The Horla

By GUY de MAUPASSANT

This version, considered by H. P. Lovecraft to stand without a peer among stories of its type, and acclaimed by other authorities as one of the three greatest weird horror stories, was specially translated by our own George Allan England. Mr. England refers to the tale a number of times in "The Elixir of Hate" which is the feature novel of next month's (October) issue of this magazine

I

MAY 8.—How fine a day! I passed all this morning stretched out on the grass in front of my house, under the huge plane-tree which covers and protects it. I love this spot; I love this house, where I have grown to manhood. From my windows I can behold the Seine flowing at the foot of my garden, the great wide Seine, which goes from Rouen to Le Havre, covered with passing boats.

How pleasant it was this morning! About eleven o'clock, a long tow of ships, in charge of a tug, filed past my iron fence. After a couple of English hookers, with their crimson pennants fluttering against the sky, came a magnificent Brazilian three-master, pure white, wonderfully spick-and-span. I saluted her, why, I know not. The sight of her gave me extraordinary pleasure.

May 12.—I've had a touch of fever the last few days. I'm a bit under the weather; perhaps, after all, it's only a slight attack of melancholia.

I wonder whence come these mysterious influences which transform our happiness into dejection, and change our self-confidence into distress? I could almost think the air itself, the invisible air, is full of incomprehensible powers, whose mystic presence casts a spell upon us.

I awake, perhaps, full of life and spirits; I feel like singing. Why? Then I take a walk down along the river; and suddenly, after I've been but a short distance, I come back to the house all upset and wretched, as though some misfortune were awaiting me. Again, why?

Can it be that some slight chill, striking my skin, upsets my nerves and so disturbs my peace of mind? Can it be the form of the clouds, the color of the daylight or the variable hues of things which, through my eyes, distress my thoughts? How can I tell? Everything about us, every object that we see without directly looking at it, everything we touch or meet, must have direct effects upon our organs, our ideas—effects as rapid as they are inexplicably surprising.

This mystery of the invisible—how deep it is! With our miserable little senses we cannot fathom it. We cannot pierce it with our eyes, incapable of seeing the infinitely great as well as the infinitely little, blind to that which is too near, as well as to that which lies too far removed, taking cognizance neither of the inhabitants of a drop of water nor of the inhabitants of a star. Our ears, our taste, our smell deceive us. Ah, if we only had still other organs which could do miracles, how many unknown things we might discover all about us!

May 16.—I'm ill, indeed. And last month I felt so well! I seem to have a fever, an atrocious fever. Shall I rather call it a heated enervation? It pains my soul as deeply as it does my body. Without respite, I feel a frightful sensation as of some threatening danger, an apprehension of some approaching peril, as though death were drawing near. No doubt this

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presentiment is due to some still undiscovered malady, now germinating in my flesh and blood.

May 18.—I have just been to consult my doctor, for sleep has forsaken me. He found my pulse high, pupil dilated, and nerves high-strung, but said none of the symptoms were grave. He prescribed baths and potassium bromid.

May 25.—No change. My condition is truly singular. As evening draws on an incomprehensible uneasiness takes possession of me, as though night hid some terrible danger. I bolt my dinner, and then try to get interested in a book, but I can't understand the words. I can hardly read the letters. Then I pace up and down my sitting-room, oppressed by a confused and irresistible terror—a terror of my bed and of sleep.

About two o'clock in the morning I go up-stairs to my room. No sooner there than I double-lock the door and shoot the bolts. I'm afraid—of what? Until this recent trouble I've never been timid in my life. I open my closets; I listen, listen—what for? Singular that a simple disturbance of the circulation, a slight indisposition, a nerve-irritation or a perturbation of the human mechanism can make the most cheerful man grow melancholy, the bravest a coward!

