

VISITS OF THE FORGOTTEN

*There await men when they die such things as they do not expect
or think of. - Heraclitus*

A Collection of Ghost Stories by

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CONTENTS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1. The Lost Fare | p. 3 |
| 2. The Specter of Memory | p. 9 |
| 3. Voyage From Eternity | p. 12 |
| 4. The Night Passenger | p. 21 |
| 5. The Ghost of Nebuchednezzar | p. 28 |

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It was almost as an accident that I came again across these short stories, which I had written in about the mid 1980's, while cleaning out an old computer of mine.

One reason I had originally put them aside was my encounter with real ghosts, as discussed and examined in my *New Treatise on Hell*. How was I to tell people about the real thing, when I had wrote about them in fiction? It was almost like being a character in one of my own stories, though I would like to think myself a good deal more thoughtful and cleverer than they. Yet enough water has passed under the bridge that I think it is safe now to make them available.

Originally there were eleven of these tales. Yet after looking them over, only five of them did I think, with a little bit of polishing up, were worth saving. As I have other work that needs to be done, I undertook to "restore" those ones I most liked. Here then are those five. Whether I will have a second opinion of one or more of the others remains to be seen. At present, these, I believe, will do.

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THE LOST FARE

As dull and slow nights went this had to be the absolute worst. Nick Gurnley had spent more than four hours in his cab and had so far barely picked up thirty five dollars. It was getting near midnight as he sat in his car parked in a vacant lot out in the suburbs. He half-dozed, yet listened as the radio dispatcher sent off taxi drivers on runs while making what were intended to be humorous remarks to some chum out in the fleet. As he tried to stay alert, Nick thought he might just as well be home in bed, so slow it had been. In his early forties, he liked his job for the freedom it gave him, and the adventure it could sometime bring. But on unavailing and tedious shifts like this it sometimes made him wish he had taken up more regular employment.

"46" the dispatcher without warning called out.

Startled, he clumsily grabbed for his radio microphone, while running his fingers through his black hair to scratch his head.

"46 - vacant" he responded, clearing his voice as he did so.

"Having fun tonight,46?" the dispatcher asked facetiously, knowing full well what a dead time it had been for Nick.

"Oh yea," he answered sarcastically.

"Well, here's something for you. Why don't you head over to Cobble's Department store. There's a lady standing at the rear entrance who needs a cab."

"Well, it's about time" Nick replied clicking his mike. "On the way."

He wondered who would be calling a taxi from the suburban shopping center at this late at night, since all the stores there had been closed for a number of hours already. Though slightly puzzled he was just glad to be getting a fare. Hopefully, it would at least be a good one. If that dispatcher gave him a call to just drive somebody across the street, Nick promised himself to personally wring the his neck when he got back to the lot.

Pulling into the back parking lot of Cobble's department store, he spotted a middle-aged woman, with black graying hair, holding a bundle, which Nick assumed to be an infant. As he got closer he saw that she wore a long, black, wool over coat, and had a rather haggard look about her. Hmmm, Nick thought, so far doesn't look so good. Bringing his cab to a stop, he motioned her to get in.

"Where to?" he asked as she entered, anticipating the worst.

The woman having entered and sat on the back seat with her child, reached into a pocket and then handed him a slip of paper. He glimpsed it over, and after doing so, sighed to himself in glee.

"This is way out there" he mused to himself surprised. "This calls for the old map book."

Turning on his overhead light, he got out the book and looked up the address she'd given him. Maybe that annoying dispatcher wasn't so bad after all, he thought.

"Yea, I was right" he told the woman. "This is way out near Shelton."

This was very good news to Nick. In fact better he could not reasonably have hoped for. The long distance, of course, meant more money.

He turned on the meter, and drove toward the freeway.

It was not long afterward, they found themselves on a country highway heading into the more sparsely inhabited interior. As they proceeded, he endeavored to start a conversation, making random comments about his job, the latest news, the autumn weather, and other like small talk. The woman, however, remained still and silent. He then tried asking her a question directly about how it was she happened to be out so late with her child.

Yet he continued to get no response.

"Not too friendly" he thought. Try as he might to coax a response, the woman said nothing. Rather than risk embarrassing himself further he decided to keep to himself as well. True, there was always the occasional unusually reticent passenger to put up with, and he was somewhat used to this. Yet what made it especially strange in this case was the length of the trip. Usually on a long drive like this there would at least be some bit of chit-chat. But not this time, and he felt offended by her incivility. Yet he knew better than to try and press the point, so instead concentrated on driving and the thought of wherever it was he was going.

Moving further and further along, his radio signal dimmed and the road became darker and darker. Other cars, signs of habitations and road lamps became fewer and fewer, till there were literally none to be seen. They were alone. This certainly would be a god-awful area to have his car breakdown, Nick thought. As he realized how isolated in the rural wilderness they were, he began to feel a creeping dread. It then wasn't long before they found themselves surrounded by dense shadowy forests, silent and thick with gloom, almost malevolent. What might be out there his imagination wondered? Madmen? Beasts? A terror unknown? What would it be like to be stuck somewhere in those lonely, dark woods now? Then he thought of his strangely quiet passengers.

As he came to think of it, he had hardly got a good look at the child yet. Glancing back in his rear view mirror he was shocked to find that, but for its size, it hardly seemed a child at all. Indeed it's eyes glared so it looked more like a tiny man.

Who were they, he wondered? They sure gave him the creeps. But was it really them, or his imagination overreacting? Their silence

not only made him uncomfortable, but it now terrified him. He almost felt as if at any moment they might spring up from behind and attack him. Thin droplets of sweat began to trickle down his brow as he grasped the steering wheel more tightly.

Having driven in this petrified state for over a half an hour, to his surprise the woman suddenly spoke.

"Take this right coming up" she said.

Relieved that the silence had been broken, he started up. The sound of her voice seemed to quell his fear, and bring him to his senses.

"No problem" he responded, doing as directed.

Turning off into the wooded exit they came upon a bumpy, dirt road. Tree branches brushed against the side of the cab as they rolled past a rusty metal fence which lined the drive, the vehicle occasionally rising and falling on the bumpy path as they did so. In the matter of a few minutes, they made their way to a clearing where the outline of a weather worn Victorian style house could be seen. As the headlights of the car shone upon it, the house looked to be terribly worn down and abandoned. The roof on one side appeared to have caved in, the white paint chipped, and faded, and some of the glass windows were broken. But for the fact that he was taking someone there, he would have taken it to be a deserted dwelling.

"Are you sure this is it?" He asked as he turned off the meter, while pulling the car to a halt.

As he turned around to receive a reply, the woman, holding the child in her arms, got quickly out of the car and ran into the house.

"Hey!" He cried aloud in dismay.

He then stopped to take a breath.

"Cheat me of my fare, will you?" He muttered indignantly to himself. "Oh no you don't!"

Leaving the car as he slammed its door shut, he paused for a moment and eyed the empty looking home. Why would anyone live here? If she lived in a wreck like this, perhaps it was no wonder she didn't have the money to pay him. Even so, this was no excuse, and he certainly was not about to just drive off and forget all about it.

He stepped up on the porch and knocked on the front door. As he did so, and to his surprise, it suddenly creaked ajar.

"Hello?" He called out, poking his head within.

The entrance parlor was almost completely dark. What little furniture in the way of a table and a couple chairs it contained were in a well worn and dilapidated condition. Glancing around for

signs of life, he looked up and saw a dim light partially illuminating the upstairs corridor. He then heard muffled conversation and laughter. Evidently some people were gathered together. She must be up there, he thought.

Making his way up stairs, he approached the occupied room, but the door was shut. It was difficult to make out what they were saying. Despite an occasional chuckle the atmosphere did not seem all that cheery. He knocked. But instead of getting a response all suddenly became quiet.

"Hello?" He said, proceeding to enter the room as he did so.

