as we met dat hyar I knew there was suthin' boun' ter happen! I ain' got no use fur meetin'

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hyars in de mawnin'—no, sah! I ain' doin' no *business* wiv 'em!"

We reached Lennox's house without further incident. It was a grey stone house, standing back in a pleasant garden, with barn and small orchard adjoining. Lennox was out on the porch to welcome me. Pete led the mare swiftly round to the side and began to unharness; I think he was anxious to escape any possible comment I might make to the doctor on his condition.

"Well, so you've got here!" Lennox said as we shook hands. "I'm very glad. Did you have a tiresome journey? Come inside. I'm very glad to see you!"

His tone was cordiality itself. To my ears it had even a note of relief. It struck me instantly, as I looked at him, that he had been through some recent stress of worry, if not ill-health. He had aged considerably. He was older than I, and his hair already a little grey at the temples. His face was lined and troubled, and he had an uneasy way with his hands I did not like. I had known him always as a rather steady-going, plodding sort of fellow, not given to excess of nervous energy in any form, and his present appearance gave me something of a shock.

He led the way into the house. Dinner was

already served. Lennox followed the country custom in dining early. I don't know how the staid elderly woman, who was both cook and housekeeper, and who was to fulfil the same offices for me, would take to such an innovation as dinner at seven. I ate well after my journey, Lennox but sparingly. He offered me a high ball with the meal, but drank only water himself.

"I've got into country ways," he said. "I'm afraid you'll find the place a bit dull, Haverill, but you'll manage all right. You can get most things you want, down here; the tradespeople aren't bad."

Over our meal we talked chiefly of the University days when we had been more or less friends, though Lennox was already a senior when I entered, of the men we had mutually known and of their careers, and lightly only, of our own. Lennox was not over-talkative, but he seemed more at ease as the day wore on. I could see he was glad to have me definitely there, was anxious to start, but I was not quite prepared for his answer when I asked him what day he thought of leaving.

"Oh, to-morrow! I shall get the twelve-thirty to the city. Everything is ready."

I suppose I looked rather blank, for I had counted on a couple of days at least in his company before I was left alone.

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“You’ll find everything easy to hand. I’ll go over things with you this evening. It isn’t a specially busy place here, you know!”

“And you’ll be away three months?” I asked.

“More or less. . . . My dear fellow, I want a change! I want it frightfully!” I agreed with him. His eyes were wandering round the room as he spoke. “The work’s nothing here—worse luck! You’ll have practically a holiday. But I’m quite run down. There’ve been some . . . some family worries. What’s the matter, Pete?”

The coloured man had come into the room.

“De mare’s done got anudder shoe loose. I ’specs I’ll hev to take her into town.”

“Again? You should have had it seen to this morning early.” He spoke irritably. “Take her in, and don’t be late back!”

“Yessah!”

Pete went out lingeringly, and I more than suspected from his entry that he had been listening, or attempting to listen, to our talk.

“That man,” I said when he had gone. “Do you find him all right?”

“Pete?” Lennox lit a cigar. “He’s invaluable! You’ll find him a splendid servant. He’s been with me three years, and I wouldn’t part with him for a good deal. He has his faults, as all darkies have, but he’s thoroughly trustworthy!”

I thought of the furtive groping in his pocket when we passed the hare.

“A bit superstitious, eh?”

“What do you mean,” Lennox fairly wheeled on me. “Has he been talking?”

“I imagine he carries an assortment of amulets about with him.”

“Oh, that!” He looked vaguely relieved. “All of ’em do. He’s a walking catalogue of superstitions. It’s the only thing we have rows about. I detest all that nonsense!”

“I’ll have a talk with him, some day,” I said.

“I wouldn’t advise you to. In fact, I wouldn’t advise you to encourage him on the subject in any way. I think it’s better to leave those things alone. Darkies are darkies, and no power on earth would persuade Pete against his rabbit’s foot. No! Steer clear of that, my dear fellow, and you’ll find him all right.”

We spent the afternoon in the surgery. Lennox showed me a detailed account of his cases—they were very few—in a notebook. He had evidently been at pains that I should find no trouble in taking over the work.

“I’ve left some things in rather a mess,” he said. “I told you I’d been upset lately . . . but I think you’ll find it all right.”

Supper was at six. Pete, true to his word, brought the mare back well before dusk. I could

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hear him whistling in the coach-house as he hung the harness away.

"I suppose you'd find use for a motor-cycle here?" I asked Lennox as we sat in the dining-room after supper. It was barely dark outside, but the housekeeper had already drawn the curtains and lighted the lamp. I would have infinitely preferred my pipe on the porch, but if Lennox chose to stew indoors this weather it was no business of mine, and it would only be forced on me for one evening.

"I used to have one," he said, "but I gave it up. The roads aren't very good here, and I found a horse better. Did you bring one?"

"It's coming on to-morrow."

"Oh? Well, you'll suit yourself. The roads aren't very good at night, but the mare is used to them. Not that I have many night calls."

It was a few minutes after that he looked at me suddenly as we sat opposite one another across the unlighted hearth.

"I suppose you're fit—in good health and all that." I didn't ask."

"Perfectly."

"That's good. Never had any nerve trouble, for instance?"

"Not an atom!"

"I'm glad. It's as well to be sure, you know."

He laughed, rather apologetically. "I was quite lucky to get you."

It seemed that Lennox kept early hours. It was barely half-past ten when he proposed turning in. The heavy country air had made me sleepy, and I was ready enough to follow his lead.

Lennox's room was directly over the surgery, with which it communicated by a little staircase, convenient for night calls. Both the surgery and the room above it had been built as a later addition to the house. The bedroom would be mine later; for the present I was put into a small extra bedroom across the landing from his own.

I slept heavily, but a little after midnight, as I judged, I was roused by hearing movements below stairs. People were talking; I fancied I heard a woman's voice, low and querulous. Evidently it was not a call too urgent to wait for daylight, for a few moments later I heard the floor of Lennox's room creak as he returned to bed. I fell asleep again easily, and when I woke the second time it was broad daylight.

I asked Lennox at breakfast if there was any fresh call for the day. He looked at me narrowly.

"Only the scarlatina case in the village and the woman at the Bend," he said, referring to the two cases he had mentioned the day before. "The woman is doing all right, but you might

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look in during the afternoon. The buggy will be back by one o'clock."

I smoked a pipe out in the orchard while he finished his packing. No one came up the road the whole morning except the baker and a traveling tinsmith; Lennox was right when he said I could take my work easily. The house stood in a pretty enough position. There were woods behind and about, skirting the orchard, and in front, on the other side of the road, a strip of pasture sloped to a little brook. The nearest dwelling was some two hundred yards away, down the road to the village. It belonged to a small farmer, I learned, a Pennsylvania Dutchman, as were most of the people about.

At twelve the mare was hitched and waiting, and Lennox came to bid me good-bye, after a few final instructions. We shook hands, and as he climbed into the buggy and took up the reins I don't think I ever saw a man's face express more utter and absolute relief.

II

THE LIGHT IN THE WOODS

MY first week passed uneventfully. I was called out twice only, on trivial cases, and I put in my spare time exploring the neighbourhood generally. I was jaded with city life, and hospital work in particular, and it was a perfect tonic to do nothing. I was too lazy even to fish, though an excellent trout stream ran not far from the house, through the woods at the back. Neighbours were not likely to trouble me, nor I them. So far I had had but little intercourse with the people about, except for professional visits and the usual country exchange of greetings when I drove into the town for my mail. In Lennox's time this task had fallen to Peter, but it was some years since I had enjoyed the use of a horse, and I took pleasure in these short trips.

The housekeeper was subdued but efficient; she looked after my wants methodically enough and rarely offered conversation, which suited me. With Peter I got on all right. As Lennox had said, he was docile, willing and capable, and did his work reliably. He seemed devoted to the

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mare, and would converse with her at great length over the morning grooming.

Lennox had a fairly good library. In ways the house was comfortable enough, and I fancy he must have had some small private income in addition to the proceeds of his practice.

I had my first tiff with Pete when I had been there nearly a fortnight. Kerosene had given out; the oilman had omitted to call as usual, and Mrs. Searle, the housekeeper, only made me aware of the deficiency at supper-time. After the meal I ordered Peter to hitch up and drive down to the village to get it.

To my utter amazement he refused almost point-blank to go. He had a lot of work to do; the buggy wasn't washed down yet; the mare hadn't finished her feed. He'd go first thing in the morning.

"Nonsense, Pete," I said. "The oil's wanted now. The mare hasn't done five miles to-day, and it'll do her good! You washed the buggy this afternoon, because I saw you."

"Dat so, sah?" He rubbed his head. "Yes, I specs dat's so, now I think. I dis-remembered it."

"Then hurry up. You can be back by eight." His eyes rolled on me.

"But it done get *dark* by eight, sah!"

"Well, you can take the carriage lamps!"

“I ain’t gwine take no kerridge lamps—no, sah! All de time I wuk fur Doc’ Lennox he ain’ ask me to do no thing like that—no, sah; an’ ef he ask me *now* I ain’ gwine do it.”

“But you’ve driven the doctor at night, you fool, time and again!” I cried, losing patience with him. “Don’t stand there and tell me lies!”

He kept his ground, obstinate, deferential.

“Yessir, I done druv Doc’ Lennox. I ain’ sayin’ nothin’ ’bout that. I’se gwine drive you, doctah, ef yoh ask me, but I ain’ gwine no vil-lage affer dark to-night ter git no ker’sine. I ain’ gwine monkeyin’ wi’ no ha’ants, an’ I d’want no ha’ants monkeyin’ wid *me!*”

That potent darkie word “ha’ants” gave me a clue. I strode out into the kitchen to Mrs. Searle.

“What’s this nonsense with Peter? What is he afraid of?” I asked her.

Mrs. Searle’s grey faded eyes rested on me a moment inquisitively. Then she went on with her dish-washing.

“I reckon Peter’s scared of the dark, sir,” she answered civilly. “Them niggers is jest like that! The oil can wait, as well as not. There’s more’n I thought, or I wouldn’t have mentioned it to you.”

“It isn’t going to wait,” I said. “I’m not going to have this absurdity in any house I live in!”

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I went back to Pete in the dining-room. I had left the doors purposely open, and I swear he fairly squirmed when he saw me come in.

“Now, Pete,” I said. “You put the mare in at once. You’re going after that oil and I’m going with you, if you’re such a holy coward that you’re afraid to drive a mile of road after dark alone!”

If I had hoped to shame him, it was without result.

“All right, sah!” he answered grandly, though I saw the relief in his eyes. “Ef you’se gwine I’se gwine. Dey ain’ no one gwine call *me* no cowa’d, doctah!”

He went off to put the mare in, and in ten minutes I heard the grate of wheels before the house. It was already dark outside, but a moon was rising, and before we had driven far the carriage lamps were scarcely needed. Pete was subdued; I think he was trying to preserve his dignity in silence. I was tempted to a lecture, but remembered what Lennox had said of the futility of trying to combat darkie superstition. I was sure that Pete still carried his beloved rabbit foot, and I hope it gave him comfort on the drive.

We reached the village, took in our can of oil, which Pete stowed under the buggy seat, and started to drive back. The moon was full over-

head now, but obscured more or less by fleeting clouds. I saw Pete glancing several times at the buggy lamps. Presently he slackened the reins a little.

“I reckon we mought put dem out now, sah! Dey ain’ no need er dem lamps to see by.”

“As you like, Pete. Get down and put them out. I’ll hold the reins.”

“I ain’t got no need er gittin’ out, sah! I kin raich ’em from here.”

He leaned over the splashboard at some inconvenience and extinguished the lamps, it seemed to me with unnecessary alacrity. I could not put his anxiety down altogether to the price of kerosene.

“What’s your worry about those lamps, Pete?” I asked.

He turned guileless yet uneasy eyes upon me.

“Dey jest ain’ no *sainse* burnin’ ’em! Dey worry a pusson drivin’ dem lamps do.”

I let it go as one of his unplumbed darkie mysteries, and we drove on. We were just entering upon the densest stretch of wood between the house and the village when a curious sound caught my ears. It was like the scrambling rush of some big bird through the trees to the left of us; a night-hawk, probably, though the confused wing-flaps were more like a turkey-buzzard. Coming unexpectedly on the silence

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it startled me, but before I could turn to Pete he had dropped the reins and flung himself upon me, a frenzied babbling lump. He clung and muttered, while I strove to hold him off, and the mare, taking fright at the moment, sent the light buggy rocking from side to side on the road. I gave the man a push that nearly threw him out. Once free of his clutch it was only a moment's work to secure the reins, but we shaved a bad accident by the skin of our teeth. Luckily we were not far from the house. My grip startled Pete into sanity—it was at least flesh and blood that had him there—and by the time I had pulled the mare to a standstill before the gate he was able to get out, shaking still miserably from head to foot, and seize the bridle.

Between us we got the mare unharnessed and into the stable. She was in a lather over head and shoulders, and I stood over the cringing Pete while he rubbed her down. I think he never ceased praying the whole time.

Whatever the noise was that had frightened him—and I put it down to no worse than an owl at the most—it had frightened him thoroughly. There was no use attempting reason or rebuke with the abject tooth-chattering being that followed me to the house, and I sent him to bed with a grim reminder that I would talk to him on the morrow. He did not go up imme-

diately, however. For a long while I heard his voice in confabulation with Mrs. Searle in the kitchen, where I did not doubt he had made haste to secure every door and window against the outside air.

I lit a pipe and threw myself down in an arm-chair in the surgery, where I had been in the habit of spending the last few evenings, putting things to rights after my own fashion. If Pete's superstition was going to obsess him to this extent my summer was likely to be a lively one! No bird that ever flew was sufficient to justify the extraordinary state into which he had thrown himself. Whiskey might be at the root of it, despite Lennox's faith; I had kept him under my eye in the village, but I knew that no human vigilance is sharp enough to keep a darkie from drink if he has the tendency. The sideboard was usually unlocked, but to-morrow I determined to take the key into my own possession.

Wanting something to read, and too lazy to go back into the sitting-room, I fell to examining the contents of the surgery bookshelves. There were the usual array of medical books, some new, some old; apparently Lennox had kept himself more or less up to date. At one end, on the upper shelf, were several volumes on mental diseases, "Lunacy and its Causes," Hoffman's "Con-

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genital Insanity," and one or two recent pathological treatises that I knew only by title. There was a well-known medical work on criminology among them also, and from their number and disposition, and the several paper bookmarks that caught my eye here and there, I judged that this particular study must have had some attraction for Lennox. There was nothing, however, that interested me for the moment, or that promised cheerful reading. I had not come down here to dive into works on mental disorders or the bound reports of Lunacy Commissions as preliminary to passing a healthful holiday, and I fell back on a month-old magazine that was lying on the surgery table.

When I had finished it I turned the lamp slightly down and went out on the porch, with the idea of trying to locate again the noise that had caused such catastrophe that evening.

The woods about were very still; not a leaf moved. The silence had an intensity that was almost oppressive. Clouds had gathered, obscuring the moon, and it was quite dark.

Presently, above the line of the farther tree-tops, a gleam of light shot up. It moved and swept, like a white arm outstretched against a black curtain. So near as I could judge, it came from the direction of Sliefer's dam, a point some two miles away, and at first glimpse I thought

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it might be a fire, but the whiteness of it put that out of the question. It had the appearance of a crude searchlight, but it was less definite in ray and moved less steadily. More than anything else, it reminded me of those "jackies" that children love to make with a bit of prism refracted on a wall.

For several minutes I watched it, then, as suddenly, it was extinguished, twitching back into darkness, and I turned and went indoors.

III

A MYSTERIOUS CALL

I HAD prepared a stern lecture for Pete while I was shaving next morning, but I was destined not to give it. While I was yet in my room Mrs. Searle called me from below stairs.

“You’re wanted over to the Bend, doctor, for Mr. Lessing.”

I finished my dressing quickly and went downstairs. Coffee was on the table. Mrs. Searle sniffed as she set a cup before me.

“You’d best take something to eat before you start, doctor. It’s a two’n-a-half-mile drive.

“Who is this Mr. Lessing? Did they say what it was for?”

I fancied she looked at me rather curiously.

“He has the new bungalow in the woods there. It’s just before the turnin’ to Sliefer’s dam.”

She spoke as though with a reluctance to name either the house or its owner, and there flashed across my mind instantly a remembrance of the first day Peter had driven me to the Bend, a few clustered cottages, hardly enough to be called a village, situated some few miles up the

road. We had passed near the house then, just visible through the trees, and I had asked him who lived there. He had answered with the same reluctance I traced in Mrs. Searle's reply. Evidently this Mr. Lessing had for some reason managed to make himself unpopular in the district.

Peter had the buggy ready, and I started off. The mare was fresher than usual this morning, and covered the two and a half miles at a brisk pace.

The road ran level for some distance, then dipped to the little hollow known as Dutchman's Hollow, where it crossed a shallow stream, nearly dry in the summer. At the top of the hill, when you had crossed the stream, was the turning to the new bungalow.

The woods were emerald with early sunlight, and the dew hung heavily on brambles and undergrowth. Birds were everywhere, and I saw a Baltimore oriole, a rare flash of black and orange, fly across my path as we neared the stream. Above the marshy space at the foot of the hollow many dragon-flies were glancing, jewelled and wonderful, and a small spotted turtle flopped from his stone in midstream at the near crunch of wheels.

I let the mare take her own pace climbing the hill. The morning was too fine for hurry,

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even on an unknown errand. When we reached the top a glint of unpainted timber through the trees led me to the left, and a few yards up the cross-road I came out on a little clearing in which the house stood.

It was an ordinary one-story cottage, newly built, and as yet with no attempt at garden or enclosure. What struck my eye immediately was a curious sort of annex, standing near it. It was a rather high, square building, windowless, but with one big skylight like an artist's studio. Yet it had not the look of a studio, and the skylight was so raised on four glass sides as to suggest a rude attempt at an observatory.

I tied the mare to a sapling in the shade, and went up to the house. The front door stood open, and the interior showed the usual living-room of a summer cottage. It was furnished scantily but artistically. There were a few good rugs on the floor, a divan heaped with cushions, a piano, and a set of low bookshelves supporting a great bronze jar filled with wild-flowers. There were few ornaments about, but those few were chiefly of Eastern origin and good of their kind. It looked a room belonging to people of taste rather than wealth.

The divan was so placed in one corner, near a window screened by drawn curtains, that it was a full moment before I realized that it was

occupied. A man lay there face downward among the tumbled cushions, in what seemed the apathy of complete exhaustion. He was clothed only in a suit of thin woolen pyjamas, that showed the meagreness of his frame. He was so thin and slight that he seemed to fill scarcely any space on the wide couch. He was evidently not asleep, but he had not turned his head at my entrance—I could see only a patch of rumpled dark hair against the pillows—and I crossed the room and paused beside him.

“Mr. Lessing. . . .”

He moved, looking at me with petulant, questioning eyes from a face that showed every sign of physical and nervous exhaustion.

“Who are you? I sent for Doctor Lennox.”

“My name is Haverill. I am taking Doctor Lennox’s place for a few months.”

“The devil you are!” He lifted his head, regarding me again intently with those queer dark eyes, the eyes of a boy set in a prematurely worn face. “Then Lennox has bolted!”

“He has gone to Europe for the summer,” I said, looking him full in the face. “He told me he needed a change, and I gathered from his looks he was pretty overworked. So I’m afraid you’ll have to put up with me for a while.”

“That’s like old Lennox! I thought he’d

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do it some day.” He slipped back again among the cushions. “Where are you from?”

I told him. He repeated the name of the hospital after me mechanically. “I didn’t know Lennox had gone when I sent over.”

The tone was ungracious, but it was more the ungraciousness of a child than a rational being. I could see that the man’s nerves were fairly on the raw. Judging roughly, I should say that he had not slept for several nights. I ignored the hint.

“As I’m here,” I said pleasantly, “I might as well look you over, don’t you think? What’s the trouble?”

For a full minute he did not answer. I fancied he was turning me over very closely in his mind.

“The usual thing,” he said then. “Overwork—like Lennox’s! A grim smile flashed momentarily on me. “I’ve been scratched up. That’s what I want you to see to.”

“An accident?”

“You may call it a dog!”

He turned, with a visible effort. Until now he had been lying almost upon his face. The light came obscured from the window, but as I bent forward I realized with a thrill of what extraordinary physical endurance that slight body was capable. The right sleeve of his pyjamas had been torn down—it seemed at one sin-

gle rip—and the edges of the flannel were caked and sodden with blood. As he threw open the jacket with the other hand I saw two long parallel scratches of the same depth running transversely across his chest.

My first act was to draw the curtain aside. He lay there blinking at me in the full light, watchful to see what change my face betrayed.

“What you think, eh?”

“I think,” I said quietly, “that the sooner that dog is shot the better.”

I made a movement to draw the jacket down, but at the touch of my hand on his shoulder he winced for the first time.

“I must have warm water,” I said. “I suppose you are not alone here?”

Almost as I spoke a woman came into the room by a second door; evidently his wife. She was young, and her face would have been noticeably beautiful but for its expressionlessness. She had deep eyes, well-moulded features, and a very clear pallid complexion, but her whole appearance suggested a slatternliness, evinced in the tumbled silk wrapper, the carelessly combed-back hair. I think I have never seen a woman, least of all in any crisis, look so utterly stupid and bewildered. Her eyes were pink about the edges, where powder had been hastily dabbed to hide recent tear-marks. I imagined

that her first impulse in any emergency would be to weep.

“Have you warm water in the house?”

“I’ll get it.”

She disappeared toward the kitchen, and I followed her in. I wanted for the moment to be out of range of the man on the couch, and I thought it would give her a chance to say something to me herself of what had happened.

She took up a bowl haphazard from the dresser, put it down again and took another, always with the scurrying half-frightened movement with which she had entered the room; went finally through a doorway into what appeared to be an outer kitchen to fetch the water. There I heard another woman’s voice, clear-cut, decisive, with what seemed an undertone of forced cheerfulness to it. Scraps of a conversation reached me while I waited.

“They won’t send it up. I’ll have to go down later. And Scholl will let us have bread if I fetch it. I thought I’d better bring three now.”

“Mary, it’s awful!”

“Did that new man get here?”

Mrs. Lessing’s voice was discreetly dropped, drowned by the accompanying splash of water from a kettle. But I heard the other say: “Is he any good?”

“Mary, sh-h!”

She fluttered back, and I took the bowl of water from her hands. Lessing was stretched on the divan just as I had left him, waiting my return. There was no chair near, and I looked about me impatiently for something on which to set the bowl, while the woman stood by in a sort of helpless indecision. Just as I was about to put it on the floor someone pushed Mrs. Lessing gently but promptly aside and came forward. It was the girl whose voice I had heard in the kitchen, and I saw in the second's glance I gave her that it was she whom I had seen on the road the first morning I came down.

"Give me the bowl," she said. "You can manage better if I hold it."

I stripped Lessing's jacket off as gently as I could, sponging the sleeve where it adhered to the torn flesh. He must have been lying untended there for some considerable time before my arrival. When I had laid bare his chest and shoulder to the light I set my lips to an involuntary whistle. The man looked as if he had been fighting with some wild animal. No dog had made those wounds. They were not bites; they were long raking cuts, as if the flesh had been torn by heavy blunt-pointed claws. A bear might have done it, but there was no sign of bruising or tooth-prints. The scratch on the

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shoulder was a good half-inch deep in one place—it nearly laid bare the bone.

He had bled freely; the jacket sleeve was soaked and stiff. I set to work to cleanse the blood from his chest, and as I did so I saw other wounds of the same order, some old cicatrices, others newly healed scars of perhaps a month old, but none so deep as the present ones. I glanced sharply at the man's hands. They were well kept, the fingers stained a little with acids as though in photography, the nails smooth and closely trimmed.

The scratches were ugly. I had slipped an emergency case of tabloids into my pocket on starting, and asking for fresh water, I dissolved two in it. The girl watched me steadily, holding the bowl of solution while I cleansed the cuts carefully, bit by bit, and I fancied that in her presence Lessing was at particular pains not to flinch. The man's endurance was extraordinary. I had noticed something else on his arm, but of that I did not immediately speak.

“You want iodoform?” said the girl. “There is some in the house.”

She fetched it, with diachylon and a roll of sterilized gauze such as is used in hospitals, from the drawer of a Japanese cabinet. I dressed the cuts—it took some little time—and helped him into the clean shirt she brought me.

When I straightened my back at last we were alone.

“Do you mind,” said Lessing, “going to the cabinet there and getting me a bottle that’s in the top left-hand cupboard? There’s a glass with it.”

I found both. I drew the glass stopper from the bottle and smelled it. It contained a familiar cardiac stimulant.

“It’s all right. It’s the stuff Lennox gave me.”

I poured him a dose and he drank it. Then he dropped back on the cushions again, watching me. I drew a chair up, but on second thought remained standing.

“Well, Mr. Lessing,” I said, “I don’t know that I’m able to do anything more for you under the present circumstances. If you feel like wanting me you know where to send.”

“What are you in a hurry for?”

“I am in no hurry.”

“Then sit down.”

“If you think there is anything to be gained.”

I sat down. I had dealt with his type before, and I waited.

“Well?” he said.

“You must know, my good fellow, that there’s no use calling a medical man in to tell this kind of nonsense! I’m not a fool.”

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“Then there,” he answered, “you differ most charmingly from old Lennox!”

I could no more be angry with him than with a sick child.

“No dog made these scratches!”

“I said you might call it a dog,” he reminded me.

“I might call it an ourang-outang and be nearer the mark! Am I to conclude that you keep a menagerie in your house, Mr. Lessing?”

“Suppose I told you I did it myself?”

“I should call you a liar,” I said. “I have seen your hands.”

“Old Lennox swore I did. I told you he was a fool.”

“We’ll drop the scratches,” I said, walking to the window. “I don’t know that it really matters if you choose to tell me they were done by a tame mud-turtle in the back yard. But one or two things you’ll have to stop if I’m looking after you.”

“Such as?”

“You want sleep, man! You look as if you hadn’t seen bed for a week.”

“I sleep in the daytime. I have to work at night.”

“What—photography?”

“Chemistry . . . of sorts.”

“Chemistry doesn’t have to be done at night,

of necessity," I answered. "You're overworked and you're using yourself up. You know you've hardly a whole nerve left in your body at this moment."

"I've plenty in my shoulder," he returned drily, and I smiled involuntarily as our eyes met. There was a fascination in the man, despite his eccentricity, his absurd persistence in what seemed to be a tissue of childish and reasonless lies, to which I held no clue.

"That won't hurt you long. I'll look in again tomorrow." I wheeled on him abruptly, of purpose. "How long have you been taking morphia?"

I expected denial. Instead his eyes merely narrowed, appreciatively.

"A year, more or less. I take it when I can't sleep."

"Lately?"

"Not for several weeks."

"Yes, you have," I thought. Aloud I said: "I'll make you up something else, for a change. Can you sleep now?"

"I'll have a try."

"Better get to bed."

"I sleep better here," he said, and without more ado turned over with his face to the wall. I waited a moment, but he took no further notice of my presence, and I went out.

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The girl who had helped me with the dressing was outside, feeding sugar to the mare. The two seemed old friends. I saw, as I drew near, that she bore a strong resemblance to Lessing himself, sufficient to proclaim her his sister. She had the same deep hazel eyes, but her hair was lighter; it showed a bronze glint as she stood bare-headed in the sunshine. It would have been an attractive face but for a look of cynicism, almost a hardness, in the lines of her mouth. I was glad that it was she I encountered instead of Mrs. Lessing. Here was at least one practical person in this puzzling household.

She turned as I came near, but without moving.

“Your brother will do all right,” I said without preamble. “Keep him quiet today, and if possible make him sleep. He wants rest badly.”

She nodded, brushing the crumbs of sugar from her hands.

“How long has this been going on?”

“The not sleeping?” She looked at me sharply. “About four or five nights.”

“I thought so. Can’t you make him?”

She looked at me almost contemptuously, as though wondering that my interview with Lessing had taught me so little. “Does he look as if I could?”

“You can do it if anyone can,” I said. “I

shall be back tomorrow. If by any chance I am wanted . . .”

“I’ll come and fetch you,” she said.

“Good.” I turned to unfasten the mare, then paused. “You have a dog here, I think. May I see it?”

For a moment she seemed about to hesitate. “If you like,” she said then.

I followed her round to the side of the house. A small sort of tool-shed stood not far from the odd building I had noticed, and which I saw now was not an annex, but separate from the house. The door of the shed was closed, and from within a whining and scratching greeted our approach. Without a word she turned the key and threw open the door.

A magnificent orange setter rushed out nearly knocking her down. There was nothing savage in his demeanor; he licked her hands and face and even tried to include me in the demonstration, but what caught my attention was his inexplicable behavior the next moment. He bounded straight toward the big outbuilding, but within a few paces of it he stopped, whining and sniffing, his ears laid back, his body trailed near to the ground, as though in some abject fear. Whining still, he dragged himself back to our feet and crouched there, trembling. Miss Lessing’s voice broke the silence.

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“Do you advise,” she said, “that he should be destroyed as dangerous?”

“I think,” I replied, “that is hardly necessary, at present. What’s the matter with him?”

Her lip curled a little as she looked at me. She shrugged her shoulders.

“He is frightened. Do you believe in the instinct of dogs, Doctor Haverill?”

“What is that building used for?” I asked curtly.

“It is my brother’s laboratory.”

“Then what in heaven’s name——?” I checked the exclamation on my lips. She was looking at me as her brother had done, but she seemed, at all events, to make up her mind more quickly. “Come with me,” she said quietly.

We walked to the building. There was a door at the side fitted with a Yale lock, but it stood slightly ajar. She pushed it open. The interior consisted of one single room, that seemed from its fittings half laboratory, half workshop. There were shelves around, containing bottles, chemical apparatus, a few books stacked together. A long table, littered with tubes and glasses, stood almost directly under the skylight. One corner of the room, to the right of the table, was screened off to form a dark-room, with the ordinary square of red glazed fabric let into the door.

I looked around the place with curiosity. There was nothing here to account for the dog's behavior. The contents of the table at one end were confused and overthrown, and a strip of cocoa matting, which had evidently lain under or near the table, had been rolled and flung in one corner. The boards were noticeably cleaner where it had been lying, and near the edge of this clean space there was a stain, smudged as though purposely by someone's foot, but to my eyes an obvious blood-stain.

Directly under the skylight, which was some four feet square, was the apparatus that for the moment puzzled me. It was mounted on a high stand that brought it near to the glass, and it looked like an acetylene lamp with very powerful concave reflectors; the kind of reflector, on a smaller scale, that is used in some lighthouses. The size of the lamp was quite outside the requirements of the room for ordinary lighting purposes, and the reflector seemed planned to throw the light outside the building, and in any desired direction. As I looked at it there flashed across my mind the recollection of the curious sort of searchlight I had seen the night before from my porch. Here was the solution of it, but I was puzzled to imagine what Lessing could be doing with an apparatus of this kind in such a place.

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I turned to Miss Lessing.

“Was it here that your brother spent last evening?”

“Yes. He came out here about nine o’clock, after dinner. He often works late, and we never sit up for him. My sister-in-law went to bed soon after; she had one of her bad headaches that she has been subject to for the last eighteen months. I sleep in the room next to hers, and I went to bed about eleven. I am an early riser, as a rule, and when I came out of my room this morning I met my brother just coming into the house.” She paused, and I could see that she was struggling with the recollection. “He wouldn’t let me touch him, and he only said something about wanting to sleep, and that I should send Doctor Lennox up to him. I left him in the sitting-room and went straight off.”

“Cycled?”

“No, walked. I have no cycle here. My brother doesn’t like me using one. If I had, it would have saved time. I came through the woods.”

“You were quick, anyway,” I said approvingly. “Now listen, Miss Lessing. Your brother has had a severe shock; of what sort I know no more than you. He will probably tell us in his own time. For the present, I don’t want him worried in any way. I shall come again to-

morrow. If I may advise you, I would lock this place and keep the key until he asks you for it. Have you touched anything in the room since this morning?"

"No. It is as he left it."

Then Lessing himself had removed the tell-tale carpet. I thought a moment.

"Was your brother wearing pyjamas when he went out last evening?"

"He changed into them after dinner, I remember. It is hot in here of an evening, and he nearly always wears them to work in."

"Did you hear any noise last night?"

"No." She hesitated a moment. "My sister-in-law was very restless last night, and she was talking in her sleep. She seemed to be in pain, so I went in to her, but she was sound asleep and I went back to bed. I heard nothing outside."

"Where was the dog?"

"Shut up. We used to have him loose, but he's sometimes noisy at night, and lately my brother has taken a fancy to have him shut up."

"It doesn't seem likely that he would trouble him here," I said.

She bit her lip.

"Doctor Haverill, what is it?"

"My dear young lady," I said, "I can know nothing until your brother is able to give us some account." I had almost said "chooses,"

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but I changed the word on a look at her face. "After all," I said lightly, "you must remember I am here only as a doctor, and a stranger at that!"

I turned back to where the mare was waiting, and she followed me, locking the door behind her.

"I shall be at the house all day, if I'm wanted, but I don't think I shall be. Meantime, you'll remember what I've told you. Your brother will have to make up sleep before he can tell us anything at all."

She seemed to take it quite as a matter of course that I should be giving my directions to her instead of Mrs. Lessing. It was as if she took the responsible place instinctively in the household. I climbed into the buggy, turning the mare around, and she nodded a good-bye to me. My last glimpse, as I left the house, was of her slim bare-headed figure, wistful in its very air of self-reliance, standing there in the sunshine with the setter by her side.