I go to bed. I wait for sleep as if it were an executioner. Horrified at thought of it, I lie there, my heart throbbing, my body trembling, till the very moment when I fall suddenly into oblivion, as a man might drop into an abyss of stagnant water to drown himself. I no longer feel sleep stealing over me, as I used to—perfidious sleep, hidden near me, waiting to seize me by the head, to shut my eyes and annihilate me!

FOR a long time I sleep—several hours—then a dream grips me. No, no, a nightmare! I feel that I'm in bed asleep. I feel and see this. And I feel also that somebody is drawing near, looking at me, touching me, getting upon the bed.

This person, this Thing, kneels on my breast, clutches my throat between its hands and squeeezes, squeezes with all its might, to strangle me.

I struggle, bound down by that atrocious impotence which paralyzes us in dreams. I try to shout, but cannot. I fight to move. Impossible!

With frenzied efforts, gasping, I labor to turn over, to fling off this Being which crushes and stifles me. I cannot!

Then suddenly I waken, mad with panic, reeking with sweat. I light a candle. I am alone.

After this crisis, which comes on regularly every night, I finally get back to sleep, and slumber calmly till daybreak.

June 2.—Worse. What can be the matter? The bromid is worthless. So are the baths. A little while ago, to tire myself out, though in truth I was already exhausted, I went for a long walk in the forest of Roumare.

At first I thought the fresh air, light and sweet, and odorous of grass and leaves, would put new blood into my veins, new strength into my heart. I started down the big hunting-road, then turned toward La Bouille through a narrow path, between two armies of enormously high trees.

Suddenly a shudder ran through me. It was no ordinary shiver, but a strange and agonized chill.

Uneasy at being alone in the wood, I hastened on, foolishly afraid, stupidly so. I hurried through the profound solitude. All at once it seemed to me that I was being followed, that somebody was dogging my heels, close enough to touch me.

Quickly I turned. I was alone. Behind me I saw only the straight path, high and empty—fearfully empty. In the other direction the path also extended till it faded from sight, just the same. It terrified me.

I shut my eyes. Why? I began to turn round and round, to spin on my heels like a top. I almost fell. When I opened my eyes the trees were dancing, the earth floating. I had to sit down. Then—ah! I no longer knew which way I had come. Strange, strange! Very strange indeed! I no longer knew anything about it. I turned toward the right, and started; and presently found myself once more in the hunting-road.

June 3.—A hideous night! I'm going away for a few weeks. No doubt a little trip will put me in shape again.

July 2.—Back again, and cured. I've had, moreover, a most delightful trip to Mont Saint-Michel. Met an old priest there, who told me some weird legends about invisible beings. Stuff and nonsense! Yet, after all, I've often thought since then of his strange tales.

July 3.—Slept badly. There certainly must be some feverish influence in this

house, for my coachman suffers from the same disease. When I came home yesterday I noted his peculiar pallor.

"What's the matter with you, Jean?" I asked.

"I can't sleep, sir," he answered. "Night plays me out. Ever since you've been away something has held me like—well, like fate."

The other servants, however, seem all right. But I've a great fear of being attacked once more.

July 4.—Yes, surely I've been attacked again. My former nightmares are all coming back. Last night I plainly felt somebody crouching on me—somebody or something. Its mouth on mine, it drank the breath out from between my lips. Yes, and it gripped my very life right out of my throat, like a monstrous leech.

At last, satiated, it got up. I awoke so racked, broken, and annihilated that I could not move. If this sort of thing goes on, I shall certainly quit the place again.

July 5.—Am I going mad? What happened last night is so incredibly strange that my head whirls when I even think of it!

According to my usual custom of late, I carefully locked my door. Then, feeling a bit thirsty, I drank a half a glass of water. Quite casually I noted at the time that my carafe was full, right up to the glass stopper.

After that I went to bed. I fell into one of my frightful sleeps, out of which I was awakened some two hours after by a still more frightful shock.