Seated about a candle lit room, were three men and two women, two of whom were elderly, the rest middle aged or older, who looked to be having a coffee or tea party of some kind. Their dress seemed somewhat and perhaps oddly out of date, but he couldn't place when. Their conversation suddenly ceased as he entered and they noiselessly glared as if incensed and outraged by his intrusion.

"Excuse me" Nick said apologetically. "I'm a cab driver and I'm looking for a woman and a child who I just brought here a few minutes ago."

Rather than answer, they continued to stare at him in resentful silence.

"Come on!" said Nick somewhat nervously. "You must know who I'm talking about. I just brought her here a minute ago"

One gaunt and graying man, and who was already standing, pointed commandingly at the door and anxiously shouted at him to leave, almost, it seemed, shaking the walls as he spoke.

"I want my money" Nick said defensively.

The man appeared to get more angry, while one of the women began to put her head in her hands as if weeping.

"Get out!" the man yelled with even more vehemence.

Taken aback by his anger, and then realizing he had no reason to necessarily assume that his passenger had anything to do with these people, Nick turned around and left the room, carefully closing the door behind him. He paused outside for a few seconds wondering where then the woman could be. The whole thing seemed so incredible, the woman, the child, the house, the people. Yet incredible or not, he was not leaving without his money.

He walked back to the head of the stairs and glanced down into the parlor. To his shock and surprise he saw a female figure in a long dress slowly making her way toward the ground floor entrance. But even more startling, as she moved it seemed Nick could see through her! She then disappeared through the open door.

Understandably apprehensive, a panic seized him. He ran down the hall and shut himself up in an empty room, breathing hard as he

did so. What on earth is this place? He wondered, not knowing quite what to do. He leaned back despairingly against the door as if to keep anyone out who might come in after him.

Suddenly he heard the sound of footsteps coming down the corridor. The handle on the door began to turn. The sheer surprise of its doing so caused him to lose all self-confidence, and he stumbled back in terror to the opposite end of the room. The door then opened and a face peered in.

It was the woman passenger. She eyed him curiously, then shook her head. For split second Nick came to his senses and remembered the money. Yet just as he caught this glimpse of her, she turned around and shut the door.

"Wait!" Nick called out.

Springing forward to follow her, he opened the door and looked out. She was nowhere to be seen. Yet there in the darkness at the end of the hall stood the elderly looking man who had shouted at him to leave, his face now deathly pale, and something like a fiend's. Yet despite his menacing appearance, his expression was also one of sorrow. He looked sadly at Nick and started to come towards him like someone seeking solace. Nick with a shudder once more withdrew quickly inside the room.

He crouched into a corner and began crying, beside himself at not knowing what to do. For about two hours he sat there on the floor trembling and petrified with fear, afraid to get up and face who or whatever it was that was out there.

Then finally out of the combined effects of shock and exhaustion, he fell asleep.

When dawn came, he got up, perplexed by what had taken place earlier. Yet not wanting to stick around and find out what this was all about, he carefully opened the door and look down the corridor. Not seeing or hearing a sign of anyone, he rushed out, and somehow made his way down the stairs and out of the house. Fortunately, the cab was still there. He got inside, and turning it around, sped off homeward.

Sleepy and still stunned, he wondered how he was going to explain to his boss why he'd been out so late past his shift, and, for that matter, how he was going to make up for the money he'd lost. He stared at the road before him as if caught in a daze and trance, baffled by what had transpired.

As he pulled into the cab lot he saw his boss standing ready for him and looking very irritated.

"Where have you been?" he indignantly inquired as Nick turned into a spot not far from where he stood.

Shrugging and not knowing quite what to say, Nick switched off the engine and arose from the cab to face him.

"I know your not going to believe this..." he began.

As he approached, his boss stumbled back, amazed, flabbergasted.

"What's the matter?" Nick asked, startled by the reaction.

"Your hair!" His boss said.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"It's completely white!"

THE SPECTER OF MEMORY

It did not make any sense. None at all. Nadia gone?

For the past two months, Joachim just could not reconcile himself to the fact that Nadia, *beautiful Nadia*, was actually dead. Or perhaps he was afraid he would become too reconciled to the fact. She was ever a mystery to him, but never more than now in death.

What was it that she wanted? The way she carried on in her own little world, impervious to all reason and good sense. Resolute, implacable and vain, she was always able to tease most by quietly doing nothing as though engaged surreptitiously in doing something. What a paradox she was: at times aloof and haughty, and at other times warm and generous.

It bothered him to have to admit to himself that when all was said and done that she had more spunk and courage than himself. He would have like to have been able to tell her this before, but now it was too late. How was he to know it would all end so soon? And why did he have to come to realize these things now and not before? If he could have done things differently he would have. He simply would not have taken her existence so much for granted. Nor would he have allowed their days together to have passed by so thoughtlessly. If only he had taken a real interest in the things she cared about, her studies, the music she liked, and the rest, then perhaps he would feel less empty and separated from her as he did. What agony it was to think that fortune had blessed him, but that the blessing could only be appreciated after it was now gone.

Such an oasis of being in this jungle metropolis, now effectively reduced to a two foot high grave marker amid the multitude of a city cemetery!

It was only yesterday that he was right beside her taking in her happy nonsense and ridiculous dreams. What was he to do now? Return to that drab, colorless existence he knew before he'd met her? What an utter fool he'd been! He thought of the times he'd lied to her, or been condescending. It made him mad that he'd allowed this Nadia who was his joy to ever make him angry. Why did they have to meet only to part in this unexpected way? Why did a girl have to be so wonderful, so that to lose her made one's life unbearable? His lies and his pride put him to shame. The more he tried to deny and resist his remorse, the more Joachim felt himself succumbing, indeed drowning, in it.

For the first time in his life, he found himself, in the late hours of the night, weeping like a child. The actuality of life and death made him feel naked as all worldly delusions were routed and slain. There he was merely a drop floating in a bleak, enormous void, once suffused with the radiance of Nadia. Beautiful and yet absurd Nadia!

While she was doing her odds jobs or going to school, Joachim was working as a laborer at the docks. With relatively little income between the two of them, life was a struggle getting by. What

heartless people! What a mechanical world, Joachim thought! Yet Nadia and he always seemed to overcome most of its challenges. They lived heedless of their poverty, heedless of the practicalities of tomorrow, ever living for the excitement and pleasure of the present. They were not without ambition, yet they did not understand or take easily to the method or means they would have to do to make their dreams a reality. The day-to-day world of more normal people, with its arbitrary formalisms and petty shortsightedness, was instinctively anathema to both of them. Nadia had hoped that by advancing her education she could land the right kind of employment, the kind that would allow her autonomy and integrity. As a student of music at the university, her intent was to become a professional composer. She worked hard and got good grades. But before she was able to graduate, she died suddenly at the age of twenty-eight of a rare disease. Fortunately for Joachim, her parents were able to cover the funeral expenses, as well as most of the medical costs, thereby sparing him the ignominy of having to bury her in a welfare plot. Even so, now after all, lost among hundreds of others, how little less anonymous was her tiny grave among the paying.

No one seemed to have understood people better than Nadia, at least more than anyone Joachim ever knew. It irked him immeasurably to think how little she was appreciated and shortchanged by not only himself, but the others who had known her. How unjust was the world! Evil was secret, subtle, yet ever omnipresent as if the majority had agreed that intolerance and envious prejudice were to guide all judgments affecting peoples lives. Society was nothing more than a conspiracy of the mediocre against the good, the beautiful and the talented. People preached about the sacredness of human life, yet weren't these the same ones who, after all, had made the world Joachim and Nadia inhabited so needlessly hard and so bitter? She deserved so much better than what he or modern life had to offer her. And perhaps (as it occurred to him) she was actually better off dead, given how it seemed so many her so for granted - including himself. So that maybe it wasn't she whom Joachim really wept for after all but himself having to go on in this unfeeling city without her. As for God, how could there be a God in so cruel and heartless a universe?