IV

DUTCHMAN'S HILL

To say the thing puzzled me would be to put it lightly enough. For the rest of the day my thoughts kept turning to that enigmatic household at the Bend. The most puzzling point of all, to my mind, was why Lennox, in speaking of the people about, had not so much as mentioned Lessing's name. Here was a patient to whom he had, as I surmised, been called once before at least on the same mysterious errand as my own that morning, with whom he was more or less on terms of intimacy, and who must have provided almost his sole educated companionship in the village, and yet he had not seen fit so much as to touch upon Lessing's existence in my talk with him. Considering the words with which my own advent had been that morning greeted, I would have given much to be able to corner Lennox just then for ten minutes' conversation.

I had heard nothing from him so far, and the following morning, on the chance of there being a letter, I drove down to the village after break-

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fast. As I entered the post office Miss Lessing was just coming out. She had a brown-paper parcel—an obvious butcher's parcel—in her hand, together with a couple of mail packets, and as I stood aside to let her pass she stopped to exchange a few words with me. Her brother was better, she said; he looked forward to seeing me that afternoon. We chatted a moment, and when she turned to go I said naturally:

“You might let me give you a lift up the road. I'm going straight back.”

She smiled. “I'm used to walking, thanks all the same! Besides, there's a short cut through the woods I've found. It takes off nearly half the distance.”

“You don't mind the woods alone?”

“I've got the dog with me.”

I watched her straight slim little figure up the street, the dog following at her heels, and turned into the post office. The clerk had grown familiar during our daily intercourse. He handed me two letters with a ready grin—Lennox's handwriting was not among them—then leaned his elbows on the shabby counter and spat reflectively into the space below.

“Mr. Lessing had another attack, ain't he?”

“What do you mean,” I said curtly.

“I heer'd you was called over thar, yesterday.

Reckon you'll have enough to do if you take on with all the crazy folks round here."

I looked at him hard.

"Oh, I ain't got nothing special against Mr. Lessing. He's a pleasant-spoken chap, all I've seen of him. On'y when a man gits to meddlin' with things it ain't no person's business to meddle with he's liable to git called crazy—ef not worse. I ain't holdin' with what people say when they get to talkin'—no sir! I got enough to do tendin' my own business. But there's plenty won't go near Mr. Lessing's place after dark nor no other time, an' if you was to listen to them I reckon they got their reasons. They say his wife's as crazy as he is. Seems when he ain't traipsin' round the woods all hours o' the night he's shut up there in that stodio place doin' his vivisectin'——"

"What?"

I laughed in spite of myself. Mr. Johnson looked sulky.

"Ain't that what they call it? I ain't no doctor."

"Mr. Lessing happens to be a student of chemistry, not a medical student, so if anyone's been trying to get round you with boggy tales they're talking nonsense. I'm surprised at a man of your education, Mr. Johnson, listening to such absurdities!"

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“Then what does he shut himself up for, with a lamp you can see two miles off, unless he’s up to suthin’ he don’t want folks to know?”

“Probably because he doesn’t want a pack of ignoramuses meddling with his affairs.”

“Well, that’s what they say, and there’s folks as believes it,” he said sullenly. “An’ as fur his walkin’ in the woods, I ain’t tellin’ you anything but what’s so. He was seen the same night as Jake Menning got killed goin’ down Dutchman’s Hill. It was Jakey’s half-brother as seen him, an’ Aaron ain’t one to be tellin’ lies. No, sir! An’ if Doctor Lennox was here now he would tell you the same, for he was called out to see a sick child at the Bend that same night and it was him as found Jake Menning there the next mornin’.”

“Do you know you’re saying things you might get into trouble over?” I asked sternly.

“Oh, I ain’t sayin’ he had no hand in it,” he returned promptly. “Everyone knows Jakey got killed through bein’ too drunk to look whar he was goin’!”

I pushed a quarter over to him.

“Well, give me some stamps, Mr. Johnson. If you take my advice you won’t pay quite so much attention to idle gossip.”

I drove home, thinking. Lennox, or someone, had been chattering; that was clear. How far

I had no means at present of knowing, for I was not going to pursue any further conversation with Johnson, ready as he was. A doctor who gives himself to gossip is no better than an old hen. I felt a sharp contempt for Lennox that overrode whatever interest I might once have had for him. If he had got himself into any tangle down here he deserved it thoroughly.

A light covered wagon, such as hucksters use, was outside the gate when I got back, and a man, who had evidently been bargaining with Mrs. Searle at the back door, came round and climbed into it. I had to pull the mare up to one side to give him room to drive off, and as I waited I happened to notice him rather closely, the more so as he gave me a civil but obvious scrutiny himself as he climbed over the wagon-wheel. He was a man of about forty, in a tightly buttoned coat of greasy black oilskin and a peaked cap, which might have belonged earlier in its career to a seafaring man, pulled down over his forehead. His face, with unpleasantly close-set eyes, was scarred by smallpox, and apart from the repugnance which this disfigurement always inspires more or less, I think I have seldom seen a countenance which impressed me more disagreeably. He was a man whom I would have ordered off my own premises anywhere at first

sight, and I replied with a curt nod to his over-subservient greeting.

I left the mare in the yard and went into the parlor. Mrs. Searle had evidently been interrupted in her morning tidying, and she came back, duster in hand, as I stood there. I had enough experience to know her for a woman who did not give herself to gossip, though she probably knew all that was afoot, by the curious intuitive sense so highly developed in all women of her class. With her I would be perfectly safe in any inquiries I chose to make.

She apologized for her intrusion and set about completing her tour of the furniture, with noiseless briskness.

"I see you've been down to the village, sir," she said after a moment. "I was going to ask whether you'd order some more coal up for tomorrow, from Harkness's. It's most finished."

"I'll send Pete this afternoon. He can walk in. By the way, Mrs. Searle, what was this story about Jake Menning? I just heard something of it in the village today."

"Jake Menning . . ." She paused in her dusting, setting back a vase carefully on the mantelshelf. "I suppose you'd have heard of it, sir. He was killed last March, goin' down Dutchman's Hill. There isn't much water now, but it's generally deep there, long after the

spring rains. Some did say it was done a-purpose, but the most of 'em thinks he jest had a fit an' fell in. Doctor Lennox found him, about six o'clock in the mornin', driving back from a night call. He was lyin' jest at the foot of the hollow, where them planks begin, with his face in the water. It wasn't deep enough to drown anyone ordinarily, an' that's why they thought it was a seizure.

"There was two half-brothers, Jake an' Aaron, both livin' over near the Bend. Aaron's took the whole business over now. Jake was always kind o' queer; they called him crazy sometimes, round the village. They was as like as two peas, which was queer, seein' they was on'y half related, so to speak. Down to the smallpox scars an' all. They'd both took the smallpox, but Jake took it worse, and they said that was what affected his brain some. You couldn't tell 'em apart, on'y for Aaron's stutterin'.

"Aaron was the best of the two. He's a good chapel member, and he's done a lot better in the business since Jakey's out of it. I heard they used to quarrel a lot in Jake's lifetime. Aaron's savin', and a bit close with his money too, and I recon he kep' Jake under some. He was an awful ill-lookin' man, Jake Menning—not that I like to say wrong of the dead, but I know a bad-lookin' man when I see one, an'

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Jake was that, for all his craziness. There weren't anyone liked him much, so they said he was harmless as a child, and right smart in business, an' now they ain't content with his being dead but they must get to startin' nonsense about his walking—excuse me mentionin' any such silly talk to you, sir!”

“Walking?” I stared.

“What they call it, sir,” she explained apologetically. “You see,” she went on, taking up her duster again, “Dutchman's Hill always did have a bad name, account of a pedlar bein' drowned there years ago, and now with this other business they try to make out the place is haunted again. . They don't seem to know rightly whether it's Crazy Jake or the pedlar I told you of, but there's quite a lot of folks now won't go nigh the place after dark, no more'n if it had the plague.”

“So that's what all this nonsense has been about!” I said, a light beginning to dawn on me. “I suppose Pete is right in it all?”

“Pete is like all the niggers, sir. They ain't happy unless they've got some sort of a ha'nt to tell about. Not that the other folks here is any better, an' I will say that of 'em. I never met such a gossipin' set in my life till I come here!”

Mrs. Searle herself was originally from New

England, and eight years' residence here had not altered her original opinion of the people. For this reason, if for none other, I knew that she kept herself very sternly aloof from the minor scandal-making of the place.

"I suppose there was an inquest on this man?"

"Oh, yes, sir. They brought it in accidental causes, an' Doctor Lennox seemed to think the man died of heart-failure, an' he must have been dead before he fell in. Anyway it wasn't drown-in', simple. I don't know. It was Aaron had heart-weakness in the family, as I heard, so it was queer Jake bein' the one took off that way!"

I rose.

"Well, I suppose the people here have precious little to gossip about, and they like to make a mystery of whatever does happen!"

"That's about as I take it, sir." She moved toward the door. "An' now I think, it was funny your asking me about Jake Menning, just this moment. That was Aaron as came round to the back door a while ago, as you drove up. He wanted to know if we'd like any chickens, so I took one for Sunday, seen' he only gets round once a fortnight now he has the whole business to attend to. I don't know whether it's think-in' over it, but it seems to me he's getting to look more like Jakey every day. If it wer'n't

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for his stutterin' I could take him for a ghost myself!"

So that was Aaron Menning. Well, he might be a good chapel member, but he had a face that would hang him if my impressions went for anything. All the same, this put me no nearer to clearing up the mystery at the Bend, which was what interested me at the moment. Jake Menning and the alleged ghost of Dutchman's Hill were ordinary enough features in a village drama, but they could have no direct bearing on the problem that occupied my mind.

After lunch I told Peter to put the mare in. He lingered about the buggy when I came out, making unnecessary adjustments to the harness. I could see he was anxious to learn the outcome of yesterday's visit, and where I was going now.

"Is yoh gwine by de village, doctah?" he asked finally, with the air of one with a commission to request.

"No, I'm going to the Bend. There is no need for you to drive me," I added as I took the reins up.

I could have sworn the old sinner looked relieved as he went back to the coach-house. When I reached the bungalow I found Lessing himself on the porch. As he rose to greet me I saw that he was taller than I had thought; there was a certain wiry strength about him when he stood

upright. What amazed me was the man's extraordinary endurance and resiliency; his face showed scarcely a sign of the exhaustion of yesterday. He was dressed in corduroy trousers and a soft silk shirt, under which the outline of the bandaging was visible as he moved.

"Well, how are you?" I asked as we shook hands!

"All right. Come into the house—or shall we stay here?"

"I'll have a look at you first." I followed him into the room. "A bit stiff?"

"Nothing much."

"Sleep?"

"Like a log."

I need hardly have asked him. He stripped up his shirt and I made a brief readjustment of the dressings. The wounds were going on all right. He must have had a magnificent constitution despite his slightness of build. We sat down on the divan, and Lessing produced a box of cigarettes.

There was a small wooden table near the window, littered with test-tubes and odds and ends, and I nodded toward it.

"Been busy?"

"I was just working out something. I have a sort of laboratory fitted outside, though. I had it built."

“That sort of studio place?”

“It’s just like a workshop—where I muddle occasionally! I’ll show you sometime, if you like.”

“I should be delighted.”

“My experiments have, unfortunately, given rather a bad name to the place. They had a bad effect on old Lennox, too. I believe I was too progressive for him. You wouldn’t expect that from a medical man, would you? Did you know Lennox very well?”

He knocked the ash off his cigarette, waiting for my reply. If he was guarded, so was I.

“I knew him at the University, a good while ago. Since then I had not seen him till the other day.”

“He’s a queer old bird! I used to tell him he made the ideal country practitioner. It made him mad because it was so exactly true. We used to disagree frightfully, you know. It’s the only relaxation in a place like this. I shall miss Lennox. . . .”

It struck me he was trying, in a casual way, to find out how far Lennox had spoken of him to me, and whether we had been at any time since his departure in correspondence.

“Lennox has quaint theories,” he went on, leaning back against the cushions. “One of them is that nothing exists outside the pharmacopœia

and Burton's 'North American Fauna.' We used to argue it at great length. I don't believe he's convinced yet."

"He was never an easy man to convince."

"So? It's habit that survives. How do you like it down here, by the way?"

"Oh, I'm putting in a good time," I smiled. "I fish a little, tramp a little. There ought to be good shooting in these woods by and by."

"They are interesting," said Lessing drily.

"Have you been here long?" I asked.

"Over a year." He rose and went into the kitchen, whence he returned a moment later, saying: "I thought I heard my wife there. We might as well have some tea."

It was Miss Lessing who brought the tea in, a few minutes later. She greeted me pleasantly, setting the tray down on the little table I pulled forward for her.

"Kate is lying down for a while," she said to her brother. "She has a headache. Do you take sugar, Doctor Haverill?"

I sat chatting there for nearly an hour. Lessing seemed at all events disposed to be friendly. All the while I was trying to reconcile this man who sat talking boyishly on trivial subjects with the outstretched figure I had seen twenty-four hours ago. If I had felt any resentment for his treatment of me yesterday it would have van-

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ished utterly, and his complete absence of restraint now showed me, if I had needed it, how all memory of that mood had changed with his physical condition.

When I rose to go it was under promise to dine with them the following week. I fancied that Miss Lessing glanced hesitatingly at her brother before she seconded his invitation. It might have been only fancy; she was certainly cordial enough as we shook hands.

“Next Thursday, then,” Lessing called after me from the doorway. I drove home no less mystified than before.

V

THE DEAD CYCLIST

LENNOX sent me a note from Queenstown. I wondered, reading the brief cheerful account of his crossing, if he guessed how much I would give to have him cornered for a half-hour's interview. That he could throw considerable light on the puzzle I did not doubt, any more than that he had promptly put the ocean between us with a view to avoiding the very question I wanted to put to him. Anyway he was securely out of reach, and there was no use in wasting speculation.

My motor-cycle had arrived some time ago, but up to now I had not made use of it. It was housed in the carriage-shed, to Peter's great curiosity. Once I had caught him meddling with it surreptitiously, and my lecture, garnished with many lies as to what would happen to him if he pursued investigations, wrought the desired effect on his superstitious mind. Devils offered to Peter the most natural explanation for anything he failed to understand. Having a free morning, it occurred to me to put the engine in

order, and Peter, cleaning harness nearby, watched my proceedings with distrustful curiosity.

"Is yoh kwine *ride* dat 'ar thing, doctah?" he asked me.

"Sure!" I stood up, wiping my grimed hands on a piece of cotton waste. "Don't you think it's a likely thing to scare the ha'nts with, Pete?"

"Yoh talk er de ha'nts, doctah, 'cause yoh ain' done *seen* 'em. When yoh's done seen 'em, doctah, I raikon yose gwine talk er suthin' else."

"If I meet one on this, Pete, it'll give him such fits he won't do any han'ting for a week. Give me that monkey-wrench."

He eyed me gloomily.

"Dat ar thing's got a debbil in 'um sure, an' yoh ain' git no better er one debbil by mixin' 'um up wid anuffer—no, *sah!*"

"Peter," I said, "you are too conservative."

"I d'know dat. I d'know dat! De debbil's de dibbil, an' dar ain' no good yet come er mixin' up wid him. 'Tain' in de Bible nor 'tain' in nature, an' I ain' holdin' wid no such dealin's."

"Well, Pete, I'm going to back my devil against your rabbit's foot, anyhow."

Pete looked suspicious.

"Who's been talkin' 'bout rabbit's fooks, doctah?"

"No one. Turn your pockets out, Pete!"

His hand clapped involuntarily to the side of his trousers.

"I got ter put dat harness away, an' I ain' got the time t' be hindered in! Sholy to Gawd, doctah, yoh ain' s'pose *I* carry no trash like that!"

He straightened himself with dignity, hanging the harness up on its pegs. I finished my job and went into the surgery. I had written to the city for the drug I wanted for Lessing. It arrived yesterday, and I had made up the powders. They were lying on the desk with a rubber band about them, and the packet caught my eye as I came in. I called to Pete.

"I want you to take a prescription over to Mr. Lessing," I said. "You can take the buckboard and bring back that sack of feed from Sliefer's at the same time."

I held the packet out to him. He eyed first it, then me.

"Well?" I said impatiently.

"I'se gwine, I'se gwine. I was thinkin' on'y dis mawnin' how dat feed done oughter be fotched. Yessir, I was sayin' dat out in de car'ge-house. It done oughter be fotched *today*."

"It'll be right on your road after you leave Mr. Lessing's."

"Yessir, dat so! On'y dat packet, doctah . . . I was jest considerin' dat packet. Ef I

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was to put dat packet in de buckboard longer de feed sack I'd be right scared 'er losing it. It don't seem to me, doctah, dat 'ar packet gwine t' be very safe dat way."

"But you've got a pocket, you old idiot!"

"Yessir, I done got pockets. I was on'y jest a-studyin,' doctah. I don' recommend pockets, not when a pusson's got a commission to 'tend to. When a pusson puts suthin' in his pocket, it happens sometime dat a pusson's gwine *forget* it."

"If it happens to you," I assured him, "I'll find a way of operating on your memory, so you'd better be careful!"

He took the packet without more ado and went off to get the buckboard ready. It was too fine a day to waste about the house, and I had it in mind to take the cycle out for a spin. Telling Mrs. Searle I would probably be away for lunch, I got into my cycling suit and set off.

I followed the road for some distance past the Bend, and then branched off to the right, joining the Pike. The machine was in good running order, and I did some twenty miles before I slowed up finally at a little village with the hope of getting something to eat.

There was the usual hotel and saloon combined, with its array of spruce bushes in tubs before the entrance. I leaned my cycle against

the porch and went in to interview the landlord about a meal.

Dinner was by luck just ready. I cleaned off some of the grime of my ride and wandered into the commercial room, which was garnished with horsehair furniture, a mildewed engraving of Washington, and two plates of sticky fly-paper, buzzing and noxious, set out on the soiled tablecloth. There was one other midday guest, a young man in a gray suit who sat watching the struggles of the latest addition to the fly-paper colony while he waited for dinner. I placed him immediately as a newspaper man, and the first dozen words we exchanged, as I took my place opposite to him at the table, proved me right. He had been sent down on the trial of one of those dull and elusive scandals which serve to lighten the papers during the dead season, and had to put in two hours' waiting for his train back to the city.

He had a considerable fund of anecdote which needed only the barest encouragement to set going, and he transferred his interest from the fly-paper to myself with complimentary promptitude. He had a trick of raising his voice a full three tones at the beginning of each sentence, and as his dissertations were lengthy I found myself speculating at to what new and rasping height his voice might next reach.

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There was a week-old copy of a local paper lying on the table, and in a pause of the meal he pushed it over to me.

“There’s a thing that might interest you, being a cyclist,” he said. “What do you make of that kind of an accident?”

I read the paragraph he pointed out. It was the account of an inquest held on the body of a young man identified as one George Powell, salesman in a Philadelphia dry-goods store. He had been found on a stretch of road a few miles beyond Coopersville by a farmer taking an early load of milk to the Coopersville creamery. The handle-bars and front part of his wheel, near by, were damaged, and the broken lamp was picked up a few yards further on. The man was dead, but the curious part, which had evidently struck my acquaintance also, was that there were no injuries found on the body except a single diagonal scratch across the face, which was of sufficient depth to have destroyed one eye and to lay the entire cheek open. This in itself had not produced death, and the coroner’s autopsy had revealed no symptom of concussion. The medical officer’s verdict had been death from heart failure.

The injuries suggested attack, but there had been no robbery, and though the man’s clothing was torn his pockets were apparently untouched.

They contained thirty-five dollars in notes, in a pocket-book, some small change, and the papers that had led to his identification.

“Well?” said my acquaintance.

“It looks queer.”

He laid a finger on the paragraph.

“You see the body was picked up fifteen yards from the edge of the wood. If anyone had laid for him, they’d have laid right in the woods, where there was cover. But whatever hit him, it hit him before he reached there.”

“He might have run into something.”

“As what?”

“I don’t know.” And there struck me instantly the thought that my companion put into words. “If you run into anything on a bicycle, at full speed, it doesn’t generally happen that the handle-bars get the worst injury. You see that the front wheel was not much broken. And he was riding toward the woods, and it’s going to take a pretty phenomenal shock to throw a man and his bicycle fifteen yards backwards. I’ll tell you another thing. I happen to know that stretch of road, because I spent part of last summer near there, with some people. It’s a level stretch, cleared both sides, and there isn’t anything larger than a stone to run into.”

I waited, wondering what he was driving at.

He chose a toothpick from the holder and began to employ it, leisurely.

“You’d reckon those things would strike the jury, wouldn’t you? But they’re so dam’ simple down here that they’re content to come up against facts like that, and they say: ‘Well, here’s a man got killed and we don’t know what hit him. Guess we’ll let it go at misadventure and go get a drink!’ That’s their mental attitude, and there isn’t anything going to shake them out of it.”

“What’s your theory?” I asked.

He revolved the toothpick meditatively.

“If I knew, I guess I’d be up against a story that would make every newspaper in the country sit up. There’s something queer there, and I’ll tell you why, and you’ll see just how enterprising these country juries are. Last April”— he raised his voice again, giving the toothpick an extra twirl in emphasis—“precisely the same thing happened to another man, not twelve miles from where this was. He was killed under much about the same circumstances, and the jury then returned the same old verdict, with a caution about the dangers of scorching. I happen to know, because I was down there on some story the time the thing occurred. I saw the man.” He paused, and without knowing why I felt my pulses quicken suddenly in anticipation. “He

had marks on his body that a wild-cat couldn't have made! He was picked up at the side of the path, among some stiff under-brush, so of course they said the fall did it. I tell you he was ripped, like I've seen a dog's face ripped by a badger. I've seen murder cases and I've seen accidents, but I've never seen the precise accident that would leave that kind of marks."

"You think it was murder?"

"The man wasn't murdered. He hit his head against a stone and died of concussion that time, right enough. But it was near enough to murder, if you assume an assailant who'd strap two-inch steel claws on to his hands." He laughed. "It's an original outfit! But that's what I'm asking *you*? What's the animal that goes round in these woods that's strong enough to wreck the steel tubing of a bicycle, that attacks with its claws and not with its teeth, and that's quick enough to knock a man down without the chance of a struggle?"

"There were no traces?"

"None. Not a single footprint."

All the while he spoke there had been before my mind the picture of Lessing—Lessing with those inexplicable scratches on his chest. Whatever had attacked these two had attacked Lessing also; that I would swear to. I was con-

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scious that the young man was watching me rather closely.

“Heard something of this before, have you?”

“No. It interests me. But I think you’re on a wrong tack.”

“How?”

“Man alive, you don’t suppose there could conceivably be any animal of that kind loose in the country without people *knowing* it! Someone would have seen it.”

“I guess two people did see it,” he suggested.

“If anything escaped from a menagerie there’d be a hue and cry raised. The woods around here couldn’t give cover to any animal of that size and ferocity for three months without some track of it being found.”

He said: “How about the murders in the Rue Morgue?”

“Those scratches weren’t made by a monkey!”

I was unguarded. He looked up sharply.

“You didn’t see them.”

“You have described them,” I reminded him.

“Besides, an ape’s instinct is to strangle.”

“Not necessarily.”

“Put the first down as a murder. The second might not have had any connection. There is nearly three months between. The medical officer suggested himself that the injuries might

have been caused by falling on the broken bicycle framework.”

“Medical officers aren’t infallible. They’ve got to say something.”

I laughed. “Well, stick to your escaped simian theory! If a third case turns up we’ll see who’s right.”

I rose, paid my bill and went out, leaving him, I have no doubt, with the impression that I was a particularly hidebound idiot. But I had my own reasons for making no further contribution to his data. I would see this thing through without any assistance from a too enterprising press.

VI

A BOYCOTTED HOUSEHOLD

THURSDAY evening found me at the Lessing's bungalow. Mrs. Lessing was in evidence this time, in a soft black gown that accentuated the pallor of her face. The evening did not correct my first impressions of her. She shook hands limply, contributed a few remarks about the weather, and then subsided on the couch in silence. Dinner was laid on a small round table near the window, and Mary Lessing came in from the kitchen with uprolled sleeves and a big apron tied about her.

"We do our own chores here, Doctor Haverill," she said. "Do you want to make yourself useful?"

I rose promptly. Lessing had not yet appeared and my *tête-à-tête* with his wife was not exhilarating. I followed her out into the kitchen, where she gave me a can-opener and a box of sardines.

"Turn those out for me, please. And if you have any hygienic aversion to canned goods, smother it. We live on them here."

"You find it far from the village?"

She smiled, quizzically. "A good way. Besides, the tradespeople here aren't exactly genial. So we subsist on boxes from the city. It gives you all the real pleasure of a desert island without the risks. Put them on that plate, will you? You see, by the time the box arrives and gets hauled up from the station we've generally forgotten what we ordered, so there's all the excitement of discovery as well. This time it was olives. Do you realize the joy of unexpected olives in the wilderness?"

"I'm going to."

"That's the right spirit! Living in the country teaches one a becoming humility. There are more things to open. Perhaps it was a mistake to ask you out here, but in any case I could hardly have palmed off these peaches as grown in our own garden, because we haven't got one."

She was standing at the table, drying crisp salad on a white cloth. The position showed me only her profile, with a little wave of bronze hair escaping near one ear. "Do you think gardening is worth the trouble?"

"When things like this grow in every department store? Perhaps not. Good heavens, Doctor Haverhill, but you must *wash* that can-opener! Give it to me!"

I gazed at the jagged gash already achieved in the peach-can.

“Don’t tell anyone and they won’t taste it!”

“I thought bachelors knew how to do everything.”

“Sardines and peaches go excellently together,” I maintained. “They call it *salade de fruits poissonnés*.”

Lessing lounged in.

“I admire the way Mary sets you to work,” he said. “She has a talent for being industrious by proxy. Here——” He pulled a parcel out of his pocket. “I’ve brought your cheese, but I won’t answer for the state of it.”

Miss Lessing cast a quick glance at me. “Where——?”

“*Not* at Johnson’s. I don’t know if my sister has explained to you, Doctor Haverhill, that we are a boycotted household? We find it quite amusing. It leads to a practice of expedience which is excellent training for the young. Mary has learned to make quite creditable bread already.”

“Out of the sawdust they pack the canned goods in,” put in his sister promptly. “Carry that dish in without spilling it, Dick, and don’t talk nonsense!”

We sat down to one of the most cheerful meals four young people have ever enjoyed. I

would except Mrs. Lessing, but that even her limp and monosyllabic presence failed to dampen our spirits. Afterwards Lessing made Turkish coffee over a spirit lamp while the two girls cleared the table, refusing my assistance high-handedly.

I moved about the room in the familiarity which our informal meal had fostered, looking at the knick-knacks, the row of books on the shelves. They were a pretty varied collection, poetry, some modern French scientific books and novels, and one of the most complete collections of detective literature I have ever encountered, side by side with a few text-books on chemistry and some volumes on occultism and black magic, some familiar to me by title, others unknown. There was a monthly magazine lying near which I recognized as occupying itself largely with the subject of psychic phenomena, and turning it over I noticed Lessing's name in the index.

"You write?" I asked.

"Once in a blue moon!" He looked up from a critical stage in his coffee-making. "Does that sort of thing interest you?"

"Indifferently—if it happens to be genuine."

"There's so little genuine." He withdrew the coffee deftly, blowing out the lamp, and stood the little copper pot aside. "That's the worst

of it. One endures hours of boredom for no result."

"You belong to the P.R.S.?"

"A most respectable and unexciting body." He smiled. "I would give in my demission, only they afford me a patient hearing from time to time. Besides, it gives me the opportunity of wrangling with someone, and contention is the spice of life, as I was saying. It was with that truism that I strove to console Lennox, when I bored him to extinction."

Involuntarily my ears pricked.

"Was that often?"

"No, I can't say the boredom predominated, in the long run." He surveyed his coffee with the air of an artist, his boyish head on one side.

"Where are those cups, Mary?"

"Your system of boredom seemed to have a remarkable effect on Lennox, anyway," slipped from me involuntarily.

Lessing laughed. "Oh, that was when the boredom ended! He stood it nobly to a point." He turned toward me. "Would you like to see what frightened Lennox, sometime?"

Before I could answer Mary Lessing came in with the coffee-cups, and the subject was dropped.

It was ten o'clock when I rose to leave, my

departure hastened by a suspicion that Mrs. Lessing had glanced several times of purpose at the clock. They all came out on the porch to say good night, and at the last moment Lessing added: "I'll walk down the hill with you."

"I've got my bicycle," I said quickly, as Miss Lessing looked up. "There's no need to bring you out."

"Oh, it'll do me good!"

It was a still, sultry night, with a humidity in the air that had arisen since nightfall. We walked leisurely, smoking, as far as the cross-road at the top of Dutchman's Hill. The hollow below was alive with fireflies, gleaming and vanishing alternately in the soft dusk. There should be a moon, but within the past hour premonitory rainclouds had gathered, blotting it out. Lessing glanced at the sky.

"How long will it take you to get back?"

"Ten minutes, more or less. It won't rain till I get there."

I scratched a match, stooping toward my bicycle lantern.

"Is it necessary to light that?" he asked.

"Why not? There's a bad bit of road at the bottom there."

"I find the glare of a lamp like that always makes it worse. What is it, acetylene?"

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He bent over the lantern to examine it, and in the pause the match burned down and went out. I felt for the box again in my pocket, and as I did so Lessing let go his hold on the bicycle. The machine slipped by its weight, and reaching quickly to catch it I heard the unmistakable sound of escaping air.

“Now you’ve done it!” cried Lessing boyishly.

“Damn!” I groped for the rear tire. It was flat. “Here’s a cheerful business. How the dickens——”

Lessing laughed. “We’ll have to walk it now! Never mind. I know the road.”

“I’m not going to bring you all that way,” I said. “I shall be all right.”

“Nonsense! I like a walk before I turn in.”

He took hold of the bicycle on one side, I on the other, and together we set off to walk down the hill. There is an exhilaration in walking through woods at night, even tempered by the necessity of pushing a heavy motor-cycle before you, and my brief annoyance at the accident rapidly vanished. Lessing was boyishly high-spirited; between us we made a fairly rowdy trip of it. We had just finished the ascent of the other side of the hollow when he laid a sudden hand on my arm.

“Did you hear anything?”

"No. Why?"

I thought he was still joking, but his cloak of nonsense had dropped from him abruptly. He pulled me to the side of the road.

"Listen!"

There seemed nothing to listen for. I waited, rather impatiently. Lessing threw back his head, scanning the line of the trees that shut us in. "There!"

It was still in my mind that he was trying to play some game on me.

"It's nothing but a bird," I said.

"Bird? You heard nothing else?"

"No."

"Come on," Lessing said. He seemed abruptly sobered, and I fancied he was at pains to quicken our pace over the remaining stretch of road. When we sighted the glimmer of the orchard palings I pulled up.

"Come on into the house and have a drink," I said.

"No, thanks. I must get back. By the way, do you carry a revolver?"

"What on earth for?"

"I only wondered. I should advise you to, around here." His hand slipped down to his pocket, and I heard a soft click.

"What are you going to do?"

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“Have a pot at the birds, going back.” He smiled. “Good night. Look in sometime during the week.”

And he went off without further delay, whistling softly.

VII

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LABORATORY

INSTEAD, it was Lessing who came a day or two later to see me. He lounged in one evening when I was sitting smoking on the porch, after supper, and my first advice of his presence was the clatter of a zinc pail which Pete let fall promptly in the side yard. When Lessing rounded the corner of the porch he was grinning.

"Your nigger must have a bad conscience," he said. "I never saw anyone so afraid of the devil in all my life!"

I made a sound of annoyance. Evidently I had not finished with Pete yet. "He's a born idiot!" I said.

"I'm not so sure," Lessing returned. "He has a very practical regard for his own skin. I appreciate that."

"You ought to."

He gave me one of those habitual quick looks, his head on one side.

"Thanks! Do you find the mosquitoes bad

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around here? I got all bitten up coming past Dutchman's Hollow."

I took the hint.

"We'll sit indoors," I said. "It's pretty cool in the surgery."

He followed me into the room, glancing curiously about him.

"So this is where old Lennox hung out . . . the place has a look of him. What's that, butterflies? He always had a weakness for things he could stick a pin into and label nicely!"

"Have you never been here before?"

"Never. He used to come to my place. I have an idea you know, that Lennox still thinks I'm not right in the head."

I lit the student lamp on the table and set out whisky and a couple of glasses. Lessing settled himself in the shabby armchair opposite me, and for a little while we smoked in silence. In the half-shadow beyond the ring of lamplight I could see his face, fine and clear cut against the shabby morocco of the chair back, the dark hair tumbled over his forehead. He was staring up at the smoke wreaths in a curious intensity of abstraction.

"I suppose," he began at last, "that I owe you some sort of an explanation, as things go."

I made a little gesture of indifference. I was beginning to know my man. If it pleased him

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to work upon my curiosity I was prepared to give him the least possible satisfaction.

“You offered me one,” I corrected him. “I believe we decided to let it go at that.”

He turned his gaze upon me, with a rather charming impertinence.

“That was when I took you for a fool. As I admit the error you ought to forgive my expression of it. The truth is . . .” He paused so long that I reached for a fresh cigarette to break the interval. “I’ll be damned if I know what the truth is myself!” He finished almost violently. “I can give you facts—all you want. When it comes to putting things together. . . . Do you know how maddening it is to have your hand on a thing—actually on it—and feel it all the while slipping through your fingers?”