Imagine a man who, murdered in deep sleep, wakes up with a knife sticking into his lungs. A man who gasps hideously, all covered with blood. A man who can no longer breathe and is going to die, and cannot understand. Well, that's the way I felt!

Yes, so it seemed to me. But after a while I pulled together again. Then I felt thirsty once more. I lighted a candle and approached the table where my carafe stood. I raised it and tipped it over my glass.

Nothing ran out. It was empty. Totally empty!

AT first I couldn't understand a thing. Then suddenly such a horrible emotion surged over me that I had to sit down, or rather, fell back into a chair.

I leaped up again. I stared all around me. Nothing!

Again I sank down, wild with astonishment and fear in the presence of that transparent crystal. I stared at it with wild eyes, vainly endeavoring to understand. My hands shook. Somebody—or something—had drunk that water!

Who? I? No doubt. Who else could it have been? So then, I'm a sleepwalker? I live that mysterious double life which makes us suspect that two separate beings dwell in each human body? Which makes us think that possibly some foreign intelligence, beyond the reach of our sight or understanding, sometimes animates our captive forms?

Ah, who can understand my abominable suffering? Who can comprehend the emotions of a sane man, wide-awake and full of reason, looking with horror through the glass of a carafe—staring at all that remains of a little water which during his sleep has disappeared? I stayed there till daybreak, afraid to go back to bed.

July 6.—I am going mad! Something drank all the water again last night. Or I did! But was it I? Was it? Who *could* it be? Merciful Heavens, I am going mad! Can no one save me?

July 10.—I have just made some astonishing experiments. I must indeed be a madman. And yet—

On the night of the sixth, before going to bed, I put on my table some wine, milk, water, bread, and strawberries.

Something drank—was it I?—all the water and a little of the milk. The strawberries and wine were not touched.

On the seventh I tried the same test again. Same result.

On the eighth I left out the water and the milk. Nothing was disturbed.

At last, on the ninth, I put back on the table the water and the milk. I took care however, to wrap both carafes with white muslin and tie in the stoppers. Then I smeared my lips, beard, and hands with plumbago, and went to bed.

The usual invincible sleep seized me at last, followed by the horrible awakening. I had not moved at all. Even my bedclothes showed no marks of the plumbago.

I climbed out of bed and ran to the table. The cloths around the carafes were immaculate. Palpitating with fear I snatched off the strings. The water had all been drunk; so had the milk! My God!

I started at once for Paris.

II

JULY 12.—Paris. I must have been out of my senses the last few days—must have been the plaything of my enervated imagination. That is, unless I really am a somnambulist, or the victim of some obscure psychic suggestion. In any case, it seems as though my mental perturbation had almost reached insanity. But twenty-four hours in Paris have been quite enough to restore my balance.

Yesterday, after divers errands and visits, I finished my evening at the Théâtre-Français. The piece was one by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*, and his quick, powerful wit completed my cure. Surely solitude is dangerous. We must have, all about us, men who think and speak. Too long alone, we people the emptiness with fantoms.

I came home to my hotel, along the boulevards, very gay and high-spirited. There, in the midst of the elbowing crowd I reflected, now without irony, on my terrors and my beliefs of a week ago. Why, then, thought I—I really was convinced that some invisible being dwelt beneath my roof! How weak-brained we are, to be sure; how quickly we go astray as soon as any little incomprehensible fact turns up! Rather than dismiss it by saying: "I don't understand, simply because the cause is beyond me," we immediately conjure up frightful mysteries and supernatural powers.

July 30.—Back home again. Everything all right. Still, I can't help thinking of what I heard in Paris a week ago.

I was dining one day with Mme. Sable, my cousin. There was a little party of guests. Dr. Parent was among them. You know Parent, of course, the famous expert in nervous diseases and in those extraordinary phenomena induced by hypnotism and suggestion. He told us about the striking results produced by English scientists and by the doctors of the Nancy School. Among other remarks I recall this one:

"We are now on the point of discovering one of nature's most profound secrets —yes, one of the very most important secrets in the world. Ever since man has been thinking at all, he has felt the contact of a mystery which his coarse, imperfect senses have not been able to penetrate. He has tried to bolster up the impotence of his physical being by the efforts of his intelligence.