One morning in his small apartment, he awoke with the realization that he'd dreamt something about Nadia the previous night. She'd called to him. Like most who try to recollect a dream, Joachim anxiously tried to remember exactly what it was he was somehow seen while unconscious. Gradually, the images began to reform in his mind and come back to him. He was walking along the great black, iron fence that lined the cemetery boundaries searching for her grave. There were so many to pass over that he stepped over many others and it gave him an uneasy feeling. Yet he had to find where her voice was coming from. He searched and searched, glancing eagerly at the headstones as he passed, always on the verge of finding her, but never actually doing so.

In nights subsequent, the same dream would reoccur. He sought for Nadia among the graves, following her voice calling out to him, but never could he find her. It was all too real to be merely a chance nightmare. Nadia was really there, somewhere, but how was he to reach her?

Overtime, he grew more obsessed with the idea that Nadia was trying to reach him. The thought of it drove him mad to the point of being little able to think of anything else. Finally after days of wrestling with his despair, he resolved to do something.

Then one very late night, he arose from bed, got dressed, and drove in his car to the cemetery where she lay. All the while the sound of her voice -- it seemed like her voice -- plaintively called out to him in his head. The memory of her ebullient face was constant in his mind as he made his way through deserted streets and traffic-less stoplights. The street lamps glow beamed in an illuminated sequence of stretched out pools of light. It seemed as if all he wanted in the world was to see her once more. Surely it was possible! Perhaps for once the gods or fate would do something wonderful to put his despair and misery to rest. She was waiting for him, and he would not have to submit to grief any longer. Perhaps, after all, the finality of her death was something the universe just would not tolerate. How could it?

Standing breathless outside the vast immensity of death's realm, he longingly surveyed the sight within of innumerable, various shaped grave stones hoping to find Nadia. In the still hush of the darkness, her voice continued to call forth to him loud and clear. She seemed impatiently yearning for his presence. Climbing over the iron fence, Joachim made his way inside the gloomy resting ground. The grass, reflecting distant lights, glistened with dewy droplets as if lighting Joachim's way toward his destination. Unlike his dream, Joachim knew where he was going, and would be able to locate her grave with little difficulty. Passing headstone after headstone of unknown folk, the old and the young, the rich and not so rich, the bad, the good, the indifferent, he made his way to her small granite marker. He paused in desperate contemplation, full of famished longing for his lost beloved. The nearby trees stood as shadows, solemn and resigned, neither sympathetic or censorious.

Then all of the sudden the voice ceased, never to be heard from thereafter. He had come to the brink over which, he now realized, there was for him no further passage. There was her grave, but where was Nadia? What had happened to "her" voice? As he knelt down, his eyes filled up with tears, and he lightly and futilely glided his fingers over her name carved in the stone, repeating it to himself it as he did so.

VOYAGE FROM ETERNITY

"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

Ever since they'd been admitted to Cottnum academy, a small, yet select, private school headed by a Mr. Matthew McClure, young Joe Cleary was felt rather left out because of his two older brothers success. The Academy was situated in Conmara, some seven miles north of the small village by the sea where Joe and his mother resided. He didn't resent Sean and Brendan's accomplishment, only he, who had little interest or aptitude for studying, was afraid that his widowed mother would think less of him for not being a natural or persevering student like his brothers, and who indeed were such adept scholars that either could have qualified for pride of the village. His mother, Patricia Cleary, often spoke glowingly of Sean and Brendan in her conversations with neighbors, while Joe now seemed, or at least so he felt, to almost go unnoticed. When he was mentioned it was usually for some trivial matter, or humorous thing he'd unintentionally done.

Ever since Joe's father had passed away a few years before, all the boys had resolved themselves to make up for their family's loss by making her especially proud of them in some way. Thus far Sean and Brendan had succeeded quite well at this, judging about how often and highly she spoke of their scholastic achievements. Sean was working toward one day becoming a engineer; Brendan a civic leader by way of barrister.

Poor Joe on the other hand, only twelve years of age, had little opportunity to prove himself, he felt, other to be a hard worker at home. In consequence of the relative neglect, he felt almost as if he was failing while his brothers succeeded. Nevertheless, he promised himself that although he wasn't much when it came to books that he would find some way to show her he possessed special qualities as well. Exactly how he would do this and what those qualities were, he wasn't quite sure. He would play around the waterfront making the acquaintance of sailors and fisherman. Perhaps he would be a seaman. He was a good soccer player, yet his mother seemed no more impressed by this than she had by his suggestion at one time of becoming a sailor. So despite all his imaginative and well-intentioned efforts, he could not but feel like the isolated, helpless infant of the family, he was usually treated as. Until he did find that something which would make him a man in his lonely mother's eyes, he did what he could to make life at home easier for her.

After coming home from school for the day, Joe was merrily sweeping off the front doorstep of the house when he heard his mother answer the telephone. With her inside at the time was Mr. Quinn, whom Joe knew, was in rivalry to a Mr. Donnal, and had been patiently courting the widow. At first he thought nothing of the phone's ringing. But it didn't take long for him to realize that she sounded to be extremely upset. Laying the broom aside, he stepped inside to find out what was the matter. The phone was now hung up and he found her sobbing.

Bewildered by the sight, Joe instantly felt his heart sink.

"Mum," Joe started apprehensively. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"The constable at Conmara just called..." she started to say, but paused as her eyes became moist.

"The constable of Conmara?"

"Your brothers," she began to say with effort. "He said they were reported drowned while out fishing in Blannett Bay.

She swallowed before continuing.

"He said he thinks Sean and Brendan may be drowned."

"What's this, your boys?" Quinn asked.

"He said a boat they had borrowed and took out was found capsized, and they couldn't find a trace of them."

"Maybe they just swam off somewhere or something," Joe proposed in search of an answer.

His mother shook her head, "I wish that were true. Mr. Donnal of the school who noticed they were gone longer than they were supposed to, and later found the empty boat floating upside down by the shore. The constable says he and some men have been out looking for two hours now, but they haven't found a trace of them."

Now it was Joe's turn to cry.

"Isn't there something we can do?"

"I'm afraid not. The constable says he wants me to stay here so that he can reach me when he finds out something more definite."

Flushed with emotion, Joe rushed to get his hat and coat, which he proceeded to throw on.

"Joseph, where on earth are you going?" Quinn demanded as if bringing him to task.

"I know something I can do!" he answered hurriedly.

"Now Joe," said Mrs. Cleary, "you stay here. There's nothing you can do. I've got two sons missing and I don't need another gone as well."

"Mother believe me. I know something I can do. You wait here and don't worry. I'll be all right."

"Joseph! Listen to your mother."

Grabbing his coat and cap, and before they could get a response, Joe flew out the door, into the now increasing blustery weather. It somewhat hurt him to have to leave her in such a pitiful

state, but he instinctively felt he had to do something. By the time Mrs. Cleary had got up to try and stop him, Joe was lost from sight. Beside herself now with worry and sorrow, she sighed. As she stood there looking in what direction he might have gone, she realized that there was nothing at the moment she could do. Returning inside, she sat back down and anxiously awaited the call from the constable.

Shortly afterward, Mr. Donnal, the instructor of Sean and Brendan's from the school, and who, like Quinn, viewed Mrs. Cleary with amorous, yet gentlemanly and sincere intentions, arrived at the Cleary house. As one of their teachers, aside from being the first to discover the upturned boat, he naturally felt it incumbent on himself to report to Mrs. Cleary the details of what had happened as best he knew them. At the same time, also like Quinn, he intended to do what he could to comfort and console her. No one knew better than he how proud she was of her boys, and how difficult it would be to reconcile her with the fact that they were now, in all likelihood, no more.

Doing her best to temper her emotions, Mrs. Cleary opened the door. Upon greeting Donnal, she asked him whether there was any news of the boys having been found. He replied that as of the latest he had heard, the constable's search had turned up nothing. Holding her heart, Mrs. Cleary looked understandably anxious at the report, as though about to collapse. Both Donnal and Quinn stood by helpless to do anything and for a while were silent. Then composing herself while attentively commenting on the rising winds, she invited him in to have a seat and warm himself.