He threw his cigarette away. “Let’s drop all this nonsense, anyway. I came over here tonight to have a talk with you. I tell you frankly, because you’re about the only sane man I’m likely to cross down here. I tried Lennox once, and Lennox thought I was batty, and there the matter ended. But I’ve got to a point now where it’s absolutely necessary, for the sake of my own mental balance, that I should have someone else’s opinion about things. I’m going to put certain facts before you, and you’ll say what you think about them.”

I nodded.

“About eighteen months ago,” Lessing began, “my wife was in rather bad health. It was some sort of nervous trouble, which I need not enter into here, but the doctor said she needed complete change, and that she must positively live in the country for some time, a year or two at least. We came down here. I bought the piece of ground up the hill there and built the little bungalow we are living in, with the idea of using it later on, when her health is restored, simply as a summer cottage. I have a fondness for dabbling in chemistry, as I think I told you, and shortly after we moved down here I built that sort of outdoor study you have seen, so that I could have a place, perfectly quiet, that I could work in without being disturbed, and without messing the house up with my things. I am not a good sleeper. I sit up pretty late at night as a rule, and it worries me to know I’m disturbing other people in the house or that the women are liable to drop in in their dressing-gowns at half-past one or so, to ask whether I’m going to bed or not.

“My laboratory has a top light for day use, and I have rigged up an acetylene lamp just over my table, with a pretty strong light. One night last fall I happened to be working rather late. As a rule I have no difficulty whatever about

keeping awake—it's the other way about, in fact—but along about one o'clock I began to get rather drowsy. It might have been the fumes of the chemicals I was using, but I'm used to that, and anyway I don't think they could have affected me. My interest in what I was doing was still awake, but the other side of my mind seemed to get drowsy at the same time. I fought against it a long while, and then gradually I seemed to get the consciousness of something—some presence—in or near the room. I don't know if you have ever attended a séance, Haverill?"

"Never—of any account."

My cigarette had burned down to my fingers, and I threw it away. I was beginning to get keenly interested in his story.

"Well, if you had, you would know that one sometimes gets the sense of a materialization some minutes before it actually takes place. I suppose the subconscious part of one's mind acts more quickly than the senses in receiving an impression. Anyway that was what seemed to happen with me. I waited. I was awake; I want you to understand that clearly. I was as awake as I am now. I saw everything about me, but I seemed to see it in a quite impersonal sort of way.

"The top light is arranged to open in sections,

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the top as well as the four sides. The side glasses were my idea for bad weather, so that I could always have ventilation on one side or the other without rain driving in, as it will with an ordinary skylight. I had the middle section raised, and one side open as well. Presently I was conscious that something was trying to enter at the glass. There were no sound on the roof itself, which is galvanized, but I could hear plainly a sort of scraping at the window. The inside light was so strong that I could see nothing, but something was gradually obscuring the opening. I had a conviction that the thing, whatever it was, was attracted by my light, and I made an effort, with the strange drowsiness gaining on me, to reach the lamp and turn it out.

“I was on my feet, reaching across the table, with the glare of the lamp full in my eyes, when something—I don’t know what—struck me and threw me to the ground. My hand was already on the lamp, and I must have managed to turn it out actually in the moment of falling. I have a recollection of struggling for a moment there in the darkness, of trying, with some sort of hazy instinct, to drag myself under cover of the table, and then I suppose I became unconscious.

“When I came to it was broad daylight. I was lying on the floor, near the table. There was broken glass near me, and I seemed to re-

member the crash of it before I lost consciousness. My clothes were torn, my arms and chest were badly scratched—I must have somehow defended my face without knowing it—and I was stiff all over when I moved. When I got into the open I was seized with an intense nausea, which lasted for several minutes. My wife and sister are used to my being up till all hours, so that my absence had caused no uneasiness. I went into the house, washed myself as well as I could, and went to sleep. It was then five o'clock, so that I must have been nearly four hours unconscious."

"Did you notice any other symptoms besides the nausea?" I interrupted.

"Yes; an intense fatigue. It was not sleepiness. I was tired out, as if I had been through some great exertion."

"Well?" I said, for I knew he had not finished.

"That was last October, the twenty-fourth, to be exact. Since then the thing has happened twice again. On each occasion I have had the same premonitory drowsiness. I have struggled against it, and it has mastered me at just the critical moment. The second time when I came to I was more badly hurt than before. My sister happened to be up early that morning, and there was no disguising my condition from her.

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She went off for Lennox. When he came he fixed me up and gave me a sleeping draught—which I didn't need—and I slept nearly the whole day. He held the opinion, which I wrested from him later, that I had had some sort of seizure, the result of overwork, and that I had inflicted the injuries on myself during unconsciousness. The rest he put down to hallucination. He was a fool, and I told him so. Whatever the thing was, it was no hallucination."

"How wide was the skylight open?"

"About eighteen inches."

"Did you find any traces in the morning?"

"Not a mark. The building is high, as you know, and the sides are of perfectly plain boarding. There is nothing that could give foothold, except to a monkey, and the nearest tree is eight feet off. Oh, I went over the whole ground carefully! Whatever it was that came, it did not reach me from the ground."

I moved impatiently. "But what other way could it have reached you?"

"That's what I ask myself," said Lessing grimly. "Do I look like a man subject to brain trouble?"

"No," I said. "I gave that theory up almost immediately."

"Then what do you make of it?" he asked quietly.

“Make of it!” I cried. “Good heavens, man, do you realize that you’re asking me to believe a thing that’s outside the range of all human possibility!”

“Human possibility! What is human possibility? I tell you the thing as it happened, simply.” He rose and began to pace to and fro in the room. “I’m a sane man. I’m not given to imaginary things. And besides—you saw yourself——”

“Wait a moment,” I said. “About this light. Have you used the same lamp right along?”

Lessing gave a quick look. I wondered if he had divined my visit to the laboratory that first morning.

“No. I altered it after the second time. There was an interval of over four months when nothing happened at all. I tried to reason it all out, and I concluded that in some way the lamp had had to do with it. From the position of the building, and the woods about it, the light I was at first using could be visible only from one certain direction. I wanted to investigate the whole thing systematically, and with that idea I raised the lamp and fitted a strong reflector that would throw the light outside the building at will, and in any direction.”

His description corresponded with the light

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I had seen above the tree-tops, the night of Pete's adventure with the turkey-buzzard.

"You were using this the last time?"

"Yes. I had been experimenting with it, off and on, for several weeks."

"Have you any idea of the shape of the thing?" I asked him.

"So far as I could make out anything, outside the glass, I might describe it as some kind of dog. It seemed to be greyish. . . . But that as a theory is sheer nonsense. You know that no dog could have made the scratches you saw."

One thing still puzzled me.

"You say that you put the light out yourself the first time?"

"Yes."

"And the second?"

"There was scarcely time to get any definite impression," he answered evasively. "I was struck down almost at once."

"But you had the impression of a dog?"

"What does it matter?" he cried, with a sudden change of voice. "I tell you, Haverill, it was like nothing that I can describe!"

We sat there for some minutes in silence. I can see now the turn of Lessing's head, the restless movement of his fingers on the chair-arm. It seemed incongruous that we should be sitting here in this common-place room, amid surround-

ings which spoke so emphatically of the practical routine of life, discussing that which should have branded us both as madmen.

It was Lessing who broke the silence first.

“What the good?” he said, with a short laugh. “I’ve told you the whole business, and it’s up to you to make what you choose of it. The only conclusion seems to be that we are up against something which is, as you put it, outside the range of experience. Good. But suppose I told you that it wasn’t outside the range of experience—that what I saw has been seen by other people, upon independent testimony, ten, twenty, thirty years ago?”

I thought of the reporter’s story. But there would be time to contribute my data presently, after Lessing had told me all that he knew.

“Did you ever hear of an apparition called the Jersey Devil?” he asked.

“I don’t remember it.”

“You probably wouldn’t,” Lessing replied. He took a fresh cigarette from the box and lit it. “The tale afforded some stray paragraphs in the papers, at different times, much as the periodical accounts of ‘authentic’ ghosts do, but I don’t believe anyone gave the slightest credence to it. The Jersey Devil, to sum up all that I have been able to glean on the subject, was a legendary monster, reputed to have been seen, on the evi-

dence of several persons, at different periods during the past fifty or sixty years. The legend goes back, I believe, to just before the Civil War. According to the story, its appearance gives warning to some national trouble or calamity. It was said to have been seen before Lincoln's assassination, before the Spanish-American War, and before the assassination of President McKinley. It is described as a creature having the body of a bat and the head of a horse—sometimes as a quasi-human head on a winged animal body—and it haunts certain counties of New Jersey, chiefly Monmouth and Ocean counties, and has also been seen as far north as Pennsylvania. The legend goes that it is a changeling, that is to say, a devil which took possession of a child's body at birth and flew off in the shape of a monster. Why it should have developed the sort of national solicitude they claim for it is unexplained. Of course the evidence is almost entirely that of superstitious country people who saw it, or thought they saw it, but the fact remains that the evidence in every case tallies, even after intervals of ten or twenty years.

“We may take it that very legend has somewhere some natural origin, however much it may be subsequently exaggerated or distorted. Why, if this particular legend is purely imaginary, should it be confined to certain districts

and not to others? We are not dealing with an apparition reputed to haunt one particular place. It has a pretty wide range of country, on the contrary, and its appearance has been vouched for, almost simultaneously, in places a great many miles apart. Why should it be seen in one certain county and not in the adjoining ones, where the inhabitants are probably equally superstitious? Also it is not seen actually at the time of trouble, when people's minds might be most naturally influenced by superstition, but days and sometimes weeks before the event. That fact in itself I attach no importance to. There is a coincidence, and people naturally connect the two ideas. But I mention it to prove that in no instance was the thing seen because it was expected to be seen; its appearance in each case was entirely without warning or predisposition."

I moved in my chair.

"We've got enough to deal with as the thing stands. If you're going to back it up with any old wives' tales of a bat-winged horse——"

"I'm not backing it up," Lessing retorted. "I'm only asking myself whether the experiences that give rise to the tale of the Jersey Devil have any connection with my own. The details don't matter. I want to get at the origin of the thing."

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"The two don't even tally!" I spoke sharply, for I had still uncomfortably before my eyes the vision of the dead cyclist on the stretch of empty road.

"They don't, on this point," Lessing continued coolly. "The Jersey Devil has never, to my knowledge, been credited with any malevolent intent. At the worst, assuming the tales to have some basis of truth, it has merely scared one or two respectable farmers driving home at night. Now the thing that attacked me, attacked me deliberately, and with an almost extraordinary ferocity of onslaught. I don't think there can be any question about that. That fact alone puts the apparition theory out of the game. We are not dealing with any mere visual phenomena. We are dealing with some actual existing menace. There is just one point that can lead up to the connection, if there is one, between the two."

"The attraction of the lamp?"

"Exactly. Those other people may have been carrying a lamp or they may not. In any case, it was probably a lantern of so slight a power as to escape notice. I said that the thing attacked me. But the real object of its attack might very well have been the lamp, and not me at all. I merely happened in each instance to be near it."

"But even admitting," I objected, "for the

sake of argument, that the thing was a bat, I am not certain about bats being actually attracted by light. They blunder into it."

"Nor am I. As I say, I give you my only theory. And if you assume a bat, you must assume a bat of sufficient size to strike a man down at one blow. The whole thing's grotesque." He pulled out his watch, and rose abruptly. "I must get back, or Mary will be worrying about me. We'll talk over this another time. If you go into the thing with me, we'll go into it thoroughly. Only you know now why I warned you against cycling with a strong lantern."

"Even to the extent of slitting my bicycle tyre?"

"Even to that extent," returned Lessing gravely. "You see, I wasn't taking any risks."

We shook hands, and I followed him out to the porch. There was a clear moon, and the road glimmered white between the black line of the woods. As I watched the swing of his shoulders down the path I was left, I admit, with a definite sense of comfort at the proximity of my own four walls. And before sleep overtook me that night the words of the reporter came back again and again to my mind:

"What's the animal that goes round in these

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woods that's strong enough to wreck the steel tubing of a bicycle, that attacks with its claws instead of its teeth, and that's quick enough to knock a man down without the chance of a struggle?"

VIII

I GO FISHING

THE next morning was one of the most glorious that I remember in that whole summer. I rose early, throwing the windows wide open while I dressed to let in the full blaze of sunshine, and set myself, while the morning common-sense mood was still upon me, to go over carefully in my mind every detail of Lessing's story. Somewhere there must be a natural explanation; it was only the question of finding it. Among other things it occurred to me that someone, for reasons unknown, might be playing a series of practical jokes upon him, but it was difficult to credit a hoax of such malignant and serious intent, and even assuming for a moment that Lessing was the victim of any such plot, it did not explain those mysterious deaths which, I felt more and more convinced, were in some way connected with his own experiences.

It was at least certain that I was in for a fairly interesting vacation. I remembered with grim humour Lennox's assurance that I would find the practice a quiet one; opinions might well

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differ on that point. Even if Lennox came back at the time agreed upon, I had still another six weeks before me, and in six weeks a good deal might happen. It would be my own fault if I did not get some part of the mystery cleared up before then.

Everyone has his own private specific for clearing the mind. Mine was fishing. After breakfast I hunted out my tackle, asked Mrs. Searle to pack me a lunch, and set out resolutely, with the determination to remain in the open air until nightfall.

Part of the creek that lay behind the house I had already explored, and this morning I decided to work upstream, in the direction of the dam. The air was clear and fresh and the woods were alive with birds. Here and there the sumach and poison ivy were already beginning to turn colour, showing patches of tawny scarlet against the green of the undergrowth. Great painted butterflies flitted across my path, and once, as I sat quietly on a boulder in midstream, a kingfisher flashed near me in the broken sunlight.

The creek ran with a pleasant sound in its bed, now swirling between great boulders, now trickling over shallows of waving bronze-tinted weed, here and there forming deep pools, outside the stress of the current, where one might catch

a glimpse of shadowy forms moving through the gold-brown sun-shot water.

I made desultory casts, taking more interest in the morning and in my surroundings than in the actual pursuit upon which I was engaged. Out here under the trees, with the music of the stream in one's ear, it was impossible to feel anything but sane and healthy.

The silence of these woods was intense. In pine woods there is always some stir of movement, however faint, but these trees, giant hickories and dense-foliaged oaks, grew so tall that sound seemed lost amid their branches. One had the impression of miles of far-reaching solitude. To break the spell I began to whistle as I moved upstream, pausing now and then to try some likely pool, picking my way over the big rocks that dotted the bed of the stream. The creek was fairly deep in places; a child, losing its footing, could be easily drowned in the strong current. It was an ideal stream for sport, but either the fish were wary this morning or I was giving but scant attention to my task, for by midday I had only one small half-pounder and a missing hook to my score. Mrs. Searle's luncheon packet bulged in my pocket, reminding me presently of hunger. I was reeling in, preparatory to settling down by some comfortable tree-trunk, when something rushed at me with a

splash and a scurry. I was standing at the moment on a rounded boulder near midstream, and the impact threw me off my balance knee-deep into the water. I turned to see the Lessings' orange setter.

"Oh, you *bad* dog!" a voice exclaimed from the bushes. "Whatever—— Oh, Doctor Haverill, I am so sorry!"

Mary Lessing stood on the bank, bareheaded, in a short golf-skirt and uprolled sleeves. The dog bounded back to her, and she dealt him a summary and ineffectual cuff on the ear.

"Don't do that!" I cried. "I was just thinking how cool it looked in here, anyway!"

I waded to the shore and joined her. "I can't shake hands, because I'm wet," I added. "How are you? I've been trying to fish, but the trout here are entirely too sophisticated!"

"You've frightened them for good now!" she laughed. "What a shame! Did you catch anything?"

"One wretched half-pounder. I put him back for luck."

"A poor luck!"

"I'm not so sure," I rejoined, smiling, and she stooped hastily down to address the setter, who sat regarding us with lolling tongue.

"When are you going to learn manners, you

wretched animal? You haven't even the grace to apologize!"

The setter put up a muddied paw and scraped appealingly at her skirt. "You deserve to go without biscuit for a month," she continued. "Go away from me; don't shake yourself here!"

The command came too late, and we both dodged to avoid the jubilant shower of water drops. Mary Lessing shook her skirt and sat down.

"Do you often explore up this way?" she asked.

"No. It's the first time. I've no idea now how far I've come."

"You're about ten minutes from the dam," she said. "Our cottage is not very far off. I was just going back to lunch."

"And I was just going to have mine here." I clapped a sudden hand to my pocket; the paper parcel was still luckily intact. "Suppose we were to consider it a picnic? I don't know what Mrs. Searle has put up for me, but I have a recollection that she baked apple-cake yesterday. It's too entirely gorgeous a day to eat indoors."

"Oh, as for that——" she began.

"As for that, you must admit that lunch indoors doesn't tempt you in the very least."

"It doesn't," she said. "I came out here this morning because——"

She stopped rather abruptly. I was looking about me for a likely spot in the shade, and when I had found it, at the base of two towering hickories, I pulled Mrs. Searle's parcel out from my pocket. The setter watched my proceedings with a keen interest, intent on the chance of the moment.

"I'm convinced," she objected, "that you ought to go home and change your boots."

"It's impertinent," I reminded her, untying the pink grocery string from the parcel, "to give medical advice to a doctor. Do you like Uneeda biscuits? Because they seem to have occupied an important place in my housekeeper's mind this morning."

We sat down on the moss beneath the hickories, and I divided the single gigantic sandwich with my pocket-knife. Luckily Mrs. Searle had over-estimated my hunger. We ate healthily, with open-air appetites, and what was left over the setter finished at one watchful snap.

"When does Doctor Lennox come home?" Mary asked presently.

"He's due in another six weeks, unless he finds Europe too fascinating. Then I shall have to go back and grind, I suppose. It won't be an attractive prospect, after this holiday."

"You have a practice in New York?"

"Not yet. I've been *interne* up to now. I

expect it'll end in the East Side. A friend of mine has a settlement there, and I'd like to join him if I can. There's always plenty to do."

"I know," she nodded. "I've seen something of it. Do you know a man named Herrick, there?"

"Herrick!" I sat upright. "If you mean Jack Herrick, that's the friend I was speaking of. Then you——"

"Then *you*," she corrected, "are the college chum he was always talking about. Why, I've known Jack Herrick ever since I used to play dolls!"

"Three and a half years . . ." I said pensively. "The world's a small place."

"You are rude, Doctor Haverill. It's a long enough time, anyway."

She was looking at the branches overhead, and in her upturned face I caught fleetingly a likeness that had puzzled me more than once before. I knew now. On Herrick's mantelshelf, in his shabby comfortable room at the settlement, there had stood always a photograph in a silver frame. It was the portrait of a child of perhaps thirteen, in a gingham overall, and with her hair braided in two short tails down her back. Herrick had said once: "That's an old sweetheart of mine."

Singularly enough, the recollection did not at

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this moment greatly please me. But I merely said:

“You wore your hair in two pig-tails.”

She brought her eyes to earth swiftly. “Who told you?”

“All proper little girls do at that age,” I reminded her shamelessly.

“I see. But we were talking of John Herrick.”

“Go on.”

“Don’t you think he’s splendid?” she continued, turning to me. “He’s done no end of good. And he works . . . I don’t believe he ever takes a real holiday. Doctor Haverill, you ought to get him——”

“To come down here for a while? I will— if it would please you.”

She looked at me so frankly that I was at once ashamed.

“Why, of course it would! But I don’t know why I said that. I don’t suppose he’d take the time.”

I watched a dragon-fly that was wheeling over the stream. She sat near me, her hands locked about her knees.

“My brother was at your house last night,” she said after a moment.

“Yes.”

I could feel her eyes fixed on me, and I knew what was in her mind.

“He told you something?”

“We were talking about chemistry,” I said. “It’s a subject your brother is very interested in.”

“Chemistry!” She put out her hand with a little gesture. “Doctor Haverill, do you take me for a child? What is the matter? You can tell me; he has spoken to you. I want to know.”

“What do you want to know?” I said, lamely enough.

“The whole thing—what is happening here. I know something threatens him, that he is in danger, and neither he nor you will tell me what it is.”

“How can I tell you,” I fenced, “what I don’t even know myself?”

She was quick. “Then there *is* something?”

I ignored the unfinished sentence.

“Miss Lessing, why can’t you get your brother to go away from here, for a time?”

“I can’t. I’ve tried. He wouldn’t leave, now. You don’t know him. He’s the last person in the world to give a thing up until he’s proved it down to the ground, one way or another. Whatever’s at the bottom of this, he won’t rest till he’s found it out. It’s just a scientific problem to him, and nothing else.”

“And you?” I said.

“I?” She moved her shoulders. “What can

I think? I had hoped just now—But I only know what he has told me, what I have seen. If one began to think——”

“Listen to me,” I said. “You must not think! You and I are two sane people. Look at these wood around! I ask you, is it possible to feel anything but sane and incredulous in a place like this? I want you to get into your head, right now, that there is nothing—nothing at all in this world—that a man has any reason to be afraid of. And there are very few things in the world, to my belief, that cannot be explained. Has it ever occurred to you that this whole conviction of your brother’s may be nothing more than hallucination?”

“But the injuries——”

“I have known hysteric patients, before now, inflict as severe injuries upon themselves without consciousness or recollection. I don’t say it is your brother’s case; I’m only trying to form a possible rational explanation such as any doctor would put forward. I have had one or two such cases within my own experience. What I propose to do is this, but I shall do it only with your consent. I will write to Herrick and ask him down here for a fortnight. It will be a new brain to bear on the problem, and I shall ask your brother to let us join these investigations with him.”

"You'll do that." She put out her hand to me impulsively.

"I'll do it to-night. Only . . . I shall have to give Herrick a detailed account of everything that has happened, so far as we know it, and I can't do that without your brother's approval."

"Yes . . . I see."

"You will excuse one question. Are they on good terms?"

It struck me that I had never heard Lessing mention his name.

"Yes." She paused doubtfully. "It's funny you should ask that. They had a disagreement, about two years ago. It was when my brother first took up this . . . this kind of study. Having séances and that. Doctor Herrick wanted him to give it up."

I moved involuntarily. Here was a new light on Lessing's attitude of mind, which he himself had been at pains, it seemed to me, to touch on very lightly. I remembered stray references of his, the signed article I had noticed on my first evening at the house.

"Your brother used to attend séances often?"

"Didn't he tell you? I don't know that I would have mentioned it, but I don't see that it matters. It was before I came to live with them. He and some friends of his were very interested, and Doctor Herrick used to join them too some-

times. They met at a friend's studio. Doctor Herrick was rather against it from the first, but I know he used to be there. Of course I understand very little about it, but . . . things did happen. I don't mean that they banged on tambourines or rapped out the alphabet or anything like that. It wasn't spiritualism. And then Doctor Herrick stopped. I think he knew more than any of them, but he said it was dangerous and it didn't lead to anything, and he wanted my brother to give it up altogether. Kate—that's my sister-in-law, you know—was their medium, and I think it was on her account. Doctor Herrick thought it was bad for her. And then one night something happened, I don't know just what, but Kate got some sort of a shock. She's very highly strung at any time, and I always supposed something frightened her, but anyway she was quite ill for a long time after that. She used to get queer sort of nervous spells, and she couldn't be left alone, and that was why I first came to live with them, on her account. Of course my brother gave the whole business up then. The physician who attended her said simply that she was in poor health, and had had a nervous breakdown, and he told her she must live in the country awhile till she got stronger, but I know Doctor Herrick thought at the time

that the séances had been the cause of it. He told my brother so."

I listened attentively. It was news to me that Herrick, the essential level-headed, should have lent himself at any time to experiments of this order. He had never mentioned the subject to me in our many talks, and I had even gathered, as one gathers an impression without any very definite grounds, that he was a confirmed sceptic on all matters of occultism.

"You say they had a disagreement?"

"It was exactly that," she made haste to say. "They didn't quarrel, but I know Herrick was very much opposed to Dick's views, and they used to have arguments. But it didn't amount to more than that."

"Good!"

She had risen to her feet, and at her movement the setter himself lazily rose and came towards us.

"Then we're going to see this thing out?" I said.

"We'll see it out."

We shook hands, and I fancied that her fingers rested in mine a moment voluntarily before she drew them away.

"Are you coming up to see my brother to-day?" she asked.

"Presently . . . I'd like to." I looked at

my watch. "I thought of taking a stroll up to the dam, as I'm so close; I've never been there. You say it's only a few minutes?"

"Not more than ten, through the woods."

"Let's walk up together," I suggested, "if you aren't too tired."

She assented readily, and we struck off up a little footpath, barely traceable, that followed the course of the stream. It was, as she had said, a scant ten minutes before the sound of the sluice broke on our ears, and through a sudden clearing of the woods the dam lay before us, a black sinister sheet of water, covered with masses of floating weed and pond-lilies, and darkened by the trees and underbrush that grew closely down to its edge. An old scow, long past use and sunken low in the water, lay pad-locked to a slimy stump near the shore.

Following an old cart-track, we skirted the edge of the dam in the direction of the saw-mill, a dilapidated building with broken roof, that seemed to have stood for many years of disuse. To reach it we had to cross the sluice itself, and Mary Lessing, who was a few paces ahead of me, paused to look down over the single rough hand-rail that protected one from a misstep.

There is something forbidding about a mill-sluice at any time, especially when dissociated, as this was, from the companionable sound of

human labour. The sheer depth, the knowledge of the vast imprisoned force behind one, the sound of water gushing here and there between the slimy weed-grown timbers, give always, to me at least, an indefinable sense of the sinister.

I leaned my rod against the railing, and we looked down side by side at the black oozing wall below.

"I like this place," Mary Lessing said. "There's something queer and creepy about it. I often come here. I suppose they haven't worked the sluice for years."

"I doubt if the machinery would move now," I said. "Of course this is never opened. There should be a smaller sluice for the millstream further on."

I glanced as I spoke at the clumsy wooden levers near me that controlled the sluice. They looked to be rotting in their place, but as I pushed one, idly, a sudden change in the sound of escaping water below warned me that the machinery was not in such ill repair as it would seem. I exerted my strength to pull the lever back, and my attention was momentarily distracted from the girl beside me. She was leaning out over the hand-rail, and when I turned it was with a sudden cry of warning.

"Look out!" I said. "That may not be safe!"

I caught her arm instinctively as I spoke, and

on the instant the rail bent outward with a slight sound of cracking. In another moment she would have been over the edge. We looked at one another, and Mary laughed, a little nervously on the stillness. Her face had flushed.

"I thought that rail was all right," she said rather awkwardly.

"Dick walked over here with me not a week ago, and we tested it then to see."

"It isn't all right now," I returned sharply.

I put my two hands on the rail, giving it a slight wrench outward. It gave easily to my touch, and looking closer, I saw that the surface towards the water had been half cut through. Someone had tampered with it deliberately and within the last few days.

"What is it?" Mary Lessing asked.

"Merely rotten, as I thought!"

I turned away, and walked thoughtfully on towards the saw-mill. The thing puzzled me, but it had an ugly look. It was no idle mischief that had prompted the act. Whoever had done it, had done it maliciously, and the purpose was not very far to seek. Hitherto I had not attached much importance to the Lessings' occasional laughing references to their unpopularity in the village. Now it assumed suddenly a significance.

I turned to Mary Lessing, walking beside me.

"I want you to promise me something," I said,

“whether it seems to you irrelevant or not. I want you not to come here again by yourself, at any time. It’s a lonely place and it isn’t particularly safe. If you come at all, bring your brother with you.”

The smile that was on her lips at first faded abruptly, leaving her face serious.

“The rail was cut,” she said quietly. “Is that what you mean? It must have been, because it was perfectly solid a few days ago.”

“Someone has been up to mischief. If there are characters of that kind in the neighbourhood, it’s best to run no risks, that’s all.”

We walked on a few paces, silently. The mill was on our right, a desolate-looking building enough, with its surrounding litter of sodden chips and piles of cut logs lying here and there in the open. A heavy smell of decaying wood was in the air, added to the stagnant odour of the dam itself.

The setter was in front of us, sniffing to and fro on the trail of the rats that infested the wood piles. Suddenly he stood still, his ears laid back, growling ominously. A short, thick-set figure slipped from the angle of the mill wall and vanished in the woods on the farther side of the cart-track.

“Aaron Menning,” Miss Lessing said. She put her hand and called the dog back. I was staring

up the track where the chicken-huckster had so adroitly disappeared.

“Does he live near here?”

“Not very far off. I suppose he comes here to fish. There are a good many in the dam.”

“Very probable,” I said.

“I dislike that man,” Mary said after a moment. “I guess it’s mutual, too. The other one, Jake, you know, had a quarrel with my brother one time. He was always loitering round the house, and Dick turned him away. Aaron’s always very civil when we meet, but I don’t believe he likes us any more than Jakey did.”

We took a turning past the mill that led us, without further event, to the Lessings’ bungalow. Within sight of the house I parted from her. I wanted to see Lessing again, but there were a few points that needed readjustment in my own mind first. As I walked slowly home down the familiar slope of Dutchman’s Hill I was thinking that the industrious and chapel-going Aaron might very well bear a little watching.

IX

PROBLEMS

I WROTE to Herrick that same evening and his answer came a couple of days later, saying that he hoped to get away towards the end of the month. I had said nothing in my letter about the events of the summer, but merely mentioned that the Lessings were my neighbours for the time being.

Herrick wrote: 'I shall be glad to meet Lessing again. He seems to have buried himself in obscurity for the last twelve months. Is he still as enthusiastic a theorist as ever, or has the country sobered his ideas? In any case you are to be congratulated on having for neighbours three of the most charming people it has ever been my luck to meet.'

I smiled at the "three." In my own mind I could have substituted another numeral which would explain much of Herrick's promptitude in accepting my invitation. He was very much mistaken if he thought that any such artless device would put me off the track. In imagina-

tion I already saw myself playing the rôle of a reluctant gooseberry during his visit.

Lessing, when I mentioned my expected guest, made a comment almost identical with Herrick's own.

"Herrick?" he said. "Good! We shall have some arguments, Haverill, that will eclipse even your own. If Herrick gets to the bottom of this by any of his cut-and-dried theories and deductions I'll give him best once and for all!"

One thing at least pleased me. I gathered from both their remarks that whatever difference had occurred between them had been purely a battle of opinion, and had no influence on their fundamental regard for one another. Meantime my meeting with Mary Lessing, and the subsequent incident of the broken hand-rail, had settled my mind on one point at least. There was some malicious influence at work in the neighborhood which was distinctly and obviously human, whether it bore any relation to the laboratory experiences or not, and at any cost, even if necessary in the face of Lessing's opposition, she must be kept clear of it.

Three-fourths of the neighbouring population were Pennsylvania Dutch, and I had learned enough, in my own infrequent dealings with them, to recognize their sullen aloofness, amounting almost to a hostility, towards any

stranger settled in their midst. The Lessings were for some reason disliked in the village, and I fancied that much of the distrust towards them was due to their having chosen for their dwelling a spot which already had a sufficiently bad reputation in the eyes of the country people about. Lessing was by no means the sort of man to make himself popular here, or even friendly. He was more or less of a recluse; he had erected a mysterious building in which, engaged upon equally mysterious pursuits, he chose to isolate himself until all hours of the night, and he displayed an open indifference towards all the current gossip and superstition of the neighbourhood. Following the primitive psychology of these people, narrow-minded to a degree and distrustful of anything unfamiliar, his habits alone were sufficient to brand him as an ungodly character. According to his sister, he had already fallen foul of Jake Menning soon after his arrival, and I had no doubt whatever that Aaron, out of revenge, had since done his best to foster the already antagonistic feeling towards him. The huckster's trade lends itself to all the back-door gossip of the countryside, and it seemed to me that I could trace easily enough the fruit of Aaron's house-to-house visits. Aaron himself was civil-spoken, industrious, religious to all accounts, and a highly respected member of the

community, but all this did not weigh very far against the man's face. Whatever ill blood ran in the Menning family, it was certainly not confined to the deceased Jakey.

I mentioned my suspicions to Lessing a day or two later, when I was at the bungalow.

"Oh, the man's right enough," he returned. "I don't like his kind, that's all. I had a row with Jakey because I didn't want him hanging round the place and I told him so. Aaron has never annoyed us in any way; on the contrary, he takes pains to be particularly civil. I think he's like all the rest around, glad enough to keep clear of Dutchman's Hill and all its inhabitants, dead or living!"

Mary Lessing had asked me, on our homeward walk, not to mention the cut railing to her brother, and I had not done so. It was sufficient for the moment that she had agreed to keep away from the mill-dam and its immediate neighbourhood. She was a sensible girl and I had no fear that she would break her promise out of any spirit of bravado or curiosity.

We were in the sitting-room. Mary had gone down to the village on an errand, and Mrs. Lessing was as usual invisible. For the time being we were free from interruption, and it struck me as a good moment to tell Lessing what

I had heard from the reporter concerning the two mysterious cycling fatalities.

He took it even more seriously than I had expected. It was even with scant patience that he heard me out.

“But good heavens, man,” he cried, “why didn’t you tell me all this sooner? Don’t you see that it’s what I’ve been expecting, what I’ve been watching the papers for month after month? It puts my experience clear of all doubt. I have felt certain—as certain as I am standing here—that sooner or later some accident of this sort would turn up.”

“It was a good fifteen miles from here,” I said. “Besides——”

“What’s fifteen miles? I don’t care if it was fifty! Have you got the cutting with you?”

I had. I had torn off the corner with the paragraph, unobserved of my reporter friend, and I took the fragment now from my pocket-book and gave it to Lessing. He read it through eagerly.

“The facts correspond. The man was killed in the open; he had no chance of shelter. The thing hit him as he was riding.”

“It’s not proved.”

“There’s the damage to the bicycle.”

“There’s exactly that,” I said, “which to my mind puts a different light on the whole thing.