"While that intelligence still remained rudimentary, the invisible phenomena of nature took various stupid and frightful forms. Hence, of course, arose popular belief in the supernatural legends of wandering spirits, fairies, gnomes, ghosts —even the legend of God itself. No truer words were ever uttered than those of Voltaire: 'God created man in his own image, and man has liberally returned the compliment!'"

August 2.—Nothing new. Magnificent weather. I pass my time watching the Seine flow by.

August 4.—Quarrels among my servants. They claim somebody's breaking glassware in the cupboards, at night. The valet accuses the cook, who accuses the maid, who accuses the other two. Who's really to blame? It would take a cleverer fellow than I to say.

August 6.—This time I'm not mad! I've seen something—I've seen—*seen!* No more doubt about it, for I've seen it! Fear has struck into my very marrow. I have seen it!

About two o'clock I was walking in my rose-garden. The sun was shining bright. I was going through the path where grow the autumn roses, now beginning to bloom.

Just as I was stopping to look at a *géant des batailles* with three magnificent blossoms, I saw—distinctly saw—the stalk of one of these blossoms bend, as though an invisible hand had twisted it. I saw it break, as if that hand had plucked it! Then the flower swung upward, following a curve such as would be made by a hand carrying it toward a face. It stayed there a moment, hanging alone and motionless in the transparent air, a frightful crimson blot hardly three paces from my eyes.

Wild with panic, I flung myself forward to snatch it. I found nothing; it had vanished. Then I was seized with a furious rage against myself, for a reasonable man isn't permitted to have any such hallucinations as that.

But was it an hallucination? I went back to look at the stalk and found it at once, freshly broken, between the other two still whole.

Mind and soul completely routed, I returned to the house. I am certain now—as sure as I am that day follows night—some invisible Being exists near me. A Being which lives on milk and water, which can touch and handle and

move material objects; a Being, therefore, of some material nature itself, though imperceptible to our senses. A Being, like myself, dwelling beneath my roof. . . .

AUGUST 7.—Slept quietly. *He* drank the water from my carafe, but did not trouble my repose.

I ask myself if I really am insane. Just now, walking in the clear sunshine along the river-bank, doubts began to invade my reason—no longer vague doubts and fears such as I had felt up till now, but absolute, precise, and vivid. I have seen madmen myself. I have known some to remain perfectly rational and lucid, extraordinarily so, regarding the everyday matters of life. Only one point has marked them as mad. They could talk about everything with great clearness, with depth and subtlety; then all at once, verging the shoals of their delusion, they burst their bonds, went shipwrecked and sank in that frightful, furious ocean full of lashing waves, fogs, and tempests which we call "madness."

I should indeed believe myself insane, hopelessly mad, were I not aware of these phenomena; were I not wholly informed about my own condition; did I not plumb my own vagaries and analyze them with entire lucidity. It seems, therefore, that I am merely a man with an hallucination, about which I can reason.

Some unknown disturbance must have taken place in my brain—one of those disturbances which psychologists today attempt to note and study. This disturbance has probably created a deep fissure in my mind, in the logic and the order of my ideas. Such phenomena take place in those dreams which lead us through the most improbable phantasmagorias, without surprising us at all, for the simple reason that our controlling apparatus, our means of verification, have abdicated, at the same time that our imaginative faculties remain awake and active.

May it not be that one of the imperceptible keys of the mental instrument is paralyzed? After certain incidents, men sometimes lose all memory of proper names, or of verbs, or of numbers—again, merely of dates, and so on. The localization of every category of ideas can be completely proved. So then, why should I wonder if the simple faculty of controlling the unreality of certain illusions has just now gone astray?