She distractedly offered to make Donnal some tea, but Donnal, seeing her distress, politely declined. She told him that now her son Joe had run off, she knew not where, and that the way things were going she expected this day would be the end of her before it was out. He asked if he might be of help in locating Joe, but Mrs. Cleary said it would have to wait for now.

"I can imagine how you must feel, Mrs. Cleary. But don't let these things hurt you. Surely none of your boys would want that" said Donnal.

"There must be some hope that they're alive, isn't there?" Mrs. Cleary asked.

Donnal looked down and shook his head.

"A witness said they saw the boat capsize out in the bay, and quite frankly it doesn't look good. I think it's frankly best not to get our hopes up."

"How did this happen?" Quinn asked.

"Evidently the boys had borrowed a boat and gone out to do some sailing. They had let me know before hand what they were going out to do. I told them that it was getting too windy for them to go out in the bay like that. But they were obviously restless and wanted to get out, and there really wasn't anything I could do to stop them. Then about three hours, noticing that they were still

gone, I went to have a look to see if things were all right. It was as I was walking along the shore to have a look it was then I encountered some people who spoke of the boat having turned over. Well, before long we went to report all this to the constable. A search for them was put under way, but, as I said, no trace of them has as yet been found. When the constable told me he had sent for help and that I could not be of further use to him, I straightaway left the scene of course to come to here. Naturally, I wish I had been more firm with them."

"I know my boys, once they've got their minds set on doing something, there's little stopping them. But that it should come to this!"

"There, now Pat" said Quinn seeking to console her.

"You know, if only I'd had the chance to speak with them before hand. A few words. That's all, a few words. That wouldn't have been to much to ask, my God, is it?"

"Of course not, Mrs. Cleary" Donnal said. "Of course not."

The phone rang, and Mrs. Cleary excused herself as she went to answer it, wiping dampness from her eyes as she did so. It was the constable. He called to say that he'd called off the search five minutes ago due to the extreme force of the winds, as well as the onset of evening. He did assure her, however, that he would resume the search tomorrow at earliest light, bad sea or no. This was all little consolation to her, and she hung up the receiver and returned to Mr. Donnal.

"Have you no kin about to help you," the constable asked "in this sad time, Mrs. Cleary?"

But for Mr. Quinn and Mr. Donnal, only her little Joseph now, she replied.

An hour passed during which, when not apprehensively contemplating her loss of Sean and Brendan, she fretted now about where her youngest might be. Donnal reassured her that Joe was probably all right. It was understandable, he went on, that a boy of his age would yield to the stress of such a tragic event by running off as he did. Mrs. Cleary was forced to agree that Donnal was probably right in his assessment.

Shortly thereafter, the door suddenly flew open, and Joe entered, his face flushed with excitement.

"Mum, it's true. Sean and Brendan they've drowned."

"How do you know such a thing?" Mrs. Cleary getting up and embracing him, as she began to weep.

"We found them!"

"We? Who found them lad?" asked Mr. Quinn surprised. "The constable just called a while ago and said they'd turned up nothing."

A burly, gray-whiskered figure with a ruddy face wearing a great pea coat then followed Joe in from behind.

"This is Mr. Fitch" said Joe.

"That fool constable couldn't find the sun on a warm day," scoffed Mr. Fitch, with a seaman's air about him. "Young Joe came and told me what had happened so I took him out in my boat up to the bay to see if we couldn't find anything. Well it were just a matter of time, and we found the bodies of the two boys floating out in the water. We hauled them in and brought them to a cove on Colum's Point where they are now. I was going to call the constable and let him know, but Joe here said we should tell you first. If you'd like then we could hop into my car and I could take you to them. That is if you want to, of course."

"Yes, Mr. Fitch" Mrs. Cleary said without hesitation. "I would like to see them."

He told her he'd covered them up with some sail cloth he had with him, and that it was very unlikely that anyone should find them before they got there. Having been prepared by Mr. Donnal, Mrs. Cleary was not that startled to receive this final news that Sean and Brendan were dead. At the same time, she did feel some relief from the suspense and tension which accompanied not knowing. She went to take hold of and put on her overcoat, while requesting that Mr. Fitch immediately take her to the spot.

"Are you sure you really want to do this now, Pat," asked Mr. Quinn lost in thought. "Shouldn't we inform the constable first, as Mr. Fitch suggested?"

"No, I want to see them!" she declared vehemently.

"It's up to you, of course" Fitch replied.

"Yes, now you and Mr. Donnal you may come with us if you like, stay here, or do as you please."

All three could not help but both pity and admire her firm determination to go out at such a late hour, and in such brisk weather, and on such a gloomy errand no less. They all thought on what an awful tragedy it was that she should be deprived of her boys at such an early age.

"We'll drive Mrs. Cleary" Quinn said addressing Fitch, "and follow you."

Then Donnal started.

"Please, Mrs. Cleary one moment before we all go, if I may. You said that you had wanted to speak with Sean and Brendan one more time. If that were still possible, would it be your wish to do so?"

She looked at him amazed.

"Mr. Donnal what for goodness sake are you talking about. You know that's impossible."

"I realize how it sounds. Yet still if it were possible, would you wish it?"

"Why certainly, Mr. Donnal. Right now I don't know that I would want anything more in the world."

"Why in heaven's name do you tease her with talk like this?" chided Quinn.

"Please, do forgive me, Mrs. Cleary, and you Mr. Quinn. But it is not as mad an idea as it sounds. It's not possible for me to explain right now, but if you'll but wait for me at the cove where Mr. Fitch says the boys are located, you will witness something you never thought imaginable, only trust me."

Mrs. Cleary could not believe what he seemed to be proposing. Yet astounded as she was by what he proffered, she could see by the look in Mr. Donnal's eyes that he was neither mad nor insincere.

"Of course, I trust you Mr. Donnal, but I haven't the foggiest idea what your driving at. But if it will suit your fancy we'll wait for you up by the bay."

"At present there is a visitor, a Dr. Rensing, who is staying up in the town, an old colleague of mine from Hoffingen, up at the school with a very unique background and special abilities. It's with his help that I believe we can make it possible to hear your boys once more. He's a very intelligent man, and I'm sure he would like to be of help to you --- again, if you wish it. The only thing I would ask Mrs. Cleary is that we keep this business a secret."

"Look here, sir, this is no time to be playing jokes on the poor woman" said Quinn growing impatient at the strange drift of his talk.

Mrs. Cleary glanced warily at Mr. Donnal. "You know, I don't know what you are talking about, but for some reason I believe you. I don't know why, but I do. Very well then, Mr. Donnal, meet us up by the bay, and I promise you this 'business' you speak of will be kept a secret as you ask."

Donnal looked appealingly to Quinn for the same assurance.

"Very well, I won't say anything either. Besides," Quinn added wryly, "who would believe it if I told them anyway? Yet I must say I don't like the sound of this. Pat you don't need such foolishness. You still have Joseph."

"Mr. Quinn, your concern is both understandable and commendable" Donnal replied. "But if I am lying, you can by all means, as

you put it, 'have my hide.' I expect my colleague and I can you meet you all up there in about an hour."

"It's not that I think you're lying" Quinn replied. "Maybe what I'm more afraid of is *is* that you aren't."

Mrs. Cleary and Joe left the house to get into Mr. Quinn's car and the three drove off toward Colum's Point which lay off into Blannet Bay, while Donnal went in his own vehicle to locate the colleague he'd briefly, and somewhat cryptically, spoken of.