If the impact of the blow was sufficient to damage the bicycle to that extent, how was it that the rider escaped all injury except a single scratch on the face? It's out of all reason. There were no marks on the body. That is testified to. If a man is knocked off his bicycle while riding at even an average speed, he'll have some marks to show for it. He died from heart failure, probably resultant upon fright and the shock of the wound. Very good. But that doesn't account for the bicycle. It seems to me that whatever attacked him wreaked its spite on the machine afterwards."

"He had time to dismount?"

"Possibly. It doesn't say how near to the bicycle he was lying. If he fell at all he must have fallen clear of it. The lamp was picked up several yards away."

"The lamp . . ." said Lessing.

The same thought was in both our minds.

"What date did this happen?" he asked.

"It was a week-old paper. I was there . . . wait a moment." I made a rough calculation in my mind. "This happened, apparently, on the Thursday previous. That should bring it to about the third of the month."

"The third was a Thursday," said Lessing. He pulled out an almanac from the bookshelves and ran the pages over. I saw him frown.

“There was a full moon on that evening. It is just possible he was riding without a light at all. If so, that throws my whole theory out.”

“The whole thing,” said I, “looks to me like the work of a maniac. Take the lamp. It was picked up some yards away. Now a bicycle lantern isn’t merely hung on; it’s screwed on, and you can’t imagine any sort of blow struck from above that would dislodge it and throw it that distance. It must have been either unscrewed or torn off, deliberately, and that in itself suggests human agency.”

Lessing barely heard me. He was staring at the scrap of paper spread out on his knee.

“The first man, according to your reporter was killed actually in the woods. The second was picked up some twenty feet from the edge of the woods, on the open road. That’s important. It was a clear night. Why should he be attacked in the open when there were woods within half a dozen yards that would have given ample ambush?” Unconsciously he was repeating the reporter’s argument. “That doesn’t look like the work of a human being. Besides, the man wasn’t robbed. I tell you, Haverill, there’s something that doesn’t satisfy me in all this. Either they made some extraordinary mistake, or . . . but he was riding *towards* the woods!”

“Apparently.”

"On what evidence?"

"I suppose the position of the bicycle," I said lamely.

"There had been no rain for some days. The roads are hard about here, and a bicycle wouldn't be likely to leave tracks, especially on the edge of the path. You're a doctor, Haverill. Suppose a man died from heart failure, would he necessarily die at the instant of the shock?"

"Only in romances. Actually, there would be several seconds' interval at least."

"He might run, say, twenty feet and then drop?"

"Quite possibly. But I don't see how that helps."

"It means just this," said Lessing, "that according to my idea the man was not riding towards the woods at all. He was attacked actually in the woods or at the edge of them, and he ran the twenty feet to where his body was found. Listen. The moon did not rise that evening until 10.30. Anyone riding through the woods the earlier part of the evening would have used a lamp. He was a stranger in the district and was identified only by papers. No one in Coopersville knew him or had apparently ever seen him before. Coopersville is not a large place, and a case like this makes sufficient talk.

If he had passed through there during the evening someone would have seen him, and it would have been mentioned at the inquest. The chances are that he had come from a distance, and that he was riding *towards* Coopersville with the idea of putting up there for the night. Assuming that, and that he was carrying a lamp at the time, we have our facts fairly clear. He was attacked just within cover of the woods, that is to say, where the light would be more clearly noticeable than on an open stretch of moonlit road. The overhanging trees would break the attack more or less, which accounts for the comparative slightness of his own injury. The primary object of attack being the lamp, the rider would have the chance of escape, whereas if he had been struck actually in the open, at full force, he would have been probably killed on the spot."

The whole theory was fairly ingenious, but it didn't account for the wrecking of the bicycle, for its being found where it was, some distance clear of the woods and near the man's own body. I told Lessing so. He looked at me queerly.

"Have you ever seen a dog worry a stick?" he asked.

"We aren't dealing with dogs."

"Whatever wrecked the bicycle could have dragged it that distance."

“If your theory has anything in it the bicycle was carried. If it had been dragged they would have found traces. Don’t tell me that any animal capable of such insensate fury as you suggest would have had the intelligence to conceal its tracks!”

We were both getting rather heated over the argument. It seemed to me that Lessing was bent obstinately on maintaining his own views, to the point of extravagance. For my part, I was equally positive that the affair was due to some human agency. Neither of us, therefore, was aware of a shadow in the doorway until Mary Lessing’s pleasant mocking voice broke in upon our discussion.

“What on earth,” she said, “are you two people scrapping about so vehemently?”

“We weren’t scrapping,” I smiled. “We were discussing a problem—you might call it a scientific riddle. It concerns the law which governs the movement of bodies through space.”

Mary turned on me her invariable reproachful glance when she suspected that anyone was making fun of her. She sat down, pulling the pins from her hat, and let the sunlight strike on her roughened bronze-coloured hair.

“Is it anything,” she inquired, “with which my inferior feminine mind might be capable of grappling?”

“Certainly,” I returned promptly. “We will illustrate it with the simple objects now before us. How would it be possible, for instance, for that extremely solid book-case to be moved, say, to the other end of the room, without being dragged or carried?”

Mary affected to consider, her head on one side.

“Simple enough,” she said, laughing. “It would have to fly through the air, that’s all.”

There was a moment’s silence in the room, while I looked at Lessing and he looked at me.

“Suppose we have some tea?” he said then.

X

THE CHICKEN-HUCKSTER'S HOUSE

It was the last week-end in August that Herrick arrived. For nearly two days before it had rained steadily, and I had spent the time indoors, discounting old scores in the shape of letters, and enlivened only by a visit from Lessing, who walked over in oilskins on the Thursday afternoon to spend a couple of hours smoking on a sheltered corner of the front porch. The weather lifted on Friday night, and by Saturday morning the roads were passable. As I did not expect Herrick before the 5.40 train I took my bicycle out after lunch and went for a spin to stretch my limbs.

I set out by way of the village, posting my letters on the way, and intending to make a circuit that would bring me home from the opposite direction. I managed, however, to lose my bearings, and after some fruitless bungling stopped at a farmhouse to ask my way. The farmer seemed rather less taciturn than most of the folk about, and readily pointed me out a short cut

which, according to him, would bring me out at the cross roads just above the dam.

The road, which lay for the first few miles through cultivated land, entered eventually upon a stretch of sparsely wooded country, desolate and inhospitable enough. Stunted spruce trees, powdered with blue berries, clung tenaciously to the barren ground, and everywhere the grey monotonous boulders cropped out, scattered as though in the idle finish to some giant's play. Their uncouth rounded outlines suggested from a distance a field dotted with grey misshapen sheep, for ever movelessly browsing. The road was bad; a horse would have had difficulty in picking his way, and I cursed the well-meaning farmer roundly as I dismounted to push my heavy machine.

A little distance on, however, things became better. I reached the beginning of a wood, gaunt ragged hickories interspersed with tangles of wild grape-vine, and matted creepers, and a few hundred yards beyond a broken snake-fence suggested the whereabouts of a house.

I came upon it at the turn of the road, a square, red-painted frame house and barn, surrounded by a medley of small sheds and out-houses in every degree of dilapidation. There was no gate, merely a couple of bars let down

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in the fencing, and I left the bicycle a moment and went inside.

The yard upon which I entered was a litter of old junk of every description, ancient packing-cases, broken barrels, scrap-iron, and bones flung into piles. The wagon-ruts leading up to the house were sunken deep in filth, and an indescribable odour filled the air, in which the smell of badly kept fowls predominated. They ran everywhere, a ragged nondescript crew, scratching, cackling, gazing at me from evil yellow-rimmed eyes. Many more were confined in the coops, mere oblong boxes of lath from which protruded gaunt heads and outstretched necks, whose mournful protest mingled with the clamour of their untrammelled brethren. So far as I could see, every shed held its prisoners, all in the same state of filth and neglect, a sore to the eyes and offence to the nostrils. There was that in the look and smell of the place that stuck in my throat, used as I was to poverty in both town and country. There seemed no one about, and after a moment's hesitation I retraced my steps across the black mire of the yard and regained the roadway.

On the opposite side of the way a little ragged girl of about thirteen watched my retreat with keen eyes. She had been in the woods gathering the small uneatable nuts that children call pig-

hickories; her apron was filled with the green unripe hulls. She grinned, backing a little at my approach.

"Hello, sis," I said. "Who lives in that house there?"

"'S Mister Menning's."

"Ah!" I took another backward glance at the ill-kept yard, with its indescribable litter. As I did so a low moan, almost human in its misery, came from the barn behind the jumbled sheds. It was repeated, long-drawn and mournful, the protest of a dumb thing exhausted by suffering. I turned to the child sharply.

"What's the matter there?"

"It's the cow." She shuffled her bare toes in the dust, looking with a fascinated curiosity towards the place whence the sound came. "She hollers awful sometimes."

"Is it ill?"

"Mennin beats her." She said with the curious indifference of the country-bred child towards animal suffering. "He's allus beatin' her. Gran'pap's spoke to him, onct. He says she don't make no profit an' Gran'pa says she can't make no profit if he's allus beatin' her."

I remembered her face suddenly.

"Aren't you Mrs. Nevill's little girl, from the Bend?"

"Yep. Gran'pa's house is jest back there." She jerked her head up the road.

"How's your mother? I'll step in and see her, as I'm here."

"Mother's up. She's been washin'."

She began to retreat up the road, with the sudden movement of a half-wild thing, and I followed her, glad enough to turn my back on the chicken-huckster's dwelling. The moaning of the cow was in my ears again as I walked on.

I knew the Nevills' cottage, and my road from there lay straight enough. I had never approached the Bend before from this side, and so the lie of the land was unfamiliar to me. The Nevills were one of the few Irish families about. The household consisted of a rheumatic old grandfather, his daughter, whom I had attended a short while ago, and her husband, a steady young fellow who worked at a harness factory in the village.

Paddy was an old sinner if there ever lived one, but now, along in the green seventies, he confined himself to the cultivation of religion and the smoking of a particularly vile corn-cob pipe. He had been employed most of his life on the railway, and his rheumatism was the result of six weeks' work in a flooded cutting. Providence had released him some two years ago from a vituperative wife, whose latter years

had been soured by the burden of an invalid husband; I gathered from the old man's talk that she had to her last day regarded his rheumatism as a form of criminal idleness, and since her death Paddy had taken a fresh lease of life.

I found him on his usual corner of the cottage porch, his square old head with its bristly jaws—Paddy still shaved once a week—framed by the window-ledge and its row of flowering plants in tin cans. His daughter was inside, getting supper, and the new baby lay in a ramshackle baby-coach near Paddy's elbow. He was rocking the coach with one toe on the wheel while he smoked, the smell of his unspeakable tobacco mingling with that of the frying onions in the kitchen, through the open door.

I always felt like holding my breath when I approached the Nevill cottage. The stuffiness was of that permanent, impenetrable sort which seems to encompass the house solidly for a radius of five yards at least.

I sat down on the porch step and asked after Paddy's rheumatism. He looked down at his feet, shapeless in list slippers, like fearsome parcels.

"I ain't long fur this world, doctor, and that's truth I'm tellin' yer. Don't I know it? We ain't a long-lived fam'ly. Me father died at seventy-eight an' me brother at eighty, an' I'm

thinkin' I won't be long after thim." He raised his voice suddenly to a shout, without turning. "Mary, git a cheer out fur th' doctor!"

I refused the chair hastily; the porch step at least bordered on fresh air.

"I've just come round by Aaron Menning's place," I said. "I met the little girl there."

Paddy's face darkened.

"Ain't I allus tellin' the young limb I won't hev her hangin' round the likes of thim dirrty Dutchmen! It's her mother'll be after takin' the strap to her fur that. The place ain't fit fur a dog these days. Did ye take heed to the cow there?"

I nodded.

"The poor baste do be after cryin' day an' night, like a Christian. I've told him again an' again, but he's a bad man is Aaron. He's took after his brother, an' that's sayin' ill enough of anyone. Ye wouldn't mind Jake Mennin', doctor?"

"No. It was before I came here."

"Sure I've lived neighbors to thim fifteen years, an' I've seen things to turn your stomach on yer. He had a bad streak in him, Jake, an' it was the devil took him in the end. They had a little girl there workin', the year before Jake died. . . . That's why I tell Lizzie I'll break her neck before I see her hangin' round

there. The ould mother's a decent woman, or used to be. God knows the poor soul's had enough to turn her crazy."

"There is a mother, then?"

"Sure, but ye don't see her nowadays. 'Tis Aaron keeps her to the house, most like. I used to be civil spoke to Aaron a while back, but sence Jake died there ain't no good to him at all. Would any Christian man treat a dumb baste the way he does? An' he treats his ould mother the same, if all's known."

He pulled on his pipe.

"Two weeks ago, it would be, as we saw her last. Yes, I mind now it was the day I was thinkin' of puttin' the new winder-pane in. She come over to borry a half-cup o' sugar, an' I says to Mary to let her have it, the poor soul. She had her hand all wrapped up to here"—he measured a space on his gaunt grimy wrist—"an' she says to Mary as she'd scalded it in the kitchen. Aaron was away with the wagon, or she wouldn't 'a' come then."

"I suppose Aaron does a good business," I said casually.

"By the talk he does. I do be thinkin' he does most of it in the next county, fur I don't see him drivin' the village way more'n onct in a week or so. He'll be gone three days on a stretch wid the wagon, an' Lizzie's seen him

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come home mornin's wid the poor baste in a lather. Lizzie says he has hundreds o' chickens there, an' he can't be after sellin' thim all. They die on him all the time, fur she's seen him pull 'em out o' the coops and throw 'em to the pigs."

I asked after his son and rose to go, after turning the half of my tobacco pouch into Paddy's old tin box. It was getting on toward five o'clock, and I would have just time to clean up, get the mare put in, and drive to the depot for the afternoon train.

XI

JAKY WALKS

It did me good to see Herrick's cheery face on the platform, and to feel the hand-grip he gave me. Our friendship dated back to college days, and unlike so many of those early intimacies, it had strengthened instead of decreased with the passage of time. Then, as now, Herrick had been the same curious mixture of enthusiast and practical hard-headed worker, and in spite of the inevitable schooling of experience and years of exacting and often discouraging labour, he had carried into the early forties a certain boyish confidence, a freshness of outlook, which gave to one instinctively, on meeting him, the impression of indomitable health and vitality.

When we had tucked his valise into the back of the buggy and turned the mare about, he looked at me with a laugh.

"Well, Haverill, you look quite the country practitioner already! Seven weeks' change—ye gods! But you haven't grown a beard yet!"

"I'm keeping the beard for my leisure mo-

ments," I told him. "So far they haven't been many."

"Don't tell me this place is in the throes of an epidemic! It looks like one of those ideal Sleepy Hollows where you get about one call for whooping-cough every six months. I came here for repose, you know."

"Oh, you'll get it," I assured him. "You'll get the kind of repose that keeps you awake nights wondering where it's going to hit you next. They don't want a doctor down here; they want a new lunacy commission officer, and the first suspect will be me. Oh, I'm going to make you work, Jack! Have no idle dreams on the subject."

"Work! You look as if you'd forgotten the meaning of the word! If ever a man had the luck to stumble on a good excuse for a holiday it's you. This air, this sky, these woods to fish and loaf in—— Hello, what's up? The whooping-cough I spoke of, or have you arranged a little semblance of business for my benefit! That good lady seems about to welcome us with open arms."

A woman was hurrying down the road toward us, from the direction of my house. She had a gingham sunbonnet on which flapped at each step as she walked, and on catching sight of the buggy with the familiar roan mare in the shafts

she waved her hand in unmistakable signal. I pulled Bess up, and by the time the woman came pantingly abreast of us I recognized her for Mrs. Sliefer, who lived in the first farm-house beyond the Bend, past the cross roads.

"I been to your house, doctor," she began, "an' Mis' Searle told me you weren't to hum, so I come right on. My niece is took bad an' she's been queer sence the mornin', and I'd like you to come straight back with me an' see her."

She spoke with an air somewhat of indignation, born of her toilsome walk. Mrs. Sliefer was a stout lady, to put it at the mildest, and the heat and exercise had obviously tried her. I leaned from the buggy.

"Get right up, Mrs. Sliefer! There's plenty of room, and you can tell me as we drive."

She hoisted herself laboriously into the buggy, with our combined help, and collapsed, rather than sat down, between us. Luckily the seat was a broad one. As it was, her generous proportions all but crushed us.

I kept the mare at a walk while Mrs. Sliefer told her errand. Briefly, as I gathered from her rather spasmodic utterance, the facts were these.

Her niece, Rebecca Durn, who lived with Mr. and Mrs. Sliefer at the farm, was keeping company with the young man from Haskell's grocery store. The young couple were in the habit of

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meeting of an evening, after Rebecca had washed her supper dishes, in the woods near the saw-mill, some fifteen minutes from the farm-house and in the line of the short cut which the young man used to walk up from the village. They usually took a short stroll about the dam before returning to the farm, to finish the evening in the older folks' company on the home porch. Yesterday, as I have said, was rainy, and Rebecca had expected her sweetheart at the house. As he did not arrive, however, and the weather had lifted since five o'clock, Rebecca, thinking he might possibly have gone to the usual trysting-place, put on a shawl and her rubber shoes and went out to find him. He was not to be seen, and she loitered a few moments in the neighborhood of the dam before returning home. It was then just getting dusk. According to her account, she was strolling near the saw-mill when the ghost of Jakey Menning, surrounded by light and with flames coming from his mouth, sprang out from the bushes and yelled at her. Rebecca, struck of a heap, as she expressed it, had still the sense to turn and run, and being a sturdy young woman she speedily outdistanced the alleged ghost and gained the shelter of her own home. Once on the porch, however, she collapsed in hysterics, and it was not until she came to, a good half-hour after, that her aunt

and uncle could learn what had happened. Rebecca's sweetheart had meantime arrived, and being a strong-minded young man had at once induced Mr. Sliefer to set out with him, armed with a stout cudgel and the farmer's shotgun, to investigate. They patrolled the neighborhood of the saw-mill thoroughly, but needless to say nothing was found.

Rebecca recovered, but this morning, on the matter being mentioned at breakfast, had promptly gone off again into hysterics, a state which had lasted all day, off and on, and which her aunt had been unable to check. The hysteria had brought on sickness, and the girl, so Mrs. Sliefer told me, was now in bed in a state of utter collapse.

I told Herrick I would drop him at the house.

"On the contrary," he returned, "I'll come along, with Mrs. Sliefer's permission."

We drove on accordingly, the three of us, covering the distance past Dutchman's Hill and the Lessing's bungalow at a smart trot. A few minutes beyond the saw-mill, along the road Mary Lessing and I had taken some mornings ago, the Sliefer's farm-house came in sight, a comfortable low-built dwelling standing back in a good-sized orchard with the barn and out-buildings clustered near it.

We found Rebecca in an upper bedroom,

watched over by a mute and scared-looking neighbor, who had been fetched in to sit with her while her aunt was away. The girl lay in bed, her eyes rolling, her hands twitching nervously on the covers. There was nothing alarming in her condition, which had been brought about as much by Mrs. Sliefer's well-meant home physicking as by the original fright.

I went to the bedside and put my hand on her wrist.

"Now then," I said, "what's all this nonsense about bogies? A big strong girl like you ought to have better sense than to imagine such things."

She began to whimper.

"I seen it—I seen it! It was all spoutin' fire! It was Jakey Menning as sure as there's a livin' God! Oh-h—I don't want to look at it . . . I don't want to!"

She went off into another hysterical spasm, and it took all my force to hold her still while her aunt went for water. When it was over, and she lay back on the pillows, still sobbing exhaustedly, I took Mrs. Sliefer aside.

"Give me pen and ink," I said, "and have someone drive down to the drug store with this prescription at once. I'll wait here till it's brought back. Your niece will probably be all

right tomorrow, after a night's sleep, but keep her in bed a day in any case."

She took the prescription and gave it to her husband. We heard his heavy boots creaking out to the back door. I turned to Mrs. Sliefer.

"And now," I said, "you're a clever, sensible woman. What's your idea of all this nonsense?"

Mrs. Sliefer was obviously flattered by my description. She mopped her flat round face, still shining from the walk.

"Rebecca ain't no liar," she said. "She's a good up-standin' girl, an' she ain't never showed no foolishness before 'this. We was talking about Dutchman's Hill on'y a few nights ago, and Rebecca was the first to laugh about it. 'I'd like to see the ghost'd scare me!' she said, right there. No. Rebecca seen suthin, or she wouldn't ha' come home the state she did. An' as for it's bein' Jakey, she'd oughter know Jakey Mennin' well enough, seein' he's brought the wagon round here time an' ag'n when Aaron was busy."

"You don't tell me *you* believe in the foolish talk there's been, Mrs. Sliefer!"

She stiffened.

"No, an' I ain't sayin' I do, but sperrits or no sperrits, Mr. Sliefer's goin' to get to the bottom of this. Seems to me there' a law had ought to deal with respectable girls bein' frightened

out of their wits ten yards from their own doorstep!"

"Listen," I said. "It seems that your niece has been the victim of a very cruel and foolish practical joke, but there's no good going into the matter here and now. Only look after her. If anyone is playing tricks around the saw-mill, keep her away from there. She's in no state to risk any more shocks. Don't let her go wandering about alone."

"I wouldn't ha' let her last night, on'y she was so sure of findin' George Freeman there. Rebecca was born an' brought up here, and she knows the woods as well as our own front yard. But there'll be an end of these doin's, an' I told her so."

"That's right." I paused a moment. "Who was here, the evening that your niece spoke of not being frightened?"

"Only us an' Mis' Scholl there, an' George Freeman. There wasn't one of 'em would play a trick on her. An' George Freeman was in at the house a'ready when Rebecca come runnin' back."

I did not leave until the farmer returned, and I had seen Rebecca already quiet and subdued under the influence of the sleeping draught I had prescribed for her. Then Herrick and I drove home through the dusk to the ruined sup-

per which Mrs. Searle had prepared so painstakingly for six o'clock.

"Well," I said to him, "what do you make of it?"

Herrick smiled.

"Ghosts don't usually 'holler,' " he said, "and Rebecca seems to have been very clear on the hollering, if on nothing else. I think we may dismiss the theory of the defunct Jakey. And by the way, who was Jakey Menning, and what is this extraordinary tangle about a place called Dutchman's Hill?"

I gave the mare a light touch with the whip.

"We are passing Dutchman's Hill at this moment," I said, "and I'll give you the history over our supper."

XII

MR. CROWFOOT

I OUTSLEPT Herrick by a good hour the next morning; in fact, he was already up and out by the time I came down to a belated breakfast. I had one call to make in the village, and after that, Herrick being still absent, I sat down on the porch with my pipe and a newspaper to await his return.

There was no mail for me at the office, only a couple of letters for Herrick, forwarded from New York, and as I slipped these in my pocket I wondered again at the curious silence of Lennox. Since that short note from Queenstown I had heard nothing from him, and he had neglected even to provide me with the promised address by which I could communicate with him in case of need, an oversight by which he had certainly secured to himself a free and uninterrupted holiday, and which left me no choice meantime but to await his return or such news as he might ultimately choose to send. I must admit that Lessing's phrase "bolted" stuck unpleasantly

in my mind, little as it accorded with my estimate of Lennox's character. His haste to be off, the lack of any communication from him since, had more than a look of flight, but why, or from what he had bolted I was still at a loss to understand.

I was still turning this over in my mind when Herrick sauntered into view down the road, accompanied by a stranger. Visitors were sufficiently rare in the neighbourhood, and as the two approached the house leisurely I studied the new-comer with some curiosity. He was a small man, of apparently some fifty years, sparsely bearded, and dressed in a very shabby knickerbocker suit of greenish tweeds. A soft felt hat covered his head and at least half his forehead; he wore dark glasses and carried a botanical collecting-box slung over his shoulder. There was something quaintly rabbit-like in his appearance, enhanced by the air of timidity with which he hung back while Herrick strode forward to the porch to greet me.

"I want to introduce Mr. Crowfoot," Herrick said, with a gesture which had an effect of herding the mild little man up to the porch step as he might have herded some curious and inoffensive zoological specimen. "He is down here hunting orchids, and I came across him in the woods and brought him along to have a chat

with you. You might be able to give him some hints about the country.”

I shook hands with the little man and gave him a chair on the porch, where he settled himself shyly, his collecting-box across his knee.

“I’m afraid I don’t know much about the flora round here,” I said, “but I imagine Mr. Crowfoot will find a good deal to interest him.”

“Oh, I am only an amateur,” said the little man. “I s—— I s—— I s-s——”

He undoubtedly did, and the reason for his shyness stood forthwith revealed. He stammered, and had more than the usual sensitiveness of his infirmity.

“S-simply indulge a hobby,” he finished heroically. “It gives me an object for my leisure time. I s-s—— *presume* you have lived here some time, Mr.——?”

“H a v e r i l l — Doctor Haverill,” Herrick prompted.

“Haverill.” He repeated it in a certain child-like way, as though to place the name definitely in his memory, and immediately I was conscious of a liking for him. He was at once so diffident and so meticulously polite.

“On the contrary, I’ve been here only a month or so, taking a friend’s place for the time. The country about is delightful, so far as I know it.”

“Delightful!” he echoed, and lapsed into a

pleased silence, which lasted so long that Herrick rose.

"I want to change my shoes," he said. "I've been up to the neck in bog. I don't know our resources, Austin, but I guess we can offer Mr. Crowfoot a drink?"

"Water—I should like very much a plain glass of water," said the little botanist.

"And a cigar at all events," I supplemented. "I should have some pretty decent cigars somewhere around that my predecessor left here. Look in the drawer in the surgery, Jack, will you?"

Herrick reappeared a moment later with the box.

"Excellent," said our new friend as he helped himself. "Excellent! Apparently you d-d-don't care for these cigars then, Doctor Haverill?"

I laughed. "Oh, I only smoke a pipe, as a rule!"

"You make, if I may s-say so, a great error," he said gravely.

He smoked for a few moments tranquilly, his gaze, behind the dark glasses, seeming to rest dreamily on the stretch of road before the house.

"I suppose you are staying in the village?" I asked.

"Over there." He made a vague gesture

which included half the visible landscape. "With some excellent people of the name of S-S-Sliefer."

"Oh, Sliefer's," I said, interested. "I know them slightly. The big farm-house past the saw-mill."

"Precisely," he agreed, and gave me a look before relapsing again into silence.

Our conversation, if it could be called so, languished. It was evident to me that his shyness was battling with the desire to be off—I judged that Herrick had fairly dragged him here out of a mistaken cordiality—and after the exchange of a few more spasmodic sentences I accepted his courteous and timid explanation that the Sliefers dined at midday and would be expecting him back, and rose to shake hands.

"A queer chicken!" said Herrick as we watched his jerky little figure disappear down the road. "I picked him up back in the woods there, grubbing around the saw-mill, and brought him along for your benefit—a quaint example of the Pennsylvanian fauna! Timidicus proffessus, or ground-dwelling goo-goo bird. Difficult of approach and does not thrive in captivity. Guess he's more than a bit batty, by his looks."

"Mrs. Sliefer never mentioned a boarder," I remarked. "He must be a new arrival. It's

to be hoped he won't come to any grief in his grubbing around, as you call it."

"Oh, the gods protect the innocent," laughed Herrick. "Even the alleged ghost of Jakey Menning would have pity. By the way, the fair Rebecca's tale is still firmly believed in, by the Sliefers at any rate. The latest village version is that she was chased clear to the garden fence and that her skirt still shows five scorched prints where the ghostly fingers clutched. The neighbourhood must have been quite worked up. It was bad enough when Jakey had the decency to keep to one place at least, but now he has taken, like the wind, to blowing where he listeth, folks are getting scary. I got that much from our guileless little friend, though he professes himself to be quite indifferent on the subject. Of course you, as the village doctor, are above such gossip, so I thought I'd go gleaning for you."

"Someone's doing it," I said.

"Of course someone did, in the case of Rebecca at least. Real ghosts don't holler, as I said before, and the blue-fire details smell strongly of the common or garden matchbox. But as our little professor-bird spends most of his time in the woods about there, I thought his observations might come in useful."

“Private detective, eh?”

Herrick smiled.

“Oh, I’m sufficiently interested in the Lessing problem to be anxious to clear out the undergrowth, if you follow me. That done, one can judge a bit more clearly. If there’s any foolery going on we’ll run it to the ground, and Crowfoot may come in useful there.”

“I’ve a good notion,” I said, knocking my pipe out, “to try some watching round that locality myself one of these nights.”

“It wouldn’t be any good,” he returned, “for the simple reason that Jakey wouldn’t demonstrate to you or me any more than he’s demonstrated to Lessing. He chooses those he wants to favour. As a matter of fact, by the aid of my bedroom window, the convenience of which you have probably under-estimated, Austin, I spent last night prowling myself. No, I didn’t let you into it because I wanted to be alone. Needless to say, there was nothing doing. But I’ve found out one thing. There’s someone else interested in the game besides us. I don’t know who. But we narrowly escaped collision, and gave each other mutually a wide berth.”

“It couldn’t have been the ghost himself, whoever he is?”

“I think not. It was too obvious we were

both out on the same errand. Like the Irishman, we each thought we were someone else and when we met it was neither of us!" He smiled at the recollection. "Well, I suppose we'll get at the root of the thing some day!"

XIII

AN AFTERNOON DRIVE

IT was towards the end of that week that we drove over to the bungalow, one afternoon, for tea. The teacups were set out on the porch, and Mary Lessing, in a white frock, sprang up from one of the big basket-chairs to greet us with a comical dismay.

“I’ve dragged you over here,” she began promptly, “and now I’ll tell you the worst at once. There is not—one—lump—of sugar in the entire house. I’ve looked. So either you will drink your tea sugarless, smile sweetly, and say it doesn’t matter, or else one of you has got to come right down to the village with me and get some. You can take your full choice about it. I’m glad to see you had the thoughtfulness to drive, anyway.”

Herrick sat down with alacrity.

“I am a tired man,” he announced, “supposed to be on a holiday, and I’m not going to the village to get anything till I’ve had tea, and I’m not going to drink tea without sugar, not even if you promise to smile in the teacup, Mary

Lessing. So I guess it's up to you and Haverill. And I think that after all my excellent instructions of the past fourteen years you ought to be a better housekeeper. It's scandalous and disgusting of you. Where's Dick?"

"In the laboratory."

"A day like this! I'll rout him out of that in just two seconds. Ho, Dick!"

There was no response, and he rose grumbling, and trailed round to the laboratory door. Mary looked at me.

"Do you mind?" she said meekly.

I slipped off the mare's hitching-strap, and Mary climbed into the buggy beside me. We took the road past Sliefer's, and it is to be admitted that I made no effort to hurry. Our errand might reasonably be supposed to take an hour, and since chance had so obligingly given me that hour I was going to make the most of it.

As a matter of fact, I got precious little good out of it.

Romance probably demands, here, that I should describe how Mary and I drove side by side through the mellow autumn-tinted woods, how we spoke of the beauty of nature around us, and how gradually a sweet sense of companionship grew up in our young and sympathetic souls.

Instead Mary spoilt the whole thing by her

hurry to get that sugar. If the life of the whole household, including Herrick, had depended upon it, she couldn't have been more sternly anxious to get to the village, to buy that sugar and to convey that sugar swiftly and relentlessly home. Looking back, I can see now that her attitude in the matter was only part of a constraint that had been growing between us subtly ever since Herrick's arrival. A certain frank comradeship, as I had been pleased to think it, that had sprung into being on the morning of our impromptu picnic, had wavered and dropped, leaving nothing in its place. I could not decide that she actually avoided me, though she certainly devoted a good deal of attention to Herrick when we were all together. Be that as it may, her professed anxiety on the sugar question that afternoon justly irritated me. We began with constraint, and ended in something very like open warfare.

It was probably not the first time that a perverse imp of circumstance, or call it what you will, has induced two young people, who started out on apparently good terms, to waste the precious moments of each other's uninterrupted company in being pointedly and deliberately disagreeable, and that for no reason that either of them could frame. The imbecility of that drive stands out in my memory now. We should both

of us have known better. The whole thing had begun in such a meaningless way as to have no possible excuse. We had started, as I say, on good terms, with every equipment for a pleasant hour, and instead we each, in our own way, chose to behave abominably.

After one unique and disastrous attempt at conversation, I remember, we said no more, but drove on side by side in a ridiculous and stony silence, each thinking how disagreeable the other was, and wondering mutually what we had ever liked in one another.

There was the usual group of loafers gathered on the porch of Haskell's grocery store when we reached the village. I left Mary seated in the buggy outside while I went in to buy the sugar. A brisk-mannered young man, with fair hair, served me, and it was my fancy that he dawdled a little over making up the parcel. The proprietor was busy near by at the time, and from the side-glance the assistant gave him I gathered that the latter was purposely stretching out his task to gain time. I was not wrong. Upon the proprietor crossing to the back of the store, where the cash register stood, the young man leaned forward across the counter.

"Doctor," he began, "I would like a few words with you sometime when you aren't busy."

"Why, certainly," I answered. "Any time

you like. You want advice about something?"

It was almost the first time I had had occasion to go into the store, and the assistant was quite a stranger to me. I was probably known to him by sight, but I wondered at his choosing such a confidential way to approach me if he merely wanted medical advice. I kept the same office hours as Lennox had done, and everyone in the village knew where and when to find me.

"I'm George Freeman," he said. "It wasn't advice exactly. I just . . . wanted to see you."

George Freeman . . . suddenly I remembered. It was the name of Rebecca Durn's sweetheart, the young man who had shown such decision on the evening of the ghost scare at Sliefer's farm. I looked at him with new interest.