Following the water's edge, I thought of all this. The sun was flooding the river with radiance, making the earth delicious, filling me with love of life, love for the swallows, which delighted my eyes with their agility, love for the grass, which pleased my ears with its soft rustling.

Soon, however, a gradual uneasiness inexplicably took possession of me. Some force, some occult power, it seemed, filled me, stopped me, forbade me to go farther, called me back. I felt the same painful need of going home again which sometimes you may have noticed when you have perhaps left a sick person whom you love; when you feel a presentiment that the malady is growing worse.

So in spite of myself I came back, positive that I should find some bad news at home, some letter or telegram. There was nothing. This surprised me, made me more uneasy than as if I had some new and fantastic vision.

August 8.—Last evening was frightful. He no longer makes himself manifest, but I feel him near me, spying on me, staring at me, dominating me—more horrible, now that he hides himself, than when making his presence, his invisible and constant presence, known by supernatural phenomena.

I slept at last, however.

August 9—11.—Nothing, but I am still alarmed. What may happen to-morrow? I can't stay here, with my soul full of this thought, this fear. I'm going away.

August 12, ten o'clock in the evening.—I've been wanting to get away all day long, but I haven't been able. I've been wanting to do this easy little act—to go out—get into my carriage—start for Rouen. I've been held back! How?

August 13.—When certain diseases attack us, every spring of physical energy seems broken, all our strength is set at naught, our muscles are relaxed, our bones soft as flesh, our flesh like water. I seem to be experiencing the same thing in my moral nature. It is strange and most depressing. I have no longer any force, courage, or dominion over myself. No power even to set my will at work. I cannot desire anything. Something desires, something wills for me, and I obey.

August 14.—I am lost! Some one possesses and governs my soul! Some one orders all my deeds, every move I make, each thought! I am no longer anybody; I am a slave, terrified at everything I do.

Suppose I want to leave the house. I cannot. *He* does not wish me to; so I stay in, terrified and trembling, sitting right here in the armchair where he holds me. I merely want to get up, so as to think myself still partly my own master. Impossible! I am riveted to my seat. My chair is fixed to the floor. No human force could lift us!

Then, all at once I must, *must*, MUST go out into the garden and gather strawberries and eat them. And I go. I gather strawberries; I eat. Oh, my God! My God! Is there a God? If there be any, deliver me! Save me! Help me! Pardon! Pity, mercy on me! What anguish, what horror, what infernal torment.

August 15.—He who governs and controls me, who, or what can it be? Who is this invisible creature, this unknown wanderer of an unknown race? So, then, the Invisible Folk do really exist? If so, why have they never before, since the beginning of the world, made themselves manifest, as they do now to me? Never have I read anything like what is now taking place here in my house. Oh, if I could only leave it, escape, flee and never come back again! I might be saved then; but I cannot go.

August 16.—For two whole hours to-day I was able to get clear. I seemed like a prisoner who finds the cell-door accidentally open. Suddenly I felt that I was free, that he was far away. I ordered the horses harnessed at once, and got as far as Rouen. Ah, what a joy that was to me, thus to be able to command: "Drive to Rouen!" and to be obeyed!

I stopped at the library, and took out Dr. Hermann Herestauss's great treatise on "The Unknown Inhabitants of the Ancient and Modern World."

When I got back into my carriage I meant to order: "To the railway station!" But instead I cried—in so loud a voice that the passers-by turned round—"Home again!" And then I fell back, mad with anguish, on the carriage-seat. *He* had found me, he had seized me again!

AUGUST 17.—What a night! What a night! And yet it seems to me I should perhaps rejoice. I read until one o'clock in the morning, this remarkable work of Dr. Herestauss, describing the origin, power, and dominion of all the invisible beings which man has conceived or really do prowl about him.