The winds by what was now evening had partially subsided, yet were still sporadically lively in their impetus. The sky overhead was darkening, yet filled with clouds strikingly white in contrast. Through an occasional opening in them one could see silver and blue stars glinting brightly in their scattered isolation. Below on the beach, Mrs. Cleary, along with Mr. Quinn, was led by Fitch and Joe down to the cove where Sean and Brendan lay concealed under white sheets. As they neared the site, Mr. Fitch stopped and looked at Mrs. Cleary to ask if she wanted to go on with this, or if so, whether they hadn't wait till the morrow. Mrs. Cleary was adamant in her response. She wanted to see them and had no desire to wait to do so. Her grief seemed to have grabbed hold of her such that she almost seemed not a little distracted. Mr. Quinn, looking at Joe and Mr. Fitch, with knowing glances ascribed this to the fantastic proposal that Mr. Donnal had made. But none said a word to discourage her, and instead left her to guide the course of events as she saw fit.

"They're over here, mum" Joe said eagerly leading the way. They carefully followed him down to a spot behind some boulders where the two figures lay under the sail sheets. Mr. Fitch wincing as he bent over the two boys, silently waiting a signal from Mrs. Cleary to uncover their faces. At her gesture, he slowly and carefully did so. Mrs. Cleary broke down and wept when she saw them. Overcome himself, both at the sight of his mother's crying and his deceased brothers, Joe touched her shoulders as she knelt over Sean and Brendan feeling their faces with her hands.

"Let's pray, mum" he said.

Taking up one of her hands, Joe knelt down beside her and started whispering a prayer. Mr. Quinn and Mr. Fitch, meanwhile, stood back, looking for the arrival of Mr. Donnal and his colleague from the school. The former continued to wish that Mrs. Cleary hadn't let herself be led on by Donnal's proposal. But it was too late now to try and dissuade her from it. Fitch himself didn't quite know what to expect. He didn't believe, but then he didn't not believe either. There was many an uncanny thing he'd seen in his long life as a fisherman, and he knew better than anyone how strange and unpredictable life itself could be. If what Mr. Donnal proved true, he told himself, then he was the last one who would be surprised.

The three hadn't been within the cove all that long when Quinn looking about spotted two figures in the dark on the hill above them.

As he watched them come nearer, Quinn called out. "We're over here!" It was Mr. Donnal and evidently the friend he'd referred to earlier, and who followed to where he called. Donnal waved back. But before coming down, both he had set fire to a pine knot which then served as a torch for both.

"Mrs. Cleary, gentlemen" Donnal announced as he and his friend approached, his face aglow in the torchlight. "This is Dr. Resning whom I told you about."

The gentleman Donnal motioned to nodded a greeting, but said nothing. Dr. Resning was of about late middle age with aquiline nose, and lightly gray curly hair - very much a spirited scholar's mien. His pronounced brow and compassionate eyes, bespoke someone of unusual intelligence and feeling, yet with something perhaps not a little eerie and inexplicable about him as well.

Quinn again became angry again at the what now seemed the insolence of Donnal's outlandish idea.

"Enough Donnal. Pat, please. Leave the boys in peace."

"Please, Mr. Quinn, be patient with me."

Donnal then turned to the mother.

"Mrs. Cleary, I said you could hear your sons again. Is that or is it not still your wish? If not, Dr. Resning and I will leave at your pleasure."

She looked at Sean and Brendan, their countenances unconscious, yet serene and at peace. Save for the paleness of their faces, one would have thought they were merely sleeping.

"If you can, yes! Yes!"

"Very well then" said Mr. Donnal. "But as I informed you before, we must ask that you not breathe a word of this to anyone. Do I have all of your promises on that?"

Mrs. Cleary, Joe, and Mr. Fitch nodded in assent. Quinn hesitated at first, but then grudgingly added his own.

"Go ahead then Doctor" Donnal said, stepping back to let Resning approach and examine the bodies.

After a few minutes of this solemn examination, Resning stood up and announced it could be done and he was ready to proceed. The others stood back and watched in mute wonder and curiosity, save Donnal who remained calm and unmoved at his colleague's peculiar manner.

Standing over the two boys, Resning closed his eyes and a trance like state seemed to come over him. He raised his arms as if in mystical supplication and slowly began to speak words of a language unknown to the rest. The features of his face then began to

take on an almost unreal appearance. He started to tremble as if wrestling with some supernatural force, then in a burst of emotion he shouted something as if enjoining the boys to awake.

As the rest looked down they saw, to their dumbfounded amazement, the eyes of Sean and Brendan gradually open. Yet even more astonishing, the two, disencumbering themselves of their sheets, stood up like two persons mesmerized, staring off into the distance. The sound of the rolling surf compounded the sighing murmur of the ebbing winds. Then Brendan spoke.

"You have done us wrong to call us away from the land to where we have gone."

There was an unearthly echo in his voice, as the torchlight revealed his face.

"Brendan, why?" The mother asked nervously. "We want you back with us."

"Mother," Sean replied, "though we should be given dominion over the earth and possess all its pleasures and delights, we would think it no different from being locked away in a prison compared to the life and the world to which we have come."

"Do not then, keep us here longer," Brendan said, "for it is time we must return. God in his mercy cares for us."

"Thank you, mother," said Sean.

"Farewell! Farewell!"

Within seconds the two youths collapsed, lifeless as before.

In the days following, Sean and Brendan bodies were taken to the village, properly attended to, and a mass said for them. Quinn, Donnal and Dr. Resning were in attendance, as were many other of the boys' school fellows. Spectators there could not but notice that Mrs. Cleary seemed unusually composed and serene at the service, convinced her sons were somewhere safe. Yet as Quinn later reminded her, and looking at Joseph when he did, what ever reason she have to really doubt otherwise?

THE NIGHT PASSENGER

A car of an eastbound train, traveling at night, was empty, save for two men who were spiritedly discussing the merits of the newly elected William Howard Taft. One of men was a stocky, elderly mustached individual who puffed a large cigar. The other was a dapper, well attired brokerage agent in his mid-thirties named Frank Hepperston. The latter was on his way home to Pittsburgh after having negotiated a deal with some out of state bond holders. Both unhesitatingly agreed that whatever Taft's good points, it was still a shame Roosevelt hadn't won.

After passing some more miles of track, the train came to a halt and the older of the two announced that this was where he got off. Hepperston told him it was nice meeting and chatting with him. The other, rolled his cigar in his mouth. Tipping his straw hat, and wishing him good night as he did so, he left the car. Turning away, Hepperston wearily drummed the arms of his seat with his fingers as he gazed out the window into the impervious darkness.

Without warning, a slender and attractive woman in her late twenties suddenly entered the car and silently took a seat across the aisle from him. Surprised, yet at the same time pleased by the unanticipated company, the usually gregarious Hepperston thought he'd strike up her acquaintance. The rather old-fashioned character of her dress startled him for a woman so young. It was so embarrassingly out of style. He reasoned from this that she must be one of those out of touch provincial sorts who'd never seen a big city in her life. Nevertheless, she seemed to have a certain sophisticated air about her, which appeared at odds with her dated attire.

As he eyed her, the whistle blew and the train began rolling again.

"Kinda chilly, out there to night isn't it?" Hepperston commented.

The young woman turned to him and nodded smiling.

"They say it won't be long till we see some snow."

She again nodded, but looked away.

"Oh pardon me. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Hepperston. Frank Hepperston, I'm with the brokerage firm Johnson and Horn in Pittsburgh. Yourself?"

The woman turned to look at him again with her deep blue, translucent eyes.

"Gisette Derry" she said.

"Well, nice to meet you Miss Derry. Or is it Misses?"

"It's Miss."

"Yes, well nice to have your company on this train tonight, Miss Derry. After a gentleman left me at that last stop, I thought I'd be going the rest of the way alone."

At this point a conductor came through the car as Hepperston continued chatting. He gave Hepperston a puzzled look as he passed through, and then glanced where Gisetete sat.

"Everything all right sir?" the conductor asked as if a bit puzzled.

"Oh fine, just fine" Hepperston responded.

The conductor shrugged his shoulders, apparently bewildered, and continued down the aisle into the adjoining car.