"I shall be in this evening after nine o'clock," I said. "Come round to the house. You know where it is?"

"Yes. I'll be round."

"All right." I put down a quarter on the counter, taking up the parcel he held out to me. As I did so a step creaked behind me and I turned quickly.

Aaron Menning stood near us. For a second his eyes moved shiftily from one to the other; then he put up a hand to the greasy peaked cap he wore.

“Arternoon, doctor,” he drawled; “arternoon, F-Freeman. Gimme some p-plug terbaccer.”

His face was impassive and stupid, but when he pushed his cap back I noticed the veins on his temples stand out. He approached the counter with something of a swagger, his hands in the pockets of his black oilskin coat, and spat on the floor. There was something in the movements of the man which I disliked, at that moment, more intensely than ever. He had a curious shambling way when he walked, which, added to his thick-set figure, gave me the feeling of something half animal, almost simian. It amounted to an actual repugnance. I gave him a curt nod while I waited for my change, and lost no time in hastening out to the buggy.

I put the parcel under the seat and took the reins from Mary’s hands. Curiously, my mood of a few moments ago was all but forgotten as I climbed in beside her.

“Did the fellow say anything to you?” I asked her as we drove off. A sudden suspicion had struck me when I came out and found her waiting there.

“Who?”

“Aaron Menning.”

“No. I just saw him go into the store.”

She spoke with a studied indifference that

put me on the alert. Instantly I was sure that he had spoken.

“Why do you ask?”

I set my teeth.

“Because if he had,” I answered rashly, “I’d take the occasion to break his neck next time we meet.”

Mary gave a soft little laugh.

“Really, Doctor Haverill, I didn’t know you were so violent.”

“I’m not,” I retorted, “at least, not as a rule. But the sight of that man always rouses in me a peculiar and earnest desire to kick him.”

“I dare say he’s really quite a simple and kind-hearted man,” said Mary, with no other purpose, I felt sure, than to irritate me.

“The rugged exterior that hides a beautiful soul,” I suggested, remembering that sinister farmyard beyond the Bend. “That’s as it may be. The exterior is good enough for me, or bad enough, as you choose to put it. If I get the report of a S.P.C.A. inspector on that farm of his, as I intend to do one of these days, we’ll see how Aaron’s simple kind-heartedness stands out.”

The words slipped out almost without my knowledge. Mary looked at me quickly.

“What’s wrong at the place?”

“Merely that the condition of it isn’t particu-

larly pretty. I shouldn't have mentioned it. Only a man that keeps animals in the filth and neglect that he does ought to be made an example of in any civilized community. I don't know that there's anything to be gained by interfering at the present moment, but I've seen enough to make me keep an eye on him."

For a little time we drove in silence. Mary's face was grave and troubled. I was angry with myself. I was a fool to mention Menning or his place at all. Presently I turned to her.

"Look here, you're not upset by what I said just now? Because you've no need to think twice about it. I said it because . . . well, because I hated to hear you speak about him that way, even for a minute."

"No. I wasn't thinking about Aaron just then." She gave me a queer little smile. "Doctor Haverill, I guess I've behaved pretty abominably this afternoon."

I flicked the mare with the whip.

"Shall we say we both did, and call it quits? I suppose it was in the air, somehow."

"In the air," she repeated, smiling again, then shivered suddenly. "Things are in the air . . . that's just it. I had a dream last night. I suppose you'll call it silly nonsense, but it's made me queer and restless all day. Doctor

Haverill, has Herrick said anything to you about my brother yet?"

"We talked one evening."

"Well?"

"We . . . didn't get to any conclusions, that's all. He has some theory. He hasn't told me yet what it is."

She looked at me steadily.

"If he said that, it is because he knows something. I am absolutely certain of that. And if he knows . . . Doctor Haverill, you are keeping something back from me, you and Herrick together!"

"I am not. I wouldn't do it." I looked at the girl beside me. "If you want me to swear."

"No." She put out a hand. "Yes, one thing. Can you swear to me that to your knowledge there is no suspicion in his mind of any . . . brain trouble with Dick?"

"Yes, I can swear to that, absolutely!"

"I am glad." She was looking straight ahead, down the road before us. "I don't think even Herrick would have kept that from me, if he thought it. Well . . . I suppose I've got to wait."

We spoke of other things during the rest of the drive, and she did not once mention Herrick's name, or her brother's, again. We were passing Sliefer's place when I caught sight once

of our queer little acquaintance of the morning. He was just turning in at the gateway, his hat pulled well forward, his little tin box under his arm, and I nodded to him as we drove by. He jerked his head in response, peering short-sightedly up at the buggy through his round dark glasses.

“What a funny little man!” said Mary, after we had passed by. “Is he staying down here?”

“At the Sliefers’. Herrick found him in the woods this morning. He appears to spend his time orchid-hunting in the neighbourhood.”

“Orchid-hunting . . .” said Mary. She turned her head and looked back at Mr. Crow-foot rather deliberately. Following her gaze, I was surprised to see that he too had turned, and was standing looking after us from the Sliefers’ gateway. Seeing himself observed, he moved hurriedly, and disappeared in the direction of the house like a disturbed rabbit going abruptly to earth.

XIV

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT

A FEW minutes after we reached the bungalow Mrs. Searle appeared. She brought a letter for Herrick which had come by the afternoon mail.

"It had a special-delivery stamp on, so I thought it might be important," she said. "Pete was busy, so I took the liberty of bringin' it over myself. I was glad of the walk, anyway."

I had my own opinion of Pete's busyness, when it came to an errand up the hill, and I tried to catch Mrs. Searle's eye, but her gaze was discreetly lowered.

"It's awfully good of you," said Herrick. He slipped the envelope in his pocket, with a glance at the writing. "Won't you rest a minute, Mrs. Searle? I'm sure Miss Lessing would like you to."

Mary was getting tea at the moment, but Lessing seconded him promptly. Mrs. Searle shook her head.

"I'll be gettin' back, sir, thanks just the same. There's things to see to. It's done me good to get the walk."

"You needn't walk back, anyway," I put in. "I'd be glad for the mare to be home, and Mr. Herrick and I can walk over, later. You can drive yourself, Mrs. Searle, can't you?"

"Certainly, sir, if you'd rather."

She untied the mare and turned the buggy carefully around before getting in. "Ask Pete to give her a good rub down," I called. "Mr. Herrick and I will be back by supper-time."

As it happened, we stayed fairly late. The tea resolved itself into a semi-supper, with the addition of chocolate cake, canned pineapple, and sardines prepared by some special and deadly recipe of Lessing's in a chafing-dish. It was a combination that induced a certain languor afterwards in soul and body. Later, Lessing having re-engaged Herrick in the game of chess that our return had interrupted, Mary and I found ourselves once more left to each other's company at the far end of the porch. She had attempted some quite ridiculous excuse about dish-washing, but either the sense of Herrick's near presence or the meal just finished lent me moral courage to vanquish her objections on the spot.

"Either you invite people to your house," I said, "or you don't invite them. If you do, it's your business to entertain them. I'm not an exacting person, but if it comes to con-

testing my rights against those of mere crockery, I warn you that I'm going to be exceedingly disagreeable."

Our talk on the homeward drive had broken the aloofness of the past week, and I was minded not to let her slip back into it at will. She sat down on the wicker armchair opposite me, her hands folded on her lap.

"Would you like to see the family photograph album?" she suggested. "We none of us collect picture-postcards, so I'm afraid that's the only interesting object I can offer you. Or I might take you round the garden and show you the site for next year's rose bushes."

"I should be delighted!" I said ruthlessly. She made a mouth at me.

"I don't think you are in a mood to appreciate the exquisite sentiment of next year's rose bushes," she returned. "It calls for a totally different range of sympathies from yours."

I lit a cigarette.

"You don't know anything about my range of sympathies," I remarked. "For all you know, they may extend to objects even more ethereal than unborn roses."

"Impossible!" She pulled a spray off the woodbine that grew round the porch pillar, and began to pull it to pieces, leaf by leaf. "By the way," she said after a moment, "did you tell

me that that queer little friend of yours was a botanist?"

"Of Herrick's," I corrected. "I entirely disclaim him. He described himself as an amateur, whatever he may mean by that. I gather that it's his way of amusing himself on a holiday. There are a good many people who seem to feel lost unless they have some definite hobby for their vacations. I suppose really it gives him mild exercise and an excuse for grubbing about in the open."

"He takes other mild exercise," said Mary, her mouth curving in sudden recollection. "He was engaged in some the other morning, and that's what made me so interested. I'm afraid I interrupted him."

"You'd seen him before, then?"

She laughed.

"I was taking Leo for a run before breakfast, down the hill, the other morning, and I came upon him just in the hollow there near where the stream is, and I'd give you a hundred dollars to guess his occupation. I don't know if you've ever noticed a cedar there, Doctor Haverill, growing quite near the road, on the right-hand side? It branches off some little way from the ground. Well, there he was engaged, of all things in the world, in solemnly climbing up into this tree and jumping out again. I was

walking along the footpath where the ground is soft, so he never heard me coming, and the performance struck me as so interesting that I stood still for a minute and watched him. He did it four or five times, and it looked as if he was trying to see how far he could jump. The last time he landed quite near to the edge of the stream, and that seemed to satisfy him, for he didn't try any more after that. Then he looked about on the ground and began to smooth over all the footprints he'd made. He'd just finished when he caught sight of me. He had taken his glasses off for jumping, I suppose in case he smashed them, and as soon as he saw me he grabbed them out of his pocket and walked off. It was for all the world as if he was ashamed at having been caught doing it. I suppose it did look ridiculous for a man of his age to go doing stunts like a schoolboy. I guess it was some sort of an exercise, and he does it pretty often, for he was certainly active at it. I thought maybe he was a physical-culture crank."

"A mild lunatic, more like!" I smiled. "Perhaps the giddiness of youth returns to him at times and he has to work it off. Maybe it's a religious exercise—some obscure sect of jumping Baptists. I'll ask him when we meet."

Mary laughed, but her brows were drawn in a puzzled frown.

"Do you know," she said, "I have a conviction that I have seen that man before. I don't know in the least why. Generally I remember people quite well. I feel that I have not only seen him, but spoken to him. A thing like that bothers me, because I ought to remember it. I will sometime."

"You'd remember if you had spoken to him," I said. "He stammers quite badly."

"Then that settles it," returned Mary gaily. "I have only known two people who stammered in my whole life, with the exception of Aaron Menning, and one was a chemistry professor at school and the other a spinster aunt!"

My appointment with George Freeman was at nine, and it was nearly that hour when we left the bungalow. Herrick and I walked briskly down the hill, and as we passed Dutchman's Hollow I cast a curious glance at the tree which had been the scene of Mr. Crowfoot's acrobatic performances. It stood, as Mary had said, almost overhanging the footpath, a strong twisted-limbed cedar, noticeable as being the only tree of its kind along the road. The fork was a good six feet from the ground, and I reflected that Crowfoot must possess more agility than his appearance warranted.

Herrick followed my glance.

"A queer tree, that," he said. "Looks as

if it had been stuck there for some purpose. Do you ever notice, Haverill, how some inanimate things—if I may call a tree inanimate—strike one unpleasantly? Now that tree, to me, suggests a suicide every time I look at it. A man might hang himself among the upper branches, and you'd merely take his body for a part of the tree."

"Another horror to the mystery of Dutchman's Hill!" I said lightly. "Heaven's sake, Jack, but you're in a cheerful mood tonight! You seem to have creepy things on the brain. It you stood and looked at any tree long enough you could hypnotize yourself into seeing things."

"I merely called it unpleasant," returned Herrick argumentatively. "To me it is. You think that because I have taken a fancy to dislike a tree I'm ready to imagine unpleasant things about it. I believe that if it impresses me that way, for no apparent reason, it is because the unpleasant things have in all probability already happened."

"Oh, argue that stuff with Lessing," I protested good-humoredly. "It's more in his line. I heard you at it tonight. I'm a normal man, and I object to having my free imagination harrowed over things that don't count. That tree is a tree, and that's all about it."

Our fooling had brought us to a pause at the

beginning of the little plank bridge, and Herrick, leaning against the rail, had employed the interval in making a cigarette. He smiled, slipping his tobacco pouch back, and began to feel through his pockets for the little automatic tinder-box he always carried. He was methodical over trifling things to a degree that occasionally irritated me.

“Then go up and touch it,” he said. “I would like to test that sensitiveness which you boast that you don’t possess.”

“All right.”

I walked up to the tree, impatient at my own encouragement of such nonsense, and laid my hand on the trunk. Almost as my fingers touched the bark I heard distinctly a low cry, cut suddenly and horribly short. The woods, especially at night, are deceptive both as to direction and distance, and, already half-expectant of some trick, I could have sworn that Herrick himself had done it. I wheeled on him angrily. He was standing in the roadway, the cigarette at his lips, the tiny flame of the tinder-box flickering in his lifted hand, and by its light I saw his face white and startled.

“Did you do that?”

“Do you think I’m a fool?” He caught my arm and swung me round, facing the woods, of a sudden ominously silent. For a moment we

listened acutely. Then Herrick flung his unlighted cigarette away. "Come on. It was over there."

He started forward, in the direction where the dam lay, breaking through the underbrush. I followed at his heels. Along the road there had been still a glimmer of light, but once under cover of the trees we stumbled through dense blackness, with nothing to guide us save Herrick's vague sense of direction. Once he stood still to shout. There was no answer.

"Follow the stream," I said.

We had struck the edge of it again; I felt my boots sink in marshy ground, and thereafter we made quicker pace. The brook was narrow at this time of year, running a mere trickle in its bed. It branched off from the creek just below the mill sluice, and in spring carried off some of the excess of water when the creek itself was swollen. Just now, as I knew, there was a scant foot of water at its deepest. I was taking no particular heed therefore to my steps when Herrick, a few paces to my left, called out.

"Take care!" he said. "We're nearly in the creek!"

As he spoke I heard, somewhere near us in the darkness, the unmistakable sound of rushing water. I stopped abruptly, bewildered, with

the sense of having somehow lost my bearings. As we were going, the creek should have been a good hundred yards on our left.

And the sound was not the sound of the creek. I had paused at the moment near the edge of the brook; I could feel soft, saturated moss underfoot, and I fancied that it grew even softer and damper as I stood. Something swirled at my ankles, and taking a step forward I was knee-deep in sudden icy flood.

Incredible as it seemed, the stream was rising. I had barely grasped the meaning of it when Herrick shouted again. This time he was answered. A strong shout caught up the echo of his voice.

“Hello, there! Where are you?” It was Herrick.

And the answer came promptly, near at hand now in the darkness:

“Hello! By the dam. Keep clear of the stream; the sluice-gate is giving!”

XV

SUSPICIONS

THE warning came just in time. Herrick sang out and sprang, and I could hear the splash as he landed close beside me. Together we forced a way through the bushes and tall weeds and began to scramble up the sloping bank. It was a thicket of alders and brambles; the briars caught and tore at our clothes as we pushed through. We came out not far from the sluice, with the rush of escaping water still in our ears, and above the turmoil of it I called again.

“Where are you? Is there something wrong?”

“I want help here!”

The voice answered almost from under our feet, midway down the bank up which we had just scrambled. In a cleared space of the little thicket a man was standing; my eyes, used by now to the darkness, could make out his figure outlined against the surrounding bushes. It was Mr. Crowfoot, and he was bending over something that lay stretched and ominous among the trampled weeds at his feet. I had not recognized his voice in the darkness, though it sounded

vaguely familiar. Herrick reached him first, and was on his knees beside the prostrate figure when I came up.

“An accident, Haverill. I thought so. No, he’s alive. How did it happen?”

“He must have fallen off the gate,” said Crowfoot. In the excitement he forgot to stammer. “I heard him call out and went down after him. I had only just time to drag him out.”

Herrick wiped his hand on the grass.

“Cut his head open,” he said briefly. “I think there’s an arm broken. Give me a hand, Austin. We must get him up to the top.”

“Compound fracture and a broken collar-bone,” said Crowfoot in his precise tones, oddly precise even in this moment. “I’m glad you gentlemen came along. The head wound isn’t much, but there’s probably a slight concussion. If you will help me——”

It struck me that he took the man’s injuries with a remarkable coolness, utterly at variance with the impression of nervousness he had given me that morning. It was as if he were the medical man and we mere lay beings who had happened along. Herrick growled. He had found his tinder-box, and it flashed a tiny glimmer on the man’s face.

“George Freeman!” I exclaimed.

“You know him?” said Herrick quickly.

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“The sweetheart of that girl at Sliefer’s. He had an appointment with me this evening. He must have been on his way——”

I stopped short. I thought Crowfoot gave a faint exclamation, but he said nothing. Together we got the limp figure to the roadway at the top of the bank, and laid him down. Herrick turned to Crowfoot.

“Was he with you?”

“No. I was walking along the side of the dam. I often take a stroll of an evening; I sleep rather badly without. He was lying at the bottom of the sluice-gate when I found him, half in the water, and I dragged him out. I supposed he had missed his footing in the dark and cried out as he fell.”

Herrick and I exchanged glances. So far the story might be true; we had both heard the cry.

“Isn’t there a railing?” Herrick asked.

“It was broken,” said Crowfoot, “and has never been properly repaired. I have spoken about it several times at the farm, but Mr. Sliefer has neglected to mend it.”

“That’s so,” I confirmed. “It’s been broken a good three weeks. Hardly anyone passes this way, now the mill isn’t working, so I suppose they haven’t bothered.”

“Well . . .” said Herrick. He rose from his

knees. "As he's known at the farm he'd better be taken there. He must be properly moved. We can't handle him like this."

"I'll go and get help," said Crowfoot.

Herrick looked at him squarely.

"I prefer that we should go together," he said drily. "Austin, do you mind staying here for ten minutes? I suppose you haven't your revolver?"

I hadn't. I carried one usually in accordance with Lessing's suggestion, but at this moment it was locked in one of the surgery drawers.

"Never mind," I said. "I don't need it."

Mr. Crowfoot hesitated. Then his hand slipped to his pocket. Herrick had been cleverer than I gave him credit for.

"If you allow me, Doctor Haverill," he said gravely, "I will leave you my own. I should much prefer it. We are two, and it would be better that you should not remain here unarmed."

Again Herrick and I glanced at one another.

"Do you usually carry a revolver when you take your evening strolls, Mr. Crowfoot?" he asked.

"It is a precaution," replied the little botanist, "which I consider to be quite harmless. As you put a similar question to your friend just

now I presume the habit is not confined to myself."

"Take it," said Herrick curtly. "We'll be back in a quarter of an hour." And he disappeared with Crowfoot along the path toward Sliefer's farm.

Left alone, my first and perhaps pardonable impulse was to examine the chambers of the revolver Mr. Crowfoot had just given me. One of the cartridges had been discharged. I slipped it back into my jacket pocket, where it would be ready to hand, and took out my cigarette case. There was nothing to be done for the man beside me until further help arrived. I reassured myself as to his condition. It was as Crowfoot had said. The head wound had bled freely, but we had already partially stanchied it with Herrick's handkerchief. The right arm and shoulder were fractured, and I suspected a rib as well. He could not have fallen directly from the sluice-gate, but from one side, with the bushes and the water to break his fall. If he had struck one of the heavy timbers immediately below he would have had his back broken on the spot. As it was he was in no immediate danger, unless from a concussion the extent of which we could not as yet ascertain.

I sat down on the beam which marked the

beginning of the sluice-wall, and fell to thinking. The thing had not, to me, entirely the look of an accident. Crowfoot, on a moment's consideration, and in spite of the empty cartridge, I exonerated. Freeman had not been shot, and Crowfoot could have had no object in pushing him over only to rescue him afterwards, and undoubtedly he had saved his life. Possibly they had quarrelled, and Freeman had lost his footing, which would account for Crowfoot's prompt action. Crowfoot was staying at the Sliefers', in the same house with Freeman's sweetheart, and where a young woman like Rebecca is concerned there is always a possibility of misunderstandings; but the idea of little Crowfoot playing the rustic Don Juan seemed rather absurd. And that question of the sluice-gate worried me. It had been a dry season, the water in the dam was even lower than usual; there was no earthly reason why the gate should give way just then with no extra pressure to account for it.

Sitting on the wall, swinging my feet, with the sound of the water in my ears, I found myself listening mechanically to its rush. Suddenly a thought occurred to me. There had been no increase in the volume of sound since I had been sitting there. If the sluice-gate had given way only in part, the force of the escaping water would by this time have widened the fissure.

I rose, and walked the few paces to the top of the gate.

It was as I thought. The lever that controlled the sluice had been pulled half over. Bracing my feet firmly, I threw all my strength against it. I had the force of the water to contend with; as I pushed, the whole neglected structure of the gate seemed to vibrate and tremble, but little by little I could hear the gush gradually decreasing, the seething and bubbling below me quieted.

I pushed the lever back as far as I could; it refused to go the whole way, and I feared to do further damage unwittingly by forcing it. But the greater part of the escape was checked. I went back to the wall again and waited.

The minutes dragged. It was a relief to see presently the glimmer of a light through the trees and to hear Mr. Sliefer's anxious deep-throated hail. They had taken one of the stable doors off its hinges, and Herrick and the farmer carried it between them while Crowfoot walked ahead with the lantern.

I saw Crowfoot glance toward the sluice, but he said nothing. With as little jarring as might be we lifted Freeman's unconscious weight on to the door, and I took Herrick's place in the slow procession back to the farmhouse.

Mrs. Sliefer, with Rebecca, white-faced and stricken, met us in the yard. They had prepared a room upstairs, and there we got Freeman to bed and did all that was possible for him. Unconsciousness spared him the pain of our handling; the fracture was as ugly a one as I have seen. The concussion was graver even than we had supposed; it would be days certainly, possibly weeks, before he would be in a state to answer any questions.

I decided to stay the night, and Herrick, with the Sliefers' hired man, drove over in the buggy to take a message to Mrs. Searle and bring back what was needful from the surgery.

In his absence I set myself to gather what information I could from the Sliefers themselves. George Freeman had been there that evening. He had arrived earlier than usual, it being his weekly evening off, and stayed only a short time, saying that he had an appointment in the village. On Rebecca teasing him, he had said that it was a business appointment and that she should hear all about it in good time.

He had left the house at a quarter-past eight. His appointment was for nine, and it would have taken him nearly that time to walk over, even by the short cut. It was already close upon nine when we left the Lessing's cottage to walk home, and at least twenty minutes

must have elapsed before we heard Freeman's cry. How had he employed that interval, and with what object had he lingered nearly three-quarters of an hour near the dam? Instinctively I thought of Crowfoot. He was not in the room, and in the light of what had happened I felt no hesitation in questioning the Sliefers about their guest.

He had come to them a fortnight ago, engaging his room by letter. They often took a boarder in the summer, and someone who once stayed there had recommended them to him. He was quiet and pleasant-mannered, and anxious to give no trouble, an ideal boarder from Mrs. Sliefer's point of view, though Rebecca inclined to consider him "queer." He had stipulated for a ground-floor room, explaining that for some heart affection he was forbidden to mount stairs. (I smiled, thinking of the acrobatic exercises Mary Lessing had witnessed.) They had accordingly arranged the back parlor for him, which had a door opening directly on the side porch. His meals were served to him there. Beyond the necessary service they had very little to do with him. He was not at all talkative on account of his infirmity, but always pleasant in manner. To their knowledge, George Freeman had never so much as spoken to him, though it was his unfailing joke to tease Re-

becca about the "handsome young city gentleman."

So much for Mr. and Mrs. Sliefer's account. Rebecca differed. Rebecca didn't hold with "queerness," nor with mucking one's room up with rubbishy weeds, nor with going out at night to hunt toadstools.

"Toadstools?" I said.

"Fungy, he calls 'em. It's the same thing. He says there's some that shines in the dark, like rotten wood. I've never seen 'em, nor I wouldn't go touchin' 'em if I did. Anything would need to shine good and hard for him to see it with those blue goggles on!"

"Rebecca's jest set against him because he wears glasses," said Mrs. Sliefer.

"I like to see a folk's eyes," Rebecca insisted. "I hate to have 'em lookin' at you when you think they ain't."

For some reason she seemed to distrust Crowfoot, but there was certainly no suspicion, even in her mind, of any possible quarrel between the two men. Rebecca herself admitted his courage in having pulled Freeman out. No mention was made of the sluice, and I concluded that neither Herrick nor Crowfoot had spoken of it at the house.

Mrs. Sliefer volunteered to sit up with Freeman the first part of the night, and having seen

her settled in a capacious armchair near his bed, I returned to Herrick in the parlor below. There was a couch in the room, but we were neither inclined to make use of it. It was my first chance of speaking privately to Herrick since his return to the house, and having closed the staircase door leading upstairs, I told him briefly all that I had learned that evening.

“Crowfoot couldn’t have opened the sluice,” he said when I had finished. “How does the thing work? Do you suppose Freeman could have caught at the lever as he fell and pulled it over on him? It doesn’t sound likely.”

“Impossible. The lever works in the opposite direction.”

Herrick pondered.

“He might have been fooling with the thing and opened it, and then lost his balance trying to get it back.”

I shook my head.

“He knows the dam well enough, and he doesn’t strike me as the sort of man to go fooling with a thing like that out of mischief. Besides, he didn’t fall from where the lever is. If he had, and the sluice was already open, he’d have been soaked through and probably drowned to boot. Remember the rush of that water! Crowfoot got him out, and Crowfoot was only wet to the knees. He must have fallen partially clear of

the pool, across one of the timbers. The thing looks much more to me as though someone had deliberately opened the sluice on them while they were both down there. Either the machinery stuck, or they were interrupted before they could do the worst. In any case Crowfoot knows more than he has chosen to tell us. He may be shielding someone; the whole business looks ugly."

"I'm going to handle Crowfoot in the morning," said Herrick grimly. "It's a case where he'll find it best to tell all he knows. A man who goes hunting toadstools at night with a revolver lays himself open to misconstruction." He stared a moment at the purple crocheted mat on which the Sleifers' parlor lamp sat enthroned. "Why on earth was he so keen on your keeping that revolver, I wonder?"

"Possibly for the same reason that had caused him to fire one of the cartridges himself, this evening," I said drily.

"He had?" Herrick looked up. "Why didn't we hear the shot?"

"It happens to be one of those special revolvers which are built to make as slight a report as possible. I know the pattern. The sound carries practically no distance. If Crowfoot carries that revolver habitually it is because he has good reason to be afraid of someone, and he wouldn't have used it without serious cause."

"Have you any idea," asked Herrick, "what Freeman wanted to see you about tonight?"

"Yes," I said slowly, "I have. You know the night you came down here, Jack? It was Freeman who was the most determined to sift that ghost story to the bottom, if you remember. From all accounts, he is not the young man to take half-way measures in a thing that concerns his sweetheart. I think that he has been working on his own initiative, that he found out something, and it was about that that he wanted to see me. He made the appointment for after dark, at an hour when he was not likely to be seen coming or going from my house, and he even took the precaution of coming by way of the woods. Someone had an interest in preventing him from keeping the appointment. They watched him to the Sliefers' house, and laid up for him by the sluice, which he would have to cross on his way to me."

"You mean Crowfoot himself?"

"Crowfoot wasn't here at the time of the ghost scare, and he didn't know of Freeman's appointment tonight. Moreover, I don't think he had even an idea who the man was till you flashed your lamp on him. Remember it was pretty dark there. But two people might have known of it. They were both in the store at the time. One was Mr. Haskell, whom I think

we may dismiss immediately. The other was Aaron Menning."

"Aaron Menning. . . ." There was that in Herrick's tone that confirmed instantly my own conclusions. "Then if that's so, Aaron Menning is at the bottom of the ghost business, and of the whole Dutchman's Hill story. Aaron, the pious chapel member! But why in heaven's name——?"

"There's a streak of insanity in the whole family," I said. "Don't forget that Jakey was said to be half crazy. Aaron has the look of a criminal degenerate. How on earth he has maintained his reputation in the village so long I can't think. He is cunning and malicious, if no worse."

"I'd like to know just what hold that type of man could have over Crowfoot," Herrick said. "Crowfoot comes in somewhere. If it was Aaron pushed Freeman over, what reason could Crowfoot have for shielding him deliberately? There's more behind it yet than we can lay hand on."

There was, but our plans for finding out were destined to receive a rude shock in the morning.

About two o'clock I left Herrick on the couch and went to take Mrs. Sliefer's place upstairs. Against my will I half dozed in the chintz-covered arm-chair, and through my brain there

chased puzzling dreams in which Herrick and I were trying feverishly to conceal George Freeman's body in the mill-dam, while Crowfoot, continually changing and rechanging into the likeness of Aaron, leapt up and down from the dizzy heights of a butternut tree and chattered at us angrily as he sprang.

Herrick was already drinking coffee when I came downstairs. Rebecca had brought it in, and with it a note addressed to me.

I broke it open. There was a second bulkier envelope inside with the note. Both note and address were printed in small neat capitals, such as a child might use.

"MY DEAR HAVERILL,

"I REGRET THAT I HAVE BEEN OBLIGED TO LEAVE FOR THE CITY BY AN EARLY TRAIN, AND SO MUST POSTPONE THE PLEASURE OF MEETING YOU AND YOUR FRIEND AGAIN TILL A LATER DATE.

"ALEXANDER CROWFOOT."

On the second envelope was printed:

"TO BE OPENED ONLY IF NOT RECLAIMED WITHIN THREE DAYS."

"Stung!" said Herrick.

XVI

I CATCH A BURGLAR

I FOUND Rebecca in the kitchen, weeping. It was easy to see that she had spent half the night crying, and I hastened to reassure her so far as I could as to her sweetheart's condition.

"And now about Mr. Crowfoot," I said. "What time did he leave here?"

"It must have been early," Rebecca answered. "I was down an' about by five."

"He gave you the note?"

"He left it in his room. I went to put his coffee like I always do, outside, an' the door was open. He left another envelope for mother with his week's board in. His bed hadn't been slept in. He was writin' in his room all last evenin', after he came in."

"And his things?"

"He didn't have more'n a suit-case, and he must have took that with him."

I went back to Herrick in the parlour. Crowfoot's enclosure still lay on the table, and as I took it up to put it in my pocket I felt sorely tempted to break the seal there and then.

"So he's lit out, temporarily," said Herrick. "Well . . . it doesn't look particularly wise under the circumstances, but I suppose he knows his own business."

"Should we open the letter?"

"No," Herrick said decidedly. "That point is quite clear. The instructions are definite. He gives us a certain date, and if he does not reclaim his letter personally by then we are free to act on our discretion, but not before. Meantime we can only put two and two together. Crowfoot was down here on some job in which he anticipated personal danger, or he wouldn't have gone armed. The cartridge he used was not fired on Freeman, and unless I am much mistaken the affair of last night upset, or at all events abruptly altered, his own schemes. He's learned something that we haven't, and I'd give a good deal to know just what, but we can't force his hand. Unless I under-estimate him, he'll turn up to claim that letter all right."

"Unless——" I recalled the provisional clause on the envelope.

Herrick smiled.

"He doesn't strike me as the sort of person to step off a plank bridge in the dark! That's a pure bit of dramatic effect, in my opinion."

When we had finished breakfast I drove down to the drug store and telephoned for a trained

nurse. She arrived by the midday train, and Freeman's condition being satisfactory, I was able to leave him in her charge and go home with Herrick.

We refused the farmer's buggy and walked over, following the short cut that had so nearly proved fatal to one man at least the night before. The water below the sluice-gate was at its normal level, but looking over we could see the line of uptorn weeds and flattened grasses that showed where the brief flood had swept. An alder bush on the left side, overhanging the timbered edge of the pool, was partly broken, indicating the point of Freeman's fall.

We examined the upper part of the sluice-gate carefully. On the wood near the lever I found a few dried spots of blood. Herrick nodded appreciatively when he saw them.

"Looks as if Crowfoot's cartridge wasn't wasted! Someone got hit, though not badly; there's none tracked along the road. My respect for our friend increases. Austin, why was he so careful we didn't see his handwriting?"

"Give it up. He's a queer bird anyway."

I told him of what Mary Lessing had seen that morning, by Dutchman's Hill. Hitherto it had presented itself to me merely as a whim on Crowfoot's part. Now I began to think he might have had some object in the performance. Her-

rick smiled when it came to the jumping, but his face grew serious again immediately.

"Austin," he said, "I give you a problem. What is it about that particular tree that attracts me and attracts Crowfoot? There's something more than coincidence in it. Crowfoot wasn't amusing himself. To my mind, he was testing a theory, and if we knew what that theory was. . . ." He broke off, thoughtfully, and I turned to him.

"Well?"

"Nothing much. Austin, whereabouts was Jake's body found, last spring?"

"Face downwards in the water, just near the plank bridge. Why?"

"Taken with Crowfoot's action, does that suggest anything to you?"

"Nothing to do with suicide. Jake had a fit and fell in the water."

"Exactly." He walked a few paces in silence. "Has it ever occurred to you what a really admirable country coroner you would make?"

"I don't see what that's got to do with it."

"Listen." He swung round. "Jake's death was not accident, though he may have died actually in a fit. He was frightened by someone or something that sprang out at him from that tree as he passed, and Crowfoot, depend upon it, was

merely trying to find out whether that jump was within the limits of an ordinarily active man.”

We were both tired that evening and we turned in early after supper. I had left instructions to call me if there was any change in Freeman's condition, but I anticipated none before the morning. The nurse seemed a competent woman, and I felt easy in leaving him to her care. I slept like a log, my rest untroubled by any dreams.