But not one of these in any way resembles the thing that haunts me. It almost seems as though man has been for ages foreseeing and fearing some new creature, stronger than he, which is to be his successor in this world; as though man, feeling this creature near at hand, and unable to determine the nature of this master-being, has created in terror the whole tribe of occult existences and fear-born fantoms.

So, having read till one o'clock, I went and sat near my open window to cool my face and freshen my thoughts with the gentle night-wind.

It was a fine, balmy night. How I should have enjoyed it, once upon a time! No moon. The stars danced, sparkling, in the remote blackness of the sky. What forms, what living things, what plants and animals exist there? thought I. Who dwells upon those worlds? Do the inhabitants of those unknown universes know more than we? What powers have they, superior to ours? What do they see which we cannot? Might not one of them, some day passing through space, appear upon this earth to conquer it, as the Normans once crossed the Channel to subjugate a weaker folk?

We are so infirm, we men, so unarmed and ignorant, so small, down here on this lump of mud which turns, surrounded with its film of water!

Thus I gradually dropped off to sleep, dreaming there in the cool night-breeze.

Well, having slept about three-quarters of an hour, I suddenly reopened my eyes without moving at all. Some strange, confused emotion had awakened me. At first I saw nothing. Then all at once it seemed to me that a page of the book which still lay open on my table had just turned over all by itself. No draft had entered the window. Surprised, I waited.

At the end of some four minutes, I saw, *saw*—yes, with my own eyes *saw* another page rise and go over, as if a finger had turned it! My chair, before the book, was empty. But I understood that *he* was there, sitting and reading as I had done.

With one furious leap, the leap of a beast in mad revolt, I rushed across the room to seize *him*, to strangle and to kill this monster.

But before I could reach him, his chair whirled backward as though he had fled from me. The table rocked. The lamp crashed over and went out. My window banged shut as though some evil-doer

had flung himself out into the night.

So then, he fled from me? He was afraid? He, afraid of *me?*

Why, then—to-morrow, or later—some day—I may be able to get my grip on him and crush him to earth? Do not even dogs sometimes tear and kill their masters?

August 18.—All day long I've been reflecting. Ah, yes, I'm going to obey him now, follow his orders, do his will, humble myself and be submissive, cowardly and cringing. He's the stronger. But some time—

III

AUGUST 19.—I know! I know all! I have just read in the *Scientific World* this:

> Some rather singular news has reached us from Rio de Janeiro. A curious epidemic of insanity, similar to those contagious dementias which afflicted the people of medieval Europe, is now spreading over the province of San Paulo. The terrified inhabitants are leaving their homes, deserting their villages, and abandoning their farms. They claim to be pursued, possessed, and driven like human cattle by certain invisible though tangible creatures, by a kind of vampire. These vampires, they say, feed on their lives during sleep, and drink water and milk, without seeming to touch any other food.
>
> Professor Don Pedro Henriquez, accompanied by several physicians has set out for San Paulo, to study the origins and the manifestations of this astonishing malady. They intend to present to the government such measures as shall seem most likely to restore reason to this afflicted population.

Ah! I remember the handsome Brazilian three-master which passed up the Seine the eighth of last May! I thought it so fine, so white and beautiful! *He,* this Being, must have been aboard, on his way from Brazil, the home of his accursed race. He must have seen me, seen my white house, and taken a fancy to it. He must have sprung from the ship to the shore. Great God!

Now I know, I foresee it. The supremacy of man is at an end.

He has come at last. He whom primitive man first feared in vague alarms. He whom the restless priests have tried to exorcise, whom sorcerers have in vain endeavored to call up at pitch-black midnight. He to whom we, the transitory masters of this world, have given a thousand fanciful or monstrous forms.

Of late, men have begun to foresee him more clearly. Mesmer guessed his existence, and physicians for some ten years or more have known the exact nature of his power, even before he himself had begun to exercise it. They have been using this weapon of the New Master, the domination of a mysterious will over the enslaved human soul. They have called it magnetism, hypnotism, and suggestion. I have seen them amusing themselves like rash children with this horrible power! Wo upon us! Wo on mankind!