"Well, he's sure an odd fellow, ain't he? Anyway, as I was saying," Hepperston went on, "these night trains can be tedious in the extreme. I can never *not* get enough of them. But oh, well that goes with my job I guess. I do a lot of traveling you see."

Gisette looked at him in a amicable way, but remained quiet. Hepperston ascribed this reticence to shyness, and perhaps a natural feminine hesitation to not converse with male strangers. Still, a cosmopolitan traveler like himself, who'd felt he had met almost every kind of person imaginable, wasn't going to be discouraged so readily.

"Say do you mind my asking what's a pretty young gal like you doing traveling alone this late at night?"

"I'm on my way to Forsterville. I have a room at the Cheswick hotel there."

"Forsterville? Well, if I'm not mistaken I believe that's the next stop."

"That's right."

"Is there someone there to meet you when you get off?"

Gisette shook her head "no."

That's odd, Hepperston thought. What woman in her right mind would be traveling by herself at this time of night, and a woman young and pretty no less? Why there was no telling what kind of trouble she might find herself in. As he looked more closely at her he found himself more attracted by her, and the thought occurred to him that he might at least as a matter of gallantry escort her to her hotel. For that matter, he was a bachelor, without a family expecting him at home. So why not spend the night in Forsterville himself? Years later looking back on what happened that night, he could not imagine what had got into him to think such a thing, unless, on the other hand, it was the strange fascination and interest woman had gradually provoked in him.

"Say you don't think I could find myself a room at that hotel at this hour, do you?"

"I don't see why not" Gisette replied.

"Please, don't get the wrong idea, Miss Derry. Only I hate to see a woman like you walking alone this late. And if as a gentleman I could see you home safe and sound, well I'd like to. That is if it's all right with you, of course."

"Why Mr. Hepperston, I'd be most delighted if you would. I admit, it does make me most uncomfortable to be out alone tonight, and your offer to see me to the hotel is extremely welcome."

Hepperston was just about beside himself, both at the lady's happy acceptance of his offer, and the continued proof of his own winning charm.

A brief while later, the train pulled into Forsterville and Hepperston and Gisette got off, the young woman leading the way. With respect to baggage, the woman had none, while Hepperston toted the medium size valise he usually took with him on such trips. It was a little after eleven o'clock and the small town streets were completely deserted. Although a full moon shone in the sky, what street lighting there was sparse, which occasioned the comment from Hepperston about how wise it was that he was accompanying her. Although brisk, the air was not especially cold.

"Is the hotel very far?" He asked.

"No just a few streets up this way" she replied.

"I'd call us a carriage, but there doesn't look like there are any about. Oh well, a little stroll is good for the constitution."

Gisette, clutching her purse, nodded.

Forsterville was one of those small country villages Hepperston was accustomed seeing along the rail lines he traveled, yet which he very rarely ever stopped and visited. As best he could tell, it looked like an old mill town, and by the appearance and number of its buildings the population could not at the most have been more than a few thousand. A big city man all his life, he speculated what it would be like to live in such a remote, out of the way spot. His conclusion was that it certainly wasn't something for him. The uneventful quiet of it all and the lack of exciting hustle and bustle he was used to would be unendurable. Nevertheless, it was worthwhile every so often to see how the other half of the country lived, especially when he had someone like Gisette as an excuse for introducing him to it.

"There it is over there" Gisette said, pointing to a large gray stone building with a white sign with the word "Cheswick Hotel" painted in black script. Hepperston, who had seen and stayed at not a few hotels on his business excursions, was reasonably impressed by its decorative yet functional design and how well kept up it looked. Two small gas lamps lit the entrance way.

They came into the main entrance hall, where on a tall stool behind a front desk sat a skinny, balding, old gentleman with white bushy eye brows. The interior of the hotel lobby was quaintly adorned with red carpeting and mahogany paneled walls on which were tastefully mounted some charming land and seascapes. The old man looked at Gisette with a knowing glance, and then gave a wary eye at Hepperston. Gisette approached him.

"Horace, this is Mr. Hepperston whom I met on the train and was kind enough to see me home."

Horace nodded.

"Would you have a spare room?" asked Hepperston. Then turning to Gisette he said, "At this hour it's probably too late for me to get back on the train."

Without saying a word, the old man put out a heavy register book on the desk which he opened for him to sign. As he picked up a pen to make his entry the old man looked sarcastically at Gisette.

"No he hasn't been around" the clerk casually remarked as though there was something on her mind she was thinking but didn't want to have to mention.

Hepperston looked up in the middle of his signing, puzzled, but said nothing.

"I want to thank you again, Mr. Hepperston for your very gracious generosity," she said about to take her leave.

"Why my pleasure, Miss Derry. My pleasure. But say do you think we might breakfast or lunch together tomorrow before I head back on my way to Pittsburgh? I certainly would like to see you again. It would be my treat, of course."

Gisette glanced down hesitatingly.

"I suppose I could" she answered. "But if not certainly I'll see you before you go."

"Oh there's no need to decide now" Hepperston said politely, not wanting to be too insistent on the point. "How about meeting me here in the lobby about, oh say, ten o'clock tomorrow morning? Otherwise you could leave a note here at the desk where I could reach you."

"That would be fine" she replied. "Now if you'll excuse me, I'll be off to my room and wish you good-night." Curtsying formally to him, she turned about and disappeared up an ornate staircase.

"Pretty gal, ain't she?" Hepperston quipped to Horace, who said nothing but looked at him somewhat astounded. The agent shrugged at the clerk's incivility, but remained genial.

"I imagine it's too late to be showing me my room" he said. "But if you'll just tell me where to go I'll get there myself."

"208" responded Horace handing him a key. "You'll find it on your right hand side as you get off at the top of the stairs, about four doors down. "

Hepperston thanked him, picked up his things and went as directed. On reaching the second floor he found a quiet, darkened hallway lit by a single kerosene lamp placed on a small wooden table at its end. With little difficulty he found his room, which was pleasant and comfortable enough. Like the lobby and everything else he'd seen of the hotel it was somewhat old-fashioned in the character of its furnishing. But then this perhaps was to be expected in a rather fancy wayfarers lodge in out of the way spot like Forsterville.

The hotel was shaped like a square "U," with a rear inner courtyard which filled the "U." The window of Hepperston's room looked out into this garden courtyard which the silver light of the moon had illumined. As he undressed, he thought about Gisette, wondering whether she would see him tomorrow as promised. Certainly, it would be regrettable not to be able to see such prettiness in the broad light of day. She seemed affable enough, but Hepperston knew better than to judge by appearances. If he didn't get to see her, well, there was no reason to let it get him down. Still, if he did see her perhaps they'd hit it off brilliantly; even become friends. His original intentions of being of assistance to her were honorable enough, yet like many men his natural desires could every now and then get the better of him. Traveling as much as he did, he had little time to cultivate very serious or stable relationships. Although there was another attractive young woman waiting for him in Pittsburgh, he hardly considered himself tied down by the fact.

After unpacking some of his things, and quickly glancing over a few papers, he hopped cheerfully into bed. Tired from his journey and long day, it was little more than a few minutes before he was fast asleep.

He rested soundly and undisturbed for about an hour or two. Then suddenly, he was rudely awakened by the sound of a heated commotion arising from the courtyard. Some people were arguing. There followed a woman's scream.

Getting out of bed, he hurried to the window determined to know the cause of the disturbance. Peering out below, he saw Gisette in the shadow throwing moonlight surrounded by two men. One was a short young man with a sort of scowling look on his face, and who seemed to be placidly observing the clamor taking place. The other was a rather surly looking beau, apparently drunk, who was engaged in berating and threatening her. Then to Hepperston's exasperated revulsion, the beau struck Gisette with his closed fist.

"Am I someone to be made a fool of?"

Gisette recoiled under the blow. She pleaded with him to stop, but this appeared to only make him more angry, while his companion seemed to snarl in glee.

Hepperston threw up the window.

"Say what's going on down there!" he shouted. "Leave her alone! I said leave her be!"