Towards morning, as it seemed to me, I woke up with that curious sense of something happening which arouses one at times by appeal through some subconscious perception. Five minutes before a thunderstorm would have failed to rouse me; now instinct dragged me up sitting in my bed, of a sudden keenly and alertly awake.

I listened. Someone was moving in the surgery below. Mrs. Searle went to bed always at ten, and I had the impression of having slept already for several hours. I struck a match softly and looked at my watch. It was a quarter to twelve, earlier than I had thought. I felt on the bureau for my revolver, which I had taken to my room that evening, and opened the door noiselessly.

It was not Herrick, for I could hear his regular breathing through the keyhole opposite. At the foot of the little flight of stairs a faint light

glimmered. The stairs opened directly from the surgery, and it was my custom to leave the door at the bottom open during the night. Now it was closed, and the light that I saw filtered through the crack. I crept quietly down and pushed it open, revolver in hand.

A pocket electric lamp lay on the desk, and by its light a man was searching through one of the desk drawers. It was a small drawer which had been always locked; I fancied that it contained some private papers and affairs of Lennox's which he had put together there before leaving. The man's back was towards me, but I recognized instantly the shabby tweed coat, the soft felt hat pulled low down over his head. It was Crowfoot.

I don't know what I had expected; certainly not him. I lowered the revolver and stepped forward.

"Were you looking for anything, Mr. Crowfoot?"

At the sound of my voice he turned; his hand shot out towards the electric lamp, and instantly the room was in darkness.

For a second we stood there, neither moving, and we could hear each other's breathing across the room.

"Light that lamp," I said quietly. "If you have any explanation I am ready to hear it.

I have a revolver in my hand, and if you attempt to move I shall be compelled to treat you like any other common housebreaker."

"Listen here," he began, "and don't for heaven's sake play the fool!" His voice sounded excited, impatient, but with an assurance in it that was somehow vaguely familiar to me, and, as on the night before, there was no trace of his usual stammering. It was the voice of a man interrupted in important business rather than caught red-handed in an attempt at common theft. "Put that revolver down, Haverill. I tell you, you don't know what you're meddling with! I'm in a hurry. Let me go out of the house now, without any questions, and I swear to heaven I'll come back to-morrow and tell you everything you want to know. I'll tell you *everything!* But don't stop me now!"

"You will, eh?"

I laid the revolver down on a chair that stood behind me, but only to have both hands free. He made a movement, chancing the darkness, but the room was too small. I collided with him somewhere near the armchair—the solid mahogany caught my knee an ugly whack through my thin pajamas—and for a moment we grappled together fruitlessly.

"Haverill, you idiot—let me go!"

He gasped and struggled, but I held my grip.

"Not so easy. I want the lamp."

He swore, wrenching an arm free, and the little white bulb glowed out. He must have slipped it in his pocket when he turned. The light shone on our two blinking faces. Crowfoot's hat had fallen off in the struggle, and for the first time I saw him without his black glasses.

It was Lennox!

Stupefied, I let go my hold.

"Now will you let me go?" he snarled.

"I thought you were in Europe! What's it all about? Are you crazy?"

"Oh, you idiot!" There was a savage patience in his voice. "Get on your trousers, then, and come along. You were always an obstinate devil, Haverill! Bring that revolver with you and don't wake the house, and don't for God's sake stand wasting any more time! I'll wait for you."

I ran upstairs. A hundred wild ideas passed through my mind as I groped my way hurriedly into sweater and trousers, in the dark, not even staying to light a candle. I hardly knew, in my bewilderment, whether Lennox had been impersonating Crowfoot or Crowfoot Lennox; the whole thing seemed inextricably and extravagantly mixed. Curiously, Herrick had not even been roused by our scuffle. I carried my boots

down to avoid waking him now, and pulled them on in the surgery.

"Take your revolver," said Lennox.

We passed out through the door; he had used his own latchkey to come in with.

"Will you tell me——?" I began, when we were clear of the house.

"All in good time."

A few paces up the road an automobile was standing. Two men were already seated in it, besides the chauffeur. One leaned out, watching, and he gave an exclamation as the two of us stepped into the light of the lamps.

"It's all right," said Lennox. He almost pushed me into the tonneau, where I tumbled into a big broad-shouldered Irishman, and swung up himself to the front seat. "This is Doctor Haverill; he's coming along. Haverill, this is Mr. Keary, the county sheriff, and Inspector McWade."

The chauffeur let in the clutch and the big car swung forward in the direction of Dutchman's Hill.

"And now, Haverill," Lennox said, turning to me, "you wanted to be in it, and you're in it. These gentlemen are accompanying me to the Bend with a warrant for the arrest of the man known as Aaron Menning."

"Ah!" I looked at the burly Irish inspector

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beside me, and the conviction of yesterday grew clear in my mind. "For assault on George Freeman!"

"No," said the sheriff, speaking for the first time. "For the manslaughter of his brother on the seventeenth of last March."

XVII

A MIDNIGHT CHASE

WE swept on at a steady pace, through a silence broken only by the throbbing of the engine and the hissing whir of tires over the dust. On either side of the road the woods stretched black and inscrutable. Just before we came to Dutchman's Hill Lennox said a word to the chauffeur, and he paused to extinguish the two headlights. Thereafter we drove more slowly.

A few paces beyond the bridge, at the beginning of the hill, the car stopped suddenly. Something had gone wrong with the engine, and while the chauffeur got out to attend to it Lennox and the sheriff took the opportunity to walk back to the bridge we had just crossed.

"Have to get a light on it," the chauffeur said, unhooking one of the side lamps. "The blame thing might have held out a bit longer! We ain't far from Dutchman's Hill, by all accounts."

"This is Dutchman's Hill," I said.

"It is, eh?" He glanced at the inspector; who was holding the lamp for him. "Well, they say

one cuss leads to another, and be darned if I don't give this place a worse name than it's had yet!"

Alone in the car, I leaned back against the cushions, speculating as to the chance that had drawn me into this midnight adventure and what its outcome would be—the climax, for aught I knew, of all the summer's mysteries. Of Lennox's part in it I could but guess, but the experience of the last forty-eight hours gave me a confidence in him that overrode all earlier impressions. Mentally I contrasted the vision of Crowfoot, alert, cool-headed, decisive, with the Lennox of my first evening's arrival, and marvelled at the grip he had brought to bear on himself in the two months' interval.

The air was still and oppressive in the hollow; the stench of gasoline rose in a warm reek mingled with the stagnant smell of the swamp close by. The mosquitoes were thick; they descended in swarms upon us with the stopping of the car, and a host of moths and midges fluttered round the lamp, attracted by its glare. The two men, bent over the engine, joked and grumbled in undertones, as cheerfully as though we were out on no more serious errand than a mere pleasure ride.

The sheriff rejoined us.

"How long will you be, Jackson?"

The chauffeur straightened his back.

"Twenty minutes, sir, more or less. I can't fix it under."

There was a brief consultation, and the sheriff turned to Lennox.

"How far are we from the Bend?"

"Three-quarters of a mile, by road. We can strike a short cut at the top of the hill."

"We'd better walk it. There's no good wasting time. Get your job through, Jackson, bring the car on to the top of the hill and wait for us there, along the road. I suppose . . ."

Lennox caught my eye.

"I can rely on Doctor Haverill," he said promptly. "As we are one man short already I don't think it advisable that we should divide."

"Very good. Have either of you gentlemen an extra revolver?"

I pulled mine out and gave it to the chauffeur. He grinned cheerfully as he slipped it in his pocket.

"Right, sir! If any spook puts a game on me I won't start tellin' my beads! Give me twenty minutes, Mr. Keary, and I'll have the car right there!"

We left him at his task and set off up the hill, following the little footpath at the side of the road, Lennox and the sheriff in front, the

inspector and myself at the rear. When we were nearly at the top the inspector paused.

"There's fire somewhere," he said. "I can smell it."

"Someone been burning bush, most likely," said Lennox. "We can tell further on."

At the top of the hill it was unmistakable, a sickly charred odor that hung heavily on the air. Lennox gave an exclamation and quickened his pace involuntarily. A moment later the Lessing bungalow came in sight; there were lights in the windows, and I caught sight of a slim shawl-wrapped figure on the porch. Lennox and the sheriff were well ahead, and as they reached the bungalow someone stepped out and joined them in the roadway. I heard Lessing's voice raised in amazement. "Lennox, by all that's holy!"

"It's Menning's place," said Lennox as we came up. "I thought as much! The game's up."

"Burned to tinder an hour ago," said Lessing cheerfully. "Hello, Haverill! Have you all joined the local fire-brigade?" He caught sight of the inspector's square shoulders behind me, and whistled. "So that's it! Well, if you're wanting an interview with Menning, I guess his present address is somewhere in the woods between here and Coopersville!"

We ran on hastily to the Bend, taking a short cut across the fields behind the bungalow. It was as Lessing had said. The fire had broken out some three hours ago, and his first intimation had been the sudden lurid glare across the tree-tops as he sat on the porch smoking a final cigarette before turning in. The house, a dilapidated structure at best, had caught from the basement upward, and by the time he arrived on the scene it was already beyond hope of saving. He had given what help he could to the neighbours, hastily collected, but with the limited appliances at hand the task was hopeless from the first.

The huckster's yard with its strewn debris, desolate enough by daylight, was made doubly sinister by the red wavering light that still played and flickered among the broken boxes and tumble-down sheds, lit up the loathsome scrap-heaps and the trampled mire underfoot. The prisoned chickens, startled from sleep, kept up a mournful squawking, pushing and struggling in their coops. The efforts of the men had been directed to the barn and cowshed. They stood now, an awed, strangely silent little group, gathered near a broken bureau and a pile of household goods that had been dragged somewhere from the burning and huddled forlornly in the open yard. I remember that a wooden

clock, still ticking, and a filthy and ancient foot-tub were among the collection. I spoke to one of the men; it was old Paddy's son-in-law.

"We done all we could; the old place was no better'n tinder. Pop was fur lettin' it burn an' not lift a hand. We got Miss Mennin' out. Hiram Scholl he bust the door in an' got her. She's over to the house now. Aaron ain't here. It's funny about him. He ain't took the horse anyway. They was sayin' . . ."

He stopped short and looked at me, the glare of the fire on his sweat-streaked face.

"They was sayin' he started it. I dunno. It broke out downstairs. They ain't no one seen Aaron."

And after a moment he added: "He'd oughter be insured. There's no savin' anything."

I went back to Lennox and the sheriff, standing a little apart.

"Aaron's gone," I said.

"I know. There's nothing to be done here. We'll go and see the old woman."

I stayed behind with the inspector and Lessing while the other two went over to the Nevills' cottage, and together we made a thorough search of the barn and outhouses. There was nothing to be learned. Filth and disorder reigned everywhere. To describe the condition of the place, as we found it, would only

be to recall the actual physical sickness that overtook me during the task.

The neighbours had gradually dispersed during our search. By the time the others rejoined us the place was deserted. The fire had completely burned itself out; only a tiny smouldering flame pulsed up here and there, to die down again immediately into blackness.

McWade and the sheriff exchanged a few words, and the latter turned. "Well, gentlemen, I think there's nothing more to be done," he said. "I expect Jackson has the car ready by now. We'll walk back to the house, and if Mr. Lessing has no objection I should like a few words with him before we go."

We did not meet the car, nor was it in sight when we reached the bungalow. Mary Lessing was on the porch, and while the others went indoors I stayed outside to smoke a cigarette in the open air and watch the road in case Jackson turned up.

"I'm glad it was Menning's house, if it had to be somebody's," said Mary, with really feminine lucidity. "I wanted to go, but Dick wouldn't let me. I guess I wouldn't have been much use. Doctor Haverill, is it . . . Aaron they're after?"

"They think he had something to do with that business last spring. It's Lennox's story.

I haven't had a chance to talk to him yet. Anyway I'll take back all I said against him last night."

She had heard nothing of the accident at the dam, and I told her as briefly as I could all that had happened since we left the bungalow last evening. She listened breathlessly.

"So it was Doctor Lennox all the time! Now I know why he didn't want to meet me that morning. I was sure I knew him, somehow."

"You were smarter than we were," I admitted. "He took us in. Only I don't see why, now."

"Sliefer's is near to Aaron's place," said Mary, "and if he was watching Aaron he wouldn't want anyone to know who he was. You think it was Aaron who attacked Freeman last night?"

"I am nearly sure of it."

Mary shivered. "It's horrible," she said. "It's horrible! I wish now——"

"What?"

"I wish I'd known," she said quickly. "That poor girl! I shall go over and see her first thing tomorrow. I know Rebecca quite well. We get our milk from there."

"Do," I said. "You'll cheer her up a bit." I rose as I spoke and peered down the road. "It's time that car put in an appearance."

"Your car? Where did you leave it?"

“Just down the hill there. It had a breakdown,” I explained. “The man was going to catch us up.”

“I thought I heard a car,” she said, “a little while ago. It was while you were over at the fire. It didn’t come past here. Do you suppose Menning knew what you came for?”

“Lennox thinks he must have suspected it. Anyhow he’s far enough away by this time.”

She looked at me, as I thought, a little uneasily.

“You aren’t afraid of Menning?” I exclaimed. “Far or near, he’ll take good enough care to keep out of anyone’s way just now. Well, I’ll go and see if I can find the car. He may have misunderstood the directions. You might tell the others if they’re looking for me.”

As it happened, I had barely gone a dozen paces up the road before I heard the cheerful approaching throb of a motor, and a moment later the car, with Jackson in it, swung into sight.

“I was just coming along to look for you,” I said as he drew up. “I thought you’d missed us.”

“Thought the spooks had got me!” He grinned appreciatively. “No, sir! I just pulled up the road a bit—didn’t know which way you’d gone. I guess they weren’t huntin’ company tonight.” He laughed. “Mighty thick these

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woods are. I don't know this part of the country much. Do you get any big animals, round about?"

"Nothing bigger than a badger," I said. "Why?"

"There was something crossed my path, coming up the hill there. It might have been a dog, now I think of it, but it didn't look like no dog I've ever seen. Rather high in the hind-quarters, and grayish . . . I on'y saw the back of it. It slunk off in the bushes as I come up."

"There aren't any very big dogs that I know," I said, "except Mr. Lessing's setter, and that's generally chained up at night."

"It weren't no setter," said Jackson. "Weren't the build of a setter. And it weren't no badger, for I've seen 'em. Low-running, brownish beasts they are. . . . Is this the house, sir?"

We drew up outside the bungalow, and I jumped down to join the others, waiting on the porch.

"It wasn't anything *like* a dog, now I think of it," said Jackson.

XVIII

LENNOX'S STORY

LENNOX'S face, when the car had deposited us once more at our door, expressed utter chagrin and annoyance. He flung himself down in the surgery arm-chair and lit a cigar.

"That's what comes of not acting on the minute," he said. "I had my hand on the man last night. I tell you, Haverill, you can't drive plain facts into people's heads. There's formality and formality, and the end is your man gets a clear twelve hours to lay his plans and the game's up."

"Bad luck," I rejoined.

He sat staring moodily down at the carpet. "While I think of it," I remembered, "I've got some property of yours. You might as well have it back."

I pulled out the envelope he had left for me that morning. Lennox took it without a glance and thrust it into his pocket.

"Considering that I didn't have the opportunity to open it," I remarked, "I think you might let me into the story now."

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He pulled out his watch. "Well, I don't know but what sleep's out of the question, anyway, tonight. Get the whisky out, Haverill, there's a good chap, and we'll go into it."

"One moment," I said as I unlocked the cupboard. "Have you any objection if I fetch Herrick down?"

"Not in the least."

I roused Herrick accordingly, and he bundled sleepily into a dressing-gown and joined us below, where his sleepiness rapidly vanished in the few moments that it took to grasp the new turn of events, and the part that Lennox himself had played in last night's happenings.

Put briefly, this was the story as Lennox put it to us, gathered round the surgery table in the chilly half-hour that precedes dawn.

The Menning household, when Lennox first came here, had consisted of the two half-brothers, Jake and Aaron, and the old mother, who kept house for them and helped more or less in the business. They were of Westphalian origin, but had settled in this country for two generations. The mother, according to Lennox, was a curious survival of the original peasant stock. Stolid, hard-working, and uncommunicative, she preserved always a certain aloofness from her neighbours, a taciturnity that marked her out even among the Dutch families

about. She had preserved a great deal of her native superstition and traditions, and was reputed to have a great knowledge of herbs and some skill in home doctoring and decoctions, when she could be induced to use it, by reason of which the neighbours, ready enough in such gossip, believed her to have actual powers of witchcraft. Superstition dies hard, even in a new country, and there was at all events a marked unwillingness among them to annoy or "cross" her in any way. About thirty years ago she had married a young Pennsylvania Dutchman, Menning by name, who had deserted her shortly after. Aaron, their son, had his mother's characteristics in a modified degree. He was inclined to be friendly, if not sociable, a good business man, thrifty but honest-dealing, and very religious. Jake, the half-brother, was some years older than Aaron, and, in Lennox's phrase, a "throw-back." There was considerable mystery and gossip about his birth. Some said that he was born before the mother's marriage, some after. He was certainly only half related to Aaron, and the wide difference between them was in curious contrast to their strong physical resemblance, a result in both cases of the virile persistence of the mother's peasant type. Jakey was mentally deficient, but not enough to debar him from ordinary tasks. He occupied himself

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in the huckstering business, and took the wagon round in turn with Aaron, week and week about. In many ways he could be trusted, but he was malicious and cunning, and the bad streak seemed to predominate with age. Lennox never considered him safe. There was always the possibility, in his opinion, of a serious outbreak, and he had even gone so far as to suggest to Aaron the advisability of having him put under definite restraint. At first Aaron had been disposed to consider the idea favourably, then later, for no given reason, he changed his mind. His manner, at about this time, in regard to any discussion about Jakey, changed also so noticeably that Lennox supposed there must have been words between Aaron and the mother about his (Lennox's) interference in the matter, and that Aaron had perhaps been naturally induced to range himself upon the mother's side. Lennox urged him at least to have his brother medically examined, but he always met with a dogged refusal.

"Jakey's all right in the daytime," Aaron persisted. "He ain't doin' harm to nobody. Nights we lock him in."

Once only he went so far as to say that if it became necessary he would take his own steps in the matter, rather implying a resentment at outside interference, and Lennox, to avoid mak-

ing further bad blood, was forced to let the matter drop. So things went on till last March, and the events which led to the finding of Jakey's body by the creek at Dutchman's Hill.

Lennox saw the body, and there was no doubt in his mind at the time that death was due to an epileptic seizure. There were no marks of any sort on the body. The ground was fairly soft at the time—a thaw had set in that same afternoon—but there were no footprints to be found other than those of the man himself, leading down to the creek, and the tracks of some large dog which had evidently passed that way in the night, sniffed at the body and gone on.

At the word "large dog" I saw Herrick shift in his chair.

"Do the Mennings keep a dog?" he asked.

"A watchdog, I believe. Most people do."

"Nothing else was found near the place?"

"Nothing but this, which I myself happened on a few days later. Either of the brothers might have dropped it, or it might have been dropped by another person altogether. It was lying some little distance from the creek, beyond the bridge there. The inspector attached no particular importance to it. There is a certain amount of traffic along this road, and there is no indication that this wasn't dropped by some

passing person a day or two after the body was found.”

He drew from his waistcoat pocket a small round silver object, slightly larger than a pea.

“Looks like some boy’s treasure,” I said. “A button, isn’t it?”

“It has been a button,” Herrick said. “The shank has been broken off and it’s been hammered. Well, Lennox, go on.”

“Of course there was an inquest,” Lennox said. “They found that the man died during an epileptic seizure, which carried out my own conclusions. And now I am coming to the queer part of my tale. It was Aaron who formally identified the body. I saw him and spoke with him at the inquest, and I saw him again the day after Jakey’s funeral.”

He paused.

“Six weeks after the inquest, Haverill, I was walking down the short cut from the Bend, and I met Jake Menning face to face. I am as certain of it as that I am sitting here. He made off without giving me a chance to speak to him. But that it was Jake, in solid flesh and blood, I had no shadow of a doubt.

“The next day I went to the house. I asked for Aaron. The old woman met me. She said that Aaron was away with the wagon. I asked when I could see him, and she became evasive.

It seemed that he was very busy, that he was away a good deal of the time; she could not say at all when he was likely to be found.

“Her answers, and more particularly her manner, set me to thinking. I had not seen Aaron since the day after Jakey’s funeral. No one, so far as I could learn without pushing inquiries unduly, had seen much of Aaron since the inquest. His trade had always lain further afield than the immediate neighbourhood, where most people raised their own chickens for use, and few in sufficient quantity to sell. Mrs. Searle had seen him, certainly, and Mrs. Searle had remarked a change in him. She said that he was queer and silent; she thought that the shock of his brother’s death had preyed on his mind. In her own words, he was ‘getting just like Jakey in his ways.’

“It was about this time that the talk first began about the haunting of Dutchman’s Hill. I am not a credulous man where ghosts are concerned, and I scoffed any idea of the supernatural. One stranger, a pedlar, said that a ‘something’ had jumped out and chased him to the bridge, where it stopped. Others declared that it was the ghost of Jakey that haunted the place. On top of all this came the—er—the very singular attacks upon Mr. Lessing. I don’t want to go into Lessing’s case now. His own

story was of course untenable, and I strongly believe that he knew a great deal more than he chose to tell me at the time—in other words, that he found amusement in trying, deliberately, to see how much I would believe. We were always strongly opposed on certain questions, though in general I found him a most courteous and charming man, and I am afraid he was not above trying, in this matter, to take a rise out of me, as they say. If he had taken me into his confidence then, instead of inventing the ridiculous sort of boggy-tale he did, we should have been at the truth of this matter much earlier.”

Herrick and I exchanged glances. I fancied he was about to speak, but on second thoughts changed his mind. Lennox continued.

“The problem resolved itself into this. If Jakey was still alive, and I could swear to it that he was, whose was the body that had been identified and buried in March, and how was it that no one, save myself, guessed at his continued existence? *Who was Aaron Menning?*

“I tell you, Haverill, the thing became a nightmare. I had no proof to go upon, nothing but my own instinct. The more I thought over it, the more clear it grew to me. The man whose body had been found at Dutchman’s Hill was not Jakey at all, it was Aaron.”

“But——”

“Listen here, Haverill,” Lennox said. “I know what I am saying sounds incredible to you. But consider for a moment, on what superficial observations we base our recognition of people, every day. Remember the very strong likeness which existed between the two brothers, even to the scarring and thickening of the skin by smallpox, which in itself blunts the individuality of a face. The face of the dead man was swollen both by the manner of death and the partial immersion in mud. Remember that there were no intimate relatives to impose upon, for the mother undoubtedly knew the truth. The farmer who found the body identified it as that of a huckster named Menning who had called upon him the week before. Aaron was away from home that night, and he did not return with the wagon till the afternoon. It was the mother who first identified the body as that of Jakey, and the news was already spread when I arrived on the scene. Aaron appeared at the inquest, but with the exception of myself there were not three men there who knew him at all intimately, or who could have sworn to his actual identity *unless* they saw the two brothers side by side. Both Aaron and the mother opposed the inquest strongly, and the neighbours told me that she would let no one help her in

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preparing the body for burial. She had always kept herself rather aloof, as I said, and at the time her refusal did not strike me as peculiar.

“Given the clue, the thing was easy enough to construct. I believe myself it was fear of his brother’s placing him under restraint that first suggested the attack. He must have concealed himself in the tree near the footbridge, knowing that Aaron had an errand in the village and would pass that way, and so sprung out upon him. The impact of his body bore them both down to the edge of the stream. There was no struggle. The shock brought on the seizure in which Aaron died, and Jakey, leaving him there, had sufficient cunning either to follow the stream or swing himself up by the bridge, and so avoid leaving any traces. He returned to the house, and with his mother concocted the story of Aaron’s absence with the wagon, harnessed the horse and made off ready to return the following afternoon, when the dead man’s identity would have been safely established. People might have suspected Jakey of killing Aaron, but no one would suspect Aaron of killing Jakey.

“I think now that he was on his guard against me at the inquest, and that his suspicion must have deepened as time went on. I was morally convinced that the man was a dangerous homi-

cidal lunatic, but I had no evidence to convict him. He would have been cunning enough to defeat me, since no one would have credited my story. Aaron was known and respected. It would have been folly to bring any hasty charge against him. Convinced that he already mistrusted me, and that my only safety was in disarming his suspicion, I took the only course possible. I determined to go away for a time, and I took the precaution of letting it be supposed that I went for my health. I wanted Menning to think that he had driven me away, and I believe I succeeded. Up to last night he had no suspicion of my identity with Crowfoot. I counted on his relaxing his caution once I was out of the way, and I was right.

“Freeman must have suspected something of the truth, since that Rebecca swore she had seen Jakey’s ghost near the mill-dam, and if it had not been for Freeman’s well-meant imprudence we should have had Jakey under lock and key at this moment. He got suspicious of Freeman, laid up for him last night, and pushed him over the sluice. I heard Freeman’s cry and the splash, and guessed instinctively what had happened. It was then that Jakey’s mania came out. He disappeared when Freeman fell, but in a paroxysm of rage and fear came back and tried to pull the gate open on us while we were

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both down there. I had to fire on him in defence, and he made off. He had taken the alarm, however, and instead of waiting the one more day I had intended, I judged it best to post straight off and lay my facts as I knew them before the sheriff then and there. The rest of course you know."

"Then you had no intention of going to Europe?" I asked.

"Not in the least. A friend posted my note from Queenstown, a wise precaution, since Menning would undoubtedly hear of it through the postmaster's gossip. I went to the Sliefers' because they were near enough to the Bend to enable me to carry out a few investigations without arousing too much interest, and also because they happened to be about the only people in the village whom I never attended professionally, and they would therefore be less likely to recognize me. You were the only person I was afraid of, Haverill, and you I had to chance. We spent only a few hours together before I left, and before that we hadn't met for years; it was only my voice that troubled me, and there I took a leaf out of Jakey's book. Mr. Herrick would make a better detective than you. He played me a neat trick over that revolver last night!"

Herrick smiled. "You must admit that things

looked ugly for you! Now I see why you were so reluctant to be dragged up to the house that morning."

"My old training in college theatricals came in useful anyway!" He looked at his watch. "Give me another of those cigars of which you are so lavish, Haverill, and I'll turn in. I'm dog-tired, and there's plenty before me tomorrow, yet."

He betook himself with a blanket to the dining-room sofa, to get a few hours' sleep. The first violet light of dawn was already filtering between the curtains, and Herrick stood up abruptly and extinguished the lamp.

"Lord," he said, "it's stuffy in here! Well, Austin, what do you make of it all?"

"It may be true," I said. "It throws sufficient doubt anyway for the arrest of this man. They might prove manslaughter. Lennox's idea evidently is that if he can be once arrested on this charge they can have him medically examined, and the whole truth will come out."

"Exactly." He walked to the window, pulling aside the curtains, and threw up the sash. The clean fresh air of the dawn, faintly cold, swept past him into the room. "Austin, what points struck you particularly in this story?"

"If he really saw Jakey that disposes of the ghost tales. Only one doesn't know . . ."

“His doubts about his own judgment, in the earlier case, weakens this,” Herrick supplemented. “I agree. He seems certain at one moment and uncertain at another. But he is more positive, I take it, on that point, than on any other. It was *apparently* Jakey’s body, it was *apparently* Aaron at the inquest, but it was definitely Jakey himself whom he saw and recognized later.”

“Jakey is alive. Whether Aaron was actually killed, or whether Jakey in some extraordinary way came to life again. . . . There have been cases.”

“There have been cases,” Herrick said. “The inquest was held the next day, and no one apparently saw the body after the inquest. People have been buried alive before now. And we must remember that Lennox, for all the skill and ingenuity he has brought to bear in this matter afterwards, has only the experience of the average country practitioner. You know what that’s worth.”

“It seems to me,” I said, grappling with an idea which had somehow forced itself upon me all through Lennox’s narrative, “that—I don’t want to criticize unduly—but I do feel that Lennox’s tale has been more evolved to fit existing facts than suggested by them. He seems

to me to be trying to convince himself just as much as us. And——”

“Yes?” said Herrick.

I hesitated.

“I—well, hang it all, Herrick, I *saw* the man before he left, and whatever the cause, or however temporary the effect, I am pretty sure that the story he told us tonight is not sufficient to account for the state of nerves he was in then. You saw how touchy he was about Lessing?”

Herrick nodded.

“Lessing said once that Lennox only cared for things he could stick a pin into and label.”

“And unless I am much mistaken,” said Herrick quietly, “it will take a bolder man than Lennox to label the real truth of this business. However, Austin, we’ll drop that part of it for the moment. There are one or two points I want to recall to you particularly.”

“Well?”

“They are these.” He spoke deliberately. “The character of Menning’s mother. She is important. The rather curious isolation in which the family seem always to have kept themselves. Aaron’s sudden change of mind about having Jakey put under restraint. And . . . the two other details to which Lennox himself seems to attach the least importance. One is that of the footprints, presumably of a dog—a large dog—

noticed near the spot where Menning's body was found."

"And the other?"

"The other," said Herrick, "I have here in my hand, and to me it provides the most significant clue in the whole case."

He opened his hand, and I saw lying on the palm the battered silver button that had been picked up on Dutchman's Hill.

XIX

THE MILL DAM

I COULD get nothing further from Herrick just then. He went back to his room, but not to sleep, for I could hear him pacing up and down overhead. For myself, I dozed fitfully in the surgery arm-chair, and when I finally opened my eyes with a start it was to find the room filled with sunlight and Herrick standing over me, fully dressed, a cup of steaming coffee in his hand.

“Wake up, Austin,” he said. “I’ve stolen a march on Mrs. Searle. It’s hot, if it isn’t otherwise drinkable.”

I rubbed my eyes.

“Where’s Lennox?”

“Sleeping the sleep of the just. By the look of him he won’t wake up till midday. That’s the reward of an easy conscience for you—— ‘Something accomplished, something done.’ Which reminds me. Are you using your motorcycle today?”

“I don’t think so.” I drank the coffee—it

was strong and scalding hot, and it pulled me together. "Why, do you want it?"

"I'd like it for today, yes."

"Sure." I looked at him curiously. "Have you got something in mind?"

"Only a little tour of investigation. You needn't look injured, Austin! Just something I want to check up on. Are you going over to Sliefer's today?"

"Later on. I've got two calls in the village."

"Well, if you see the Lessings tell them I'll be over tomorrow—or tonight if I get back in time."

We got the cycle out without rousing Pete, and I watched Herrick off down the road. When he had gone I lit my pipe and set out for a little stroll until such time as the household should be awake.

There had been a heavy fall of dew, and the weeds by the roadside were drenched and silvered. Spider webs like jewel-work upon the brambles. I was reminded of the first time I had driven over to the bungalow, early in the summer, on just such a morning as this, and of how little thought had been in my mind then of what I should find at my journey's end. To me, then, these far stretching woods, dense and close-grown, the hollow with its rank growth of teeming insect life, the little creek that followed

threadlike among the emerald mosses and tufts of sedge, suggested nothing more than the idle peace and pleasure of a summer's holiday. I had envied whoever lived here all the year round. These cool depths of shadow, with the freckled at nothing more dreadful than the tragedy of play of sunlight through the branches, hinted weasel and rabbit, of hawk and thrush. Now their aspect was to me indefinitely changed. I felt them sinister, secretive, their peace a mere deceptive veil for the evil that lurked beneath.

What was the secret that overshadowed the place? What had Herrick meant by his insistence upon the silver button and those queer footprints by the cedar where Aaron had met his death? Did Lennox's story after all explain anything? I felt that it did not and yet I felt, in a strange, unexplained way, that somehow, in connection with the Mennings, and the Menning homestead, loathsome and sinister, was to be found the answer to our whole problem. But how?

Retracing my steps, I reached the house to find smoke curling cheerfully from the chimney and Lennox, contrary to Herrick's prophecy, dressed and on the porch. Mrs. Searle had breakfast ready, bacon, buckwheat cakes and coffee which obliterated the lingering taste of

the decoction Herrick had pressed upon me before starting out.

Lennox was not very communicative. I think he was still inwardly chagrined by the failure of last night's expedition.

After breakfast Pete hitched the mare and I set out on my rounds. The news of the fire had already spread. Everyone was talking about it, and from what I could gather no one had any sympathy over it, unless it was for the old woman now rendered houseless. The current belief was that Menning, heavily insured, had fired the place himself. There was even a suggestion that he had intended the old woman to perish with the house. Disaster works strangely in loosening people's tongues, and I gathered that though the supposed Aaron had outwardly enjoyed the respect of the community there was inwardly very little liking lost between him and his neighbours. At all events they were ready enough now to speak of his queerness, his surliness, the way the farm was kept—in itself a sufficient ground of condemnation in a hard-working neighbourhood—and above all of the way he had, of late months, neglected and ill-treated his old mother. Odds and ends of scandal, restrained up to now I imagined through a lurking fear of Menning himself, found free tongue. But in all this talk there was no clear

idea as yet of the real reason for the sheriff's visit. Menning was "wanted" for something, but no one quite knew what, and gossip confined itself so far to dark hints and speculations which fell very wide of the real mark.

I reached the Sliefers' house about midday. Freeman was progressing favorably, though not yet out of danger. Mrs. Sliefer pressed me to eat dinner with them, and over the meal the talk turned naturally on the excitement of the night before. Mrs. Sliefer was very definite in her opinion of the Menning household, almost as vehement as old Paddy had been that day I talked to him of his neighbours.