For he has come at last, the—the—how shall I name him? I seem to hear him crying his name to me; yet I cannot make it out. The— Yes, he *is* shouting it! I listen. What? Once more? The—Horla! Ah, I heard it, that time! It is he, the *Horla!* He has come!

Ah! The vulture eats the dove. The wolf devours the sheep. The lion tears the sharp-horned buffalo. Man has killed the lion with arrow, sword, and powder. But the Horla is going to make out of man what we have made of the horse, the ox. He will make us his chattels, his slaves, his food, through the mere power of his will. Wo unto us!

Even an animal may at times, however, rebel and slay its tormentor. I, too, will—can—but how? First I must know this Thing, touch it, see it!

I thought along still further. My human sight is so imperfect that it cannot even distinguish solid bodies, if these happen to be transparent. Let a spotless mirror stand in my path, and I am very likely to be misled by my vision, to be sent crashing into the glass, as a bird caught in a room dashes its brains out against the panes.

A thousand things deceive our sight. Why should we wonder, then, if it cannot perceive some new body, entirely nonresistant to light?

A new Being? Why not? Surely, it had to come! For why should *we* be the last? You say we cannot discover it? Very well; that is because of its more perfect nature, its body finer, and more complete than ours—ours so weak, so clumsily conceived, encumbered with always-tired organs. Finer than ours, which live like any animal or plant, painfully fed on air and grass and flesh—ours, the mere outline-sketch of a being

which might perhaps in time become intelligent and superb.

There are, after all, so few creatures in the world, from the oyster right up to man, why should there not be one more late-comer? Why not, if the period has been completed which marks off the appearance of each new species? How poor, mean, and miserable everything is! Miserly given, dryly invented and clumsily built! Ah! The elephant! The hippopotamus! What grace! What elegance in the camel!

Now, consider the butterfly, a flitting flower! I dream of one which shall be as vast as a hundred universes, with wings, color, movement, and beauty which I cannot even imagine. Ah! I behold it. It goes from star to star, refreshing and perfuming them, with the light, harmonious breath of its flight! And, in ecstatic ravishment, the people up yonder watch it pass!

EH? What's the matter with me? Oh, it's the Horla, the Horla which is haunting me, which makes me think such insane thoughts. He is inside of me. He is becoming my soul. I'll kill him!

August 19.—I certainly will kill him. For I have seen him!

Yes. . . . Last night I was sitting at my table. I pretended to be writing with great interest. Well I knew that he would come and wander round me, very close, so close that I might possibly touch or even seize him. And after that? Ah, after that I should become a madman! My hands, my knees, my very forehead itself, my teeth and all would strangle and crush and bite and rend him!

With my whole being overexcited, I lay in wait.

I had lighted my two lamps, as well as the eight candles on the mantel, as if perhaps I might be able to discover him in all that radiance.

Right opposite me stood my bed; an old oak bed with tall posts. At the right my fireplace. At the left the door. After having left it open a long time, so as to attract him in, I had carefully closed it. Behind me was a very high clothes-press, with a full-length mirror. This I used every day to dress by, and to shave in front of.

Well, I pretended to be writing, in order to deceive him. For he, too, was spying on me. Suddenly I felt, I was positive that he was reading over my shoulder, that he was there, almost brushing my ear.

I jumped up, my hands outstretched. I whirled about so quickly that I almost fell. Ah! What? The room was almost as light as day. And yet I couldn't see myself in my mirror!

The glass was empty, clear, deep, and full of luminosity. No reflection appeared therein! Yet I was standing directly in front of it! I saw the great mirror perfectly limpid from top to bottom. And with horror-stricken eyes I stared at it. I dared not go forward; I dared make no slightest movement. Well did I know the Thing was there; yet I feared, too, that he would yet escape me, he whose imperceptible body had cut off my reflection.