The man hitting Gisette ignored him, while his companion looked up menacingly at Hepperston's attempted interference. Gisette herself was in tears and continued to implore the beau's mercy.

Finding his commands ignored, Hepperston swiftly put on his pants and shoes, resolved on putting an end to the outrage. In a flurry of incensed indignation, he rushed downstairs, pausing in the empty lobby to grab a poker from the fireplace. He then went out into the courtyard.

Upon making his way outside, he found that the noise had suddenly ceased and that the two mysterious rogues had vanished. But there a few feet in front of him lay Gisette lying as if dead in a pool of blood aside some bushes. He ran over to attempt to offer her aid and assistance.

"Miss Derry," he cried, kneeling over her and taking her hand, "Miss Derry, are you all right?"

Before he could listen or check for a response, he was without warning knocked on the head from behind, and in moment lay there unconscious.

When he awoke, it was daylight. His head ached as he found himself still in the courtyard. The sun streamed in upon him and he could hear small birds warbling, as he lifted himself up wondering what had happened. He then recalled the quarrel he'd attempted to end. Where was Gisette? What had happened to her? He looked over to the spot where he had last seen her lying, but she was gone.

As he numbly arose to get up and return inside, he gasped and stepped back in a stupefied daze at the sight that met his eyes. The well-kept, pleasant hotel he had secured a room in just a few hours before was now little better than a dilapidated ruin, vacant and silent but a somber breeze blowing across its desolate bounds. No less strange he found his valise and clothing tossed casually in the courtyard walkway not far from where he'd arisen.

Gathering his things, he managed to dress himself, and finally made his way back to the rail depot where he was able board the train bound for Pittsburgh. On his way home he kept to himself and meditated on the hotel, Gisette, and the men, completely baffled by all that had transpired. Was it a dream? If only that was all there was to it! The soreness of his head was more than real enough.

When he returned to the firm the next day, his associates were mystified by his sudden solemnity. Was this the same Hepperston whom they had always known to be so gay and carefree? Yet for all their surprise, he said not a word about what happened, taking to his tasks with uncharacteristic reserve. Yet even more odd to his fellows was how, ever after that he seemed to have abandoned his characteristic, indeed trademark, flirting -- though without ever knowing or bothering to find out why.

THE GHOST OF NEBUCHEDNEZZAR

Murton Tinch could hardly be happier. All those years of purposely nosing up to uncle Cyril had finally paid off as of the present moment, and but for the tax people and some creditors, he was the *exclusive* inheritor of the old man's wealthy estate and bank holdings. Now he could quit the law firm where he was working and live the rest of his life on easy street. Apparently Cyril had seen something in his attorney nephew that especially pleased him. Privately, Murton viewed his uncle as the crackpot just about everyone else did. But that only made getting on his good side and keeping others away that much easier. For, of course, what had appealed most to Murton about him was not his person or his character, but his money.

Yet almost as wonderful as the newly got property and money was that he had out done and could now spite his siblings and other relatives, some of whom had been as greedy to get their hands on the old man's wealth as himself, but who simply could not find it in themselves to have been so friendly toward the peevish old man. The Tinch family had long been characterized by selfishness, covetousness and a love of lucre. It was typical of them to constantly use and played off one against the other for ulterior motives. Although there was typically some simmering enmity among them, it rarely took the form of open hostility, since really they were, for the most part, so much alike. Rather they preferred to deceive, dissemble and manipulate each other, while to the rest of the world presenting the facade of devotion and unity. When news got around that Murton had become the inheritor of Cyril's wealth, he immediately became the star member of the family. Those who had previously given him the cold shoulder now went out of their way to put on a kind face for him.

But Murton wasn't fooled. He smiled, and let them think he was fooled, while relishing the leverage and sway he could now hold over them.

Shortly upon receiving word of his windfall, Murton promptly started taking measures to move into his uncle's former mansion. The estate, surrounded by spacious lawns with a long circular driveway leading into it, was located in a famously affluent and respectable residential neighborhood. Despite its great age, the granite and stone structure was in good condition. True, it needed a few adjustments and repairs. Yet these deficiencies were not observable to a casual observer. It was magnificently, if also rather eccentrically furnished with valuable furniture, fine oil paintings and antiques. Even so, the whole bespoke opulent arrogance and unapologetic avarice rather than an affinity for culture and good taste.

Murton managed to sell the home he had been residing in for a good price, and then proceeded to have his things moved over to the new home. Since the mansion was much too large for Murton to take care of all by himself, he decided to hire a full time

butler, and a housekeeper to help with its upkeep and maintenance of the interior.

Although he had been to the mansion on numerous occasions, there was even so still much of it he had not seen. Just prior to finally installing himself there, he made himself more familiar with its various rooms. Upon this inspection, he made some interesting discoveries.

Perhaps most interesting, certainly the strangest, of these hitherto unseen rooms was his uncle's personal library which heretofore had been inaccessible to everyone except uncle Cyril himself. It was filled with all manner of strange items, rare books and curiosities. Among these was a bronze sculpture of a dancing faun, an astrolabe, assorted old portraits of unusual and mysterious personages, and a human skull perched grimly on top of a desk. The book shelves contained volume upon volume of some very, ancient and dusty works. What was peculiarly surprising to Murton was that so many of them were concerned with cryptic matters like necromancy, kabalistic rites, spiritualism and demonology. Surprised yet bemused, he smiled and shook his head in wonderment at this as yet unrealized side of the old man's character. No doubt Cyril had fancied himself as some kind of amateur sorcerer. In retrospect, it seemed to fill out and help account for his more queer than usual character.

Despite the odd humor of it, the library gave Murton an ill and unsettling feeling and he decided that clearly that this was one room that needed to be redone. Indeed, really as far as some people would be concerned, it was an embarrassment. And there was no way he was going to let anyone else see it, not, at least, until he'd removed the oddities, strange books and occult paraphernalia it contained.

The initial weeks in the mansion passed peacefully and without event. The elated Murton spent most of his time thinking about how he might make use of his newly acquired wealth, and what alterations he might make to the home to best impress his fiancée, as well as others who no doubt would no doubt be seeking him out in search of a loan or some favor.

One summer's day, after an afternoon meeting with some decorators, and going through some account books, he thought he'd take a little rest. Relaxing lightly on an upstairs bedroom couch, both meditating and reveling on his overwhelming good fortune, he gradually sensed something moving on, of all places, the ceiling above him. Thinking at first that his eyes were bothering him, he blinked in bafflement. Yet as he glanced up again he saw what looked like a yellowish glowing blotch beginning to take form. What on earth could be causing that, he wondered? Picking up and putting on his glasses the image slowly came into focus.

To his horrified alarm, the yellow glow made itself out to be a face: a frightful, obscene and hideous visage. It moved its mouth and contorted its expression as an insane person might do. Without making a sound it glared directly into Murton's face as if trying to make his acquaintance, albeit in a weird and disconcerting manner.

Murton closed his eyes, hoping it would disappear after he opened them. Yet as he peered up again, there it still was looking down at him more loathsomely and deranged than before.

Murton shrieked aloud, then fainted.

On reviving a few minutes later, he heard the sound of someone walking in the attic above, the boards creaking to the sound of their footsteps. Either he was delirious or someone was playing a trick on him. In any case, he now was determined to find out what this was all about, and put a stop to it. Arising from the couch he made his way down the hall to where the hatch to the attic loomed overhead. No doubt if there was an explanation for what was happening it was to be found up there.

Grabbing a stepladder from a nearby closet, he stepped up to the attic opening and slowly thrust its rusty lid door over and aside. He popped his head up into the mold corroded and musty loft. A small triangular window let in some faint sun rays, and by their light Murton could at first make out some boxes.