"If there was ever call for a place to be burned," she declared, "it was that one, though I ain't one for wishing ill to my neighbours without cause. But there's a bad streak in that family an' always has been. The old woman's grown feeble of late and I'm sorry enough for her, poor soul, by all I hear, but there was a day when I'd 'a crossed the road sooner than pass the time of day with her, and so would many another. I never believed all these ignorant tales of old Ma Menning bein' a witch, for there ain't no witches and we well know it, but there was something about her that wasn't like other folks, and though we was neighbours in a way, she never took to me nor I to her. Things did get

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better in the two years Jakey was away, an' then it did seem like Aaron had a chance to take hold an' run things decent, till he come back again. And after his death one would have thought there'd been a turn for the better, but it didn't last. I guess the bad streak was in the whole family, an' after Jakey died I suppose it preyed on Aaron's mind, in a way, an' he got to goin' the same road as his brother."

It was on my tongue to mention the truth, but I checked myself in time. Evidently the police hoped to gain something by keeping the real facts dark, at least until after Jakey's arrest.

After dinner I drove round, by way of the Bend, to the Lessings' bungalow. The Menning place was a mere charred ruin, except for the outhouses which stood empty and deserted. The few remaining chickens—Menning had sold out the greater part of his stock a few days before the fire, which was another reason why his neighbours thought it premeditated—had been taken elsewhere; the cow, filthy and gaunt from weeks of neglect, poor brute, was grazing hungrily in a small stony pasture adjoining, thankful to be at liberty.

Old Paddy, with a greasy, old velvet cap on and his feet in slashed shoes, was leaning over

his fence-railing, smoking his black pipe. I asked about Menning's mother.

"The old woman, she's took an' cleared out. Scared er Aaron, I guess. She got a wheelbarrer an' loaded her bits o' truck on it, an' carted it up to that little empty shack back off the road yonder, what belongs to Scholl. Reckon the Scholls don't mind her usin' it. She wouldn't have no help neither—carted the lot herself, in two journeys, an' I'll say she's still pretty spry on her feet fur an old lady, though she does look so feeble. My darter, she was sorry fur the old soul, an' she gives her some potatoes an' a bag o' flour, but she didn't git so much as a thank you for it. Jest chucked 'em on the barrer an' went off. Kinder dazed that night, she was, but she come round pretty quick once the excitement was over."

He paused to spit, with precision, at a white stone by the fence rail.

"No one ain't seen nothin' of Aaron."

"No," I said.

"Guess they won't, neither. He's cleared out for good, by the looks of it."

"Maybe it's well."

"No one round here ain't grumblin'. It's a case o' good riddance. I don't trust Aaron. My darter, she ain't lettin' her young 'un run through

the woods, neither. He'd orter be jailed an' done with it."

I found Mary and Lessing on the porch. They hailed me cheerfully, and I hitched the mare in the shade and joined them.

"Poor old Crowfoot," said Lessing. "I don't think the arm of the law was best pleased at being fetched out on a wild goose chase last night. It's my private opinion that Lennox has solaced his loneliness by reading up on detective novels. I always thought he had some bats in his belfry. Did he tell you anything more last night?"

"Quite a lot."

"I told them the story as briefly as I could.

"Lennox is crazy," Dick said when I had finished. "The thing doesn't hang together. And when he gets to a point where he can't trust his judgment as to the identity of a man in one case, how can he trust it in another? What did Herrick think?"

"He didn't say definitely."

"So like Herrick! What?"

"He seemed to lay more stress on the dogs' footprints and the button Lennox picked up than on anything else. Oddly enough, someone else spoke of dogs, now I think of it." And I told him what the chauffeur had said last night.

"Queer," said Lessing. "You'd think he'd

know a dog when he saw one. I'd like to have a look at that button."

"Herrick has it."

"He has . . ." Lessing was silent a moment. "Even if Jakey did kill Aaron, and Aaron is really his brother—hang it all, the thing's so mixed—I don't see that that gets us any further on. Does Lennox think he's at the back of everything? What's he playing at?"

"He was at the back of Rebecca's scare, and that business of Freeman. If Freeman were only well enough to speak. . . . I don't know that he could tell us much then, that we haven't found out for ourselves."

"Grant that Jakey did kill his brother, and has succeeded in putting it over. He was at the bottom of all these Dutchman's Hill scares, and that business with Rebecca. Freeman found out something, and he laid for Freeman . . . and got him. That doesn't explain the cyclist affair, nor what happened to me."

"And it doesn't explain another thing, either," said Mary, breaking in for the first time. "It doesn't explain what the one point was that Lennox himself was unwilling to face, what it was he tried to avoid by ridiculous explanations that wouldn't satisfy a child. I don't mean recently, I mean further back, almost in the beginning, the second time he was here to attend

Dick." She turned to her brother. "Perhaps I haven't told you this before. But it did strike me at the time, and afterwards I've been thinking of it more and more.

"I was standing out here on the porch, wondering whether I could leave you with Kate and slip over to Lennox's house, or whether I could get hold of anyone to send, when Lennox himself came by, driving. I ran out to stop him and tell him what had happened. He pulled up as soon as he saw me, before I had time to call out, and I tell you if I ever saw a man frightened it was then. He was afraid, and he was afraid before he saw me, or even knew what I had to say. Something had happened, something that gave him a shock, before he came up the road there. He tried to pass it off, but I'm not a fool; I know when a person is just puzzled, and I know when he is afraid, and I tell you that Lennox was afraid. And I'd like to know just what it *was* that frightened him."

"Where was he coming from?" Lessing asked.

"Down the road here, the way Austin came just now. He came from the Bend."

"From Menning's place."

"It might have been. I don't know. He didn't say and I didn't ask him. But something, that morning, had happened to upset him before

he got here. And it was as if he *knew*—or at least expected, what he was going to find.”

“Did you ask him?”

“I said something about it. He told me he’d been up all night on a case some miles away, that he’d only left at daybreak to drive back, and that he felt all in. But it was something more than that, I feel certain, to have thrown him into the state he was in.”

“I shall ask him tonight,” I said. “If he’s keeping anything back——”

“Ask him!” said Mary. “Ask him, and get the truth! You can tell him just what I said.”

I had promised to look in at the Sliefers’ again, later in the evening, and instead of doing so on my way back, Mary proposed that I should walk across with her, after tea, while Lessing got some letters written.

“I want some cream for supper,” she said, “and I want to see Rebecca too. I meant to go this morning. If you don’t mind the walk we’ll take Leo along. He hasn’t had a run today yet.”

She called the setter and he came bounding up, glad enough of the prospect of a walk.

“Poor old Leo!” Mary said. “He doesn’t get half enough exercise. We’ll take the leash, Austin, if you don’t mind. There’s a collie at

the farm and the two are sworn enemies. I always have to fasten him if I go there."

I put the leash in my pocket and we set off through the woods by a short cut that brought us out eventually upon the cart-track near the old saw-mill. On the other side of this road the Sliefers' land began, and only a couple of pasture fields, with low snake-fences, separated us from the farm. Leo had dropped behind after we passed the mill, and as we stopped by the fence to wait for him we saw a woman coming along the path. She wore a faded check cotton dress and a sunbonnet that almost hid her face, and she was carrying a basket filled with chips, evidently gathered near the mill. As she drew near I caught a flash of very keen eyes, set in a dark wrinkled face, directed upon us in a glance that was by no means friendly.

Mary stepped forward and spoke to her, and I saw her slip something into the old woman's hand. The gnarled fingers closed on it unwillingly; she muttered something and passed on.

"Do you know her?" I asked.

"It's old Mrs. Menning," Mary said. "Poor old soul! She's crotchety, but I can't help feeling sorry for her. Is it true they are sending her to the poorhouse?"

"I've no idea. Old Paddy Nevill told me she'd moved her things up to some little empty

shack near her old place. I suppose they'll let her stay there till something can be arranged."

I watched the bent, dragging figure out of sight. As Paddy had said, she covered the ground fairly spryly, for all her feebleness of gait. It was my first acquaintance with this woman to whose personality Herrick had particularly drawn my attention the night before. If Lennox were right, she had played an almost incredibly cunning part throughout, even if her brain had not itself evolved the whole plot.

"You'd think she could find chips nearer than the saw-mill," Mary said. "It's a good walk from the Nevills' place, if she's near there. I wouldn't wonder if the old body were unhinged by the fire altogether. She's never friendly at her best, but she looked quite queer just now. Did you notice how she was muttering to herself?"

I let down the bars and we passed through into the field.

"Austin," Mary said, as we picked our way over the boulder-strewn pasture, "do you know that I've got a confession to make, and it's worrying me."

I smiled.

"Anything very dreadful?"

"I don't just know," she said. "It's about last night. You know I stayed out on the porch while

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you were all over at the fire. Well, it was while I was sitting there, about a quarter of an hour after you went, I saw Menning come up by the road. I don't think he even saw me. He was going at a sort of shambling trot, and he never looked up when he passed the house. I am sure it was he, though."

"And you never told us!" I exclaimed.

"I knew you'd be angry, but I couldn't help it. I didn't know about this whole story then, and—and I hate the idea of any man being hunted that way, no matter what he's done. I thought he might have some sort of chance to get away, and that's why I didn't say anything last night, even to Dick!"

"Which way was he going?"

"Toward the hill. Your chauffeur must surely have met him. That's what I couldn't make out."

"He saw no one at all. The man may have turned off into the woods when he saw the car. I suppose you know what the sheriff would say to this?"

"Compounding a felony!" Mary laughed. "Anyway he never asked me, so I didn't have to tell any lies about it. Only after what you said last night it worried me, and I thought I'd better own up. Now if he is caught it won't

be on my conscience that I had a direct hand in it.”

“Oh, woman!” I exclaimed.

“You’d have done the same in my case,” she retorted. “Besides, I wasn’t supposed to know. You never told me anything.”

“You are *sure* it was Menning?”

“Quite sure. I had left the house door open, and he passed right into the light. I wondered why he was going away from the fire instead of toward it, and I thought at first he might be going to get more help. I didn’t know then. He hadn’t been there all along.”

We reached the farm, and I left her below while I saw my patient. Either I was longer than I thought, or we must have loitered unconsciously on our way over, for when I joined her again on the porch the light was already fading. Then there was a delay about the cream. Rebecca had to fetch it, and while she was gone Mary turned to me.

“This farm is still bewitched,” she said. “It’s the cream-pans now. Rebecca swears that the milk has gone, these last few nights. Last night she set out three pans in the spring-house and this morning one of them was two-thirds empty. I suspect cats, but anyway the problem takes Rebecca’s mind off her other trouble, poor girl. Here she is. Can you spare this, Rebecca?”

"It's a bit scant, Miss Lessing, but it's the best I can do. We'll be short for churning this week, as it is. Whatever ails the milk I don't know! I've never had it go before."

"Well, it isn't witches' work;" Mary smiled. "They turn the milk, you know, Rebecca, they don't steal it! I'd keep an eye on the cat. If you'll take Leo a moment, Austin, till we're out of the grounds, I'll carry the pail—no, it isn't heavy, and I don't trust men anyway. They spill everything. Good night, Rebecca!"

"Carry your old cream yourself," I retorted. "I won't help you—not after that. And the way I've condoned your offences, too! Come on, Leo! Can I let him loose here, do you think?"

"Wait till we're quite clear of the house. He had a dreadful fight here once. It'll be all right now. We'd better take the path along the dam; it's a little shorter."

We followed the footpath along which they had carried Freeman that night to the house. Given any other time and place, I should have been tempted to do my best in prolonging this stroll, but I had none too pleasant associations with the place and its surroundings, and with twilight closing rapidly upon us I was in no mind to loiter. A stagnant weedy smell rose from the dam, a gloomy stretch of water with enclosing trees that darkened it still more effectually.

Frogs croaked in monotonous chorus from the weeds at the edge and the midges were thick. In the end Mary had to give in ignominiously, and I carried the pail while she fought their attacks off with a handkerchief.

It was here that Rebecca and her sweetheart used to walk of an evening, and I wondered at their choice of a trysting-place.

"It's romantic," said Mary, "in a way. Can't you imagine this the deserted moat, with the ruined castle of Lord Thingummy in the background? I am sure that Rebecca reads Laura Jean Libbey on the sly. What spot more suggestive of lovers' vows and maidens palely loitering! Rebecca's too healthy not to be romantic at her age."

"Romance?" I said. "Fiddlesticks! The Sliefers ought to have this place drained if they aren't going to work the mill any more. As a plain medical man I have no use for picturesque sheets of water that smell bad after sunset."

"So you'd sacrifice all this——" she waved the hand that was not occupied in keeping midges at bay—"and plant cabbages on it!"

"Why cabbages?"

"Aren't they the symbol of all that is practical?"

"Including myself!" I snapped. I was getting

badly bitten, and with no opportunity for redress.

“Oh, I didn’t say that!” She stopped short. “Did you see that big fish jump just then? Right beyond the pond-lilies there. This place must be full of them.”

“Carp, most likely. It’s pretty deep up at this end.”

She stopped to watch the circle widen and disappear, leaving the water black. “Austin . . . do you suppose I ought to have spoken about Menning before?”

“I don’t know that it matters. They’ll get him anyhow.”

There was no good in mere speculation, and I didn’t want to enlarge on the subject of Menning. She had come into contact with sufficient ugliness this summer already. “It’s more than probable that he has cleared out altogether by this time. In any case, until we know, I think it would be better that you kept near the house unless one of us is with you. There’s no good running any risks.”

We had passed the mill and were just turning into the little path that would bring us to the road near the bungalow, when Lessing met us.

“I thought you two would never turn up,” he said. “I’m dying of hunger. How’s the patient, Austin?”

“Getting on. You can carry the pail if you want to work. Where’s that dog got to?”

I had released the setter some little way back, and he had kept within sight nearly all the way. Missing him now, I turned to whistle, and saw Leo, a pale shadow in the dusk, nosing eagerly about the scattered logs that lay in the clearing near the mill. Lessing called him several times by name, sharply, but he paid no attention.

“Got a rabbit, most likely. Wait a minute. I’ll soon fetch him out of that.”

He walked back the few paces to the clearing, and Mary sat down at the edge of the path with a little sigh of resignation. I offered her a cigarette, and for some minutes we smoked in silence, listening for her brother’s step. Presently Mary stood up.

“I’m not going to wait here all evening! We’ll go on to the house and let him catch up to us.”

We had nearly reached the bungalow before Lessing overtook us. He was holding Leo by a handkerchief knotted through his collar. The dog came unwillingly, cringing against his master’s legs, the hair along his spine bristling and his ears laid back.

“Why, look at that!” Mary exclaimed. “I’ve never seen him act that way before. You haven’t been beating him, Dick?”

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“I’d like to!” Lessing stooped to take a fresh grip on the dog’s collar. “Be quiet, you brute! You aren’t going back there now.”

Mary patted the setter’s head. “Poor old boy! Did he get a rat, and wouldn’t they let him have it! Was it a good rat, Leo?”

But the dog only twisted impatiently from her touch, his head turned backwards and his nose working.

“It was a darn good rat,” said Lessing, “but he won’t have it now. Go open the shed door, Mary, till I get him in.”

She threw open the door of the tool-shed, and Lessing thrust the dog inside, pushing him in with his foot, and fastened the latch.

“That’s that! Aren’t you staying for supper, Austin?”

“Wish I could! I must get the mare back, and I want to be there when Herrick gets in.”

I untied the mare and backed her around. Mary was standing on the porch.

“Do you notice you can smell that stagnant water at the dam? We seem to get it in whiffs, every once in a while. I noticed it very strongly last night, sitting out here. I wonder the Sliefers can stand it, living as close as they do.”

There was a slight taint on the air. As Mary said, it seemed to come in whiffs. It might have

been the dam, but it carried my mind back, as a smell will do, to some vague recollection I could not quite place.

“There’s a lot of rotting vegetation there. Maybe it isn’t so bad at their end. Sometimes you smell things much more at a distance.”

“It just comes and goes. I don’t notice it now. You’ll be over this evening?”

“I’ll bring Herrick along if he’s back.”

I paused, held by a vague trouble in her eyes.

“You aren’t worried, Mary?”

“Worried? No. I just feel . . . restless. It’s the sort of feeling you get before a storm. As if we were all waiting for something, and you don’t know what.”

“You’ve been upset about this Menning affair.”

“It isn’t that. I don’t know what it is. The place, maybe . . . I always liked woods before, and now I feel as if I should never like them again.” Her grave clear eyes held mine “Austin, I wish I *knew*. If only . . . sometimes I almost wish we’d never come to this place at all.”

“Mary, you don’t really wish that?”

“No, I don’t. I ought to, but I can’t. But . . . I do wish we were all away—out of here—somewhere else.”

"We shall be, soon enough." I was thinking of the end of my holiday, the breaking-up of a summer that, if it had brought danger and ugliness and all but tragedy, had brought also something infinitely precious into my life—something I was far from ready to lose.

"The summer has done Kate good, anyway. We had a letter from her this morning."

"Where is she?" I knew that Mrs. Lessing had left a few days before, to stay with some friends.

"On Long Island. A place on the Sound. We'll probably join her there in a couple of weeks. I wish you could come—you and Jack both. I think the sea air would blow sense into all of us!" She laughed. "I'm talking like an old woman, and I've got Dick's supper to get and nothing ready! Well, we'll see you to-night."

"Would you rather I stayed?"

"Nonsense! You'll begin to think I'm developing nerves, next!"

She waved her hand as I climbed into the buggy. Gathering up the reins, I turned the mare's head homeward. It was already nearly dark, but I could still see the road before me. Was it presage, or only the desire for Mary's company that made me wish, even before I had turned the corner by Dutchman's Hill, that I

had after all accepted Lessing's invitation and stayed on?

As I reached the point where the road dipped to the hollow it seemed to me that I could smell once more that queer unplaceable odour of which Mary had spoken.

XX

WHAT WE FOUND IN THE SAW-MILL

HERRICK had not yet returned when I reached the house. Lennox was just sitting down to supper, in which I joined him. While we were lingering over our coffee I remembered what Mary had said that morning, and asked him point-blank about it.

He gave me a curious look before replying:

“So Mary Lessing told you that, did she? Well, I give her credit for observation. I remember that morning perfectly. She was quite right; something *had* happened.”

He paused to light a cigar over the lamp-chimney before saying: “Shall we go into the surgery, Haverill?”

I followed him in, leaving the dining-room to Mrs. Searle, and closed the door between us, while Lennox threw himself back into the arm-chair and smoked for a few moments in silence.

“I’ve told you, Haverill, that between one thing and another my nerves were in a pretty unreliable state early this summer. I mention that now, because I still think it had a certain

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bearing on what happened. When Mary Lessing stopped me that morning in the road it was just a case of one shock on top of another.”

“Then——”

“Wait a minute,” Lennox said. “If I tell this thing I’ve got to tell it my own way. I’ll tell you just what happened and I haven’t got any explanation of it at all. You can take it or leave it. And you’ll understand that I don’t even claim to be telling you facts. The whole thing might have been just an impression in my own mind. That’s what I want to make clear, regardless of any effect it may have had on me at the time.

“I had been out on an all-night case. I was physically tired, and through a particular anxiety in this instance, just about all in. I had a seven-mile drive home, and I could almost have fallen asleep there in the buggy. I had left my patient out of danger, and coming back I remembered that Mrs. Searle wanted a couple of chickens from Aaron and that I’d told her the day before I would stop in some time and get them. It was very little after daybreak, but I chanced the Mennings being early risers and turned out of my way to go by the Bend. There was smoke coming from the chimney, so I got out and knocked at the door, and the old woman opened it. I guess she was just dressing; she looked

half asleep, and she told me Aaron wasn't up yet, but that the chickens were ready, and she'd get them for me if I didn't mind waiting a minute.

"I stood about outside. It was a chilly morning, and a bit foggy. I guess I had my mind more on a cup of hot coffee than anything else, and I wondered if the old woman would give me some if I asked for it when she came back, though I'd be needing coffee pretty badly before I'd drink it in that house. You knew the Menning place, before it was burned?"

I nodded.

"There are a lot of tumble-down outbuildings there where they used to keep the chickens he bought, and one in particular—I don't know if you noticed it—a sort of lean-to near the open wagon shed, painted green. I don't know what it was built for, but it had a door and a square window-hole, high up, about the height of a man's head. I don't suppose the whole floor space inside would be more than about eight foot square, about the size of a calf-pen, and I shouldn't wonder if that was what it was. I'd walked over to it because I wanted to get my pipe started, out of the breeze. The door was shut, and I'm certain there wasn't anything moving in there, or I'd have heard it.

"I'd struck a match, and was just bending over to draw on my pipe when something shot past

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me. It seemed to come out of the uncleared patch of woods back of the sheds. I didn't get more than a half glimpse of it, and I can't even tell you what it looked like, except that it was biggish, and it seemed to shamble on all fours, and it panted, the way an animal does that's been running, and it *smelt* like an animal too—I seemed to get a whiff of it as it went past. It came by me so close I could almost have touched it, and flung itself straight at that window-hole and slithered through, and I could hear the thud of its body on the inside.

“I'm a short man. That window-hole was well above the level of my head. My first thought was to pull myself up and look through, and then—well, you can put it down to what you like, but the thing had given me such a queer turn when it shot past, like cold water down my spine, and I believe if I could have touched that window I wouldn't have had the physical strength to pull myself up and look through. Instead I backed away and just stood there, staring. The door was tight shut. It had all happened in such a flash that I began to wonder, then, if I'd imagined the whole thing. I might have stood there for a couple of minutes, though it seemed to me longer, and then suddenly the door was flung wide open and Aaron himself—or as I know now, Jakey—walked out.

"The door opened outward, and I could see straight past into the shed. There was a heap of broken harness and some rags lying in one corner, and except for that the place was as bare as my hand.

"I daresay I must have looked queer—I know I felt it—for Menning gave me a pretty surly look. He asked me what I wanted, and I told him I'd stopped for the chickens. He said they weren't ready, that he'd bring them over, but just at that minute his mother came out from the house with them in her hand, and I tell you I was glad enough to grab those chickens and drive off. I didn't want to ask questions or to stop near the place."

"This thing—what did you think it looked like?"

"I can't even tell you. It—it didn't look like anything."

"But it ran?"

"Yes, it ran. It's no good trying to tell you what my impression was, any more than I have done."

"Do you suppose Menning kept something shut up there?"

"If he did, where was it when he opened the door? I tell you the shed was empty."

"There was no trapdoor?"

"I went back to see. I didn't just give it up,

either. I went back a few days later, one time when Menning had passed our house and I knew he'd be away on his rounds some time. I saw the old woman. She was surly in a way, but friendly to me. You see, I'd tended her before when Menning had been beating her up—oh, yes, he'd done that more than once to my knowledge. The Nevills knew it, but there was no good interfering; she'd deny it, and no one dared tackle Menning. But she had to come to me, once, and though she put up some story, I could tell what had happened. Well, I chatted with her there, and just to see what she'd say I asked her if they didn't keep some sort of a dog on the place. She said no, that they'd had a dog and her son shot it because it howled at night. After a while I left her settled there in the kitchen and before I left I took my chance to go over every hole and corner out of doors. Except for the cow and a couple of pigs there wasn't the sign of any animal round the place bigger than a cat. And there was no opening in that shed except the window and the door Menning came out by.

“So now you know the whole thing—all Mary Lessing claimed I was keeping back from you—and I imagine you're about as wise as I am, and that isn't much.”

“Why didn't you tell us sooner?” I asked.

“What could I do? If I went telling that

around anyone would have a right to say I was crazy and that I'd imagined the whole thing. You might say—and I've tried to think myself—that what I heard was just something running in the bushes and what I saw was an old hen fluttering in at the window. And maybe it was. And I've known men who've been just as startled, and have told circumstantial tales, over nothing more."

"You could have told it at its face value."

"No," said Lennox, "I couldn't. My mind doesn't work that way. I've got to weigh things. And I've got to exhaust every possible reasonable explanation, including my own physical state at the time, before I'll admit that a thing is so when I know it *can't* be so. If I've kept this to myself it's because I wanted to find some sort of explanation in my own mind first."

He faced me, stolid and obstinate. Even in that moment I admired his self-possession, his dogged, common sense determination not to be drawn into admission of the existence of any thing that, as Lessing said, he couldn't stick a pin into and label. And I knew, too, that it had cost him something to tell me that story.

"Well," I said, "that's only one more to the list of things we don't seem able to clear up. There's one point; that whatever the explana-

tion may be, it all seems to centre, in the end, round Menning himself."

Lennox rose and went to his desk. "It's what I've always said," he threw back over his shoulder. "Get Menning, and you get the root of all this mystery."

I sat pondering his story. It was not long before my ears caught the sound of a motor cycle along the road, and a few minutes after Herrick appeared. He looked as if he had ridden far and fast; his clothes were covered with dust and there were grimy circles round his eyes.

"No, I don't want to eat," he said. "I got a sandwich coming along. Just let me get this dirt off, that's all."

He went through to the kitchen, and we could hear him splashing at the sink. When he came back, still vigorously towelling his face, Lennox had already mixed him a drink at the sideboard.

"Well," Herrick said, settling himself in the chair Lennox had vacated, "let's begin at the beginning. When I left this morning, Austin, I couldn't tell you where I was going, because I didn't know myself. I had to pick up my information on the way. I was on the track of something which, it seems to me, none of us has so far taken into account, and that is, Jakey Menning's early life."

"He was born right in this county," said Lennox.

"He was not. That's where you make your mistake. He was between eight and nine years old when he first came here. His mother, when we first hear of her, was employed with a traveling show, owned by a German Jew called Goldstein, a sort of fourth rate circus that used to do one-night stands in the small towns and villages. She cooked for the men and looked after the wardrobe. While she was working with them Jakey was born. No one seems to have known just who his father was. The mother passed as a kind of half-wit. She was cunning under an appearance of heavy stupidity, spoke a poor English, was easily teased and enraged, and seems to have been treated as the butt of the company. They wintered usually in Pottsville, where the proprietor's brother kept a saloon. The proprietor's wife took rather a fancy to Jakey, and later on, when Jakey's mother, during the slack season, took a job as cook in a cheap eating-joint there, she simply abandoned the baby to the circus people. While she was employed there she met Menning, married him, and doesn't seem to have troubled about Jakey for several years. Probably she never told Menning of his existence.

"They settled in the country, where Aaron was

born, and a few years after, for reasons unknown, Menning deserted her. Then, for the first time, she seems to have remembered Jakey, now growing to an age when he might begin to make himself useful about the farm. She set about claiming him. The circus people, from what I could hear, made some opposition. Jakey was being trained as an acrobat and showed some promise, though he was a difficult child to manage. Moreover, they had kept him all this time and expected some return. Times, however, were slack, they probably foresaw trouble with the school inspectors also, and in the end they let the boy go.

“He worked about the farm, off and on, for some eight or ten years, and got himself thoroughly disliked, as you know, by all the Mennings’ neighbours. The criminal streak in him was already apparent, though in those days it only took the form of spitefulness and mental deficiency. He was idle and vagrant and finally, at about seventeen years old, took himself off one fine day and went back to the travelling show, which he managed to trace up through the Pottsville saloon-keeper. They took him back as an extra hand, to help with the wagons. He was not good enough for a performer, his training being interrupted, but the proprietor about that time had the idea of running one or two

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freak side-shows, and they tried Jakey out as the hoary old fake of 'wild man.' ”

Herrick paused a moment to light a fresh cigarette, and in that instant I saw Lennox's eye turn to me with something very like relief.

“It seems,” Herrick went on, “that he was quite a successful attraction and I can certainly believe it. There was naturally something apish and uncouth about him, and very little make-up would have turned the trick most naturalistically. He stayed with the show nearly two years, doing odd jobs by day and playing his wild-man stunt at the performances. And then some sort of queer thing must have happened.

“I couldn't get the whole truth of it from the Pottsville brother, who told me most of the story. Either he didn't know or he was unwilling to tell, but the gist of it is that there was some row and Jakey got suddenly fired. From what the Pottsville brother 'guessed,' Jakey played his rôle too realistically, and the proprietor refused then and there to keep him another day. He had a little money in his pockets, he turned up in Pottsville, where he hung about for two or three days, and then made his way back to the farm.

“I would give a great deal to have ten minutes with Goldstein himself, and know exactly what did happen and why Jakey was fired. I

gathered that it was something pretty unpleasant. But Goldstein is somewhere out in Ohio, and try as I would, I could get nothing more from the brother than what I have told you. I think myself there was something hushed up at the time, and that he is afraid even now of its coming out. But I got enough I think to throw some interesting light on what has happened since."

"Did you get any idea," Lennox asked, "of Jakey's make-up when he was with these people?"

"No. Why?"

"Tell him your story, Lennox," I said.

He repeated briefly what he had already told me. Herrick listened, his face intent.

"So that was——" He pulled himself up short. "Well, it isn't difficult to put two and two together. The obvious explanation is that Jakey has fallen back on his old circus stunt as a means of terrorizing the neighbourhood. It wouldn't be difficult. No one here, from what I can make out—possibly not even his own family—knew how he spent those two years while he was away. There is a form of mania which takes just that expression, and it is possible that in Jakey's case it began out of sheer maliciousness, and developed later into something a great deal worse—a fixed mania which, with the rousing of

the homicidal instinct, turned him actually, at moments, into the wild beast he pretended to be.”

“You think it was Menning—it was—well, what I saw—that attacked Lessing?”

“I am certain of it. Go over the thing carefully, Lennox. There was no stunt outside the possibility of a man with unusual physical strength and ability, who had had acrobatic training in boyhood. And remember that a maniac can perform feats that in his sane moments might be outside his powers. We are not dealing with a normal person. That’s the one thing in this whole business we’ve got to remember.” He rose. “Austin, will you come over to the bungalow with me? I’d like to see Lessing to-night.”

I looked at my watch. “Ten o’clock. I told them I’d be over. We’ll take the cycle. It’ll carry two of us.”

He had left the motor cycle outside the porch. As we wheeled it out to the roadway I said: “You think that is the explanation of the whole thing?”

Herrick gave me a quick look.

“I said it was the obvious explanation. It is. But there’s more mixed up with it than that. And it’s the other side of it that we shall never

get to the truth of until we get hold of Menning himself."

I thought of Lennox's description of what he had seen, in that fleeting glimpse, and in spite of myself a shudder went over me.

"Do you mean that mania can actually transform a human being to that degree?"

"Haven't you see enough, Austin, in your own experience, to answer that question?"

I was silent. Every doctor, I imagine, has had experiences which he is glad enough to put out of his mind, and though my own were limited so far, I had heard enough tales of abnormality, at second hand, to know that there was truth in Herrick's words.

I took my seat on the back of the motor cycle, and in a few minutes we had reached the rise of hill. Turning the corner, we could see the bungalow through the trees. There was still a light burning. As we approached, the deep melancholy howl of the dog broke on our ears. Evidently Lessing had not yet let him out.

We left the cycle against a tree and went up to the porch. The door stood wide open, the light streaming through it from the lamp on the table inside. Of Lessing or his sister there was no sign. Except for the steady howling of the dog in the shed, the place was absolutely silent.

We went through the empty rooms, came out

again on the porch. A chair was drawn up near the doorway, with a book dropped in it face-downward, as though someone had risen in haste. That, and the lamp left flaring on the table, gave me for the first time a definite thrill of uneasiness.

Herrick went back and lowered the flame. "They can't have gone far," he said. "They wouldn't have left the light that way. Let's try the studio."

We crossed the little space of ground beside the house. The studio was dark; the door was locked and the key on the outside. As we passed the tool-shed there was a tumult within. The dog, hearing our footsteps, flung himself against the door in a frenzy of eagerness, whining, scratching, tearing at the wood with his nails. There was something in the deep, agonized, almost human anxiety in his voice, raised, not in yelps, but in steady entreaty, that sent a queer thrill down by spine. Herrick felt it too. He stopped short.

"What's *got* that dog?"

"Lessing shut him in this evening. It was after——"

I paused. All at once there came back to my mind the dog's behaviour that afternoon, when Lessing dragged him back from the saw-mill, bristling and rebellious—Lessing's own face

when he joked about the rat. It was near the identical spot where we had missed the dog before, when he broke away from us on our way down, just before we saw Menning's mother. Menning's mother . . . and Menning himself had been seen in the neighbourhood the night before. In a flash I saw the whole thing clearly—Freeman's action, the ghost that haunted the milldam, Rebecca's rifled cream-pans and the old woman with her basket of chips. What a fool I had been!

In a moment I had drawn the bolt and the setter was free. He barely stopped to notice us; with a flash of his white chest and a wide-flung yelp of relief he was off across the road and into the woods.

I caught Herrick's arm. "Lessing is at the saw-mill. Come on—I'll tell you later!"

"The saw-mill?"

I saw his hand slip down to his pocket as we ran. The same thought was in both our minds. We broke through the underbrush on the far side of the road, stumbled by chance on the footpath and were racing along it, shoulder to shoulder, while the setter's barking still echoed in our ears.

For a while his voice guided us. Then, abruptly, he was silent. We paused on the edge of the clearing to take breath. All was still—that closed-in stillness of the woods at night,

when all daytime life hushed. Before us loomed the old mill, its broken roof and ruined timbers black against the sky. For a moment there was no sound but the pounding of the blood in our ears, the dry rustle of a dead bush as Herrick leaned forward, listening.

Then suddenly, from somewhere in the recesses of the old building itself, there broke on that tense stillness another sound—more horrible to me than anything else—the hoarse choking breaths and muffled worrying of a dog at grips with his enemy. It came, not from the main floor of the mill, but from the basement where the water-wheel hung. There was a doorway on the near side of the mill, formerly used for carting away the sawdust, but it had been nailed up, and remembering this I called to Herrick as I ran directly for the steep slope on the side by the sluice. Here there was open space to squeeze through, and with Herrick close on my heels I trampled a way through the breast-high weeds and bushes round the corner of the building and gained an entrance.