Fear numbed me. Then, suddenly I began to see myself as in a fog, way at the back of the mirror—as in a stream of troubled waters. It seemed to me this water was flowing from left to right, letting my image show more and more clearly every instant. It reminded me of an eclipse passing by. The object which concealed my reflection seemed to possess no definite outlines, but rather a sort of transparent opacity, which gradually grew clear.

At last I could see myself completely; I knew that he was gone.

So then, I had caught a glimpse of him! The terror of it makes me shudder yet.

August 20.—Kill him? But how? I cannot catch him! Poison? He would see me mixing it with the water. And, moreover, would our poisons have any effect on his impalpable structure? No, no. But then, how?

August 21.—I've had a locksmith come down from Rouen. At my order he has made iron shutters for my room. He is also going to make me an iron door. I'll have to pass for a coward. But what does that matter?

SEPTEMBER 10.—I am at Rouen, in the Hotel Continental. I've done it! It's all over! But—is he dead? I'm in a frightful state with what I've seen.

Yesterday the locksmith finished putting on the iron blinds and the door. I left everything wide open till midnight, even though it began to grow cold.

Suddenly I felt that he was there. A joy, an insane joy, took hold of me. I

got up slowly and paced back and forth a long time, so that he should suspect nothing. Then, quite carelessly, I took off my boots and put on my slippers.

I then shut and locked my iron shutters, chained them, and put the key in my pocket. I quietly stepped over to the door and closed that also.

Suddenly I knew he was moving uneasily around me, that now he too was afraid, and that he was commanding me to open the door. I almost gave in. But I resisted. I set my back against the door; then I opened it just enough to let myself out. Backward I retreated. I knew he could not have got out at the same time. Ha! I locked him in, all, all alone! What joy! I had him—at last I had him!

I ran down-stairs. In the *salon*, directly under my room, I seized both lamps. I flung oil over the carpet, upon the furniture, everywhere. I set fire to it. And then, I ran away—after having securely locked the big front door.

Down into the garden I ran. I hid in a clump of laurel at the lower end. How long the waiting seemed! Everything remained dark, motionless and still. No breeze; not a single star; mountains of clouds which could hardly be made out, yet weighed so heavily—so heavily—upon my soul!

Watching the house, I waited. How long it seemed! I had already made up my mind that the fire had gone out or had been extinguished by *him*, when suddenly one of the lower windows burst outward with the pressure of the conflagration. A flame, a great red and yellow flame, long, soft, and caressing, licked up the wall even to the roof.

A dull light spread among the trees, in the branches, in the leaves. A shudder of fear spread also. The birds awakened. A dog began to howl. It seemed almost as though the day were breaking.

Presently two other windows crashed out. I saw that the whole lower portion of my home was nothing but a frightful brazier. But—ah, what?—a cry, a horrible, high-pitched, rending cry rent the night—the cry of a woman! Two attic windows were flung open!

I had forgotten my servants!

I saw their fear-maddened faces, their arms which they waved in agony!

Then, wild with horror, I rushed away toward the village, shrieking "Help! Fire! Fire!" I met people already coming. With them I ran back, to see the end of the catastrophe.

Now the house was nothing save a hideous yet magnificent pyre, a monstrous pyre which lit up the whole countryside, a pyre wherein human creatures were being consumed—where he, he too, my prisoner, the New Being, the New Master, was burning as well, he the Horla!

Suddenly the whole roof fell in between the walls. A volcano of flames shot to the sky.

Through the gaping open windows I watched this hell of incandescence. I thought: "*He* is there in that furnace, dead!" . . .

Perhaps. His body dead? That body which did not impede the light, could it be destroyed by any means fatal to us?

And—if he were not dead? Maybe time alone has power over this frightful Invisible Being!

After man, the Horla!

No, no, he is not dead! I know he still lives. So then, so then—I must—what?—must kill—myself! . . .