Then, to his very strange surprise, a few yards down, he made out an ugly and peculiarly outlandish figure sitting on a crate. It looked away from him and rested its head on its hand as if lost in contemplation, it was apparently not aware, or at least not acknowledging Murton's presence. Yet this was no normal being. It was some grotesque entity, half-man, half-beast. Murton recognized the face as the one he had seen on the ceiling. With a pointed long nose, and chin that jutted out absurdly, the creature, for so it could hardly be characterized otherwise, had for hair on its head a messy shag of gray and brown. Except for a loin cloth like appendage, it was practically naked. The arms and legs were long and, covered with hair and a glossy substance much like grease. The fingers nails were excessively long, and instead of toes on its feet, it had hooked talons. Its face wore the same sinister and lunatic grimace which Murton had witnessed earlier.

Taken aback by this inexplicable and unsightly intruder, Murton found himself almost panicking. Was he hallucinating? If so perhaps all the better, than that such a thing should be real. He then rushed down to summon the butler, Wickly, to his aid.

It was obvious to Wickly that something had shaken Mr. Tinch considerably, and wasn't quite sure that he wanted to share in what ever it was that caused his ill concealed distress. Murton could see Wickly's reluctance to assist, but wasn't about to relieve him so easily.

"Have a look up in the attic," Murton ordered, "and tell me what you see."

"What is it I'm looking for, sir?" Wickly asked.

"Just do as I say, Wickly."

The butler ascended and entered the attic while Murton waited below. "Is he in for a surprise," he chuckled to himself, half in amusement, half out of distraction.

After walking around for about a minute or so in the attic, Wickly called down to him.

"I don't see anything up here, sir, but these boxes, some old furniture, and oh some brickbrack."

Murton wasn't so sure that this is what he wanted to hear. He told Wickly to keep looking. Yet Wickly's answer was the same. He came down and asked Murton again what he wanted him to see. The latter commanded him to stand out of his way and went up the ladder again himself. Sticking his head up into the attic, he saw the demon, as no less than demon it was, sitting as before. This time however, it turned and looked at him.

"Master!" it cried.

With a yell, Murton stumbled backward down the ladder, just missing Wickly, as he landed on the floor. The butler hurried to help him up and dust him off.

"Are you all right, sir?"

"I'm fine, I'm fine" Murton insisted angrily as he arose. "Are you sure you didn't see anyone when you were up there?"

"Anyone? Why, no sir, no one."

"Well, go look again, and this time look good."

Wickly did as directed, yet came back with the same response he'd given earlier. Murton had no reason to think him a liar, and by all appearances he seemed to be telling the truth. He decided, however, that the two should have a look together. Up they went, yet this time the demon had vanished. They carefully examined the attic for secret doors or possible places of concealment, but found nothing. Embarrassed, Murton decided to give up the search.

Wickly closed the attic door behind them as the two went back down the ladder.

"That was so very odd. I could swear I saw someone, something..." Murton mumbled.

The butler looked confusedly at him for an explanation, but none was forthcoming.

"Is there anything more I can do, sir?"

"No" Murton replied, pondering what had occurred, and dismissed him.

Who or what he had seen, he was at a complete loss to say. He dare not speak of it to anyone else they think him mad. Presumably,

as he remembered the library, the demon had something to do with his uncle. Maybe, on the other hand, it was all a figment of his mind brought on by his subconscious memories of that room. In any case he hurried to have the library cleaned out and restocked with his own books and things. Despite this, he found that this new dilemma far from resolved.

For the next two nights the demon came to him in his bedroom as he was trying to sleep. The first time Murton became aware of him, he woke up to find it sitting in a chair staring as if both studying and attending on him. Murton shuddered aghast and spent these disturbed nights under his covers trembling and desperately wishing for the thing to vanish or go away. After the second night, he decided he'd had more than enough and moved to another bedroom in the house. This seemed to have the desired effect for he saw no more of his unwelcome visitor and was able to sleep undisturbed thereafter.

As time went by, Murton began to regard the demon he'd seen as nothing more than a hallucination, brought by he knew not what, nor did he much care. It was better to just forget the whole thing and just be glad of the fact that he seemed to be rid of it. Indeed, he thought trying to explain too exactly what was going on would only make things worse.

Soon the day approached when he and his fiancée, Ixene, were to be wed. It was decided that the ceremony would be held outside under a canopy in the back garden of the mansion. Many respectable, wealthy and eminent people, including many of his law firm associates, were invited, and the event looked to be one of great social notoriety. No expense was spared in preparation and all was made to be as posh and lavish as possible, as befitting someone of Murton's most propertied station.

After taking their vows, Murton and Ixene turned from the justice of the peace to walk back down the aisle of folding chairs to start their new life. As they did so, they were smiled upon by the guests and onlookers. Yet just as the couple was moving past the spectators on their way out to the not too distant food and refreshment area, who should Murton spot standing in the back unnoticed among the revelers but his demon. It stood grinning as though it were merely just another one of the celebrating company. On seeing it, he halted and collapsed, much to the dismay and consternation of the guests.

"Murton!" Ixene whispered to him in exasperation. "Please get up! People are watching!"

As she endeavored to raise him, he pulled himself together as best he could, and looked in the opposite direction of his tormentor. Fortunately, he was able to evade the upset occasion without further incident. During the festivities following upon the nuptials, Murton was collectively excused by the guests for his subsequent lack of celebratory zeal, in light of what some present assumed to be last minute "cold feet" on his part.

The newly wed's honeymoon on a private south sea cruise went off without a hitch. Ixene forgave him for the great embarrassment he had caused her at the wedding, and both found great solace together in the sumptuous luxury they could afford to indulge in. All seemed to go so well that when it was over, and Murton felt himself cured once and for all of his hallucinatory malady.

Yet as the two returned home, their limousine pulling up the mansion driveway, a sight greeted Murton which revived all his previous fears and worries. There on the mansion rooftop was his hairy, ungainly demon clambering around like a gleeful ape ecstatic at seeing Murton come home.

"Oh my God" Murton murmured as he buried his face in his hands.

"What's the matter?" Ixene asked.

He ignored her question, and the two got out of the car and entered the mansion.

Things thereafter went none too smoothly for the newly married couple. Ixene could clearly see that something was troubling him, but she knew not what. Try as she might to coax an explanation from him, there was simply no way in the world Murton would confess what it was that troubled him. He would brush off her suggestions that he see a psychiatrist with absurd accusations that there was something wrong with her.

His nights grew sleepless and occasionally he would wake up screaming. He became pale and thin, and found it more and more difficult to shave himself properly. Overtime he became a nervous, irritable wreck. The demon would be popping up every now and then when he least expected him, in the most unusual places. Nor did it limit itself to the mansion, but would appear almost anywhere Murton decided to go. The moments when he wasn't jittery or depressed, which resulted from these unwelcome visitations were rare. Ixene, finding his behavior intolerable, began to have grave doubts about his sanity. Rather than ask that he seek help, she grew to demand it. Yet for all her efforts, Murton refused to comply, brazenly took up the bottle, and angrily denounced her for her deliberately insulting insinuations and meddling with him.

Having had three years of enduring his strange and unusual conduct, Ixene went and got herself in a divorce. Preoccupied with no one knew what, Murton made little contest in the legal proceedings that followed, and as a result Ixene easily obtained half of his wealth. There were times that Murton thought of making a clean breast of what ailed him, yet ultimately his all important pride and fear of others incredulity prevented such disclosure to anyone.

In the ensuing years, then decades, that lead finally into old age, the demon would sooner or later return to see him. Incapable of functioning due to the stress it caused him, Murton became a morose and temperamental recluse shunned by everyone including his image conscious family. Despite many independent attempts at amateur

diagnosis, no one could explain what exactly it was that was that ailed him, though someone came close in saying that he reminded him of old uncle Cyril.

Murton cared little for there ridicule and antipathy, but cursed them all. He managed his money well and was never in lack of it. Most of the latter period of his life was spent locked away in his mansion occupied at no one knew quite what.

However, not everyone in the Tinch clan was put off by his eccentric ways. Shortly before he died, Murton came to make the acquaintance a rather audacious nephew who seemed unusually friendly and much interested in getting to know him.