Within all was pitch black. The water was shut off, but a little trickle still flowed through, dripping from the slimy motionless bulk of the great wheel above us. The air was warm, heavy with the smell of rotting sawdust and of something else, fetid and nauseous. The worrying

had ceased; we could hear the broken rapid breathing of two bodies, there, unseen, somewhere within a few feet of us in the darkness. I made a step forward, but Herrick clutched my arm, and as he did so the fight broke out again with renewed fury, somewhere it seemed up in the far corner, among the drifted sawdust. I could recognize the setter's deep-throated snarls, the snap of teeth seeking a grip, and with it was another voice, deeper and more guttural—something wholly strange and horrible—something that snarled and panted and coughed in choking gasps. The darkness moved; there came the breath of a warm animal body, the straining of a heavy weight flung against resisting wood, and then the nailed planks gave way, the sudden square of the doorway was obscured by a tumbling, heaving mass and the next instant we were alone—alone in the darkness with silence round us and that fetid unforgettable smell on the air.

It was the same smell that Mary had complained of that evening, wafted to us as we sat on the porch—the smell, I knew now, that I had first noticed on the day I passed the Mennings' place in the early summer.

“Phew!” said Herrick.

He struck a match, shielding the flame with his hands. The little flicker threw out shadows

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high on the piled sawdust and gray ruined walls. We could make out the huge mass of the wheel, the shafts that ran to the story above, the great beams supporting the broken flooring over our heads. The match spluttered and went out, but in that instant it had shown us what we sought, a dark motionless figure lying huddled in the far corner, where the sawdust sloped up in a shadowy drift under the rafters.

Herrick reached it first, his feet sinking deep at every step as he scrambled up. I heard him draw his breath in sharply as I struck another match, and by its gleam saw Lessing, one arm doubled under him and the clothes nearly torn from his body, lying unconscious in a saturated pool of blood.

Of Mary there was no sign.

XXI

THE THING IN THE WOODS

TOGETHER we managed to get Lessing back to the house and laid him on the couch, and while Herrick held the lamp I did the best I could for his injuries with the means at my disposal. It was an ugly job. One arm and shoulder were badly mangled and the collar bone broken; he had lost a great deal of blood and there was a nasty contused wound above the temple. A flicker of consciousness came back while I was working over him, but the loss of blood told, and he lapsed back again almost immediately. There were stitches to be taken; nothing much could be done except to check the bleeding with temporary bandages and as soon as I could manage single-handed Herrick rode off to Lennox for help.

In reality it was not long, though it seemed to me an eternity that I kept that nightmare vigil, my ears strained for any sound from without, bending all my will-power on my task to keep me from the one thought that I dared not

face, Mary. Where had she gone—what had happened to her? I went over a thousand possibilities, trying to find some reasonable explanation to which I might cling, though as each moment went by the stillness became more and more a torture. If she had merely missed her brother and gone down the road to call for him we should have met her, or she would be back by now. If she had been with him at the mill, or had followed there . . . I thought of the deep blackness of the water at the end of the dam, where we had passed that evening, the sheer drop blow the sluice-gates, and shuddered.

It was with infinite relief I caught the approaching noise of the motor cycle and saw Herrick reappear, followed only a few moments later by Lennox with the light spring-wagon. It was decided to take Lessing straightway to the doctor's house, where he could be better looked after than in the bungalow. We laid a mattress in the bottom of the wagon and lifted him on to this, and Herrick and I on the motor cycle accompanied Lennox beyond the hollow at the foot of the hill. Before we started Herrick, his face grim and set in the lamplight, pulled out the revolver I had lent him that morning and handed it to me.

“Keep that, Austin. I bought another to-day. Lennox has his own.”

"There was an extra box of cartridges," I said, "in the table-drawer."

"Lennox gave them to me."

When we had seen the wagon well along the road we turned, and rode back to the bungalow.

"Now," said Herrick, when we stood once more in the lighted room, "the first thing is to find Mary. And then . . . there has got to be an end to this. Are you ready to face it?"

He did not need to ask me. I looked round on the little room, gay and friendly with its rugs and books and the great bowls of wild-flowers that Mary loved—the countless little signs of her occupation, a sweater flung across a chair, her work-basket of Indian grass on the table—the room in which I had spent so many happy hours, now suddenly sinister in its desertion. And then my eye fell on the couch where we had laid Lessing, and the hideous litter I had left in my haste—stained wads of cotton and the torn strips from his shirt with which we had striven to check the blood before we carried him up from the mill.

"For God's sake," I exclaimed impulsively, "let's get that cleared away before she gets back!"

Before Mary got back . . . the words died in my throat. But I gathered up the telltale evidence all the same—every last scrap and frag-

ment—and thrust them out of sight behind the kitchen woodbox, before I turned to Herrick.

“We’ll try Sliefers’ first,” he said. “There’s just the possibility she is there.”

It was a slight chance, and as it proved, fruitless. The farmer was still up, and opened the door to us in stockinged feet. No one there had seen Mary since the afternoon. Sliefer heard our errand with a grave face.

“There’s no house she’d have come to but this,” he said. “There’s only Scholl’s and Nevill’s at the Bend, and they were both asleep as you passed? They’re a-bed by ten. Besides, if there was anything out of the way they’d either one of them have sent over here straight. No. Unless the young lady’s missed her way, or met with some accident. . . .”

He looked at us doubtfully. It was no time to mince matters. We told him, as briefly as we could, what had happened that evening and how we had found Lessing at the mill.

He heard us out, his jaw set grimly. When we had finished he rose without a word, a tall, still stalwart figure in his stockinged feet, and crossing the kitchen took down his gun that hung on a rack above the door.

“I guess I’m coming with you,” he said.

I glanced at Herrick. He nodded.

“Three are better than two, Austin. We may

be glad of an extra hand before the night's out." He turned to Sliefer, who had laid his gun on the table, and was pulling on a pair of heavy boots. "Have you got a good dog? I don't mean the collie."

"Aye. There's old Spot, back in the barn. He'd pick up a trail anywheres. Nor he ain't none too friendly to Menning, either, that's one reason we've kep' him tied up, most of the time. Now I guess I'll step up an' leave word with Mother."

He opened the stairway door and tip-toed up, curiously noiseless on his heavy feet. We heard whispering, a smothered exclamation; then he came down, gently closing the door behind him.

"I ain't told her nothing, only that you'd missed Miss Lessing and we was going out to hunt her up. There's no need she should know about the rest of it. This ain't no woman's job, nor it ain't no sheriff's job either. If they'd come to me first off I know every track in these woods back an' forth, and it won't be easy for anyone to get away from me, not once we pick his trail up. Menning can run these woods like a fox, but he won't run far, not when I got a gun in my hand. Not that I'd be scared to meet him anywheres, gun or no gun, and I bet he knows it."

A strange expression flitted across Herrick's

face as he measured the farmer's sturdy figure with his eye. But he only said gravely: "You're a good neighbour, Mr. Sliefer. As you say, this is no sheriff's job now; it's up to us. And we're going to see it through."

We closed the door behind us.

"I told Mother to bolt that, once we're gone," Sliefer said. "Reckon we don't need no lantern."

"Better not," Herrick said.

The old man crossed to the barn and came back a few minutes later with the dog on a chain, a cross-bred hound by the look of him, heavily built and brindled white and brown.

"That's what they used to call a bear-dog," the farmer said, "when I was a boy. The breed's pretty well died out now. I've had old Spot here eleven years, and I had his mother an' grandmother before him. You don't see 'em nowadays, any more. They raise these light-built hounds now, but they ain't the fighters these dogs were."

The farmer was a brisk walker. He picked his way through the woods, turning here, pausing there, at what seemed to us invisible signs and landmarks, making his way unerringly through the trees and undergrowth, the hound close to his heels, till presently we stood once more on the open road a little below the bungalow. I looked eagerly towards the house, only to see

the turned down light burning just as we had left it.

“We’ll try here first,” Sliefer said.

He took two or three turns about the road and clearing, but the dog took no interest. We recrossed the road to the farther side, and here, among the underbrush near the path Herrick and I had taken, he showed the first signs of keenness, sniffing to and fro, his nose laid close to the ground. In a few moments he was off at a leisurely trot along the path.

“Picked up the other dog’s scent, most like,” said Sliefer, watching him. “Come on. We’ll find him at the mill.”

He took us by a short cut through the bushes, across a cleared space of stumps and blackberry vines, and turning into the woods at the left again, brought us in a few minutes on the saw-mill road. The hound was there before us, moving shadow-like about the clearing. When we came up to him he was clearly puzzled and uneasy. He moved warily, his forefeet stiffly braced, his ears laid back, the hair along his spine bristling as he snuffed to and fro.

I touched Herrick’s shoulder. “Do you see that? It’s the same way Leo was acting this afternoon.”

“Give him time,” said Sliefer. “I know Spot. He ain’t made his mind up yet.”

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Shifting the gun under his arm, he pulled out a can of tobacco and began to roll a cigarette. Somehow that natural matter-of-fact action did much to relax my tense nerves. With Herrick I watched the hound closely. He approached the broken doorway, sniffed, peered, circled off a couple of times and then, as though suddenly making up his mind to it, plunged inside, only to reappear an instant after and set off, head down, with a queer muffled whine, through the underbrush. I made a move to follow but Sliefer checked me.

“Wait a bit. He ain’t sure yet. He’ll give us the holler when he’s sure started.”

He was right. After a little while Spot came back, breaking cover near the back of the mill, and returned to us, uneasiness and perplexity in every line of his taut body. With his eyes fixed on his master’s face he waited, eager and yet strangely reluctant, and again with a thrill I noticed that involuntary bristling of his spine, the trembling of his lower jaw, as though at some unfamiliar and disturbing proximity. Twice the farmer spoke to him encouragingly, and twice the dog circled off, checked abruptly and came back. Sliefer grew impatient.

“I don’t know what’s got into the dog. He ain’t never acted that way before. Hey there, Spot! Get to it! Fetch em’ boy!”

For a moment the hound eyed him. Then, with the same abruptness with which he had entered the mill he raised his head, gave a low whine, and was off in a straight line through the underbrush. Almost immediately we heard his first call, the warning bell-like note of a hound on the found trail.

“He’s picked it up all right,” the farmer said. “Come on. I back Spot to keep a scent once he’s got it.”

We started after him, keeping as steady a pace as we could in the darkness. It was well that Sliefer was with us. He made his way with the unerring ease of a man used to the woods from boyhood, to whom night is almost the same as day, and all we needed to do was to follow in his tracks. The hound seemed to be keeping an even course, some couple of hundred yards ahead of us; his deep warning cry, pitched always on the same two notes, rang out at intervals and Sliefer had no difficulty in guiding his way by the sound.

Once, in the neighbourhood of the Menning house, the dog was at fault; he hesitated and all but turned aside towards the out-buildings, but in the end picked up the scent again and struck out in a northerly direction through the woods.

For nearly an hour we followed him, through tracts of dense second growth and across spaces

of stony pasture, out again on a back road, with an occasional darkened house tranquil in its grassy yard, looping and turning here and there, but on the whole keeping a fairly straight course. We crossed two sloping pastures, plunged into a thicket of young trees, and presently found ourselves on a space of rising ground, strewn with huge boulders and set with stunted juniper and spruce.

Ahead of us the hound's voice rang out clear and mournful, as it seemed to me with a deepening note. Sliefer paused and looked about him. The moon was rising. It showed the sharp line of hills, densely wooded on either side, with the dark cleft of a gorge between. Through the gap in a ruined stone fence we could see a cart track, all but obliterated, that wound into obscurity.

"I know this place," the farmer said. "It's near what they call Rocky Hollow. I haven't been here in years, but I used to know it well when I was a boy. I sort of suspicioned he was heading for here, right along. Once in them big rocks in there you won't trap a man easy, not if he knows his way. If we'd had time to head him off, now."

I glanced at Herrick. He was staring straight at that narrow closed-in gorge, his eyes keen and fixed.

"Is there any other outlet there?"

“Not easy. It’s straight-up rock at the far end and the woods are pretty thick. A man would have to make slow going, either way he took it. If he’s in there——”

We followed the cart track till it ended in a little grassy clearing from which a few steps brought us to the spot Sliefer had called “Rocky Hollow.” It was a small, narrow valley, filled with masses of piled boulders, some enormous, some small, the remains evidently of some ancient moraine. They looked as if giant hands had flung them there in sport, one upon another. Seen by daylight, with the black wooded hillside shutting it in, the place would be desolate enough; by the faint growing moonlight it had a look indescribably grim and sinister. Here, one felt, among those barren stones and piled boulders, that took fantastic shapes in the play of light and shadow, would be a fit hiding-place for anything evil.

Higher up the ravine, near us but hidden from sight, the hound was baying furiously, no longer the bell-like note that had guided us through the woods, but a hoarse deep voice of warning and anger. We made our way towards the sound, scrambling over the stones, and found him standing before an opening between two boulders, where an overhanging rock formed a sort of rough cavern. There was a glimpse of

something white within, and for a moment my heart turned sick with fear. But it was only a sheet of crumpled greasy newspaper that had evidently contained food. There were the charred remains of a small campfire and an old tin can lay in one corner.

Sliefer caught the dog by his collar as we peered inside. He picked up the crumpled sheet.

"A week old," he said. "Here's where he hung out, all right. No tramp ever comes here; it's too far off the main road."

Stooping forward, I had rested my hand on the rock at one side. It was warm to the touch, and I turned quickly to the blackened embers near.

"He's not far off, either. That fire——"

"Is cold," returned Herrick quickly, touching the ashes.

The stone was warm, I could have sworn it. Somebody, only a moment ago, had lain there. There was a sudden oath from Sliefer, and I turned to see, a hundred feet down the gorge, something that twisted and moved, a stealthy misshapen shadow, between the gray boulders. It was a bare glimpse, seen in a flash and blotted out immediately against the grayish rocky background, but in that second I thought of Lennox and I too felt cold down my spine.

The farmer's face had gone a curious sickly

white. He stood holding his gun stupidly, with fingers that shook.

“That . . . that weren’t no man . . . that. . . .”

“Did you see?” cried Herrick.

There was a sharp note of excitement in his voice. I nodded. “It . . . went off down there.”

Sliefer had pulled himself together. He swung round, his face suddenly savage.

“Man or beast, by God, we’ll get him now! *That* shan’t run the woods another night, not if I drop in my tracks!”

He shouted to the dog, but the hound, with the rare stupidity of his race, was still snuffing round the cave. Dragged away, he tried one scent and another in and out the boulders, but the tracks had been crossed and confused a dozen times and we lost precious minutes before he picked up his right trail at last, halfway down the gorge, and was off again on his slow loping gait.

He ran silently, this time, and in deadly earnest. Only occasionally his voice came back to us, low-pitched and warning. Downhill, over the shoulder of that same sloping pasture we had crossed before, then a wide detour to the right, skirting a swamp where our feet sunk deep between the tussocks—more open fields and then

again back to the woods. On we kept doggedly, through hours it seemed to me—more slowly now, for the steady pace was beginning to tell on us—in silence only broken by Sliefer's heavy breathing as he forged ahead, his ear bent always for the sound of the dog's voice. By his old hunter's instinct he knew which way the hound was running, and was able to save many a turn by short cuts which we followed unquestionably, relying on that seventh sense of his which never seemed to fail us.

It was getting on towards dawn when Sliefer paused finally at a cross-road which seemed to me familiar.

"See that?" he said. "There's the right-hand fork that turns back to the Bend, past the old Sullivan house. He's circling back on his old tracks. A while back I thought he was trying to make that tract of woods the other side of the State road, but the dog's headed him out of that. It's getting on for daylight now, and the way I figure it he'll try and make for some place he knows. He daren't show up round the village and I reckon he'll keep clear of the old house, for he knows that's been watched. By the way he's headed now, it's either the saw-mill or some other place near it. He knows he can't give Spot the slip again in the woods and he's hard pushed—ain't got much chance now to pick an' choose.

I say we won't waste time but jest chance it and cut in right here towards the mill. There's an old wood-road just a little ways further up that'll be easier going than if we took the long way round."

"Right," said Herrick. He loosened the revolver in his belt. "Are we agreed? Whatever we see, close in on it, but don't fire unless you have to."

Sliefer gave him a quick, grim look.

"I reckon nothin'll get by me again. That don't happen twice. We ain't any bunch of girls that he can fool with his damn play-acting."

Again that queer look flitted across Herrick's face, but he said nothing, only fell in silently beside me as we followed Sliefer into the path.

It was darker here. The trees shut in close about us. Sliefer was a few paces ahead. Presently I felt Herrick's hand on my arm.

"Less than half an hour to daybreak! God, Austin, if we can only beat him to it!"

He quickened pace as he spoke.

"What do you mean? We'll get him anyhow."

"We'll get Menning, yes . . . but we mayn't get the thing that attacked Dick. Yes, they're the same, but—Austin, I can't explain to you now, but I tell you we've got to make every effort in these last few minutes. If Sliefer's right, and

he's doubled back, we're all right. Otherwise. . . ."

"But he must know——"

"He *knows*. He isn't playing for safety; he knows that's over. He wasn't playing for safety when he made that big detour, he's playing for time. It's time that matters, and it's there we've got to beat him. Austin, Sliefer talks of play-acting, but is it play-acting that can keep a man ahead of a dog for the best part of the night? Was it play-acting that half-killed Lessing? No, if we're ever to know the truth we've got to know it now, within these next twenty minutes. Ah!"

It was the hound again, sudden, sharp, and near at hand. Sliefer had been right after all. We were within a few steps of the saw-mill clearing, but the dog was there before us. He was circling the ground, barking furiously as he had done in the gorge, his attention divided between the mill itself and the group of trees, with an old dead chestnut among them, that stood within a dozen feet of the building and a little nearer the sluice gate. But he left the trees when we came up and flung himself savagely against the boarded doorway.

"That was open when we left it, Herrick—do you remember?"

He took out his revolver.

"Go round to the back, Sliefer, and take the dog with you. Austin, watch this end from outside. I'll go through; I've got the flashlight."

"I'm coming with you," Sliefer said.

"All right. One must stay outside, in case . . . Austin, it'll be you, then. If anything—*anything*, you understand—tries to get past you, shoot to cripple it. Fire low. Remember what I told you!"

He flung the door open; I heard the quick rush of the dog's feet. With every nerve tense to straining-point I listened, but the seconds slowly passed and there was no further sound. I moved a few paces back, to get a clearer view of the building and waited.

From within I fancied once I could hear Sliefer's voice. The flashlight moved to and fro, its gleam visible through the cracks of the old walls. Now they were going through the upper floor.

There was a stillness in the air, that chill hush which comes just before dawn. Already the light was changing, becoming faintly clear and shadowless. Somehow, with this drawing-near of daylight, of the return to common day shapes and things, the nightmare feeling of those dark hours dropped from me; I seemed to see it as something fantastic, monstrous, a bad dream. All the events of the last few hours crowded in upon me—the finding of Lessing, Mary's dis-

appearance, our grim chase through the night woods. How far were these things connected—what was Herrick's idea? What were we after—a criminal, hunted and desperate, endowed with animal strength and cunning, but yet a man like ourselves—or a figment of Herrick's brain?

From within the building I heard an exclamation, the dog's sharp whine. Nerves suddenly taut, I waited, my eyes fixed on the broken doorway. And then some instinct—I don't know what—made me turn and look up.

I was standing almost directly under the old dead chestnut, near which the dog had been nosing when we arrived. It's bare greyish limbs, gnarled and twisted, stretched above me, bare in the growing light. Bare—but as I looked one of those twisted boughs seemed to stir and change, heave slowly, detach itself in some monstrous way from the rest and take living shape. I tried to cry out, dragged helplessly at my revolver, but before I could get it free something fell on me, clutching, I was borne to the ground beneath a hairy living weight, bestial, loathesome, an unnameable horror.

For an eternity, it seemed to me, we struggled there. The thing was stronger than I, and strive as I would I could get no clear view of it. Coarse long fur, indescribably filthy, was against my mouth and nose, and my clutching hands

met in it helplessly. I made a supreme effort and twisted my head to one side till my face pressed the earth, in a blind instinct of preservation. Long curved nails caught at my throat, and once I fancied a hand that was partly human. Strangely, through it all, I kept my mind somehow clear; the fear of losing consciousness was stronger in me than any other. This, I remember thinking, was the Thing that had attacked Lessing, that had killed the two cyclists, falling on them as it had fallen on me. Herrick was right . . . I would tell Herrick . . . and I wondered what they would say when they found me. Darkness shut down; I was lying under a heavy mountain, and then the mountain lifted, I heard the hoarse snarl of the dog and an oath and Herrick's voice crying sharply: "Don't shoot!"

There was a blinding report close to me. Somehow I staggered to my feet. Herrick was supporting me. The smoke cleared away, and through it I could see Sliefer, the gun in his hands, and on the ground something that writhed and twisted in beastlike shape and yet cried out with a human voice and dragged itself, still dreadfully crying, up the slope to the water's edge, swayed there for a sickening instant and fell with a splash into the black depths below.

XXII

THE SILVER BULLET

PALE clear sunlight; early twittering of birds; the clean freshness of dawn. . . .

The lamp was still burning on the table when we reached the bungalow. Herrick put it out. Then he laid a hand on my shoulder.

“Austin——”

There was a clatter of wheels on the road outside. Someone had pulled up outside the house. It was a boy—Hiram Scholl’s boy—taking his load of milk-cans over to the creamery.

“I don’t know as you’ve missed that yeller dog that belongs here,” he called out, “but if the folks were looking for him I thought I’d tell you. He’s over to the little house back on our wood-lot up the road. I called to him, an’ I dunno but he’s hurt or something, for he’s just layin’ there an’ he wouldn’t come. So if you want to go after him I guess he’s still there.”

“Leo!” I exclaimed.

Herrick turned to me quickly as the boy drove off. “What house is that?”

“Hiram Scholl’s. It was empty, but someone said that Menning’s mother—Herrick, there’s just a chance!”

I sprang for the motor-cycle, leaning where we had left it the night before, by the side of the house. In a moment I had it out on the road and Herrick swung to the seat behind me as I started the engine up.

Five minutes brought us to the spot where the house stood, a tiny frame shack set on a space of half-cleared woodland back from the road. To reach it we had to climb the slope of stony pasture that divided Scholl’s land from the woods, and as we came in sight of the house, half-hidden among the stunted spruce and juniper trees my eyes caught a yellowish spot stretched on the doorstone.

It was the setter. He whined as I called to him, but without turning, his gaze fixed on the closed door. His fine coat was draggled and matted with blood about the throat; he sprang to his feet as we came near and began to paw at the doorway.

I knocked. No one moved within. The one window was close shuttered, but I fancied, listening, I could hear a faint crooning sound from inside.

Together we set our shoulders to the door. It gave way, and we found ourselves in the one

tiny living-room of the house. It was dark and close there was a disorder of household things piled here and there. On a small broken rocker in the middle of the floor, Mrs. Menning sat huddled, swaying to and fro, with the low crooning mutter we had heard from outside. She had an old coloured handkerchief tied over her head and a small silver cross was hung on a thin chain round her wrinkled neck. Her aged face was impassive; her eyes, uncannily keen and bright, seemed to look straight through us into distance.

“Where is Miss Lessing?” I asked.

She made no sign of having heard me, only kept up that faint unintelligible muttering. Herrick went over and shook her gently by the shoulder.

“Where is Miss Lessing? You got to tell us.”

She twisted her shoulder from his grasp and sunk lower into the chair, her eyes averted. My ears had caught a sound overhead. There was no stairway in the room, but behind a pile of furniture a wooden button betrayed a door that I had taken for an ordinary closet. Hastily, I began to drag the things aside. The old woman saw my purpose and slipped with sudden agility to her feet, her eyes blazing with anger, but Herrick thrust her aside and in an instant we had the door open and were upstairs, the dog at our heels.

“Mary!”

I caught her in my arms—unhurt, thank God—and carried her down, through the shuttered room, past the old muttering woman—out into the open and the clean air.

“Oh, Austin, that old woman! She met me on the road—I had gone to call for Dick, and she said she was looking for me; that Dick had had an accident and they’d brought him to this house and sent for me. She told me to go upstairs, that he was there, and she shut the door and wouldn’t let me out. There was no window; no one could have heard me from outside. And then Leo found me, I heard him barking and she tried to drive him away, but he wouldn’t go. Good old Leo!” She put her arm round the setter, who was trying hard to reach her face with his tongue. “I knew he’d help you to find me. Austin, where *is* Dick?”

I had to tell her, breaking it as gently as I could.

“Will you take me to him at once, please—now! Austin, I knew something was going to happen—I felt it. That’s why I was worried, last night—I couldn’t explain. And then shut up alone there, not knowing what it was. . . . That old woman—she was dreadful, but she wasn’t unkind to me. Do you suppose she *knew*

—that she just wanted to get me somewhere safe?”

Who knew? Was there perhaps a spark of human feeling in that strange warped soul, half unhinged by her own troubles, something that Mary's chance kindness, that afternoon by the saw-mill, had reached and touched? It might have been.

We walked down the hill, and I took Mary on the motor-cycle behind me as far as Lennox's, leaving Herrick to follow on foot. Dick was better. He had passed a feverish night, Lennox said, but the fever had left him with dawn and he was in an exhausted but normal sleep when we arrived.

I left Mary with him, and walked back along the road to meet Herrick.

“And now,” I said, “tell me—tell me the whole thing. Jack, what was it?”

We were near the old twisted cedar by the hollow, the tree by which Aaron had met his death that spring. Herrick sat down on a boulder by the roadside and began to scrape slowly at his pipe.

“I told you about Menning and his wild-man stunt—all that I found out the other day. Menning had a criminal twist and he knew how to turn that trick to his own ends. It is far easier to simulate the grotesque—the superhuman, if

you like—than most people suppose. Isn't that, after all, the basis of the witch-doctors' power? Even an ordinary man becomes horrible if you put a mask on him. And remember that Menning had a streak of abnormality to start with, and the thing may very easily, as I said, have become an obsession with him. Anyway that's the best explanation one can put on it, and the one that Lennox and our friend Sliefer, and Lessing himself, will agree upon. After all, it pretty well covers the facts."

I remembered his words the night before.

"Then what did you mean about the dawn?"

Herrick was silent a moment.

"We're all well out of a bad business, Austin," he said then. "Don't you think we'd better let it go at that?"

"But you had another theory. You had it that morning, after the fire. You wouldn't tell me what it was. But I don't imagine you've changed your mind altogether."

"No, I didn't change my mind," Herrick said. He put his hand into his pocket. When he withdrew it there lay, on his palm, the little battered silver button that Lennox had first shown us.

"You remember, Austin," he said, "that I recalled one or two facts to your mind that evening. This was one of them. I want you to look at it again."

"It is a button," I said. "A button such as you find on some European peasants' costumes."

"Westphalian peasants, such as Menning's mother came from. Lennox overlooked that fact, though as the button is badly defaced we can excuse him. I'll help you out, Austin. It is of pure silver, very soft, and it has been hammered to form a rough bullet that could be fired from an old-fashioned muzzle-loading gun."

"I don't see how that helps you."

"I want you to think," he said, "what particular associations there are with a silver bullet."

I stared at the little pellet in my hand, striving with some vague recollection at the back of my mind.

"They were used against . . . against . . . some sort of witchcraft," I said at last. "I don't see——"

"They were used against lycanthropy," said Herrick.

I stared at him. I suppose I looked stupid. I felt it. It was as though some spectre, strange, ghastly, altogether of another world, had risen up suddenly there before us in these quiet Pennsylvania woods.

"A mania—subject imagines himself some beast, resulting in actual physical transformations—exhibits depraved appetites—frequently

homicidal . . .” I recalled haltingly the words of an old treatise.

“They did more than believe they were animals,” said Herrick dryly. “They seem to have succeeded in impressing their belief pretty strongly upon their neighbours and relatives. Did you ever dig into old records of that sort, Austin? The were-wolf stories of the Middle Ages? They’re rather grim reading.”

I was silent.

“Remember our facts,” he went on. “Mening’s mother came from Westphalia, one of the parts of Europe where the belief in lycanthropy is most widely spread and where its existence is still credited among the peasants of to-day. Lycanthropy was believed to be a hereditary taint, as transmissible as insanity, which may lie dormant through one or more generations, so much so that at one time the relatives of an accused man or woman were all held suspect. There seems to have been more or less of a mystery about the Mennings altogether, chiefly on account of the mother’s character, and most particularly in regard to Jakey. Remember also what Lennox said about the strong persistence of type in both sons, although of different paternity. We have Lennox’s assertion that there was something peculiar, ‘animal’, about Jakey, which certainly impressed him, but

which he seemed rather at a loss to describe. Then there is that unexplained incident when Jakey was with the circus. Whatever it was, it was something that gave such a shock to the proprietor—who, remember, had originally conceived the idea of the wild-man stunt himself, so wasn't likely to have been taken in by acting—that he sacrificed his best drawing card then and there sooner than have Jakey remain another night with the show. All the brother would say was that he 'guessed Jakey acted too well,' which in itself is fairly significant.

"That Aaron knew, or suspected, certain facts about his brother, there is no doubt. Why else should he so obstinately oppose any medical examination, and particularly the idea of Jakey being removed even temporarily from their control? Why did he make the very singular statement that Jakey was 'all right in the daytime,' and that *at night they shut him up?*"

"And the bullet?" I asked.

"Do you remember that Aaron promised if it became necessary he would take steps? What those steps were he did not say, but I believe myself that this silver bullet answers the question. Remember the horror in which lycanthropy was held, the revulsion it excited, and think whether he would not have resorted to the

gravest measures sooner than have the whole concealed story come to light.

“I think that Aaron had already determined that night, unknown to their mother, to put an end to the whole thing; that he went out to seek his half-brother at the time, and under that form, when alone it would be possible to bring himself to do that which he felt had to be done. Jakey must have suspected. There was a struggle between the two, and it was Aaron who was killed, before he had time to use the silver bullet which he dropped, there, in the moment of unexpected attack. The old mother must have known the truth; through all her horror and superstition her love for her first son survived, and together they concocted the story of Aaron’s absence with the wagon. That she paid bitterly, many times over, for her impulse, there is no doubt. She was now completely under Jakey’s dominion—the dominion of a being little better than a monster, whom she dared not now denounce, for who would have believed her story?

“It is certain that what we saw last night is what attacked Lessing, and had attacked him previously. It reached him through the skylight, but not altogether as he thought. It climbed. You will remember that in every instance the attack was from overhead.”

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"But the thing that . . . that I touched . . ."
I cried. "It was *furry!* It——"

I stopped short, taken with a sudden shudder.

"I know," said Herrick.

"I had hoped," he went on, "that you didn't retain any very definite impression. That's why——"

"*You* saw it."

"We all saw something. We thought we did."

"And Sliefer . . ." I paused. "Herrick, there was something else. I remember now. You were holding me. And you told Sliefer not to fire. I wondered . . ."

"They say there is a change, one way or another, at the moment of death," Herrick said. "I knew it. I tried to stop him." He paused a moment. "I was too late. That's all."

We sat there for a moment, not speaking. Then Herrick knocked his pipe out against the boulder and rose to his feet.

"Come on back to the house. Mrs. Searle will have breakfast for us, and we both look rather a wreck!" He laid a hand on my shoulder. "Take my advice, Austin, and put this whole thing out of your mind. I told you in the beginning—there's the other explanation; why not stand by it? As I say, it covers all the facts. The rest is between us three. Look at it how

you will, whatever happened last night happened for the best.”

I remembered the thing that had cried and twisted on the ground, and was silent. Herrick was right.

As soon as Lessing was able to travel we went down, the three of us, to the little cottage on the Sound which they had rented for the remainder of the fall. Herrick came down for an occasional long week-end, and it was during one of these, when we were lounging out on the beach before supper, that he handed me without comment a little cutting from a Pennsylvania local paper.

It was headed “Man’s Body found in Mill-pond” and stated briefly how some boys, fishing in Sliefer’s dam, had discovered the body of a man, believed to be that of a certain Aaron Menning, chicken pedlar, who had disappeared from the neighborhood mysteriously some weeks before. The body, which had lain for a considerable time in the water, showed the trace of two bullet wounds, but owing to the difficulties of medical evidence after so long a time had elapsed it was not possible to prove that either of these had been sufficient to cause death, which was brought in, on the finding of the coroner’s jury, as accidental. “It will be remembered,” the

article concluded, "that equally mysterious circumstances attended, less than a year ago, the death of Menning's stepbrother, whose body was found at a spot not half a mile from the scene of this later tragedy. Though there was no suggestion of foul play at the time, rumor later connected Aaron's name, in no uncertain terms, with his stepbrother's death, a rumor which his disappearance served to strengthen in many persons minds. Whatever the circumstances which led to this second tragedy, and how far the two may be connected, will remain for ever a mystery, since Aaron's death closes definitely the last chapter in the story of this singularly ill-fated family."

"What's that?" asked Lessing.

I slipped the cutting into my pocket. My compact with Herrick still held good.

"Only some more nonsense of Jack's."

Lessing grinned up at me from where he lounged, one bandaged arm stretched above his head, in the deck-chair.

"I should think, as an engaged man, you ought to be getting impervious by this time."

"I am. Don't you worry!"

Over the lawn, through the warm-scented dusk, came Mary's voice from the porch.

"Austin!" she called. "Dick! Are you three going to sit there all night?"

Herrick moved away.

“Come on,” he said over his shoulder. “Supper is ready, and I won’t risk being told again that I monopolize you all the day!”

THE END